

23 April 2024

By email: [REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED],

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) which we received on 1 April 2024.

You said:

I was wondering if I could please have a list of all books, comic books, magazines and journals banned in New Zealand from 1st January 1939 to 31st December 1959? Any details about the law or government department that banned them (e.g. the Indecent Publications Act 1910 or by the Customs Department) would be appreciated as well.

Response to your request

Te Mana Whakaatu—Classification Office does not hold any list or other records of books, comic books, magazines, and/or journals banned in New Zealand between 1 January 1939 and 31 December 1959.

For the reasons set out below, we also do not believe it is likely that this information would be held by the New Zealand Customs Service.

Accordingly, your request is refused under [section 18\(g\)](#) of the OIA.

Additional information

Under [Part 10 of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993](#), many decisions of the Indecent Publications Tribunal continue in force. The Tribunal was established in 1963. Te Mana Whakaatu holds records of Tribunal decisions dating back to 1963, but we do not hold records of decisions from bodies that were active before this period.

Under the [Indecent Publications Act 1910](#), the question of whether a publication was indecent (ie banned) was determined by the courts each time an individual was prosecuted. Section 6 of the 1910 Act deemed some topics to be indecent. This may indicate some of the kinds of publications which resulted in criminal convictions for individuals in New Zealand between 1910 and 1963.

[Information available on Te Ara–The Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#) states that although the New Zealand Customs Department provided censorship opinions throughout the 20th century, these were “informal” and “were recognised to have no legal force”.

Under the [Censorship and Publicity Emergency Regulations 1939](#) (followed additionally by the [Public Safety Emergency Regulations 1940](#)), Customs had powers to seize certain publications. These powers applied during World War II. However, they did not require Customs to keep records of each decision to seize a publication. In any event, it is unlikely that such records would still exist today.

You may find [this dissertation](#) and [this book chapter](#) on press censorship during World War II of interest, along with [our timeline of the history of classification in New Zealand](#).

Publication of response

This response may be published on the Classification Office’s [website](#). If it is published there, your personal information will be redacted.

Right of review

You have the right to make a complaint and seek a review by the Ombudsman of this response under [section 28\(3\) of the OIA](#). Information about this process is available at [ombudsman.parliament.nz](#) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Thank you for your interest in our mahi.

Ngā mihi nui,
Te Mana Whakaatu—Classification Office