

19 April 2023



REF: OIA-12187

Dear 

**Request made under the Official Information Act 1982**

Thank you for your email of 9 March 2023 requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- 1. I am requesting a comprehensive list of the specific letter combinations (i.e. the first three letters of a standard vehicle registration) that are prohibited or excluded from use.*
- 2. I am also requesting a list of specific letter combinations or words that are prohibited or excluded for use on personalised vehicle registrations, such as those available through Kiwi Plates*
- 3. If no such list or lists exist, please provide any relevant guidelines, policies or documents etc. that set out the process for determining if a specific vehicle registration will be permitted or is prohibited or excluded from use.*

On 20 March 2023, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency sought clarification for part two of your request and subsequently you confirmed you request the following (for the past ten years).

- the general criteria used to decide whether a personalised plate should be rejected or not
- personalised plates (already in circulation) that have been revoked by Waka Kotahi following a complaint.
- personalised plates (already in circulation) that have been complained about, but where the complaint was not upheld.
- and personalised plate applications that have been declined following Waka Kotahi consultation.

On 14 April 2023, we sought further clarification of part 2 of your request as it remained very broad in scope due to the timeframe provided. Subsequently, you refined this part of your request to be for information since July 2019.

I have numbered each part of your request for convenience and will address each part in turn.

**1. I am requesting a comprehensive list of the specific letter combinations (i.e. the first three letters of a standard vehicle registration) that are prohibited or excluded from use.**

A list of specific letter combinations that have been excluded from use since Waka Kotahi began recording this information is provided in the following enclosed attachment:

- Attachment 1 – Withheld plate series data.xlsx

Since 7 September 2022 (to 20 March 2023), the following three letter combinations have also been excluded from production:

<b>PGR</b>	<b>PMS</b>	<b>PSD</b>	<b>PUB</b>	<b>PUS</b>
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**2. I am also requesting a list of specific letter combinations or words that are prohibited or excluded for use on personalised vehicle registrations, such as those available through Kiwi Plates**

The criteria applied for prohibited personalised plates generally fits within six broad categories – sexual, racial, religious, safety, violence, and derogatory. In addition to this, Waka Kotahi reviews plate combinations and any associated caption to reduce the risk of offensive plates being manufactured and issued.

The criterion applied currently is that personalised plate legends/messages must not in any way imply a message or meaning that relates to:

1. violence, discrimination or bias based on race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation/notations, or against any individual.
2. any activities or the promotion of substances which are prohibited by law.
3. disturbing the public peace or the maintenance of law and order.
4. any offensive, abusive or derogatory message or meaning negative or derogatory with respect to the program, for example, alcohol or speed.
5. public or well-known figures, including members of the government and other dignitaries.

A list of personalised plates that have been revoked from use following a complaint between July 2019 and 31 December 2022 is provided in the following enclosed attachments:

- Attachment 2 – Revoked personalised plates Jul 2019 – 31 Dec 2021
- Attachment 3 – Revoked personalised plates in 2022

A list of personalised plates where a complaint was laid but not upheld between July 2019 and 31 December 2022 is provided in the following enclosed attachments:

- Attachment 4 – Personalised plate complaints not upheld Jul 2019 – 31 Dec 2021
- Attachment 5 – Complaints not upheld in 2022

A list of personalised plates that were declined for production following consultation with Waka Kotahi between July 2019 and 31 December 2022 is provided in the following enclosed attachment:

- Attachment 6 – Declined personalised plates applications

Unlike general registration plate numbers, a personalised plate is more identifiable to members of the public, neighbours, friends and family members. As people are more likely to remember seeing a certain plate sequence on a vehicle, any personalised plate number that was either previously registered to or currently displayed on a vehicle could identify the vehicle owners. Therefore, the plate

number sequences that have been allowed in Attachments 4 and 5 have been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons.

The names of individuals have been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act also.

The names of Waka Kotahi staff who reviewed applications/complaints have been withheld under section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the Act to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the protection of such Ministers, members of organisations, officers, and employees from improper pressure or harassment.

With respect to the information that has been withheld, I do not consider there are any other factors which would render it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available.

**3. If no such list or lists exist, please provide any relevant guidelines, policies or documents etc. that set out the process for determining if a specific vehicle registration will be permitted or is prohibited or excluded from use.**

General plates are made up of a three or two letter combination, followed by a sequence of numbers. There are 999 plates in each two or three letter combination (for example, the AAA plate series ranges from AAA001 to AAA999).

When deciding which general plates will be released into production, Waka Kotahi bases its decision on the letter combination that will appear in the next sequence. A combination will be excluded from release, and the entire series of plates numbering 001-999 held back, if it is deemed to be:

- offensive
- derogatory
- obscene
- profane
- promoting violence, discrimination or bias against:
  - race
  - age
  - religious or ethical belief
  - ancestry
  - place of origin
  - citizenship
  - sexual origin
  - family or marital status
  - disability or handicap.

For example, if the combination 'RAT' is deemed to be offensive, then all plates in the series starting from RAT001 through to RAT999 will not be released.

Furthermore, as a general rule, all plates that show the letter 'I', 'O', 'V' or 'X' within the series are automatically excluded from production for the following reasons:

Letter excluded	Reason for exclusion
I	Easily confused with the numeral 1
O	Easily confused with the numeral 0
V	Used for visiting overseas vehicles only

X	Used for trade plates only
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In line with Waka Kotahi policy, this response will soon be published on our website, with personal information removed.

Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision to withhold some information. The contact details for the Ombudsman can be located at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

If you would like to discuss this reply with Waka Kotahi, please contact Ministerial Services by email to [official.correspondence@nzta.govt.nz](mailto:official.correspondence@nzta.govt.nz)

Yours sincerely



**Emma Bevin**  
Manager, Customer Services