

Version
as at 28 October 2021



Interpretation Act 1999

Public Act 1999 No 85
Date of assent 3 August 1999
Commencement see section 3

Interpretation Act 1999: repealed, on 28 October 2021, by section 6 of the Legislation (Repeals and Amendments) Act 2019 (2019 No 59).

Contents

	Page
Title	3
1 Short Title	3
Part 1	
Purposes, commencement, and application	
2 Purposes of this Act	3
3 Commencement	3
4 Application	4
Part 2	
Principles of interpretation	
5 Ascertaining meaning of legislation	4
6 Enactments apply to circumstances as they arise	4
7 Enactments do not have retrospective effect	4

Note

The Parliamentary Counsel Office has made editorial and format changes to this version using the powers under subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Legislation Act 2019.

Note 4 at the end of this version provides a list of the amendments included in it.

This Act is administered by the Ministry of Justice.

Part 3
Specific provisions applying to legislation

Commencement of legislation

8	Date of commencement of Acts	4
9	Date of commencement of regulations	5
10	Time of commencement of legislation	5

Exercise of powers between passing and commencement of legislation

11	Exercise of powers between passing and commencement of legislation	5
----	--	---

Exercise of powers in legislation generally

12	Power to appoint to an office	6
13	Power to correct errors	6
14	Exercise of powers by deputies	6
15	Power to amend or revoke	6
16	Exercise of powers and duties more than once	6

Repeals

17	Effect of repeal generally	7
18	Effect of repeal on enforcement of existing rights	7
19	Effect of repeal on prior offences and breaches of enactments	7
20	Enactments made under repealed legislation to have continuing effect	8
21	Powers exercised under repealed legislation to have continuing effect	8
22	References to repealed enactment	8

Amending legislation

23	Amending enactment part of enactment amended	8
----	--	---

Authority to make certain enactments

24	Authority to make certain enactments	8
25	Amendment and revocation of regulations made by Act	9

Forms

26	Use of prescribed forms	9
----	-------------------------	---

Part 4

Application of legislation to the Crown

27	Enactments not binding on the Crown	9
28	Review of this Part	9

Part 5

Meaning of terms and expressions in legislation

29	Definitions	9
----	-------------	---

29A	Meaning of de facto relationship	12
29B	Meaning of step-parent, etc	12
30	Definitions in enactments passed or made before commencement of this Act	13
31	Use of masculine gender in enactments passed or made before commencement of this Act	13
32	Parts of speech and grammatical forms	13
33	Numbers	13
34	Meaning of words and expressions used in regulations and other instruments	13
35	Time	13
36	Distance	14

Part 6

Amendments and repeals

37	Amendments to other Acts	14
38	Repeals and saving	14

Schedule 1

Amendments to other Acts

15

Schedule 2

Enactments repealed

16

An Act relating to the interpretation, application, and effect of legislation

1 Short Title

This Act may be cited as the Interpretation Act 1999.

Part 1

Purposes, commencement, and application

2 Purposes of this Act

The purposes of this Act are—

- (a) to state principles and rules for the interpretation of legislation; and
- (b) to shorten legislation; and
- (c) to promote consistency in the language and form of legislation.

3 Commencement

This Act comes into force on 1 November 1999.

4 Application

- (1) This Act applies to an enactment that is part of the law of New Zealand and that is passed either before or after the commencement of this Act unless—
 - (a) the enactment provides otherwise; or
 - (b) the context of the enactment requires a different interpretation.
- (2) The provisions of this Act also apply to the interpretation of this Act.

Part 2 Principles of interpretation

5 Ascertaining meaning of legislation

- (1) The meaning of an enactment must be ascertained from its text and in the light of its purpose.
- (2) The matters that may be considered in ascertaining the meaning of an enactment include the indications provided in the enactment.
- (3) Examples of those indications are preambles, the analysis, a table of contents, headings to Parts and sections, marginal notes, diagrams, graphics, examples and explanatory material, and the organisation and format of the enactment.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 5(j)

6 Enactments apply to circumstances as they arise

An enactment applies to circumstances as they arise.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 5(d)

7 Enactments do not have retrospective effect

An enactment does not have retrospective effect.

Part 3 Specific provisions applying to legislation

Commencement of legislation

8 Date of commencement of Acts

- (1) An Act or an enactment in an Act comes into force on the date stated or provided in the Act for the commencement of the Act or for the commencement of the enactment.
- (2) If an Act does not state or provide for a commencement date, the Act comes into force on the day after the date of assent.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 10A; 1986 No 115 s 6

9 Date of commencement of regulations

- (1) Regulations or enactments in regulations come into force on the date stated or provided in the regulations for the commencement of the regulations or for the commencement of the enactments.
- (2) If regulations do not state or provide for the date on which the regulations or enactments in the regulations come into force, the regulations come into force on the day after the date of their notification in the *Gazette*.

10 Time of commencement of legislation

- (1) An enactment comes into force at the beginning of the day on which the enactment comes into force.
- (2) If an enactment is expressed to take effect from a particular day, the enactment takes effect at the beginning of the next day.
- (3) An Order in Council may appoint a day for an enactment to come into force that is the same day as the day on which the Order in Council is made, in which case the enactment comes into force at the beginning of that day.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 10; 1986 No 115 s 6

Exercise of powers between passing and commencement of legislation

11 Exercise of powers between passing and commencement of legislation

- (1) A power conferred by an enactment may be exercised before the enactment comes into force or takes effect to—
 - (a) make a regulation or rule or other instrument; or
 - (b) serve a notice or document; or
 - (c) appoint a person to an office or position; or
 - (d) establish a body of persons; or
 - (e) do any other act or thing for the purposes of an enactment.
- (2) The power may be exercised only if the exercise of the power is necessary or desirable to bring, or in connection with bringing, an enactment into operation.
- (3) The power may not be exercised if anything that results from exercising the power comes into force or takes effect before the enactment itself comes into force unless the exercise of the power is necessary or desirable to bring, or in connection with bringing, the enactment into operation.
- (4) Subsection (1) applies as if the enactment under which the power is exercised and any other enactment that is not in force when the power is exercised were in force when the power is exercised.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 12

*Exercise of powers in legislation generally***12 Power to appoint to an office**

The power to appoint a person to an office includes the power to—

- (a) remove or suspend a person from the office:
- (b) reappoint or reinstate a person to the office:
- (c) appoint another person in place of a person who—
 - (i) has vacated the office; or
 - (ii) has died; or
 - (iii) is absent; or
 - (iv) is incapacitated in a way that affects the performance of that person's duty.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(f)

13 Power to correct errors

The power to make an appointment or do any other act or thing may be exercised to correct an error or omission in a previous exercise of the power even though the power is not generally capable of being exercised more than once.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(j); 1936 No 58 s 2

14 Exercise of powers by deputies

A power conferred on the holder of an office, other than a Minister of the Crown, may be exercised by the holder's deputy lawfully acting in the office.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(e); 1986 No 115 s 7

15 Power to amend or revoke

The power to make or issue a regulation, Order in Council, Proclamation, notice, rule, bylaw, Warrant, or other instrument includes the power to—

- (a) amend or revoke it:
- (b) revoke it and replace it with another.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(h)

16 Exercise of powers and duties more than once

- (1) A power conferred by an enactment may be exercised from time to time.
- (2) A duty or function imposed by an enactment may be performed from time to time.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(g)

Repeals

17 Effect of repeal generally

- (1) The repeal of an enactment does not affect—
 - (a) the validity, invalidity, effect, or consequences of anything done or suffered:
 - (b) an existing right, interest, title, immunity, or duty:
 - (c) an existing status or capacity:
 - (d) an amendment made by the enactment to another enactment:
 - (e) the previous operation of the enactment or anything done or suffered under it.
- (2) The repeal of an enactment does not revive—
 - (a) an enactment that has been repealed or a rule of law that has been abolished:
 - (b) any other thing that is not in force or existing at the time the repeal takes effect.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 20(a), (e), (f)

18 Effect of repeal on enforcement of existing rights

- (1) The repeal of an enactment does not affect the completion of a matter or thing or the bringing or completion of proceedings that relate to an existing right, interest, title, immunity, or duty.
- (2) A repealed enactment continues to have effect as if it had not been repealed for the purpose of completing the matter or thing or bringing or completing the proceedings that relate to the existing right, interest, title, immunity, or duty.

Compare: 1924 No 11 ss 20(g), (h), 22

19 Effect of repeal on prior offences and breaches of enactments

- (1) The repeal of an enactment does not affect a liability to a penalty for an offence or for a breach of an enactment committed before the repeal.
- (2) A repealed enactment continues to have effect as if it had not been repealed for the purpose of—
 - (a) investigating the offence or breach:
 - (b) commencing or completing proceedings for the offence or breach:
 - (c) imposing a penalty for the offence or breach.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 20(h)

20 Enactments made under repealed legislation to have continuing effect

- (1) An enactment made under a repealed enactment, and that is in force immediately before that repeal, continues in force as if it had been made under any other enactment—
 - (a) that, with or without modification, replaces, or that corresponds to, the enactment repealed; and
 - (b) under which it could be made.
- (2) An enactment that continues in force may be amended or revoked as if it had been made under the enactment that replaces, or that corresponds to, the repealed enactment.

Compare: 1924 No 11 ss 20(d), 20A; 1960 No 50 s 2

21 Powers exercised under repealed legislation to have continuing effect

Anything done in the exercise of a power under a repealed enactment, and that is in effect immediately before that repeal, continues to have effect as if it had been exercised under any other enactment—

- (a) that, with or without modification, replaces, or that corresponds to, the enactment repealed; and
- (b) under which the power could be exercised.

Compare: 1924 No 11 ss 20(d), 20A; 1960 No 50 s 2

22 References to repealed enactment

- (1) The repeal of an enactment does not affect an enactment in which the repealed enactment is applied, incorporated, or referred to.
- (2) A reference in an enactment to a repealed enactment is a reference to an enactment that, with or without modification, replaces, or that corresponds to, the enactment repealed.
- (3) Subsection (1) is subject to subsection (2).

Compare: 1924 No 11 ss 20(b), 21

*Amending legislation***23 Amending enactment part of enactment amended**

An amending enactment is part of the enactment that it amends.

*Authority to make certain enactments***24 Authority to make certain enactments**

- (1) It is not necessary for an enactment, Proclamation, Order in Council, Warrant, or other instrument made under an enactment to refer to facts, circumstances, or preconditions that must exist or be satisfied before the enactment, Proclamation, Order in Council, Warrant, or other instrument can be made.

- (2) An enactment, Proclamation, Order in Council, Warrant, or other instrument is not invalid just because the enactment under which it is expressed to have been made does not authorise its making as long as its making is authorised by another enactment.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 24

25 Amendment and revocation of regulations made by Act

Regulations amended or substituted by an Act may be amended, replaced, or revoked by subsequent regulations as if they had been made by regulation.

Forms

26 Use of prescribed forms

A form is not invalid just because it contains minor differences from a prescribed form as long as the form still has the same effect and is not misleading.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 5(i)

Part 4

Application of legislation to the Crown

27 Enactments not binding on the Crown

No enactment binds the Crown unless the enactment expressly provides that the Crown is bound by the enactment.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 5(k)

28 Review of this Part

- (1) The Ministry of Justice must, by 30 June 2001, report to the Minister of Justice—
- (a) whether it is desirable that the law be changed so that all enactments bind the Crown unless provided otherwise; and
 - (b) whether changes in the law may be required to impose criminal liability on the Crown for the breach of any enactment.
- (2) In preparing the report, the Ministry must consider any reports prepared by the Law Commission or any other body relating to the liability of the Crown.
- (3) As soon as practicable after receiving a report from the Ministry, the Minister must present a copy of it to the House of Representatives.

Part 5

Meaning of terms and expressions in legislation

29 Definitions

In an enactment,—

Act means an Act of the Parliament of New Zealand or of the General Assembly; and includes an Imperial Act that is part of the law of New Zealand

commencement, in relation to an enactment, means the time when the enactment comes into force

Commonwealth country and **part of the Commonwealth** mean a country that is a member of the Commonwealth; and include a territory for the international relations of which the member is responsible

consular officer means a person who has authority to exercise consular functions

de facto partner means a person who is a party to a de facto relationship (as defined in section 29A)

enactment means the whole or a portion of an Act or regulations

Gazette means the *New Zealand Gazette* published or purporting to be published under the authority of the New Zealand Government; and includes a supplement

Governor-General in Council or a similar expression means the Governor-General acting on the advice and with the consent of the Executive Council

Minister, in relation to an enactment, means the Minister of the Crown who, under the authority of a warrant or with the authority of the Prime Minister, is responsible for the administration of an enactment

month means a calendar month

New Zealand or similar words referring to New Zealand, when used as a territorial description, mean the islands and territories within the Realm of New Zealand; but do not include the self-governing State of the Cook Islands, the self-governing State of Niue, Tokelau, or the Ross Dependency

North Island means the island commonly known as the “North Island”; and includes the islands adjacent to it north of Cook Strait

Order in Council means an order made by the Governor-General in Council

person includes a corporation sole, a body corporate, and an unincorporated body

prescribed means prescribed by or under an enactment

Proclamation means a proclamation made and signed by the Governor-General under the Seal of New Zealand and published in the *Gazette*

public notification, public notice, or a similar expression in relation to an act, matter, or thing, means a notice published in—

- (a) the *Gazette*; or
- (b) 1 or more newspapers circulating in the place or district to which the act, matter, or thing relates or in which it arises

regulations means—

- (a) regulations, rules, or bylaws made under an Act by the Governor-General in Council or by a Minister of the Crown:
- (b) an Order in Council, Proclamation, notice, Warrant, or instrument, made under an enactment that varies or extends the scope or provisions of an enactment:
- (c) an Order in Council that brings into force, repeals, or suspends an enactment:
- (d) regulations, rules, or an instrument made under an Imperial Act or the Royal prerogative and having the force of law in New Zealand:
- (e) an instrument that is a legislative instrument or a disallowable instrument for the purposes of the Legislation Act 2012:
- (f) an instrument that revokes regulations, rules, bylaws, an Order in Council, a Proclamation, a notice, a Warrant, or an instrument, referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e)

repeal, in relation to an enactment, includes expiry, revocation, and replacement

rules of court, in relation to a court, means rules regulating the practice and procedure of the court

South Island means the island commonly known as the “South Island”; and includes the islands adjacent to it south of Cook Strait

territorial limits of New Zealand, limits of New Zealand, or a similar expression, when used as a territorial description, means the outer limits of the territorial sea of New Zealand

working day means a day of the week other than—

- (a) a Saturday, a Sunday, Waitangi Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Anzac Day, the Sovereign’s birthday, and Labour Day; and
- (b) a day in the period commencing with 25 December in a year and ending with 2 January in the following year; and
- (c) if 1 January falls on a Friday, the following Monday; and
- (d) if 1 January falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, the following Monday and Tuesday; and
- (e) if Waitangi Day or Anzac Day falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, the following Monday

writing means representing or reproducing words, figures, or symbols in a visible and tangible form and medium (for example, in print).

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 4

Section 29 **committed for trial**: repealed, on 1 July 2013, by section 413 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011 (2011 No 81).

Section 29 **de facto partner**: inserted, on 26 April 2005, by section 3 of the Interpretation Amendment Act 2005 (2005 No 13).

Section 29 **regulations** paragraph (e): replaced, on 5 August 2013, by section 77(4) of the Legislation Act 2012 (2012 No 119).

Section 29 **summary conviction**: repealed, on 1 July 2013, by section 413 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011 (2011 No 81).

Section 29 **writing**: substituted, on 21 November 2003, by section 38 of the Electronic Transactions Act 2002 (2002 No 35).

Section 29 **working day** paragraph (d): replaced, on 1 January 2014, by section 8 of the Holidays (Full Recognition of Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day) Amendment Act 2013 (2013 No 19).

Section 29 **working day** paragraph (e): inserted, on 1 January 2014, by section 8 of the Holidays (Full Recognition of Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day) Amendment Act 2013 (2013 No 19).

29A Meaning of de facto relationship

- (1) In an enactment, **de facto relationship** means a relationship between 2 people (whether a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman) who—
 - (a) live together as a couple in a relationship in the nature of marriage or civil union; and
 - (b) are not married to, or in a civil union with, each other; and
 - (c) are both aged 16 years or older.
- (2) Despite subsection (1), a relationship involving a person aged 16 or 17 years is not a de facto relationship unless that person has obtained consent for the relationship in accordance with section 46A of the Care of Children Act 2004.
- (3) In determining whether 2 people live together as a couple in a relationship in the nature of marriage or civil union, the court or person required to determine the question must have regard to—
 - (a) the context, or the purpose of the law, in which the question is to be determined; and
 - (b) all the circumstances of the relationship.
- (4) A de facto relationship ends if—
 - (a) the de facto partners cease to live together as a couple in a relationship in the nature of marriage or civil union; or
 - (b) one of the de facto partners dies.

Section 29A: inserted, on 26 April 2005, by section 4 of the Interpretation Amendment Act 2005 (2005 No 13).

29B Meaning of step-parent, etc

For the purposes of an enactment, the relationship of step-parent, stepson, step-daughter, or any other relationship described by a word containing the prefix

“step”, may be established by civil union or by de facto relationship as well as by marriage.

Section 29B: inserted, on 26 April 2005, by section 4 of the Interpretation Amendment Act 2005 (2005 No 13).

30 Definitions in enactments passed or made before commencement of this Act

In an enactment passed or made before the commencement of this Act,—

Act includes rules and regulations made under the Act

Governor means the Governor-General

land includes messuages, tenements, hereditaments, houses, and buildings, unless there are words to exclude houses and buildings, or to restrict the meaning to tenements of some particular tenure

person includes a corporation sole, and also a body of persons, whether corporate or unincorporate.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 4

Section 30 **constable**: repealed, on 1 October 2008, by section 130(1) of the Policing Act 2008 (2008 No 72).

31 Use of masculine gender in enactments passed or made before commencement of this Act

In an enactment passed or made before the commencement of this Act, words denoting the masculine gender include females.

32 Parts of speech and grammatical forms

Parts of speech and grammatical forms of a word that is defined in an enactment have corresponding meanings in the same enactment.

33 Numbers

Words in the singular include the plural and words in the plural include the singular.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 4

34 Meaning of words and expressions used in regulations and other instruments

A word or expression used in a regulation, Order in Council, Proclamation, notice, rule, bylaw, Warrant, or other instrument made under an enactment has the same meaning as it has in the enactment under which it is made.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 7

35 Time

- (1) A period of time described as beginning at, on, or with a specified day, act, or event includes that day or the day of the act or event.

- (2) A period of time described as beginning from or after a specified day, act, or event does not include that day or the day of the act or event.
- (3) A period of time described as ending by, on, at, or with, or as continuing to or until, a specified day, act, or event includes that day or the day of the act or event.
- (4) A period of time described as ending before a specified day, act, or event does not include that day or the day of the act or event.
- (5) A reference to a number of days between 2 events does not include the days on which the events happened.
- (6) A thing that, under an enactment, must or may be done on a particular day or within a limited period of time may, if that day or the last day of that period is not a working day, be done on the next working day.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(a), (b)

36 Distance

A reference to a distance means a distance measured in a straight line on a horizontal plane.

Compare: 1924 No 11 s 25(c)

Part 6 Amendments and repeals

37 Amendments to other Acts

The enactments specified in Schedule 1 are amended in the manner indicated in that schedule.

38 Repeals and saving

- (1) The enactments specified in Schedule 2 are repealed.
- (2) Section 26 of the Acts Interpretation Act 1908 as set out in Schedule 2 of the Acts Interpretation Act 1924 continues in force despite the repeal of both of those Acts.

Schedule 1
Amendments to other Acts

s 37

Imperial Laws Application Act 1988 (1988 No 112) (RS Vol 30, p 1)

Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Regulations (Disallowance) Act 1989 (1989 No 143)

Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Schedule 2

Enactments repealed

s 38

Acts and Regulations Publication Act 1989 (1989 No 142) (RS Vol 31, p 36)
Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Acts Interpretation Act 1924 (1924 No 11) (RS Vol 31, p 1)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1960 (1960 No 50) (RS Vol 31, p 32)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1962 (1962 No 9) (RS Vol 31, p 32)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1973 (1973 No 46) (RS Vol 31, p 32)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1979 (1979 No 71) (RS Vol 31, p 33)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act (No 2) 1979 (1979 No 128) (RS Vol 31, p 33)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1983 (1983 No 22) (RS Vol 31, p 34)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1986 (1986 No 115) (RS Vol 31, p 35)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1988 (1988 No 113) (RS Vol 31, p 36)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1994 (1994 No 22)

Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1996 (1996 No 70)

Finance Act (No 2) 1952 (1952 No 81) (RS Vol 31, p 31)
Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Statutes Amendment Act 1936 (1936 No 58) (RS Vol 31, p 30)
Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Statutes Amendment Act 1942 (1942 No 18) (RS Vol 31, p 30)
Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Statutes Amendment Act 1945 (1945 No 40) (RS Vol 31, p 31)
Amendment(s) incorporated in the Act(s).

Notes

1 *General*

This is a consolidation of the Interpretation Act 1999 that incorporates the amendments made to the legislation so that it shows the law as at its stated date.

2 *Legal status*

A consolidation is taken to correctly state, as at its stated date, the law enacted or made by the legislation consolidated and by the amendments. This presumption applies unless the contrary is shown.

Section 78 of the Legislation Act 2019 provides that this consolidation, published as an electronic version, is an official version. A printed version of legislation that is produced directly from this official electronic version is also an official version.

3 *Editorial and format changes*

The Parliamentary Counsel Office makes editorial and format changes to consolidations using the powers under subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Legislation Act 2019. See also PCO editorial conventions for consolidations.

4 *Amendments incorporated in this consolidation*

Legislation (Repeals and Amendments) Act 2019 (2019 No 59): section 6

Holidays (Full Recognition of Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day) Amendment Act 2013 (2013 No 19): section 8

Legislation Act 2012 (2012 No 119): section 77(4)

Criminal Procedure Act 2011 (2011 No 81): section 413

Policing Act 2008 (2008 No 72): section 130(1)

Interpretation Amendment Act 2005 (2005 No 13)

Electronic Transactions Act 2002 (2002 No 35): section 38