



2 April 2024

Rep Albert

fyi-request-25944-c07bc98f@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe Rep Albert

Thank you for your email to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), received on 4 March 2024, requesting information on the number of staff employed by Oranga Tamariki who work remotely from overseas. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Oranga Tamariki permanent and fixed-term staff are based in New Zealand. Oranga Tamariki has a policy stating which overseas locations permanent and fixed term staff can work from and under what circumstances:

- The *Offshore Remote Access Policy* details that staff can only work on Oranga Tamariki provided devices (laptop and phone) to access Oranga Tamariki IT systems, email and services.
- Working from overseas is restricted to countries approved by Oranga Tamariki.
- Staff would need to be able to legally work from that country – for example, if they have a work visa or a dual citizenship.
- Staff need to provide justification (such as compassionate or extenuating circumstances – more examples are outlined in response to your third question) and seek explicit approval to work when overseas. This approval process is outlined in our response to your fourth question below.

Oranga Tamariki does not employ any staff who are permanently based overseas, so all staff who may travel overseas and work are only overseas for a finite period. For your request, we have provided information for the period of 3 February to 3 March 2024, as this most recent period is an accurate reflection of employees using Oranga Tamariki devices overseas for work purposes at any one time.

I have responded to each of your questions below.

IN-CONFIDENCE

How many employees (permanent and fixed-term) are working remotely from overseas? (Focusing on Fiji and Australia)

Between 3 February to 3 March 2024, 21 permanent and fixed-term staff members had been approved to take Oranga Tamariki devices offshore. However, many of these staff were on leave for some part of this period, meaning that they may not have been working while abroad but applied to take their devices with them when travelling as a backup in case they were called on to work while away.

Of the 21 staff who were approved to take their devices offshore, 10 travelled to Australia or Fiji. To protect the privacy of staff who may have been travelling for reasons not related to work for Oranga Tamariki (such as compassionate leave), we have not provided specific numbers of kaimahi who travelled to each country. As such, this element of your request is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, on the grounds of protection the privacy of natural persons.

Which division or directorate those employees are assigned to? (Please list the division/directorate and the number of employees working from overseas)

The 21 staff who are currently travelling or who have travelled offshore between 3 February and 3 March 2024 are assigned to the following division or directorate:

- Service Delivery: 14
- People Culture and Enabling Services: 3
- Māori Partnerships and Communities: 1
- Office of the Chief Executive: 1
- Quality Practice and Experiences: 1
- System Leadership: 1

What is the business justification to have those employees working remotely from overseas?

As per Oranga Tamariki policy, permanent and fixed-term staff can work from overseas and take Oranga Tamariki devices overseas only under exceptional circumstances, such as:

- While on official overseas Oranga Tamariki-related work e.g. international child protection or adoptions.
- When staff in critical roles are on leave overseas, they can seek approval to take Oranga Tamariki devices to be contactable by Oranga Tamariki for emergencies or business continuity reasons.
- If they work in a critical role and may need to be contactable by Oranga Tamariki for emergencies or business continuity reasons when travelling under compassionate or extenuating personal reasons (for example, personal travel by staff if a family member overseas is sick or are stuck overseas due to unforeseen circumstances).

Which position within the Ministry approved the overseas remote work?

Requests to take Oranga Tamariki devices overseas are approved on a case-by-case basis. Our Offshore Remote Access policy requires approval at the following levels:

- Line manager of staff member
- General Manager, Human Resources or Senior Human Resources Officer
- Chief Information Security Officer/Acting Chief Privacy Officer
- Deputy Chief Executive, People Culture and Enabling Services.

With the public service cuts, how do we justify having employees working overseas while people in New Zealand will lose their jobs?

Like all Government agencies Oranga Tamariki is operating in a challenging fiscal environment. With the new Government signalling a fiscal reset and public sector reform the Ministry is looking, and will continue to look, at ways to manage its resources.

Oranga Tamariki is currently exploring options to meet the fiscal savings expectations outlined by the Government. Oranga Tamariki initiated a thorough approach to identify targeted savings areas including administrative efficiencies such as travel costs.

Oranga Tamariki has introduced interim changes to our Travel Policy while we review our policy and ensure it remains fit for purpose. There is currently a pause on non-children related travel until 30 June 2024. This will not impact any travel needed for children or young people in the care or custody of the Chief Executive.

Oranga Tamariki permanent and fixed term staff are all based in New Zealand – any staff who may be working overseas are doing so for a finite period and there is an expectation that the staff member will return within an agreed period. As noted in our response to your third question, the justification for working overseas is first and foremost the need to undertake overseas related work including international child protection and adoptions. Other justifications include compassionate or extenuating personal reasons (e.g. an employee in a critical role is on leave overseas or needs to attend an overseas family emergency and needs to be contactable by Oranga Tamariki for emergencies or business continuity reasons). This situation would apply if the staff member performed a critical support role and may be required to respond to an important business-related situation.

IN-CONFIDENCE

Oranga Tamariki may make the information contained in this letter available to the public by publishing this on our website with your personal details removed.

I trust you find this information useful. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Oranga Tamariki. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



pp

Cassandra Anderson
Deputy Chief Executive
People Culture & Enabling Services