



8 January 2025

Ref: OIA 24-759

Felix Lee

By email: fyi-request-29297-794aa0f7@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Lee

Request for information under the Official Information Act 1982

Thank you for your email to the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs) received on 22 November 2024, requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

"I would like to request information regarding eGate with Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and BN(O) passports.

Please give:

- 1. the progress and timetable about using eGate in NZ for visitors with the above mentioned passports*
- 2. the progress and timetable about reciprocal eGate access for NZ passport holders in Hong Kong and Macau*
- 3. correspondence and meeting notes with officials of HKSAR, Macau SAR, UK, and China regarding the above matter."*

On 29 November 2024, Customs contacted you to clarify the timeframe for Question Three of your request. On 2 December 2024, you clarified the timeframe for Question Three to be the time period of 1 August 2022 to 22 November 2024.

I have outlined Customs' response to each part of your request below.

Question One

"the progress and timetable about using eGate in NZ for visitors with the above mentioned passports"

The expansion of eligibility for eGate to new countries had been put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout 2023 and 2024, Customs has been considering all remaining visa waiver countries, including Hong Kong and Macau, as it will allow increased numbers of travellers to use eGate and enhance the traveller experience at Aotearoa New Zealand's international airports.

However, Customs' focus over 2024 has been progressing the eligibility for the use of eGate for the remaining 21 European Union countries, the last of which was implemented in September 2024. You can find the list of eligible countries for eGate use in New Zealand at: www.customs.govt.nz/personal/travel-to-and-from-nz/travelling-to-new-zealand/egate/.

Customs has recently begun to focus on the remaining visa waiver countries, including Hong Kong and Macau, in our plans for 2025. There are a number of dependencies such as completing a risk assessment process that need to be satisfied before new countries can be added to the eligibility for the use of eGate in New Zealand.

It is Customs' intention to continue to work to progress the eligibility for eGate in New Zealand for the remaining countries in batches (every two to three months) over 2025. This should lead to Macau being included in the next batch of countries, provisionally scheduled to progress in early 2025. As Customs is currently working through the risk assessment process for Hong Kong, it is likely that the timeframe for Hong Kong to be enabled as an eligible country for eGate will not be until late 2025.

Question Two

“the progress and timetable about reciprocal eGate access for NZ passport holders in Hong Kong and Macau”

To date, Customs has only had informal discussions with officials from the Hong Kong Immigration Department regarding reciprocal eGate access. Once Customs has confirmed the plans for 2025, Customs will be in a position to further engage with officials from Hong Kong and Macau on reciprocal eGate access. Please note that most arrangements are not on a formal bilateral basis, as each country needs to work through their own processes and approvals.

Question Three

“correspondence and meeting notes with officials of HKSAR, Macau SAR, UK, and China regarding the above matter.”

As noted in the response to Question Two above, Customs has only had informal discussions with officials from Hong Kong regarding eGate in New Zealand which has been co-ordinated through Customs' overseas based counsellors. There has been email correspondence between Customs and officials from Hong Kong Immigration Department on the progress of reciprocal eGate access. As these discussions are ongoing, the email correspondence (which also includes a briefing attachment) is withheld in full under section 9(2)(j) of the Act to enable a Minister of the Crown or any public service agency or organisation holding the information to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations).

Customs' overseas-based counsellors and officials from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been briefed on our intentions to expand the eligibility for eGate to all visa waiver countries. This may have been mentioned in discussions with their counterparts from these countries. However, Customs is not aware of any other formal correspondence or meeting notes with officials from Macau, United Kingdom and China regarding eGate. Customs also does not hold any meeting notes with officials from Hong Kong. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

Where information has been withheld under section 9 of the Act, I consider that the public interest arguments in favour of making this information available do not outweigh the necessity to withhold this information.

You have the right, by way of complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act, to seek an investigation and review of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available online at: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or you can phone 0800 802 602.

Please note that Customs proactively releases responses to Official Information Act requests on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after we have sent it to you. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dana McDonald', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dana McDonald
Group Manager, Border Operations