



4 September 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email dated 3 July 2025 in which you requested information regarding the COVID Wage Subsidy scheme.

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.

I would be grateful for clarification of some of the information provided about the survey of 1000 wage subsidy recipients. I would like this to be treated as a request under the Official Information Act.

There were 136 recipients excluded from the survey because of "data limitations".

- 1. The point is made that some of these exclusions were recipients to the survey who had applied under a previous wage subsidy scheme and so were excluded. Are you able to tell me how many replies came into this category?*
- 2. Some emails to recipients "bounced back" and were excluded. You have explained that this can happen because the email is associated with a person who no longer works for the company. But as the subsidy was paid to the company, was the company then sent an email? I am assuming that MSD records contain details of the business address and not just an email address. I would like to know how many of the 136 excluded recipients were "bounced back". Also, could you please tell me why the survey did not name the specific business that had received the wage subsidy?*

As noted in the Ministry's response to you dated 26 June 2025, in order to provide a more detailed breakdown of the sample, 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, the above parts of your request are refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as requiring 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 requests 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.

We can confirm that the Ministry collected a range of details from employers as part of the wage subsidy application process, including a physical address for the company and their contact information. However, while carrying out the survey, we found that some phone numbers and email addresses held on application forms were no longer in use (such as where the business was longer operating, had changed ownership, or where the person responsible for submitting the application was no longer employed).

Please note, that this was an assurance exercise employing a survey-based approach (as opposed to a full Ministry investigation, which would only be undertaken in cases of potential fraud). As such, the extent of our follow up in this instance was based solely on the contact information provided in the application forms, without further information being requested.

3. *Some responses were received from businesses that were not in the survey but were included in the survey if they had responded to the correct declaration. Could you please tell me how many replies came into this category? Did the inclusion of such responses mean that the survey was no longer random?*

We are unable to provide you with the number of responses that the Ministry received from companies not initially intended to be included in the sample. This information, which is not centrally held, is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to provide it. This information is contained within individual files, each of which would require manual review to respond to your request. 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.

Please note, however, that we do not believe the Ministry's approach in this case severely impacted the randomness of the sample, as all businesses included were still identified through their association with an email address that had been randomly selected.

4. *47 businesses could not be traced. All wage subsidy money was paid into bank accounts, held by some entity or by someone. Did MSD follow this up with the banks concerned or seek assistance from Inland Revenue*

about who held these accounts and the addresses of the account holders?

As noted in our previous response, the survey emailed to selected recipients included a link to a declaration asking them to confirm that they had met the eligibility criteria and obligations under the Wage Subsidy Scheme.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the purpose of the survey was to seek written confirmation of eligibility from a sample of wage subsidy recipients, as per the 2021 recommendations of Audit New Zealand and the Office of the Auditor General. There was no expectation that the Ministry verify an applicant's eligibility with banks, Inland Revenue, or with any other agencies.

- 5. If MSD does not have the answers to questions 1- 3, and does not wish to undertake any analysis of the 136 recipients excluded from the survey, I would be grateful if a copy of the anonymised data for the 136 recipients could be sent to me and I will undertake this work.*
- 6. I had also asked for information on how many of the 136 recipients excluded from the survey, and how many of the 47 missing recipients, were in the 500 businesses with more than 80 employees. However MSD has indicated that it is unable to carry out this analysis as it would divert staff from other work. Given these circumstances, I would be grateful if MSD could provide me with an anonymised data base from the survey so that I could attempt to undertake this work.*

To reiterate, the Ministry no longer holds a centralised record of businesses that were contacted as part of the survey, and we would therefore have to compile this list manually from a review of the individual wage subsidy applications. In order to provide a more detailed breakdown of the sample, 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, the above parts of your request are also refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as requiring 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 requests 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.

I will publish 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services