



**Te Pā Whakamarumarū**  
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Muhammad

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Tēnā koe Muhammad,

### **Official information request**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 3 May 2023 to the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) seeking information about National Security Checks (NSCs). The timeframe for responding to your request was extended to 22 June 2023 as the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request were such that a proper response could not reasonably be made within the original time limit.

I have responded to each of your questions below.

***Question 1a: Why NZSIS recently refused to disclose the average processing time of NSC checks on several occasions? While NZSIS did disclose the average processing time in the past.***

The NZSIS makes decisions about OIA requests on a case-by-case basis and considers the security implications of releasing information for each request. As you have noted, we have previously released average processing times. When making decisions on several recent requests for processing times, we assessed that there would be a likely harm to New Zealand's national security if we continued to release processing times. This is because providing a snapshot of processing times is not a concern; however, continuing to release this information over time is of security concern as it could allow exploitation of the border screening system.

***Question 1b: If the disclosure of processing time may prejudice the New Zealand Security and Defence then did NZSIS compromise the New Zealand by disclosing this information in earlier requests?***

We do not consider we have compromised New Zealand's security or defence by releasing the information previously, but we assess that if we were to continue releasing this information it would likely be prejudicial to security.

***Question 1c: Did NZSIS find any evidence that disclosing processing time may risk New Zealand Security (the answer can be yes or no, I don't need more details).***

No. All OIA decisions are made based on an assessment of national security risk and an understanding of how the security context changes over time.

***Question 2: Are the NSC checks processed in the date order? Or is there any other criteria in place? I understand that processing time may vary and depends on individual circumstances. However, I just want to know the general process to initiate/start NSC checks? Like do they process on first come first serve basis or other factors.***

The NZSIS supports border security agencies to maintain the integrity of New Zealand's border, and each year we conduct a large number of NSCs. Immigration New Zealand (INZ) administers the visa application system, including the legislative framework under which NSCs are required. The NZSIS does not approve or decline visa applications, rather we provide assessments to help INZ make decisions. INZ makes the final decision on all visa applications.

The NZSIS conducts NSCs in line with INZ's priorities, which are dynamic and can change according to circumstances.

Generally, we process NSCs for temporary visas first, as these have the shortest time frame for a response. We then process other visa categories in line with INZ priorities. In general, we would process the oldest referrals first.

***Question 3: If NSC checks took 3 months in 2020 to process for some applicants for a visa category, then why it is taking more than 10 months to process the NSC checks for some applicants and for the same visa category? Does it mean the resource utilisation is at its peak at NZSIS and it is hard to process NSC checks in reasonable time.***

As we have previously noted, the processing time for individual NSCs varies across the year, for a number of reasons. While I cannot advise on actual processing times, I can tell you that the NZSIS works to the following timeframes for responding to NSCs, with the time being calculated from the date NZSIS receives the application from INZ.

- An NSC response is provided for 90% of temporary visas within two weeks (for routine responses).
- An NSC response is provided for 90% of residence applications within six months (for routine responses).

Current processing time has been impacted by the re-opening of the country's borders at the same time that the NZSIS received a large backlog of NSC referrals. The roll-out of INZ's new IT system initially impacted the timeframe it took for some visas to be referred from INZ to NZSIS for assessment, and the NZSIS received the applications in large batches.

The NZSIS has responded to the majority of applications within the timeframes outlined above.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [oa.privacy@nzsis.govt.nz](mailto:oa.privacy@nzsis.govt.nz).

Ngā mihi



**Andrew Hampton**

Te Tumu Whakarae mō Te Pā Whakamarumarū  
Director-General of Security