



25 FEB 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 13 December 2019 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The data showing how many beneficiaries in the Taupo electorate (broken down by Service Centre - Cambridge, Tokoroa, Taupo and Turangi) have been overpaid by Work and Income NZ since 1 January 2019, and per year since 2015, and what the average level of debt for these overpayments is.*

You clarified your request to exclude debt created as the result of a fraud investigation and recoverable hardship assistance loans and provided the example of overpayments being created through misdeclaration or late declaration of income.

The rules and rates of entitlement to the various welfare payments administered by the Ministry are set out in the Social Security Act 2018. A benefit overpayment occurs when it is determined that a client has received payments to which they were not entitled. Generally, these occur when a client delays or fails to inform Work and Income about changes in their circumstances which effect their benefit entitlements, such as starting work or entering a relationship.

When the Ministry establishes a benefit overpayment, it is reviewed to determine whether the debt should be recovered or written off as an office error. Where the debt is proven, it must be repaid. The Ministry negotiates a repayment amount that takes account of the client's circumstances and their ability to pay without causing undue hardship.

Table One enclosed, shows the number of clients and average amount of overpayment debt for the Cambridge, Taupo, and Tokoroa Service Centers over the last five years. Please note there has been no Service Centre in Turangi since 2010.

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. 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 overpayment debt in the Cambridge, Taupo, and Tokoroa service centres, 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 extending to the right.

George Van Ooyen
Group General Manager Client Service Support

Table One: Number of working age main beneficiaries with an overpayment debt, and average overpayment debt amount for the Cambridge, Taupo, and Tokoroa electorates, broken down by Service Centre.

Service Centre	As at the end of December									
	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Number of clients	Average debt amount	Number of clients	Average debt amount	Number of clients	Average debt amount	Number of clients	Average debt amount	Number of clients	Average debt amount
Cambridge	327	\$2,112.57	332	\$3,394.49	269	\$2,929.84	306	\$3,040.71	319	\$2,620.08
Taupo	736	\$3,464.76	750	\$3,671.32	780	\$3,548.05	831	\$3,762.59	873	\$3,659.79
Tokoroa	1,281	\$3,807.35	1,364	\$3,741.49	1,304	\$3,697.21	1,345	\$3,693.09	1,348	\$3,391.46

Notes:

- This table includes working age clients only (18 to 64 years old) and shows data at a point in time as at the end of December each year.
- Main Benefits exclude NZ Superannuation, Veteran’s Pension, Non-Beneficiary assistance.
- This table excludes debts for recoverable assistance and fraud created on the current benefit.
- This report includes primary clients and partners.