

Media release

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Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Palmer, President, Law Commission

PUBLIC REGISTERS

The Law Commission's report on *Public Registers* was tabled today in Parliament. This is the result of stage 2 of the Law Commission's 4 stage Privacy Review.

The Commission has identified well over one hundred public registers in New Zealand – including rates databases and dog registers, transport registers, the electoral rolls, births, deaths and marriages registers, land registers, company registers, the health practitioners' registers.

“Public registers need to be open to the public for all sorts of reasons. They include tracing fraudulent company directors, verifying official records for evidence of births, deaths and marriages, locating a qualified plumber”, says Law Commission President, Sir Geoffrey Palmer.

“But personal information on such registers needs to be protected so it cannot be used for more dubious purposes, such as tracing people for harassment purposes or identity crime. Bulk access to register information for commercial purposes is also an oft-voiced concern”.

Regulating the balance between open access and protection of personal information currently varies greatly. There does not seem any rhyme or reason for much of this diversity.

The Commission concludes that the law regulating public registers needs greater clarity and consistency. “We recommend that a dedicated team should review all public registers, over a year, against a template set out in the report”, says Sir Geoffrey. Recommendations for resulting legislative changes should then be introduced by way of a single Omnibus Bill.

However, the Law Commission's recommendation for a public register review will not be considered by the Government until the Commission's reference on the Privacy Act is completed early next year.

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