

12 September 2025

By email to: [REDACTED]

Kia ora [REDACTED]

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST 2025/59

On Sunday, 17 August you made a request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA) for the following information:

Our question/s are about the time it took in the 2023 General Election to return and count all special votes

- 1) *A) What was the minimum, maximum and average time it took to return special votes cast outside the main islands of New Zealand, by continent (including Antarctica) to the appropriate electorate (for subsequent counting and validation)?*
B) What was the minimum, maximum and modal time it took to return special votes cast within the main islands of New Zealand to the appropriate electorate (for subsequent counting and validation)?
- 2) *A) How long did the validation processes take for special votes that were cast overseas by (i) previously enrolled voters (ii) newly enrolled voters who enrolled during the voting period but prior to election day, (iii) voters who enrolled on election day.*
B) How long did the validation processes take for special votes that were cast in New Zealand by (i) previously enrolled voters (ii) newly enrolled voters who enrolled during the voting period but prior to election day, (iii) voters who enrolled on election day.
- 3) *How long did the counting process take once special voter validation had occurred?*

Please find answers to your questions below.

- 1) *A) What was the minimum, maximum and average time it took to return special votes cast outside the main islands of New Zealand, by continent (including Antarctica) to the appropriate electorate (for subsequent counting and validation)?*

Special votes cast outside the main islands of New Zealand are either overseas votes or some remote votes which may include voters:

- On Tokelau, Campbell Island, Raoul Island, Pitt Island and the Ross Dependency
- On vessels who during the period beginning with the close of nominations and ending with the close of the poll have not had reasonable access to voting facilities

- On offshore installations
- On remote islands administered by the Department of Conservation, and
- Who are overseas during the period between nominations day and polling day and by reason of their remote location, have had no access at any time during the period to voting facilities other than remote voting services.

Any votes from these locations have been counted by a Centralised Processing Team (CPT) based in Wellington since the 2020 General Election and are no longer repatriated to their appropriate home electorate.

The Electoral Commission does not hold precise timing data by continent and for each electorate, nor do we calculate statistical measures such as mode or average delivery times. Instead, we can provide indicative information about how special votes are transported and the typical timeframes involved.

The time to return is dependent on the method used to return voting papers and this varies by country. However, there are specific legislated deadlines, by which votes must be received, depending on the method voters use.

Overseas Votes returned from overseas:

- by Upload, must be received by 7.00pm (NZ time) on election day
- to an overseas voting place must be received by 4.00pm (local time) the day before election day
- must be posted to New Zealand no later than the day before election day and received by noon 10 days after election day.

Disability telephone dictation service (all votes including from overseas voters):

- the vote must be completed by 7.00pm on Election Day.

Remote voting service (overseas voters):

- by 4.00pm (NZ time), 2 days before election day, if cast by electronic means or postal vote
- by 7.00pm (NZ time) on Election Day, if cast by remote dictation.

All special votes must be received by a Returning Officer by 7.00pm (NZ time) ten days after election day.

Voters who use services such as upload, dictation, or remote will have their votes received within moments, regardless of the country they vote from.

Where a voter returns their vote through an overseas voting place, the estimated time of arrival refers to delivery in Wellington, where the CPT is located. These estimates are based on votes departing the overseas voting place at the close of voting (4.00pm local time) the day before election day. For the 2023 General Election there were 72 overseas voting places, and the DHL estimated arrival times have been provided in the attached table.

We do not provide minimum or maximum delivery times for overseas voting places. Instead, the table shows the estimated arrival times into Wellington as a working guide. Actual delivery may be affected by factors outside our control, such as customs clearance, aircraft delays, mechanical

issues, or freight restrictions. In practice, the estimated delivery is generally accurate, with timing sometimes extended by about a day, and in some cases arriving earlier.

The CPT began receiving votes on Wednesday 27 September 2023 and votes had to be received by 7.00pm on Tuesday 24 October 2023 (ten days after election day). Votes received after this date were marked as late and not eligible to be included in the official count.

B) What was the minimum, maximum and modal time it took to return special votes cast within the main islands of New Zealand to the appropriate electorate (for subsequent counting and validation)?

The Electoral Commission does not hold precise timing data for each electorate, nor do we calculate statistical measures such as mode or average delivery times. Instead, we can provide indicative information about how special votes are transported and the typical timeframes involved.

Special votes are transported under normal NZ Post Courier timeframes, or by hand where close by. Delivery speeds vary depending on the distance between the place of dispatching and the receiving electorate office:

- **Minimum:** Where a special vote is received and dispatched to an electorate within the same area i.e. Auckland, it is commonly hand-delivered by electoral officials within the same day.
- **Modal (most common):** For most electorates, special votes are dispatched via NZ Post courier and arrive overnight, particularly when sent to main centres (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch) or neighbouring electorates.
- **Maximum:** For inter-island or electorates not located in main centres, courier delivery typically takes up to three working days.

Where a special vote is initially sent to the wrong electorate, it is redirected using the same courier process and subject to the same timeframes (same-day, overnight or up to three working days).

Special votes cast within New Zealand were repatriated to their home electorates from 16 October 2023 until 3 November 2023. The table below shows the indicative number of votes received on each day from other electorates, including redirections, expressed as a percentage of the overall total for the 2023 General Election. This table does not include special votes cast within their home electorate.

Table 1: Repatriated Special Votes – Daily Receipt %

Date	17-Oct	18-Oct	19-Oct	20-Oct	21-Oct	23-Oct	24-Oct	25-Oct
% rec at home HQ	3.38%	33.95%	35.50%	13.36%	0.06%	0.00%	7.49%	4.50%
Date	26-Oct	27-Oct	30-Oct	31-Oct	1-Nov	2-Nov	3-Nov	
% rec at home HQ	0.38%	0.23%	1.10%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.00%	

Note: the figures illustrate typical delivery patterns, rather than precise timing for every electorate.

2) A) *How long did the validation processes take for special votes that were cast overseas by (i) previously enrolled voters (ii) newly enrolled voters who enrolled during the voting period but prior to election day, (iii) voters who enrolled on election day.*

The Commission does not categorise overseas or remote special votes by the enrolment status (previously enrolled, newly enrolled before election day or enrolled on election day).

Any person casting a special vote from an overseas location must be enrolled by midnight (NZ time) the day before election day. Any person casting a special vote within New Zealand must be enrolled by midnight (NZ time) on Election Day. The centralised processing team qualifies all vote received against a singular roll provided after the roll is closed.

The validation process following an election is done in two main parts;

- Validation, which checks the declaration form is complete, and
- Qualification, where voter eligibility is checked against the roll for that election.

Validation of special votes processed by the centralised processing team began on 15 October 2023 (the day immediately after election day) and continued for approximately 1 ½ weeks. Qualification began on 19 October 2023 and was finished on 1 November 2023.

B) *How long did the validation processes take for special votes that were cast in New Zealand by (i) previously enrolled voters (ii) newly enrolled voters who enrolled during the voting period but prior to election day, (iii) voters who enrolled on election day.*

The validation process following an election is done in two main parts;

- Validation which is where we validate the declaration form as complete, and
- Qualification, where voter eligibility is checked against the electoral roll for that election.

Validation of special votes cast within New Zealand started on 16 October 2023 and was completed by 2 November 2023. Qualification began on 16 October 2023 and was completed on 3 November 2023.

3) *How long did the counting process take once special voter validation had occurred?*

Special Vote counting was conducted for the 2023 General Election

- At the centralised processing team from 22 October 2023 and was completed on 3 November 2023
- At the electorate headquarters from 27 October 2023 and was completed on 3 November 2023.

In the interests of transparency, we release responses to Official Information Act requests every 3 months. We will publish this response with your personal details redacted.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the Act to make a complaint to the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the response to your request. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Martin Rodgers
Director Voting Services

OVERSEAS VOTING PLACE ESTIMATED ARRIVAL TIME

The table below shows the estimated arrival day for votes returned from each overseas voting place. These estimates are based on DHL's time sensitive international courier services.

- Note 1.** Other return methods (upload, dictation and remote electronic methods) are received almost immediately and are not dependant on country.
- Note 2.** Remote postal votes are generally routed through an overseas voting place and included with the bulk courier return. Where they are returned directly, the timeframe is similar, as they are also likely to be couriered back via DHL.
- Note 3.** Individual postal votes are not tracked. We do not provide minimum or maximum delivery times beyond what is advised by each country's postal service. Voters are strongly discouraged from posting directly to New Zealand, as delivery is subject to local postal service international timeframes.

DAY	E+2	E+3	E+4	E+5	E+6	E+7	E+10	
% RET	18%	26%	33%	78%	86%	99%	100%	
OVERSEAS VOTING PLACE OFFICE LOCATIONS	Melbourne	Hobart	Nuku'alofa	Riyadh	Suva	Yangon	Brasilia	Addis Ababa
	Canberra	Adelaide	Port Vila	Cairo	Seoul	Ankara	Sao Paulo	Dili
	Sydney	Singapore	Darwin	Abu Dhabi	Kuala Lumpur	Mumbai	Bogota	Tehran
		Brisbane	Los Angeles	Colombo	Bangkok	Warsaw	Santiago	Tarawa
			Hong Kong	Noumea	Washington	Jakarta	Port Moresby	Moscow
			Perth	Manila	Tokyo	New Delhi	Pretoria	Alofi
				Dubai	Vancouver	Brussels	Buenos Aires	
				Ottawa	New York	Geneva	Mexico City	
				Ha Noi	London	Milan	Honiara	
				Ho Chi Minh City		The Hauge	Stockholm	
				Taipei		Vienna	Guangzhou	
						Madrid	Beijing	
						Dublin	Honolulu	
						Rome	Shanghai	
						Berlin	Apia	
						Paris	Rarotonga	