



19 November 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 16 October 2025, requesting information about Winter Energy Payments (WEP) overpayments, and the cost of recovering these overpayments.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

You requested, for each year since the introduction of the winter energy payment in 2018:

- 1. How many winter energy over-payments were made?*
- 2. Of these how many were to superannuants? Number and/or percentage of request quoted*
- 3. Of these how many were due to travel overseas for more than 28 days? Number and/or percentage*
- 4. Of those, how many had notified MSD of their travel plans prior to departure and prior to MSD receiving notification from DIA regarding their departure from NZ? Number and/or percentage.*

The Ministry is unable to provide the total number of Winter Energy Payment (WEP) overpayments, or the additional breakdowns requested. While the Ministry can provide clients with their own debt information upon request, as this information is recorded on their individual files, aggregated data on overpayments cannot separate WEP-related debts from other types of overpayments. Each request for an individual's overpayment summary must be completed on a case-by-case basis, requiring manual collation.

Therefore, to provide group-level data on New Zealand Superannuation recipients who have received a WEP overpayment since 2018, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as it

requires substantial collation. 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 its work would still be prejudiced.

5. What is the real cost (man-hours, postage etc) of recovering these overpayments?

Following the establishment of a debt, any staff member within the Ministry—typically case managers—may negotiate repayment rates that reflect a client's circumstances and aim to be sustainable. However, supporting clients with debt repayment is only one aspect of a case manager's varied role, and the time they spend on recovery activity for current clients is not specifically recorded.

Therefore, the Ministry cannot provide staff or other costs associated with recovering current client debt—WEP-related or otherwise—as isolating these costs would require substantial manual collation, including reviewing individual client files to determine the time staff spent on debt-recovery versus other activities and estimating the relevant costs. As with your requests 1-4, to provide you with this information, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, this aspect of your request is also refused under section 18(f) of the 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 its work would still be prejudiced.

6. If the data required for questions 4 & 5 is not available what is being done to close this data gap?

7. To the best of knowledge to any MSD employee or Minister that they report to, has there been any change or are there any planned changes to processes to prevent this double handling and/or checking of travel data before sending offensive letters to the superannuant and incurring significant recovery cost back onto the system?

The Ministry is exploring operational and efficiency improvements to reduce the impact of WEP processing on clients in 2026. These changes will help ensure that client travel information received by the Ministry is accurate and up-to-date, and that required actions are always taken promptly, preventing unnecessary debts for clients who do the right thing.

Where an overpayment was created due to an administrative error by Ministry staff and the client received the payment in good faith, our policy allows for write-off in certain circumstances. More information can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/current-client-debt/debt-the-result-of-an-error-01.html.

In such cases, the correct procedure is to first apply for a Review of Decision, which has two stages: an initial review followed by consideration by the Benefit Review Committee. More information about the ROD process can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/feedback-and-complaints/review-of-decisions.html.

The Ministry is also working on a multi-year programme to upgrade our systems and transform how we deliver our services for the future. This work is focused on three main areas:

- **Work** – Delivering services that are responsive to the New Zealand labour market, so employers get timely help, and clients get the right level of support to get work-ready, into work, and stay in work.
- **Partnering** – Working better with partners and reducing red tape so they can focus on helping people.
- **Payments** – Making sure people get the right financial help and reducing overpayments.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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



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