



12 JUN 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 26 May 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA), the following information:

- *Names of businesses, and amounts repaid by them [in the Tairāwhiti/Gisborne area], with regards to the Wage Subsidy.*

The Wage Subsidy has enabled rapid support for thousands of New Zealand businesses during this time of uncertainty and has ensured that employees were able to remain connected with their employers during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Government has previously made it clear that the Wage Subsidy Scheme has been set up on a high-trust model, in order to deliver funds to support workers, families and businesses.

The Ministry recognises the need for more information about the recipients of the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy. However, the Ministry does not have the capability to report this data by region, or Territorial Local Authority. The system used to receive and process Wage Subsidy applications did not have that functionality built into it, and the rapid timeframe for implementation did not allow for that to be incorporated at that time.

Applicants are required to provide the Ministry with a business address. However, a significant number of businesses have headquarters in big cities such as Auckland. Therefore, a disproportionate number of businesses that applied for the Wage Subsidy come under 'Auckland' or other big cities in the Ministry's data pool, although they may (solely) operate in other places. The Ministry therefore cannot compile a sound data table for businesses operating in a certain place at this time; any data provided may potentially be misleading.

As such, your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act, as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department of the Crown or organisation.

The OIA enables people to request official information from Ministers and agencies. However, the OIA only applied to information that is already held by a Minister or agencies. There is no obligation to create information in order to respond to requests.

In the meantime, the Ministry has published information about successful applicants for the Wage Subsidy through a search engine available at the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/2020/covid-19/covid-19-wage-subsidy-employer-search.html.

This search engine is set up similarly to the Companies Register and requires searchers to know the names of the businesses they are searching for. The search engine provides the number of employees paid, and the total amount paid for each employer. However, the search engine holds limited information about the nature of who has received Wage Subsidy payments, such as location.

The search engine does not, at this time, include all employers. The Ministry has a team of people working to update the list on an ongoing basis.

The Ministry's reporting on COVID-19 related measures is published on the Ministry's website here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/index.html.

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 businesses in the Tairāwhiti/Gisborne area in receipt of the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy, 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



Kate Satterthwaite
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services