



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

10 JUN 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 14 May 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *How many National Superannuitants to date have elected to opt out of the Winter Energy Payment. The date nearest to your reply will be sufficient, but hopefully a May 2020 date.*

The Winter Energy Payment (WEP) is a non-taxable benefit paid to people in receipt of a main benefit, New Zealand Superannuation (NZS) or Veteran's Pension (VP) to support their household heating costs during the winter period. The WEP is paid from 1 May to 1 October.

To receive the WEP a client must:

- be receiving a qualifying benefit (or portion of it) during the winter period. Qualifying benefits include Sole Parent Support, Supported Living Payment, Jobseeker Support, Jobseeker Support Student Hardship, Emergency Benefit, Emergency Maintenance Allowance, Youth Payment, Young Parent Payment, New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension
- be either the person granted a qualifying benefit or their partner, and the qualifying benefit (or portion of it) is paid to the client
- not be disqualified from receiving WEP
- not have chosen to opt out of receiving the WEP
- be living in New Zealand, and not be outside of New Zealand during the period that WEP can be paid for more than 28 days during any one or more absences.

With the exception of the Emergency Benefit, a client must have New Zealand Citizenship, permanent residence or hold a residence class visa to receive the above qualifying benefits for the WEP.

More information about the WEP can be found here:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/winter-energy-payment/index.html

Clients don't have to apply for the WEP, it is automatically paid to those receiving a main benefit, NZS or VP and meet all other eligibility criteria.

Please note that WEP rates have doubled for this year only due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. Single people with no dependent children will

receive \$40.91 each week, and couples and people with dependent children will receive \$63.64 each week.

In regards to your request, I can advise that between 1 May 2019 and 30 September 2019, 680 NZS recipients 'opted out' of the WEP. Please note, that a client can 'opt in' and 'opt out' of the WEP anytime during the payment period. You are provided with the number of people who 'opted out' and were not regranted the WEP during the 2019 payment period.

Please note that your request for data on WEP 'opt outs' up until May 2020 is unavailable, as the WEP payment is only distributed to clients from 1 May to 30 September every year. In line with the Ministry's standard reporting of quarterly data, the figures for WEP 'opt outs' for May 2020 can be released to you in a new Official Information Act request at the beginning of July 2020, if you still require them.

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 regarding the number of Superannuants who opted out of the WEP, 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



Bridget Saunders
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