

20-D-00979

s 9(2)(a)
Reporter
Radio New Zealand
s 9(2)(a) @rnz.co.nz

Dear s 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email of 17 June 2020 requesting the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

What proportion of the workforce had flexible working arrangements/ were working from home prior to Covid-19? Under Level 4? Under Level 3? Under Level 2? Now under level 1?

Copies of emails from Cabinet or the office of the Minister to chief executives and from chief executives to staff regarding working from home arrangements under level 1.

Copies of emails, reports and surveys regarding staff and managers' experience of working from home and any measures of productivity carried out.

This information has been provided in summary form, under section 16(1)e of the Act where the information requested by any person is comprised in a document, that information may be made available by giving an excerpt or summary of the contents.

Formal flexible working arrangements

The number of people who had formal flexible working arrangements prior to COVID-19 Level 4 was 24.7 percent. This is made up of working from home/remote locations, nine-day fortnights and part time hours.

Working arrangements under Alert Level 4

During Alert Level 4, all Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) staff worked from home.

Working arrangements under Alert Level 3 and Alert Level 2

Under Alert Level 3 the Ministry opened Environment House in Wellington from 5 May 2020 for people who needed to work from the office. A breakdown is provided in the table below of the percentage of people who were working from home during Alert Level 3 and Alert Level 2:

Week	% of people working from home	Alert Level
7 – 13 May 2020	98%	Level 3
14 – 20 May 2020	91%	Level 2
21 – 27 May 2020	85%	Level 2
28 May – 2 June 2020	90%	Level 2

Working from home arrangements under Level 1

We did not receive any emails from Cabinet or the office of the Minister to our chief executive during COVID-19.

During COVID-19, delegation of communicating with our staff around working from home arrangements was given by our Chief Executive Officer to Amanda Moran, Chief Operating Officer, who was our Response Controller for Business Continuity and Response Team (BCaRT).

On 19 June 2020, an email was sent to the organisation from our Response Controller, BCaRT, which set out the Ministry's expectations for working under Alert Level 1. This has been attached as Appendix A.

The Ministry is committed to providing a flexible workplace and has the technology in place to support our people to work remotely. We are working with our people to decide how we will continue to work in a flexible and sustainable way that meets the Ministry's and our people's needs.

Wellbeing Survey

From 6 April 2020 to 10 May 2020 the Ministry ran five wellbeing surveys. The key areas of focus were:

- how people were feeling
- how connected they felt
- how informed they felt.

The response to these surveys has been summarised in Appendix B.

Future of Work

The Ministry set up the Future of Work Programme @ MfE, which was designed to capture people's experiences of working remotely during COVID-19. We wanted to come out of this experience stronger than we went in, and create a new normal that works well for individuals, teams, the Ministry as a whole, our customers/partners and authorising environment.

We gathered the feedback through workshops, which were a mix of staff, people leaders and special interest groups. The feedback was collated and broken down into six key themes. This information has been attached as Appendix C.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Office of the Ombudsman of my decision to withhold information relating to this request, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on their website at:

www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Please note that, due to the public interest in our work, the Ministry for the Environment publishes responses to requests for official information on our [OIA responses page](#) shortly after the response has been sent. If you have any queries about this, please contact our Executive Relations team: ministerials@mfe.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely

Neil Hurley
Director, People Experience

Alex Galvin

From: COVID-19 Update
Sent: Tuesday, 9 June 2020 3:56 pm
To: All Remote Staff; All Staff Auckland; All Staff Christchurch; All Staff Wellington
Subject: 9 June 2020 - COVID-19 update

Categories: WFH Info

COVID-19 update

9 June 2020

In this update - we are now at Alert Level 1!

- Moving from a 'working from home organisation' to a 'flexible by default' organisation
- We care about your wellbeing
- Equipment from the office
- Travel
- What Alert Level 1 looks like
- Deliver smart solutions with the Future of Work project that help us work effectively

Alert Level 1: moving from a 'working from home organisation' to a 'flexible by default' organisation

As you will know, as of yesterday New Zealand is now at Alert Level 1. I'm sure this is great news for most of us, and that we are looking forward to doing more of the things we love – including interacting with our work colleagues.

We are no longer the 'working from home' organisation we needed to be under higher alert levels; we are a 'flexible by default' organisation. That means that we recognise people have individual circumstances and we can balance that with our work. We need to be effective teams that deliver our work programme, and support our ministers' and customers' needs. We also need to be agile and expect there to be a transition period.

Please start to discuss with your manager how you can come back into the office in a flexible way over the coming weeks. Let's be patient and deliberate with how we move back to our new normal. We're still working this out together.

Those based in our Auckland and Wellington offices will need to start a mix of working from home and in the office to balance our limited desk capacity from the higher alert levels. Each team and division will need to work out a plan within their allocated office spaces. And we will continue to adjust to working virtually and in person. Where possible, teams should work together to make sure they have time in person each week.

Under Alert Level 1 we no longer need to contact trace everyone in the office and where they sit. We are registering with the [NZ COVID Tracer app](#) and will have QR code posters displayed should you or your guests wish to keep track of where they have been. We will advise once they're up.

We care about your wellbeing

If you have any concerns, or need help, please reach out. We acknowledge that the move to Alert Level 1 is a time of change and may be unsettling. You can speak to your manager and/or colleagues, and there is a range of options to help on our [Te Taiao wellbeing page](#).

Equipment from the office

Many of us have sourced equipment from the office to improve our home workstation setups. Please consider carefully how you will use your equipment to best effect. It is best to bring your equipment back if you are mainly working in the office. You can drop it off at reception in Environment House. It is best to avoid moving equipment regularly between your home and the office.

Travel

We have had some great experiences working with stakeholders virtually and travel should remain limited at Alert Level 1. Domestic travel still requires Deputy Secretary approval and we are not travelling internationally.

What Alert Level 1 looks like

Changes at Alert Level 1

- Alert Level 1 looks like pre-COVID-19 business as usual but with public health measures and border restrictions in place.
- Public health measures include guidance on hygiene, contact tracing, testing, isolation and quarantine for people displaying symptoms or who have tested positive for COVID-19.
- There are no controls on businesses and services, gatherings, physical distancing or requirements to keep records to enable contact tracing.
- Work can be undertaken as normal, so all employees should be working or using usual leave arrangements.
- Vulnerable employees can work normally.
- Public transport operates as normal.

What doesn't change

- If an employee is required to self-isolate, or care for a dependant who is required to self-isolate, they should work from home wherever possible. Special paid leave is available if working from home is not possible.
- If a school or early learning centre is closed or has limited access on advice from the public health unit, special paid leave may be required in some circumstances. For example, where an employee cannot find alternative care arrangements and is unable to work from home.

Remember, stay home if you are unwell and continue to practice good hygiene. Refer to the [COVID-19 State Services Workforce Guidelines – Alert Level 1](#) for more information.

Deliver smart solutions with the Future of Work project that help us work effectively

Feedback from our Future of Work workshops tells us that our people are largely positive about working from home and its many benefits. As we move to Level 1, we will keep some of those benefits. This is not to say that working from home suits everyone or every business need. There is still work to be done to enable us to work effectively as a flexible organisation.

As a next step, summarised feedback from the workshops and initial recommendations will be provided to Te Pūrengi in the next week. We will then share the results more widely.

Heoi anō tāku mō nāianeī

Amanda Moran - Response Controller, BCaT
Ministry for the Environment – Manatū Mō Te Taiao



Making Aotearoa New Zealand
the most liveable place in the world
Aotearoa – he whenua mana kura mō te tangata



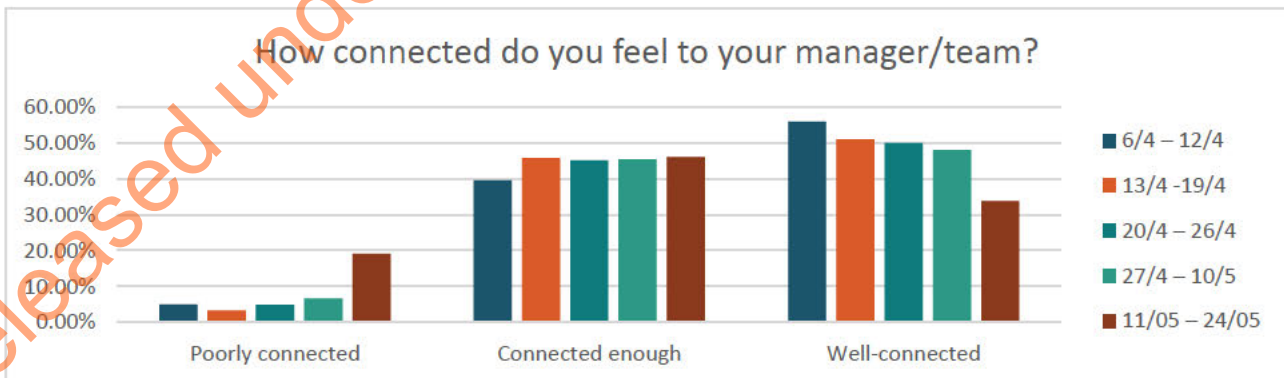
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Results from our Wellbeing Survey

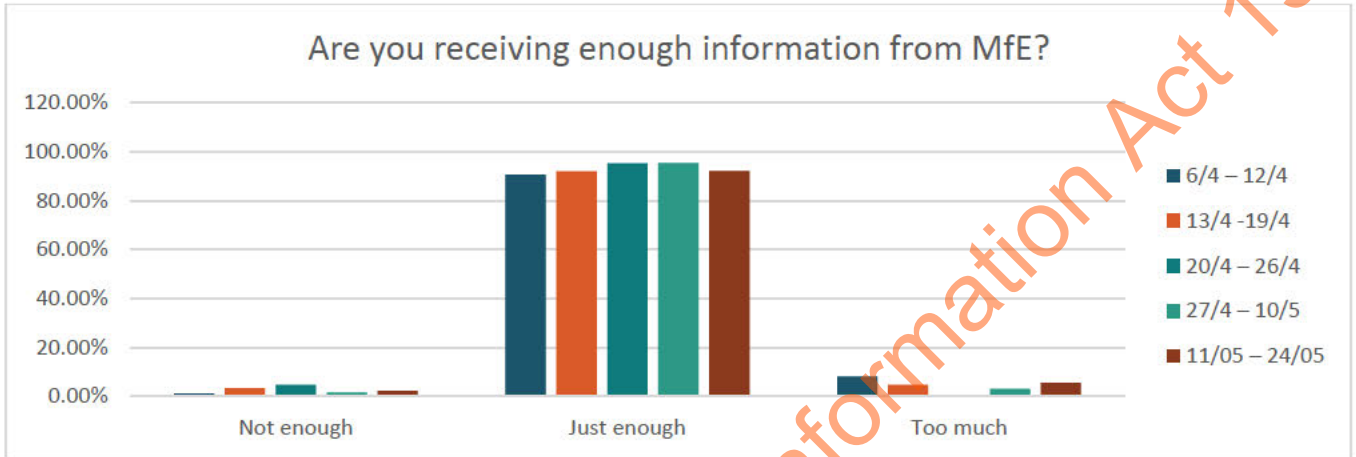
How are you doing today?						
Survey Period	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Respondents
6/4 – 12/4	3.47 %	26.64%	44.02%	20.85%	5.02%	259
13/4 -19/4	7.19%	26.08%	44.44%	18.30%	3.27	153
20/4 – 26/4	10.94%	23.44%	42.19%	18.75%	4.69	64
27/4 – 10/5	6.12%	27.55%	39.29%	23.98%	3.06%	196
11/05 – 24/05	11.24%	31.46%	37.08%	16.85%	3.37%	89



How connected do you feel to your Manager/team?				
Survey Period	Poorly connected	Connected enough	Well-connected	Respondents
6/4 – 12/4	5.04%	39.51%	55.81%	258
13/4 -19/4	3.27%	45.75%	50.98%	153
20/4 – 26/4	4.84%	45.16%	50.00%	62
27/4 – 10/5	6.63%	45.41%	47.96%	196
11/05 – 24/05	19.10%	46.07%	33.71%	89



Are you receiving enough information from MfE?				
Survey Period	Not enough	Just enough	Too much	Respondents
6/4 – 12/4	1.16%	90.73%	8.11%	259
13/4 -19/4	3.31%	92.05%	4.64%	151
20/4 – 26/4	4.69%	95.31%	0.00%	64
27/4 – 10/5	1.55%	95.36%	3.09%	194
11/05 – 24/05	2.25%	92.13%	5.62%	89



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At a glance

- Feedback from staff focus groups and emails has been summarised by picking out salient points that were representative of wider themes.
- In total, we categorised and systematised 330 key items of feedback into 6 themes:
 1. Staff wellbeing & engagement
 2. Working in a virtual environment
 3. Accommodation
 4. Environmentally sustainable work practices
 5. Capability & culture
 6. Organisational practices, policies & processes
- Between 3 and 7 sub-themes have been identified under each theme (shown on the next slide).
- Staff wellbeing & engagement was the theme that received the most feedback, followed by Working in a virtual environment.
- MfE has embraced working from home (WFH) and working virtually. Overall, staff reported an improvement in wellbeing, both physical and mental, and that they were enjoying less commuting, and having more time to spend on things such as family or exercise.
- The key challenges of working from home/working virtually related to a lack of informal connections, developing rapport, finding ways to disconnect from work, on-boarding new joiners, and finding ways to innovate & bounce ideas off each other.
- There is a strong desire to permanently embed working from home practices and virtual working options, to achieve better outcomes for our people and the environment.
- To do this, refreshed policies, practices & processes, as well as more sophisticated use of digital tools and an enabling culture, need to be put in place.
- People leaders need to lead by example to embed these new ways of working.

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Staff feedback: six themes + sub-themes identified

1. STAFF WELLBEING & ENGAGEMENT

95 ideas

- Improved work-life balance
- Blended approach (WFH & office)
- Normalising WFH
- Manager insights into wellbeing
- Disconnecting from work
- Improved engagement
- Improve WFH set-up

2. WORKING IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

77 ideas

- Digital tools and setup
- Connecting w/colleagues
- Connecting w/stakeholders
- Managing virtual work structure

3. ACCOMMODATION

41 ideas

- Building
- Office design
- Guidelines
- Location



4. ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE WORK PRACTICES

12 ideas

- Sustainability benefits of WFH
- Measuring sustainability benefits
- Leadership, process & culture change

5. CAPABILITY & CULTURE

56 ideas

- Informal connections & rapport
- Fostering workplace culture
- Shaping solutions for Māori staff
- Diversity & recruitment
- Feeling of connection
- Onboarding
- Managing staff

6. ORG PRACTICES, POLICIES & PROCESSES

46 ideas

- Connectivity within teams
- Connectivity across MfE
- Leading by example
- Learning & development
- Need for refreshed policies/processes
- 'Soft touch' leadership

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Theme 1: Staff wellbeing & engagement

This was by far the biggest theme, with 95 ideas. Of these, 35 related to improved work-life balance.

Key themes

Improved work-life balance

- Wellbeing has improved significantly, e.g. through more time with family, more time exercising, better eating.
- Staff are saving time and money not commuting.
- MfE's approach to bringing our whole selves to work is appreciated and some reported feeling seen and valued as Māori and individuals who have lives outside of work.

Normalising WFH

- Those already WFH are pleased to not be singled out anymore.
- Training/advice on WFH would be welcomed.

Blended approach (WFH & office)

- Broad support for a blended approach, with key days in the office, and WFH on the remaining days.
- A clear policy on this is needed to make it work well for the organisation.

Improved engagement

- Many staff felt able to focus more and be more efficient WFH.
- WFH has led to MfE becoming a more 'human' organisation. Staff know more about colleagues' home lives.

Challenges around disconnecting from work

- There is less of a boundary between work and home. Some staff reported working while sick, and having trouble disconnecting.

Opportunities to improve working from home set-ups

- Not everyone has an ideal WFH set-up.

Challenges around managers getting insights into staff wellbeing

- Managers need to think of new ways of ensuring and understanding staff wellbeing if they cannot see them face to face.





Theme 2: Working in a virtual environment

This was the second biggest theme. Half of the responses were related to the need for better digital tools and setups, especially when working from home.

Key themes

• Digital tools and setup

Generally, digital tools and setup have worked well, but there is room for improvement, especially:

- Work phones – not everyone has one
- Updating the online org chart
- Improving/updating the intranet
- Providing screens when WFH
- Introduction of better virtual tools to innovate and brainstorm
- Not everyone has an ideal WFH set-up, e.g. small apartments/flatmates

• Connecting with stakeholders

- Virtual stakeholder engagements have worked really well and there is potential to expand this.

• Connecting with colleagues

- There has been better connectivity with colleagues outside Wellington. Non-Wellington staff have felt much more included. Teams generally feel well connected through regular team check-ins and socialising, e.g. quizzes.

• Managing virtual work structure

- Policy needed for virtual working, including:
 - Asking staff to communicate how they work and when they will be available. This will help colleagues respect working hours and locations.
 - Transitioning from one meeting to the next, e.g. suggestion that meetings should only be 55 minutes to provide a break.

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Theme 3: Accommodation

Two-thirds of feedback about accommodation was related to office design.

Key themes

- **Office design**
 - Staff overwhelmingly want a mix of spaces to address different needs, e.g. quiet pods, meeting rooms, spaces for video calls, socialising zones.
 - Enable exercise by improving the bike set-up, increase the number of showers, provide space for yoga/meditation.
 - Support work-life balance by setting up a child-friendly area.
 - Indoor space should be welcoming, with lots of plants.
- **Location**
 - With people working virtually, MfE could consider setting up regional hubs.
- **Building**
 - Support for a green building – ‘walking the talk’ on sustainability.
- **Guidelines**
 - Develop guidelines on the use of office work spaces, e.g. desk bookings, having loud meetings in designated areas.

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Theme 4: Environmentally sustainable work practices

Half of the responses in this theme focused on the sustainability benefits of working from home/working virtually.

Key themes

- **Environmental sustainability benefits of WFH/working virtually**
 - WFH lowers carbon footprint due to less commuting.
 - Connecting virtually with stakeholders, and a decrease in domestic travel, bring lower carbon emissions.
- **Measure sustainability benefits**
 - It would be helpful to quantify the emissions reduction from WFH / working virtually.
- **Leadership, process & culture change**
 - Top-down support from leaders is required for a meaningful improvement to environmentally sustainable work practices.
 - Room to improve waste management, green procurement and sensor lights.
 - Develop refreshed policies around air travel.

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Theme 5: Capability & culture

Half of the responses were related to challenges or ideas for improving informal connections and rapport when working virtually.

Key themes

- **Informal connections & rapport**
 - Hard to read visual cues online.
 - Miss the informal, ad hoc interaction that comes with working in the office.
 - Harder to 'catch' managers who have busy calendars.
- **Feeling of connection**
 - A mix of feeling more and less connected.
 - Online sessions on wellbeing and MfELive had been helpful in fostering a sense of connection.
 - Non-Wellington-based staff reported feeling more connected.
- **Onboarding**
 - Virtual onboarding generally a challenge, including connecting with those beyond the immediate team and allowing for "quick questions" moments.
- **Diversity & recruitment**
 - Working virtually allows MfE to recruit from a much wider range of candidates in different locations – this is a real asset.
- **Shaping solutions for Māori staff**
 - WFH has enabled some Māori staff to work from their whenua. This also provides an opportunity around improving MfE's regional footprint.
 - WFH also presents challenges, such as ensuring Tikanga Māori.
- **Fostering workplace culture**
 - Virtual working has removed some perceptions of hierarchy.
 - Drop-in sessions for remote workers help with getting to know each other.
- **Managing staff**
 - Managers reported having less contact with junior staff.
 - Risk that staff who were disengaged could 'disappear off the map completely' when working remotely.

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Theme 6: Org practices, policies & processes

Half the ideas in this theme were related to the need for refreshed policies & processes for WFH/working virtually.

Key themes

- **Need for refreshed policies & processes**
 - Set policies around core working hours and office days, including expectations for remote workers to occasionally be onsite in MfE offices.
 - Set policy around virtual working, e.g. volume of online meetings, tech etiquette.
 - Develop policy on WFH and accessibility for differently-abled staff (or add to existing policy).
 - Develop policy on MfE resources available to remote workers.
- **Connectivity within teams**
 - Regular team check-ins work well and help staff feel connected.
 - There has been an increase in meetings due to a lack of ad hoc chats – need to manage this.
 - Consider establishment of remote teams with remote managers to allow for better connections.
- **Leading by example**
 - Leaders need to ‘walk the talk’ when it comes to wellbeing and WFH, and role model inclusion.
- **Connectivity across MfE**
 - Teams are feeling connected, but there is less connectivity across MfE.
 - Harder to ‘catch’ senior staff for sign-offs etc.
 - Make a readily available up-to-date org chart with pictures.
- **‘Soft touch’ leadership**
 - It’s harder to do soft touch leadership online, and also harder to reach (or be aware of) staff who are struggling.
- **Learning & development**
 - Does MfE’s learning & development need to be updated to reflect new ways of working?

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