



11 NOV 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

On 13 October 2019, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- 1. Information on the number of NZ Superannuation recipients who had the Winter Energy Payment reduced because of overseas travel during the 2019 period that this payment applied to*
- 2. Information on the total amount of money that was saved during this same 2019 period because of the reduction in Winter Energy Payments to NZ Superannuitants as a result of such overseas travel*
- 3. An estimate of the total cost of administering the programme specifically relating to recording the stopping of payments, the restarting of payments and including the administrative costs of recovering overpayments relating to NZ Superannuitants wherever such administrative costs have arisen as a result of overseas travel during the Winter Energy Payment programme in this same 2019 period.*

The Winter Energy Payment assists with the extra costs involved to heat homes over the winter period. It is recognised that people may leave New Zealand for short periods, and so it was decided that those people would continue to receive the Winter Energy Payment if they were overseas for 28 days or less. This broadly aligns with other supplementary payments such as the Disability Allowance and Accommodation Supplement.

When setting the details of a new payment or social security policy, decisions about the level of administrative burden the client and the Ministry should face are considered and balanced against both the objectives and cost of the policy. The design of the Winter Energy Payment, including the rules around overseas travel and granting it automatically without means testing, tries to strike the right balance.

I am unable to provide you with the information you have requested regarding the suspension of the Winter Energy Payment as a result of overseas travel under section 18(f) of the Act. The Ministry is unable to report on the number of people in receipt of New Zealand Superannuation who have had it suspended for the reason of overseas travel in 2019. To do so would require the Ministry to manually check thousands of individuals' files as there is no coding in the electronic system that can be used to report on this. 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 operating of the Winter Energy Payments, and the administration of any overpayments as a result, is included as a normal business function and not itemised or costed specifically to the administration of the Payment. As such, I am unable to provide an estimate of the total cost of administering the Payment and recovering overpayments relating to it. This information does not exist in accordance with section 18(e) of the Act.

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 shortly. 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 EH SNGs, 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Saunders', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bridget Saunders
Manager Issues Resolution