



28 JAN 2021

On 11 December 2020, you emailed the Office of Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development and Employment requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *I would like to know whether or not New Zealanders who have already taken up, and are completing, seasonal jobs of more than 6 weeks are entitled to the incentive payments under the seasonal work scheme, ie are the incentive payments backdated from the moment the employment commenced or are they only applicable to seasonal work undertaken from the date of the announcement.*
2. *I would also like to know whether this payment under the seasonal work scheme can be utilised more than once, ie: to garner \$2000 across two 6-week contracts with different employers.*
3. *Furthermore, if it is not the case that the payments are able to be backdated, what consideration has been given to the skewed incentive this would provide to jobseekers to abandon employment and seek a contract with a new employer?*
4. *Regarding point three, was a cost benefit analysis undertaken?*
5. *I would like a copy of all internal and external correspondence regarding this policy announcement, including the internal communication made to staff in work and income regarding this policies enactment.*

On 14 December 2020, your request was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) to respond to.

On 17 December 2020, the Ministry contacted you to refine question five of your request as it is broad in scope and would likely be refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to provide you with the requested information. The Ministry suggested you refine your request to the following:

- *Request for all internal and external communication or guidelines regarding the seasonal work schemes (excluding emails).*

To date, the Ministry has not received a response to this request for refinement.

For the sake of clarity your questions are addressed in turn;

1. *I would like to know whether or not New Zealanders who have already taken up, and are completing, seasonal jobs of more than 6 weeks are entitled to the incentive payments under the seasonal work scheme ie: are the incentive payments backdated from the moment the employment commenced, or are they only applicable to seasonal work undertaken from the date of the announcement.*

The New Zealand Seasonal Work Scheme is an existing scheme intended to be an incentive for New Zealanders to take up seasonal work, and to provide support when undertaking seasonal work. There is an eligibility criteria to be accepted into the scheme, which includes criteria such as age and residency status. Changes to the scheme came into effect from 15 November 2020 to allow MSD to pay an incentive payment and accommodation costs for eligible participants who are required to relocate to take up seasonal work. Incentive payments are not able to be backdated for people who had already commenced seasonal work before the changes to the scheme came into effect. More information about the scheme and the criteria can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/productas/a-z-benefits/nz-seasonal-work-scheme.html#null.

2. *I would also like to know whether this payment under the seasonal work scheme can be utilised more than once, ie: to garner \$2000 across two 6-week contracts with different employers.*

The incentive payment is generally paid to eligible participants of the scheme in two instalments. The first instalment of \$500 is given halfway through the contract and the final instalment of \$500 is given at the end of the contract. A person receiving the incentive payment can only receive up to \$1,000 in a 52-week period, therefore they cannot receive the full incentive payment more than once in a year.

3. *Furthermore, if it is not the case that the payments are able to be backdated, what consideration has been given to the skewed incentive this would provide to jobseekers to abandon employment and seek a contract with a new employer?*

Anybody that took up seasonal work before the additional incentive payments and accommodation costs came into effect on 15 November 2020 will have their eligibility assessed from this date onwards. Therefore, while payments cannot be backdated, people may still be eligible if their existing contracts continue for six weeks after 15 November and they meet all other eligibility criteria. Alternatively, a person could finish their existing contract and take up a new role that means they can receive payments under the scheme. We do not consider that jobseekers will be able to abandon employment and then receive payments under the scheme.

4. *Regarding point three, was a cost benefit analysis undertaken?*

The Ministry undertook policy analysis considering the policy setting of the scheme and considered how the scheme could help address current barriers that unemployed New Zealanders face in taking up seasonal employment. The Ministry worked with the regional teams to work on the cost of the scheme based on estimate take up through each region. The Ministry does not consider the scheme will enable people to abandon their current employment and use the scheme to seek a contract with a new employer.

5. *I would like a copy of all internal and external correspondence regarding this policy announcement, including the internal communication made to staff in work and income regarding this policies enactment.*

The Ministry is unable to answer question five of your request for all internal and external correspondence as it is very broad and substantial manual collation would be required to locate and prepare all documents within scope of your request. This is due to the fact that many of these documents are held within Ministry staff members email accounts. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake it's work would still be prejudiced.

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 available to the wider public. 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 in regard to the support that seasonal workers have received from the Ministry, 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.

Ngā mihi nui



Megan Beecroft

Manager
Employment and Housing Policy