



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Jeremy Roundill  
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30 JUN 2020

Dear Jeremy Roundill

On 7 April 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information about businesses who have applied for the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy:

- *Business name*
- *NZBN*
- *Number of employees paid*
- *Total amount paid*
- *Application date*

On 15 April 2020, you received a response from the Ministry advising that the information you requested was available in the form of a search tool on the Ministry's website. A link to this search was provided to you in this response.

Information concerning the New Zealand Business Number (NZBN) was unable to be provided to you as the Ministry's reporting does not electronically collate this, meaning that gathering this information would require staff to manually review thousands of applications. As such, this aspect of your request was refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act.

Subsequent to this response, the Ministry received communication from the Office of the Ombudsman on 29 April 2020, advising that a complaint was made in relation to the response.

As a result of your complaint, the Ministry has reviewed its decision and will be providing you with the dataset that sits behind the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Employer Search (search tool).

Please treat this information with care, particularly when it comes to using and disclosing this information. The Ministry is mindful that disclosure of sets of information may heighten risks of financially motivated scams targeted at recipients of COVID-19 support. For example, an individual may use the list to contact businesses pretending to be a Ministry representative.

The Wage Subsidy scheme has enabled rapid support for thousands of New Zealand businesses during this time of uncertainty and has ensured that employees are able to remain connected with their employers during the COVID-19 lockdown. The scheme has been set up on a high-trust model, in order to quickly deliver funds to support workers, families and businesses.

Page 1 of 3

The Ministry has received a number of requests for the full list of recipients of the Wage Subsidy, including requests for the dataset that sits behind the search tool. The need for more information about the Wage Subsidy recipients is recognised, however the Ministry has had to carefully balance transparency and privacy considerations when making a decision about publishing this information.

The Ministry developed the search tool with close involvement from the Privacy Commissioner to ensure compliance with the Privacy Act 1993. The group the Ministry was particularly concerned about, from a privacy perspective, were sole traders, as the publication of their information on a public register is also the publication of personal information and would reveal that they are personally receiving financial support. The Ministry is conscious that for some, there is stigma around receiving government support.

The information available in the search tool is limited to employers with three or more employees. Sole traders with two or less employees are excluded from the searchable database to further protect the privacy of individuals who had applied.

Please find attached, an excel spreadsheet of the dataset which sits behind the search tool. This dataset includes the business name, the number of employees, and total amount of Wage Subsidy paid, as at 11 June 2020, for all employers with three or more employees.

Please note the following regarding the dataset provided:

- it does not include businesses that have repaid the subsidy in full
- it may not include accurate figures for businesses that have made repayments, as this information may take 2-3 working days to update
- the information is accurate as at the 11 June 2020, changes may have been made since this date, including that mentioned in the above point
- it does not include regional or industry sector breakdowns, and
- business names are the names given by employers on the Wage Subsidy application. Businesses may be known by, or operate under, different names.

The Ministry is unable to provide the full list of Wage Subsidy recipients, as doing so would require Ministry staff to manually review thousands of applications. This collation would constitute a line by line analysis of the full dataset (some half a million applications) redactions of personal and/or identifying information, and comprehensive fact-checking of amounts for each application.

For these reasons, the Ministry is also unable to provide you with the New Zealand Business Number (NZBN) or the application dates of Wage Subsidy recipients.

As such, your request for the full list of Wage Subsidy recipients is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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 be prejudiced.

You may be interested to know that the Ministry publishes Income Support and Wage Subsidy Weekly Updates that include updates on the number of Wage Subsidy application approved and paid, the total cost of this, and the number of jobs associated with paid applications. The Ministry also publishes COVID-19 Support for Businesses, which show Wage Subsidy data by industry sector. Both sets of data are available at the following link: [www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/index.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/index.html).

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding businesses that received 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Nadine Kilmister  
Deputy Chief Executive  
**Organisational Assurance and Communication**