



20 March 2025

Ref: DOIA-REQ-0010052-Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons

Tēnā koe Privacy of natural persons

Thank you for your email of 20 February 2025 to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

"Hello, I'm a journalist writing for the Privacy of natural persons fact checking team. We're a third-party fact-checking partner with Meta (Facebook) working to mitigate misinformation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

I'm checking claims made by the Taxpayers Union that the government spent \$4m on a research project that involved playing audio recordings of whales to kauri trees to treat kauri dieback in what it calls the Ngā Rakau Takekake project.

It claims this funding was part of the National Science Challenge and cost taxpayers \$4,027,020, which was approved by Ayesha Verrall.

https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/2025_kauri_trees

https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/2025_jonesie_awards_for_government_waste_winners_announced

https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/whalesong_trees

I'm trying to check if it is correct that the government spent \$4m on a research project that consisted of playing sound to kauri trees to treat kauri dieback.

It claims this information is based on an Official Information Act request, so just getting in touch to request a copy of any OIA requests that have been released related to this project and funding.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you require further information or are unclear on what has been requested."

In response to your request, total funding for the 'Whalesong' project 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' was \$521,453. This project was part of a wider research theme programme, the Oranga (Wellbeing) theme, total funding for this theme was \$4.2 million and consisted mainly of seed banking, both protocols and collection. Further information is provided below.

Background:

As context for the response to your request, your email refers to a project funded through the Strategic Science Investment Fund (SSIF) Programmes fund. SSIF Programmes are structured around science platforms. Under this fund, MBIE makes decisions on who will host a particular platform and on the overall plan of research to deliver against government priorities, using criteria in the SSIF Investment Plan, and contracts with a host organisation to deliver the platform.

Funding decisions implementing that plan are made by an independent governance group with expert advice. This devolved process allows researchers and end-users closer to the issues, to design and deliver specific research projects needed to address the overarching question set by Government.

MBIE's contract with hosts include outcome frameworks and key performance indicators (KPIs). MBIE monitors SSIF contracts through annual reporting, regular interaction with governance bodies, and strategic discussions with platform hosts and research leadership. Monitoring is done against the SSIF programmes performance framework.

In relation to your specific request:

- In 2018, the previous government decided to fund a myrtle rust/kauri dieback research platform (Ngā Rakau Taketake) at \$13.75 million over three years, and decided as part of Budget 2019 to fund a further \$20.75 million for the development of tools to help manage kauri dieback. It was agreed that Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWLR) through New Zealand's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge (Biological Heritage NSC: [New Zealand's Biological Heritage | Ngā Koiora Tuku Iho | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment](#), [Biological Heritage NZ](#)) would host and implement the platform. The Biological Heritage NSC was a long-term programme responsible for research to improve New Zealand's biodiversity and biosecurity. This programme ended in June 2024.
- Research done under Ngā Rakau Taketake was required to align with the research priorities identified in the kauri dieback and myrtle rust science plans ([Kauri dieback science plan](#) and [Myrtle Rust Science Plan](#)) and with the Biological Heritage NSC's objective of protecting our biodiversity, improving our biosecurity and enhancing our resilience to harmful organisms.
- MBIE assessed a platform plan of research provided by the Biological Heritage NSC and contracted Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research to deliver the plan in May 2019. MBIE decided in June 2019 to extend that contract to include the Budget 2019 funding. The Biological Heritage NSC hosted and implemented the platform over a 5-year period from May 2019 to March 2024.
- Funding decisions for specific Ngā Rakau Taketake projects were made by the Biological Heritage NSC governance group: [Our People - Biological Heritage NZ](#). Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWLR) were contracted to administer funding for the SSIF platform and were required to have appropriate decision-making frameworks including governance, international science advisors, and management. The groups making and advising on investment decisions are listed [on their website](#).
- Ngā Rakau Taketake finished in March 2024, and the National Science Challenges finished in June 2024. Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, which hosted both Ngā Rakau Taketake and the Biological Heritage NSC, maintain repositories containing information and documents relating to both investments on a dedicated website ([Biological Heritage NZ](#); [Welcome - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#); [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Biological Heritage NZ](#); [Ngā Rākau Taketake Inventory - Collections - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)).

We respond to your questions below:

Whether it is correct that the government spent \$4m on a research project that consisted of playing sound to kauri trees to treat kauri dieback.

The Taxpayers' Union] claims this funding was part of the National Science Challenge and cost taxpayers \$4,027,020, which was approved by Ayesha Verrall.

- Total funding for the wider Ngā Rakau Taketake myrtle rust/kauri dieback research platform was \$34.5 million from May 2019 to March 2024. It was funded through the SSIF Programmes fund. The Biological Heritage NSC hosted and implemented the Platform. The Minister who made the decision to allocate SSIF funds to myrtle rust and kauri dieback research was the Hon Dr Megan Woods, who was at that time the Minister of Research, Science and Innovation. The Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall was not part of the 2018 and 2019 decisions to allocate SSIF funds to myrtle rust and kauri dieback research, as she was first elected to Parliament in October 2020. Ministers did not make decisions on the research platform, or on individual projects within the platform. The

decision to fund the Ngā Rakau Taketake platform through these funds was made by MBIE, in line with other SSIF Funds.

- The Ngā Rakau Taketake platform included seven research themes. One of those themes, the Oranga (Wellbeing) theme, included five kaupapa Māori subprojects. Information on the Oranga theme and subprojects is available at [Oranga – Wellbeing – Biological Heritage NZ](#) and [Oranga - Wellbeing - Datasets - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#). Total funding for this theme through Ngā Rakau Taketake was \$4.2 million, around 12% of the total platform funding. The decision to fund the Oranga theme and subprojects was made by the Biological Heritage NSC Governance Group, and they made the decision for the NGO Te Tira Whakamātaki ([Te Tira Whakamātaki | Māori Biodiversity Network](#)) to coordinate the research under that theme, including subcontracting for particular subprojects. Te Tira Whakamātaki's website also has information on the Oranga project ([Oranga Programme | Te Tira Whakamātaki](#)).
- Te Reo o te waonui o Tāne (The language of the domain of Tāne), also known as Research Aim 2 or RA2) was a subproject of the Oranga research theme which included bioacoustics research and mātauranga Māori on the influence of sounds on the health of forests, and on measuring forest health through sound. Part of the project involved playing soundscapes in forests, and the soundscape included whalesong. Total funding for the Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne project was \$521,453. The project was a collaboration between researchers and the Pawarenga community in the Far North. The research project was led by Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Te Tira Whakamātaki subcontracted AUT for the full amount of the project.

Request for a copy of any OIA requests that have been released related to this project and funding.

Note that MBIE is responding to a number of requests under the OIA relating to this topic. We intend to make responses to requests, including your request, available on MBIE's website at [Published Official Information Act requests | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment](#) once they have gone to requesters.

As at the time of writing, MBIE has responded to four OIA requests about the Oranga project and subprojects and their funding.

Request number	Date of MBIE response
DOIA 2425-05394	04 September 2024
DOIA-REQ-0008854	19 February 2025
DOIA-REQ-0009366	07 March 2025
DOIA-REQ-0009607	07 March 2025

In addition, in DOIA 2425-05394, MBIE transferred a request under the OIA for information about the Oranga project and subprojects and their funding to Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research. MBIE holds the response that Manaaki Whenua sent to the requester on 2 October 2024.

MBIE is therefore refusing your request under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information requested is or will soon be publicly available. We expect this information will soon be available on the above MBIE website for Published requests. Details identifying the requester will be redacted on the MBIE website for privacy reasons. You may make a further request under the OIA for these details if you wish.

I understand that Manaaki Whenua has received other requests under the OIA for information about the Oranga project and subprojects and their funding, and that you could approach Manaaki Whenua in respect of any such OIA requests.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request or this response, or if you require any further assistance, please contact OIA@mbie.govt.nz.

Again please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the MBIE website: www.mbie.govt.nz/about/open-government-and-official-information/published-official-information-act-requests.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

9(2)(a)

Science System Investment and Performance