26OIA2397

3 July 2026

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your request made under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), received on 6 June 2026. You requested the following:

*I request the following:*

1. *All complaints received by Inland Revenue over the past five years where a taxpayer alleged an audit was issued retaliatorily or without proper evidential basis, including the nature of each complaint and its outcome.*
2. *All complaints received over the past five years where a taxpayer requested reassignment of a Customer Compliance Specialist and that request was refused, including the outcome of those requests.*
3. *All complaints received over the past five years where a taxpayer alleged unreasonable document demands were made for records not in their possession, including the outcome of those complaints.*
4. *All Ombudsman findings made against Inland Revenue in the past five years relating to audit conduct, compliance specialist behaviour, or procedural fairness in the audit process.*
5. *All internal policy documents, guidelines, and procedures governing when a Customer Compliance Specialist may issue a formal audit notification, including what management authorisation is required prior to issue.*
6. *All internal policy documents governing the process for reassigning a compliance specialist where a formal complaint has been lodged against them by a taxpayer.*

**Complaints process & data**

Inland Revenue holds itself to high standards of conduct when interacting with taxpayers. Where a taxpayer believes we have fallen short of these standards, they are encouraged to make a complaint so that Inland Revenue can investigate and work with them.

Complaints about staff are evaluated on a case-by-case basis by Inland Revenue's Complaints Management Service, and if there is sufficient reason to uphold the complaint made then the most appropriate next steps to resolve the issues raised will be identified, which may include considering reassignment of staff if necessary. As outcomes are determined on a case-by-case basis, there is no specific internal policy document governing the reassignment of staff following a complaint by a taxpayer against the staff member assigned to their case. As such, your request for this document (question 6) is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as it does not exist.

Overall, the professionalism and integrity of Inland Revenue staff is generally positively reflected in our complaints data. For example, across all 3 of the questions posed in this request (over the last 5 years), the total complaint figures are <10.

Due to the very low number of total complaints in-scope for the questions posed in the requested period, we consider that breaking down the figures any further would increase the risk that individuals could be identified from the data. This would go against Inland Revenue's obligations to protect the confidentiality of information provided by taxpayers, and would result in a decrease in the public's confidence in the ability of Inland Revenue to safeguard their information.

Accordingly, the information requested in questions 1 – 3 is refused under section 18(c)(i) of the OIA, as releasing it would be contrary to section 18(3) of the Tax Administration Act 1994 (TAA). The Commissioner of Inland Revenue is not required to disclose revenue information where release would adversely affect the integrity of the tax system or prejudice the maintenance of the law.

**Ombudsman cases**

The information you have requested is not 'official information'. This is because the OIA specifically excludes information contained in any correspondence or communication which has taken place between the office of the Ombudsmen and any public service agency (such as Inland Revenue) which relates to an investigation conducted by an Ombudsman, in section 2(1) *"official information"* (i). I am therefore refusing your request for this information under section 18(g) of the OIA, as the information you request is not 'official information'.

**Formal audit notification**

Inland Revenue does not hold a single, consolidated internal policy document setting out when a Customer Compliance Specialist may issue a formal audit notification. Nor is there a standalone requirement for prior management authorisation solely to issue an audit notification letter.

At a high level, internal documents related to audit processes describe that audit notification generally marks the transition from pre-audit work, including risk review, into the formal audit phase. However, these don't discuss when audit notification should occur. The decision to progress to a formal audit and when a notification of audit letter is issued depends on factors such as the risk treatment plan, audit type, and information gathered during pre-audit activity. This will usually involve discussion with a Team Lead, Technical Specialist, or Project Lead, and an audit plan must be submitted to the Team Lead for approval. Management oversight occurs throughout the audit process, including approval of audit planning and ongoing supervision.

The relevant internal guidance and procedural material cannot be released because it relates to Inland Revenue's internal audit workflows, risk assessment, planning, and compliance processes. Releasing this information could reasonably enable people to alter their behaviour to avoid detection or enforcement activity, undermining the effective administration of the tax system. Your request for these internal documents, guidance, and procedures is therefore refused under section 18(c)(i) of the OIA, as release would be contrary to section 18(3) of the TAA.

You may find *SPS 16/03 Notification of a pending audit or investigation*, useful. This is publicly available and can be found on Inland Revenue's Tax Technical website here: https://www.taxtechnical.ird.govt.nz/standard-practice-statements/investigations/sps-1603-notification-of-pending-audit-or-investigation. This statement outlines Inland Revenue's general approach to notifying customers of an audit.

**Right of review**

If you disagree with my decision on your OIA request, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the OIA. You can contact the office of the Ombudsman by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz.

**Publishing of OIA response**

We intend to publish our response to your request on Inland Revenue's website (ird.govt.nz) as this information may be of interest to other members of the public. This letter, with your personal details removed, may be published in its entirety. Publishing responses increases the availability of information to the public and is consistent with the OIA's purpose of enabling more effective participation in the making and administration of laws and policies and promoting the accountability of officials.

Thank you again for your request.

Yours sincerely

Bernadette Newman
**Customer Segment Leader - Small & Medium Enterprises**