

Reference: 20210178

29 June 2021



Dear 

Thank you for your Official Information Act (OIA) request, received on 3 May 2021.
You requested:

... any documents and other details relating to meetings which Treasury officials participated in or arrange during March 2020 with Business New Zealand or other business interests where the wage subsidy was discussed.

... any correspondence or details of other contacts relating to the wage subsidy with Business New Zealand and other business interests during 2020.

... a copy of the register of gifts and other favours received by Treasury officials since 1 January 2020.

I wrote on 25 May 2021 to let you know the time limit for responding to the request was extended to allow time for consultation, with the new due date for responding being 29 June 2021.

Information publicly available

The following specific information is covered by your request and is publicly available on the Treasury and COVID-19 websites:

Item	Date	Document Description	Website Address
1.	February 2021	The Treasury Gifts and Hospitality Register for 1 January – 31 December 2020	https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/information-release/treasury-gifts-and-hospitality-register-information-release
2.	14 March 2020	Aide Memoire: Wage subsidy scheme	https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/proactive-release/Aide-Memoire-Wage-Subsidy-Scheme-Note.pdf
3.	27 November 2020	Future of COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme T2020/3581	https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/other-official-information/responses-official-information-act-requests

Accordingly, I have refused your request for the documents listed in the above table under section 18(d) of the OIA: *the information requested is or will soon be publicly available*.

Some relevant information has been removed from documents listed in the above table and should continue to be withheld under the OIA, on the grounds described in the documents.

Various wage subsidy documents

A number of documents on the wage subsidy or related COVID-19 financial supports have been previously released to you or are available on the Treasury or COVID-19 websites.

Some of these documents contain minor reference to meetings or discussions with Business New Zealand, business groups or other social partners such as the Council of Trade Unions, during the 2020 calendar year. The documents or meetings may not have been specifically on the wage subsidy and may have covered general economic impacts of COVID-19 and the range of government supports including the wage subsidy.

In regards documents that specifically focus on the wage subsidy and include feedback from business groups, I draw your attention to these two documents which are publicly available:

1. *Aide Memoire: Wage subsidy scheme* makes reference to feedback received from Business New Zealand on the wage subsidy scheme
<https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/proactive-release/Aide-Memoire-Wage-Subsidy-Scheme-Note.pdf>
2. *Future of COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme T2020/3581* contains in Annex 1 a summary of discussions with Business New Zealand and other social partners. This document was released to you under a previous request and will be on the Treasury website shortly <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/other-official-information/responses-official-information-act-requests>

Information to be released

Meeting with business groups during 2020

A list of business groups Treasury engaged with in 2020 on COVID-19 related matters is attached to this letter.

Register of gifts

The register of gifts and hospitality is published shortly after the end of each calendar year. I expect the register for any gifts received in the full 2021 calendar year will be published around February 2022.

In the meantime, for the period 1 January 2021 to 3 May 2021, the following gifts and hospitality have been recorded.

	Recipient	Team	Description of gift or hospitality	Provider of gift or hospitality	Date
1.	Analyst	Housing & Urban Growth	Ticket to National Māori Housing Conference	National Māori Housing Conference Governance Group	24/2/21
2.	Principal Advisor	System Design and Strategy Team	Bottle of wine <i>[for providing lecture to students]</i>	Auckland University	15/3/21
3.	Senior Solicitor [on behalf of members of the Legal Team]	Legal Team	Light lunch at seminar on climate change legal risks	Chapman Tripp	16/3/21

Information to be withheld

There are additional documents covered by your request that I have decided to withhold in full under the following section 18(f) OIA, as applicable: *the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.*

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Official Information Act.

Additional summary information relevant to your request

Engagement with Business New Zealand in March 2020

There was frequent engagement between Business New Zealand and various government agencies, including Treasury officials, in March 2020. This was a period when the original wage subsidy advice and other economic advice was being prepared. The liaison with Business New Zealand and other social partners was organised through the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). This included for a period a representative from Business New Zealand being physically present in MBIE to enable continuous engagement on issues during this time.

Engagement with local business groups in 2020

The Treasury has undertaken broad and frequent (often virtual) engagement to get immediate feedback from businesses, industry sectors and communities to further help Treasury's understanding of the direct impact the pandemic has had. The Treasury's ability to advise the Government on how New Zealand is impacted by COVID-19 also depends on having a clear understanding of how New Zealand's businesses, communities and sector groups have been impacted, and how they are positioned to support the recovery.

During 2020, the Treasury undertook over a hundred engagements across a wide spectrum of organisations. These engagements helped inform the Treasury's policy advice on COVID-19 related matters.

Engagements included:

- 46 engagements with exporters and export-related organisations
- 20 engagements with regional chambers of commerce and employers' associations spanning all regions
- 12 engagements with sector organisations covering tourism, transport, retail & hospitality, construction, manufacturing and heavy industry
- Over a dozen engagements with iwi, NGOs, trade unions and business advisory organisations.

As would be expected, the conversations included discussions of the various wage subsidy schemes and other financial support measures. Among the feedback that was sought from these groups was how the Government's support measures were 'landing' and the areas in which additional government assistance may be welcomed.

For example, Treasury met with members of the New Zealand Construction Industry Council who made it clear that government support such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme had been widely appreciated, and that further assistance could be required to address the impact COVID-19 was having on the mental health of people in the construction sector. Treasury was also able to access and share information direct from Pacific small businesses and other frontline services on the uptake and effectiveness on various government supports.

The Treasury prioritised regional engagement with key stakeholders, to gather local intelligence that could inform our policy advice, and substantiate our understanding and "grass roots" exposure to how the outcomes of policies are being experienced by New Zealanders. Treasury targeted sectors that had been hard-hit by the pandemic and/or are likely to be central to the recovery.

From these discussions we learned that many firms made use of the Wage Subsidy Scheme and indicated that it was instrumental in keeping people in jobs. However, some participants suggested that the cessation of the wage subsidy might result in some staff reductions.

Further information on this engagement is included in online posts found at:

- <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-and-commentary/rangitaki-blog/2020-treasurys-year-covid>; and
- <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-and-commentary/rangitaki-blog/weu-special-topic-hyefu-business-talks>

Many of these meetings were held on a confidential basis as it could cover matters that were commercially sensitive to those businesses and sectors involved. A review of a sample of notes relating to these meetings indicates that much of the discussion was either on themes outside the scope of your request for information on wage subsidy discussions, or contained personal details, or commercially sensitive information that would usually be withheld under any release of material.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and enclosed documents may be published on the Treasury website.

This reply addresses the information you requested. You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keiran Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Keiran Kennedy
Manager, Welfare & Oranga Tamariki

Attachment: Record of COVID-19 related engagement with business and community groups

Date in 2020	Theme	Main contact for meeting
25 Sept	Whanganui	Whanganui Chamber of Commerce
18 Sept	Businesses	Investment banks and business advisors
11 Sept	Hospitality	Restaurants
3 Sept	Rotorua	Destination Rotorua
27 August	SMEs	Icehouse
21 Aug	Tourism	Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs)
14 Aug	Tourism	High-level in/outbound operators (Air NZ, airports)
12 Aug	Auckland	Employers and Manufacturers Assn
12 Aug	Auckland	Auckland Chamber of Commerce
5 Aug	Rotorua	Rotorua Chamber of Commerce
3 Aug	Tourism	Tourism sector peak bodies
30 July	Retail	Heart of the City
27 July	Industry	NZ Steel/BlueScope
16 July	Industry	Refining NZ
15 July	Hospitality	HospitalityNZ
8 July	Southland	Southland Chamber of Commerce
8 July	Industry	NZ Aluminium Smelter
3 July	Retail	RetailNZ
1 July	Taranaki	Taranaki Chamber of Commerce

18 June	Northland	Northland Chamber of Commerce
15 June	Hawkes Bay	Hawkes Bay Chamber of Commerce
10 June	Construction	NZ Construction Industry Council (NZCIC)
28 May	Pasifika	Pacific Business Trust
28 May	Waikato	Waikato Chamber of Commerce
27 May	Wellington	VUW
26 May	Wellington	Deloitte – Corporate Taxpayers' Group
22 May	Wellington	Wellington Employers Chamber of Commerce
21 May	Otago-Southland	Otago-Southland Employers' Association
20 May	Northern half of North Island	Employers and Manufacturers Association
13 May	Wellington	Wellington Chamber of Commerce
11 May	Canterbury	Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce
8 May	Gisborne	Gisborne Chamber of Commerce
8 May	Canterbury	Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce
29 April	Queenstown	Queenstown Chamber of Commerce
24 April	Nelson-Tasman	Nelson-Tasman Chamber of Commerce