



- 2 MAR 2020

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

On 16 November 2019, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *Any information relating to all overpayments of the Winter Energy Savings Payment to people who fall outside of entitlement requirements paid out by the Ministry of Social Development between the period of its establishment to the latest records taken*

The Winter Energy Payment (WEP) assists with the extra costs involved to heat homes over the winter period.

When the Winter Energy Payment was announced as part of the Families Package in December 2017, it was decided that eligibility to the payment would be limited to those who receive New Zealand Superannuation, Veteran's Pension or main benefits. This was to ensure that standard requirements relating to citizenship, residency status and being ordinarily resident would be met automatically, and allows for the administration of the WEP to be efficient and cost effective. More information regarding eligibility for the WEP is available on the Ministry's website at: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/winter-energy-payment.html.

To recognise that people may leave New Zealand for short periods, it was decided that those people would continue to receive the WEP if they were overseas for 28 days or less. This broadly aligns with other supplementary payments such as the Disability Allowance and Accommodation Supplement. Overpayments of the WEP primarily relate to recipients leaving New Zealand.

Under the Privacy Act, the Ministry was required to give people receiving New Zealand Superannuation or a Veteran's Pension 10 days notice before stopping extra payments. This contributed to people being overpaid and having to pay the money back.

On 20 May 2019, an Approved Information Sharing Agreement (AISA) between the Ministry and the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs) came into force, which removed the 10 day notice period and allowed the Ministry to suspend

supplementary assistance payments, including the WEP, immediately when a person is overseas for more than 28 days.

More information about the AISA including all relevant documents that have been publicly released on this matter are available on the Ministry of Social Development website at: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/information-sharing-agreement-between-the-msd-and-the-nz-customs-service.html.

The table below shows the number and amount of WEP overpayments created during the quarters June 2018 to September 2019, as at 11 December 2019.

Quarter Ending	Number of Debts	Amount of Debt
June 2018	2	\$174.03
September 2018	11,449	\$397,396.07
December 2018	3,772	\$231,738.61
March 2019	482	\$39,619.94
June 2019	2,152	\$55,685.62
September 2019	7,628	\$227,497.12
Total	25,485	\$952,111.39

Notes:

- This is a count of overpayments not individual clients
- The same client may incur more than one debt
- WEP overpayments were only created since June 2018.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding WEP overpayments, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

George Van Ooyen
Group General Manager Client Service Support