



8 November 2021

Tēnā koe

On 23 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

The amount spent on each emergency management fund in response to extreme weather events.

- 1. Total amount of funds allocated in 2021, 2020, 2019 and 2018*
- 2. How much funding was allocated to each extreme weather event and region, and from what sources*
- 3. What each pool of funding was used for*
- 4. What the total budget for emergency funds your ministry had set aside each year (if there is a budget).*

The Ministry administers special assistance specifically designed for relief in emergency events. The types of specific special assistance that the Ministry may provide in the event of an emergency, including severe weather events, include Civil Defence Payments, Enhanced Task Force Green (ETFG), and Rural Assistance Payments. The Ministry also runs the 0800 Government Helpline.

Civil Defence payments are part of the hardship assistance appropriation. They are available for people who have been affected by a Civil Defence emergency, and can cover the following costs:

- Accommodation to host for evacuees (billeting in private homes, marae or community centres)
- Accommodation in motels, hotels, and temporary rental accommodation
- Loss of livelihood payments for affected people who cannot work and lose income due to the civil defence emergency i.e. the person cannot go to work, the workplace is closed, or they need to remain with their family
- Food, clothing, bedding, and petrol.

Civil Defence emergency assistance does not have to be repaid and is not income and asset tested. When granting this assistance, it is not required to take into account any other Special Needs Grant assistance that has been paid to the applicant over the last 52 weeks.

For a schedule of Civil Defence payments made in the period specified in your request, please refer to the enclosed **Table 1**, showing Civil Defence Special Needs Grants between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2021. As your request is only regarding extreme weather events, Civil Defence Grants paid in respect of the Christchurch mosque attacks have not been included in Table 1.

When adverse weather events or natural disasters occur, depending on the scope and scale of the damage, the Government may announce the use of **ETFG** with enhanced subsidies

and specific duration projects. The ETFG scheme is an employment programme used to help territorial authorities recover from an adverse event. It provides funding to councils or other authorised agencies to employ jobseekers to assist with clean-up, and the hire or purchase of equipment and clothing. In some cases, private residents may also be eligible for assistance in removing trees blocking driveways etc., where other help is not available.

Work and Income identifies suitable recruits for ETFG workers and supervisors. These workers may be jobseekers getting a benefit, students, or workers displaced from their jobs due to the event, e.g. farm or freezing workers.

Under delegated authority from Cabinet the Minister for Social Development and Employment can approve up to \$500,000 plus GST for ETFG. This cost is usually met within baselines and can assist in clean-up activities for a specified period, which will depend on the size and impact of the adverse event. Amounts more than \$500,000 require Cabinet approval.

The \$500,000 plus GST is not per region. If the event extends beyond one region, ETFG funding is allocated across the affected area based on damage, impact assessments and work required.

ETFG funding can be used for the following purposes:

- Standard wage subsidy, plus wage top-up to the minimum wage, including holiday pay, ACC levies and GST, based on a 40-hour week. Supervisors can qualify for slightly more than the minimum wage.
- Wages for supervisors based on a 40-hour working week when supervising four or more workers (incl. holiday pay, ACC levies and GST). The actual wage paid will depend on the size of teams and what is required.
- The purchase of personal safety gear and equipment such as boots, spades and gloves (GST inclusive).
- The hire of light equipment, e.g. chainsaws and vans or four-wheel drive vehicles. 'Light equipment' does not include heavy machinery hire.
- A start-up grant for local authorities to assist with administration costs and other items, for example, manual handling training, fencing repair, chainsaw use and Red Cross First Aid Certificate.

For EFTG payments made in the period specified by your request, please refer to the enclosed **Table 2**, showing Enhanced Task Force Green funding in the financial years 2018/2019, 2019/2020, and 2020/2021.

Please note, the 2021 Buller and Marlborough floods are not included in Table 2 as all of the expenditure for these EFTG programmes will fall in the financial year 2021/2022.

Under delegated authority from Cabinet, the Ministers of Finance, Social Development and Employment, and Agriculture can approve the use and approve funding of up to \$500,000 from the Between Budget contingency for **Rural Assistance**. Payments are made specifically to a Primary Industry in a certain area, usually after the industry in that area has been affected by a natural disaster, e.g. a flood, a climatic event (such as a drought), or a biosecurity event (such as a pest or disease).

The payments help farmers who meet all the qualifications and have an approved Primary Industry, no other significant income, and no readily realisable assets that are not connected with the Primary Industry.

For a schedule of rural assistance payments in the financial years 2018/2019, 2019/2020,

and 2020/2021, please see the enclosed **Table 3**.

Furthermore, the Ministry may offer additional support to people following an emergency event. For example, people may access financial assistance such as main benefits, Special Needs Grants, Advance Payments and Recoverable Assistance Payments. Details regarding whether assistance has been paid specifically in response to an extreme weather event would be held in notes on individual records. In order to provide this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

The Ministry has considered whether it would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. The Ministry has concluded that, in either case, its ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

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, 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

Simon Scott

Simon Scott
**National Manager Emergency Management and BC
Emergency Management and Business Continuity**