



18 November 2024

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Tēnā koe Mijail

OIA request 2425-0377 Request for sharing and use of New Citizenship Information

Thank you for your follow-up Official Information Act (Act) request to OIA2425-0277 received by the Department of Internal Affairs (Department) on 18 October 2024.

You requested –

I would like to follow up with just a few more questions, specifically focusing on the Rongotai and Chatham Islands electorate over the last two years.

1. Frequency of Data Sharing:

Could you provide data on how often new citizenship information (names, addresses, emails, etc.) has been shared in the Rongotai and Chatham Islands electorate over the last two years? Specifically, I request:

1.1. The number of times the data has been shared with Members of Parliament (broken down by MP), and

1.2. The number of times the data has been shared with local authorities.

2. Monitoring and Enforcement:

What specific measures are in place to monitor whether MPs and local authorities are using this information strictly for welcoming new citizens, as per the Department's guidelines? If there is no monitoring system, how does the Department ensure MPs and local authorities are not misusing this data for purposes beyond welcoming new citizens?

3. Detection of Misuse:

If there is no active monitoring, how does the Department identify potential misuse of this information by MPs or local authorities? For example, are there any mechanisms in place for auditing or reviewing how this data is handled after it is shared?

4. Actions Taken for Misuse:

If the Department becomes aware of misuse of the data by MPs or local authorities, what specific actions are taken in response? How does the Department address such violations of the intended use of this data?

In response to your request, I can provide you with the following information.

Question one

The frequency of data shared with Members of Parliament (MPs) and local council (Wellington) for Rongotai and Chatham Island is attached to this letter of response as Appendix A. This data is from 2022 to 2024.

I can advise that there have been no ceremonies in the Chatham Islands for the past two years. Therefore, there is no record of information shared with this council. Also, there were no notifications to MPs of new citizens in this region.

The Department has been unable to locate any information shared with MPs for the year 2023. I must therefore refuse these parts of your request pursuant to section 18(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held by the department or Minister of the Crown or organisation and the person dealing with the request has no grounds for believing that the information is either held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation, or by a local authority.

Question two

The Department does not have a monitoring mechanism in place for the purposes of reviewing how MPs and local authorities make use of the contact details shared with each entity.

New citizens authorise the sharing of their information in the applicant declaration on the citizenship application form which includes the statement:

I authorise the Department of Internal Affairs to release my name and address to my local Member of Parliament and local councillors so that they can formally welcome me to New Zealand following my grant of citizenship.

As the list contains personal information of new citizens, the Department will only send it to the MP's parliament email address, not that of office or support staff. Doing so helps ensure that when an MP or staff member leaves Parliament, or changes roles, they stop receiving the list. Once the MP receives the list, they can distribute this to support staff within their office for action (as required).

The Department also includes the following advice in the e-mail to local MPs and council:

This information is provided to you for the purpose of welcoming new citizens to your electorate.

The information provided must not be used for any other purpose, such as marketing or campaigning, or be shared with third parties in any capacity.

The list must be destroyed once it has been used for its intended purpose.

Once the list is received by local authorities and MPs, it is the responsibility of these parties to ensure this information is used for the purposes intended above.

Question three

The Department provides this information to MPs and Local authorities with the reasonable expectation they will comply with the Privacy Act 2020. The Department does not have monitoring, auditing or review mechanisms in place to ensure they comply with the law.

Question four

I can advise that if data misuse is reported, the Department will engage with the relevant MP or local authority to address the issue. The Department may decide to discontinue providing them with the list.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, the Department has decided to proactively release a copy of this response on the DIA website. All requestor data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available here: www.dia.govt.nz/Official-Information-Act-Requests-2.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'T' followed by a horizontal line.

Julia Taylor
Manager Operational Policy and Official Correspondence
Service Delivery and Operations