

Business Case

Project No.	Project Name	Business Group	Sponsor	Business Owner	Project Manager	Date
4820	NZ Research Information System (NZRIS)	LSE	Danette Olsen	Privacy of natural persons		17/11/2025

Business Case Purpose					
This business case seeks \$1.944M of opex funding, \$1.401M in financial year FY25/26 and \$544K in financial year FY26/27 to deliver the New Zealand Research Information System . The delivery stage of the project will start on 18/11/2025 and is expected to be completed by 3/09/2026 .					
Problem and Opportunity					
Data within New Zealand’s Science, Innovation and Technology (SI&T) system is fragmented across multiple entities, with no centralised source for information on publicly funded research. Despite the government investing around \$1.4 billion annually, data is collected using varied standards and technologies, making it difficult to compare, aggregate, or gain a system-wide view. This lack of cohesion hampers transparency, policy evaluation, and strategic planning. Recognising this gap, the 2016 RSI Domain Plan proposed establishing a national research information system (NZRIS) to consolidate data from funders and research organisations, providing greater transparency around how public funds support SI&T activity, and facilitating greater connection and collaboration across the sector.					
Impact of Not Proceeding					
Lack of data to inform science reforms, which are a critical component of the Going for Growth Strategy; continued inability to gain cross-sector views of how public funding is used to support science; inability to realise efficiencies and remove duplication.					
Complexity	Med	Treasury RPA	Med	Business Impact	Med
Project Start Date	17/02/2025	Indicative Closure Date	21/12/2026	Privacy Threshold Assessment	Med

Recommendation	Decision
Approve: The business case funding 1. Opex of \$1.944M (\$1.401M in FY25/26 and \$544K in FY26/27) to fund the 4820 NZ Research Information System (NZRIS) Project from the National Research Information System appropriation via cost centre 1318 New Zealand Research Information System.	Approved/Not Approved
Approve: 2. Whole of Life Cost of \$4,900,400	Approved/Not Approved
Approve: 3. The project closure date of 21/12/2026.	Approved/Not Approved
Approve: 4. The benefits claimed and the associated measures as stated in the Benefits Table.	Approved/Not Approved
a) Note: That the Opex requirements have been reviewed and funding availability confirmed by Finance.	Noted/Not Noted
b) Note: That the next governance document submitted to this forum will be a Project Closure Report to be presented on 21/12/2026.	Noted/Not Noted

Project Overview (Short)
In Budget 2018, MBIE received \$10.1 million over four years to develop the New Zealand Research Information System (NZRIS) as a minimum viable product (MVP), along with \$1.7 million annually for ongoing operations. The MVP aimed to securely ingest, store, and share research data from funders and research organisations. An initial bespoke IT system was completed in 2022, but failed to process data correctly. A 2023 technical review indicated the cause of this was due to overly complex architecture in the data ingestion and warehouse components leading to a fragile system that was prone to breaking. The public interface component was considered usable, but required additional components to complete the system. The review indicated that fixing or rebuilding the system would come at significant cost, so MBIE chose to investigate alternatives.
Following this, an off the shelf product (Symplectic Elements) was identified as a viable solution. A successful proof of concept was completed in late 2024 and the project are now seeking approval to progress to a complete system. Continued development of NZRIS is supported by other funding organisations including MPI, the Royal Society Te Apārangi and the Health Research Council, research organisations including universities and public research organisations, and the Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Funding Source: Capex	Funding Source: Opex	Associated Memo Account	FIC Approval Needed?
N/A	Source: Science, Innovation and Technology: National Research Information System via 1318 New Zealand Research Information System	N/A	No

Strategic Case	The strategic case for NZRIS highlights the critical need for a centralised, reliable, and accessible system to manage research information across New Zealand’s science, innovation, and technology (SI&T) sector. It addresses longstanding fragmentation in data collection and reporting, which limits transparency, policy effectiveness, and collaboration. NZRIS is positioned as a key enabler of system-wide visibility, supporting better resource allocation, increased public value from research investment, and enhanced opportunities for innovation. The initiative aligns with government priorities for data-driven decision-making and sector-wide coordination.
Economic Case (Preferred Option)	Investing in a cloud-based managed service platform was the preferred solution to enable use of the existing public interface rather than a new build or fixing the existing system. A configurable off-the-shelf option offers a more cost-effective, scalable, and reliable path forward, as the system is already in use by other organisations and has been tested with data similar to that collected by NZRIS. This option also avoids the high costs and uncertainties of re-engineering or rebuilding from scratch. Four potential suppliers were assessed and preferred option was Digital Science’s Symplectic Elements. The product is already used by most universities, and provides opportunities to maximise other investments such as ORCID and the Dimensions bibliometric dataset. The flexibility and global expertise of Digital Science also make it a strong fit for NZRIS.
Commercial Case	Digital Science is engaged via a Fixed Priced SOW under procurement exemption rule 14.9.c.i. An MSA is in place. Deviate will be engaged again under Rule 13 and 14 (of the NZ Govt Procurement Rules) to complete the website enhancements under a time and material SOW. An MSA is in place. Procurements and vendor management will be managed by the project and overseen by Commercial Services and Asset & Supplier Mangement. Regular vendor status reports will be provided monthly to the Project Steering Group.
Management Case	The Project will be managed in alignment with MBIE project governance, management and quality assurance disciplines. Application development and testing will follow MBIE’s Systems Development Life Cycle. Website Development will follow an iterative approach overseen by TWSD Digital Channels. Business Change and Stakeholder engagement will be managed at the NZRIS Programme Level. Operational Readiness processes will be followed, including security accreditation and the support operating model design. Learnings from previous projects will be applied during delivery and the option for external quality assurance is included in the funding estimates if required by the PSG or DGB. The project will prioritise an earliest possible launch date and cost minimisation over a high risk delivery with an overly complex solution lacking clear benefits.
Financial Case	The total approved funding required to deliver the recommended solution is \$2,085,002. Funding will be drawn from the NRIS appropriation and managed through cost centre 1318 New Zealand Research Information System. Of the \$2.085M, \$1.363M is to cover Vendor Services and Hosting costs, and \$722K to cover project delivery resources and costs. The 1.363M vendor costs includes Digital Science 1.060M, Deviate 146K, Datacom 54K and Silverstripe 39K. The 722K staff and contractor costs includes Project Management 314K, Solution Architecture 110K, Cyber Security Consultancy 85K and Business Analysis 44K. Remaining Vendor SOWs and Resource requests will be actioned following Business Case approval. 1.541M of the 2.085M funding request is to be consumed in FY25/26 and 544K in FY26/27. Contingency included in the request is 325K (16%) - 78K in FY25/26 and 247K in FY26/27. This includes additional IT Vendor Services 80K, Project Management 78K, Solution Architecture 37K and QA vendor services 20K. Funding will cover the 134K to date to complete the project brief and business case, and 197K for monthly hosting and support. Funding requirements exclude 300K Transition costs from the previous project in FY24/25 funded by Business Opex, and also includes internal Business Change and Communications costs. The solution will require 60K monthly ongoing costs to host, maintain and support. A current solution does not exist, so there will not be any decommissioning costs or cancellation of support contracts.

Project Objectives		
Item #	Title	Description
1	Develop database and reporting solution for cross-organisational science investment data that connect to the existing public interface.	Engage a specialised vendor to configure an off the shelf product, and integrate into an end-to-end solution that delivers benefits associated with NZRIS by following MBIE’s Systems Development Lifecycle
2	IT solution conforms to agreed business and architecture acceptance criteria	The completed system fulfils the business objectives with infrastructure and security that is scalable and durable
3	Solution maintains historical data	Historical data (2014 onwards) provided by data providers is integrated
4	Solution can be handed over to BAU	Support model around the technical solution is in place

Business Change Summary (Impact on culture, systems, policy, processes and people) within the LSE group	
- Develop and implement changes in internal processes to support NZRIS, in conjunction with CDSS - Develop changes to form and contracts for reporting requirements - Develop, implement and manage new business processes for funders to provide information - Manage impacts on how funding gets tracked across the sector	
Cross-Agency Involvement	
NZRIS has engaged with other Government funders of Research that could become future data providers. This includes TEC, MPI, MoH, DOC, MfE, EECA, Natural Hazards Commission etc. We have also engaged with DIA in its capacity as the agency responsible for guiding and coordination of digital transformation, and Statistics NZ in its role as Governments Chief Data Steward. Both groups participate in NZRIS Oversight/Stewardship and Technical Advice groups.	

High-level Project Scope (Target Outcomes)	
In Scope	Out of Scope
A unified, cloud-based research information system	Integration with other MBIE systems e.g. Pitau, FMIS
Centralising data from multiple funders and research entities	Additional funding bids and Privately funding research
Improved transparency of how public funding supports the science system	Data provider portal and Data warehousing
Cross-Agency access to information that supports investment and Policy decision making.	Changes to legislation mandating provision of funding data to MBIE

High-level Project Deliverables		Date
1	NZRIS data processing and storage managed service	30/05/2026
2	Data Quality processes and tools	30/05/2026
3	Public-facing website providing reports and analysis on initiatives supported by science funding	31/08/2026

Key Project Milestones		Date
1	Build completed, ready for Systems Integration Testing	2/03/2026
2	Commence Pilot	4/05/2026
3	Full Launch	4/08/2026
4	Delivery Stage Completed (Commence Project Closure)	3/09/2026

Benefits (Between 1 – 3 Maximum)				
#	Type	Benefit Name	Description	Target Measure & Date
1	Improved Services: External	Enable Public Access to Research Information	Enhance the impact of research by making information held on government funded research publicly available online	Estimated amount of public funding data covered (target 60% by 15/12/2027) Number of NZRIS data downloads (target 120 pa)
2	Efficiency	Enhanced Quality and Coverage of underlying Research Data	Improved understanding of New Zealand’s research and science system by creating a consolidated view of research information for government funded research	Number of grants reported (target 250p.a. by 15/12/2027) Number of data providers (three by 30/09/2026) Number of website hits (target 12,000 pa) – note this is an additional indicator but is outside MBIEs control

Key Risks			
Theme	Description	Treatment & Controls	Rating
Data	Lack of Data Provider readiness	Business change including training, documentation.	M
Data	Data Quality issues	Additional data validation and inspection processes, data provider education and feedback, ongoing quality initiatives.	H
Systems	Data processing issues	Design and test. Implement system controls.	M
Solution	Excessive Customisation	Avoid. Use out of the box functionality.	M

Dependencies - Description	Impact	Date Needed
Release Schedule	Solution relies on the latest version of Symplectic Elements to deliver features	2/03/2026
IT Operations	Systems integration will require involvement of MBIE’s infrastructure vendors	16/02/2026
External data providers	System requires data to be supplied by other organisations. Full benefits reliant on external uptake of Website and ongoing maintenance of Website content.	31/05/2026

Constraints - Description		Treatment	Impact	
Limited Opex funds remain from NZRIS appropriation		Avoid gold-plating. Employ lower cost resources and contain vendor costs.	Greater reliance on operational staff to build and maintain the solution	
Project Category (Highlight one)		Run	Grow	Transform
Project Type (Highlight one only)				
Discretionary	An initiative that will improve how MBIE operates or replaces an existing system or asset. Initiatives may be able to be deferred and revisited later when resources are available but may become non-discretionary over time			
Mandatory	Legislated, regulated, or directed by Government or the MBIE SLT, or is essential to health and safety compliance, security or disaster recovery, or will result in or cause failure or reputational risk to MBIE if this is not undertaken			

Resourcing – How will this project be resourced?			
Internal		Contractors	Outsourced / Consultants
High	Resource required to deliver need to be dedicated and have specialist skills and knowledge		
Medium	Resource required to deliver would be a mix of internal / external resources		
Low	Can be delivered with existing internal resources and low resource requirements		
Minimal	Can be delivered with existing internal resources with minimal impact		

Reference Documentation (M=Mandatory)	Mako Link
Governance Group Terms of Reference (M)	178013820
Project Brief (M for medium and high complexity)	178201067
Business Case Playbook (M for medium and high complexity)	175250137
Finance Project Workbook (M)	174730775
Treasury Risk Profile Assessment (M)	178208939
Project Initiation Document (M)	179399297
Benefits Map (M)	178481123
Benefits Realisation Plan (M for medium and high complexity)	180717094
Assurance Plan (M for medium and high complexity)	179399297
Business Change Impact Assessment (M)	178340267
Privacy Threshold Assessment (M)	178352156 PIA 178199775
Stakeholder Analysis and Register (M)	178339169
Resource Management Plan (M)	180812704
Other (e.g. Architecture Forum Approval)	Business Requirements Document: 180660750 High Level Design: 180063096 DRB Approval: 181624811 Approved SOW with Digital Science: 174851246 Lessons learned from previous project: 113776310

Endorser / Reviewer	Endorsed?	Endorser / Reviewer	Endorsed?
All endorsements received (table exported from Confluence)	Yes 181672694	Project Steering Group (PSG minutes)	Yes 180976939
Project Sponsor: Danette Olsen	Yes	PMO Quality, Benefits & Assurance: Privacy of natural persons	Yes
Business Owner: Privacy of natural persons	Yes	Business Strategy Alignment: Privacy of natural persons	Yes
Cost Centre owner (if different from above) :	N/A	Technology Strategy Alignment: Privacy of natural persons	Yes
Finance Business Partner Privacy of natural persons	Yes	Workstream Mana Privacy of natural persons	Yes
Procurement & Commercial Privacy of natural persons	Yes	Digital Operations: Privacy of natural persons	Yes

Funding Information			FY 25/26	FY 26/27	FY 27/28	FY 28/29	FY 29/30	Total
A	Approved Investment Planning Bid	Capex						
		Opex	\$630,000					\$630,000
B	Previously Approved: Project Brief	Capex						
		Opex	\$140,915					\$140,915
C	Previously Approved: Business Case (if applicable)	Capex						
		Opex						
D	Previously Approved: Change Requests (if applicable)	Capex						
		Opex						
E	Carry-forwards (if applicable)	Capex						
F	Total Previously Approved Funding (B+C+D+E)	Capex						
		Opex	\$140,915					\$140,915
G	Funding requested in this Submission	Capex						
		Opex	\$1,400,508	\$543,579				\$1,944,087
H	Total Project Funding Requirement (F+G)	Capex						
		Opex	\$1,541,423	\$543,579				\$2,085,002
I	Estimated Ongoing Operating Costs	Opex		\$563,079	\$750,773	\$750,773	\$750,773	\$2,815,398
J	Depreciation							
K	Capital Charge							
L	Estimated Whole of Life Cost (H+I)		\$1,541,423	\$1,106,658	\$750,773	\$750,773	\$750,773	\$4,900,400

Lessons Learned
The previous NZRIS project conducted a Technical Review, that highlighted the following learnings: 1. The system was too focussed on fulfilling architectural and technical requirements 2. There was lack of ownership and poor communication in project delivery 3. Complexity outweighed business requirements. This project will address these by: 1. Simplifying requirements and aligning to a system that is already in use and working. 2. Embedding the business more deeply in the project, reducing vendor numbers and being more active in coordinating the various vendors. 3. Focussing in on what we want to achieve and simplifying our requirements/architecture to achieve that. 4. Basing recommendations in processes known to work and/or based on industry standards 5. Checking out possible vendors – feasibility study to see if it was possible to use COTS SaaS approach and then a POC to show it actually worked.