



19 July 2023

Tēnā koe

On 26 June 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- 1. I would like to know how many customers have been coming to MSD to get power bills paid – and if possible how many are for Nau Mai Ra*
- 2. I'd like any emails, between departments that mention Nau Mai Ra..*
- 3. If customers seeking a payment for a bill from Nau Mai Ra has been turned down for reasons due to the amount, company process etc.*

On 30 June 2023 the Ministry contacted you to seek clarification on your request, specifically questions 1 and 3. On 5 June 2023, you clarified:

- 1. How many customers have been coming to MSD to get power bills paid and how many are for Nau Mai Ra, over the past year*
- 3. How many customers seeking a payment for a bill from Nau Mai Ra have been turned down for reasons due to the amount, company process etc*

The Ministry, through Work and Income, provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to help people meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs, power and other costs. These payments are available to any person as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost for an essential need from any other source. Work and Income ensures that people receive their correct entitlement to other financial assistance as part of the application and assessment process.

Work and Income assists people to manage their costs in the longer term, not just with immediate and urgent assistance. It is important to understand why the client cannot meet these costs to provide the most appropriate form of assistance. The applicant also has an obligation to manage their own finances with the help of Work and Income. This may include seeking financial advice from budgeting services.

The Ministry can provide hardship grants to cover outstanding bills or reconnection services, for electricity, gas or water supply. What we can provide will depend on each Energy Supplier and the specific services they offer. For this request, we have only provided you with information relating to hardship grants for electricity assistance.

I will now respond to your questions in turn.

- 1. How many customers have been coming to MSD to get power bills paid and how many are for Nau Mai Ra, over the past year*

Table One in the attached **Appendix** outlines the number of hardship grants and amounts approved for electricity, overall and for Nau Mai Ra Ltd customers, in the period 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2023.

- 2. I'd like any emails, between departments that mention Nau Mai Ra..*

In order to provide you with this information, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

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

- 3. If customers seeking a payment for a bill from Nau Mai Ra has been turned down for reasons due to the amount, company process etc.*

The Ministry is unable to provide you with this information as our reporting system cannot associate declined hardship grants for electricity to a specific provider.

If this information were to be held by the Ministry, it would be held in notes on individual client files and in order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's 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'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 electricity assistance for Nau Mai Ra clients, 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

Bridget Saunders

Bridget Saunders
**Manager Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**

Appendix

Table One: Number of hardship grants and amounts approved for electricity assistance, to all energy providers and for Nau Mai Ra Ltd customers, in the period 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Year Granted	Total Grants for all Energy Providers	Total Amount for all Energy Providers	Number of Hardship grants (Nau Mai Ra Ltd)	Amount of Hardship grants (Nau Mai Ra Ltd)
2022	36,942	\$16,631,423.33	318	\$172,815.49
2023*	7,695	\$3,279,114.50	210	\$112,616.65

Table notes:

- This is a number of grants and not a number of clients.
- A client may have multiple grants during the reported period.
- 2023* is a partial year from 1 January to 31 March.
- 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.
- The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.