



25 March 2025

Privacy

Ref: DOIA-REQ-0008418

Tēnā koe Privacy

Thank you for your email of 27 January 2025 to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

“in relation to the \$4 million contract to play whale and forest sounds to kauri trees:

- *A copy of the original proposal from the entity receiving this funding*
- *A copy of the contract (or at least details of the deliverables and outcomes and how they will be measured)*
- *Details of the procurement process and how the decision to award the funding was made, including cost-benefit analysis and/or how this contract represents value for money for New Zealanders, bearing in mind our constrained economic conditions*
- *Details as to whether any of the persons or entities receiving the funding were part of the decision-making in awarding this funding.”*

As context for the response to your request, your email appears to reference the following a media release from the Taxpayers' Union ([What the media won't tell you... - Taxpayers' Union](#)) which discusses research funded under the myrtle rust/kauri dieback research platform (Ngā Rakau Taketake). Specifically, the media release references the research project 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne', a project involving whalesong and kauri trees, and the wider mātauranga Māori research theme programme, the Oranga (Wellbeing) theme, of which that project was part.

Total funding for the 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' project was \$521,453 over approximately 3.75 years. Total funding for the 'Oranga' theme was \$4.2 million over approximately 3.75 years. Further information is provided below.

These projects were 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.
- Government 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 MWLR 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.

Question 1: *"A copy of the original proposal from the entity receiving this funding"*

MBIE Response to Question 1:

Your request references the research project 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' 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 subproject.

MBIE holds a copy of the original proposal or 'Annual Work Plan' that was included in the Biological Heritage NSC governance group papers on 6 August 2020 as input into the governance group's funding decision. Please find this at Annex 1. This includes a full description of proposed research for the 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' project on pages 18-19.

Please note some information has been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

Question 2: *"A copy of the contract (or at least details of the deliverables and outcomes and how they will be measured)"*

MBIE Response to Question 2:

MBIE's contract for Ngā Rakau Taketake required MWLR to deliver the science platform contracted by MBIE, report regularly to MBIE, and perform against a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The contract included other standard requirements for MBIE science funding contracts such as to allow for audits if needed, manage intellectual property in line with MBIE principles, and make data available. A copy of the MBIE contract, including variations, and the contracted Platform Plan is available at:

- [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - CONTRACT - C09X1817 - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)

- [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - CONTRACT - C09X1817 Variation 1 - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)
- [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - CONTRACT C09X1817 Variation 2 - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)

The contract included KPIs for strategic intent, impact, science excellence, research horizons, Vision Mātauranga, and collaboration and partnerships: [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - Key Performance Indicators \(KPIs\) - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#). MBIE's investment in Māori-focused research is governed by [the Vision Mātauranga policy](#). The contract included KPIs specifically relating to Vision Mātauranga policy, building Māori research capability, working with Māori communities on research of benefit to them, and investing at least 20% of funding in Māori-led or Kaupapa Māori research. The investment level was in line with recommendations in the [Kauri dieback science plan](#).

As MBIE does not hold contracts between MWLR and subcontractors for projects and subprojects funded under Ngā Rakau Taketake, I have decided to partially transfer this request under section 14(b)(ii) of the Act to MWLR, in relation to any such contracts and subcontracts.

Question 3: *“Details of the procurement process and how the decision to award the funding was made, including cost-benefit analysis and/or how this contract represents value for money for New Zealanders, bearing in mind our constrained economic conditions”*

MBIE Response to Question 3:

Funding decisions for specific Ngā Rakau Taketake projects were made by the New Zealand’s Biological Heritage governance group: [Our People - Biological Heritage NZ](#). 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](#).

MWLR advise that all research programmes were required to align to the priorities as outlined in the [Kauri dieback](#) and Myrtle rust Science Plans and the Biological Heritage NSC Ngā Rākau Taketake [scoping report](#). The [International Science Advisory Group](#) reviewed and provided feedback to the Biological Heritage governance group before programmes were signed off. Annual workplans were updated by the research teams and indorsed annually by the Biological Heritage governance group.

The decision making and investment process for Ngā Rākau Taketake research programmes is outlined here:

[Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - NRT Decision Making & Investment Process - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)

[Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - ISAP ToR and checklist of criteria for assessment - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)

Question 4: *“Details as to whether any of the persons or entities receiving the funding were part of the decision-making in awarding this funding.”*

MBIE Response to Question 4:

Funding decisions on this project were made in accordance with standard governance practice for managing conflicts of interest to ensure that people and entities receiving the funding were not part of the decision-making on that funding.

As noted above, the Biological Heritage NSC governance group made funding decisions in regard to individual projects within Ngā Rākau Taketake. The following documents include their provisions and policies to manage conflicts of interest:

- NZBH Collaboration Agreement - [Collaboration Agreement - NZBH Collaboration-Agreement - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#) – see Schedule 5 for the conflicts of interest policy
- NZ Biological Heritage Mana Rangatira Terms of Reference – see 3.XII on page 1 of [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - Mana Rangatira \(Governance Group\) ToR - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)
- Biological Heritage Conflict of Interest policy: [Ngā Rākau Taketake - Administration - POLICY: Conflict of Interest policy - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#)

As outlined in the [Conflict of Interest](#) Policy, all personal, professional, and institutional conflicts of interest were required to be declared in a detailed Interest Register.

Each paper considered by the governance group of Biological Heritage NSC included:

- (a) A register of the interests of governance group members and directorate.
- (b) An agenda item to consider interests in line with conflict-of-interest policies of BioHeritage.

MWLR advise that for any strategic leadership/knowledge broker meetings where new proposals or funding discussions arose, participants were reminded of the Conflict of Interest Policy. If an individual had a conflict, they could respond to questions regarding the proposal or potential funding but were not permitted to advocate for it in any way. Additionally, any conflicted individual did not have voting rights on the proposal. MWLR also advised that it instructed the Biological Heritage NSC that no Contractors were permitted to have financial delegations for any funds.

The Audit and Risk Committee of host MWLR's board requested an assurance and risk report from Biological Heritage NSC, including management of conflicts of interest. This report noted conflict declarations and resolutions for all people involved in the research in the Oranga theme.

Please note that this response and enclosed documents, 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.

We note also that responses to other Official Information Act requests on this topic will soon be available on the MBIE website at the link above.

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.

I trust you will find the information helpful. 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

Dr Trevor Drage

Manager Strategic Investments

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Annex 1. Original proposal or 'Annual Work Plan' including details of '*Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne*' project