



30 JUN 2021

Tēnā koe

On 25 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

I am seeking figures for the years 2015/15-2020/21:

- 1. the number of payment errors affecting clients identified each year*
- 2. the value of payment errors each year*
- 3. the amount repaid to clients because of errors each year*
- 4. the amount of debt cancelled/written-off because of errors made each year*

On 23 June 2021, the Ministry emailed you to notify your response. You were advised that a response would be provided to you on or before 2 July 2021.

Isolated payment errors may occur due to a processing error by a staff member or can be more widespread as a result of a system error. Where an error has been identified the Ministry will take steps to resolve it as appropriate, which can result in an overpayment being written off, or an underpayment being offset with a payment of arrears to the affected client.

Where a payment issue affecting multiple clients has occurred, the Ministry will contact clients directly as well as publishing public messaging encouraging clients to make contact if they believe they have been affected. More information about this can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/payment-errors/index.html.

The Ministry does not centrally collate information on the total number of payment errors affecting clients each year. If a payment error has occurred and been identified by the Ministry, this information would be held on an individual's client file.

To provide the information requested, Ministry staff would have to be diverted from their usual tasks to examine every Work and Income client's file. I am therefore refusing questions one, two and three of your request under section 18(f) of the Act as substantial manual collation would be required to provide the requested information.

To answer question four of your request, please find **Table One** below which provides you the number of debts written off due to office errors and the write off amount, broken down by quarter.

Table One: Debt written off due to office errors from 1 July 2015 to 31 March 2021 broken down by quarter ending.

As at quarter ending	Total	
	Number of Debts Written Off	Write Off Amount
September 2015	2,400	\$1,756,619.38
December 2015	1,758	\$1,418,794.07
March 2016	1,410	\$1,160,519.95
June 2016	1,935	\$1,230,272.95
September 2016	2,178	\$1,262,222.58
December 2016	1,458	\$982,625.61
March 2017	2,388	\$1,203,122.36
June 2017	1,491	\$1,136,913.06
September 2017	1,935	\$1,602,635.72
December 2017	2,946	\$1,404,701.06
March 2018	1,728	\$1,022,798.72
June 2018	2,835	\$1,547,201.87
September 2018	1,731	\$1,018,300.33
December 2018	1,950	\$930,277.50
March 2019	1,536	\$1,029,831.69
June 2019	1,410	\$999,467.77
September 2019	1,791	\$872,409.54
December 2019	1,389	\$1,047,164.93
March 2020	1,017	\$585,131.19
June 2020	945	\$556,794.89
September 2020	7,392	\$999,217.04
December 2020	1,467	\$1,066,900.03
March 2021	1,488	\$984,870.06

Notes:

- To protect confidentiality the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table.
- A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three.
- The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals.
- The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

You will note a higher number of debts written off for the September 2020 quarter. In July 2020 there was an exchange rate error with the Netherlands overseas pension,

which affected New Zealand Superannuation payments where a direct deduction of the Netherlands pension was in place. The error was corrected, but part of the correction process meant small overpayments were created on some of the files affected. These overpayments were all written off.

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 payment errors and debt, 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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Manager
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