



27 March 2025

Ref: DOIA-REQ-0008887-Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons

Tēnā koe Privacy of nat.

Thank you for your email on 29 January 2025 to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

Dear Sir, We are absolutely disgusted that over \$4 million in taxpayer funding has been spent on playing whale music to Kauri trees. We would like the name of the person responsible for this utter waste of taxpayer money. At a time when people are dying in this country because they cannot get proper medical care, government departments are wasting taxpayer money on looney ideas. God only knows what other looney ideas you people are pursuing and wasting taxpayer money on. It beggars belief that we have so many gormless public servants in this country.

Please let us know the name of the person in charge of this ludicrous, irresponsible waste of money.

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.

Ngā Rākau Taketake (NRT) was a Kauri Dieback/Myrtle Rust research platform funded through the Strategic Science Investment Fund (SSIF) Programmes between 2019 and 2024 to combat the spread of kauri dieback and myrtle rust. Total funding for NRT was \$34.5 million. Funding for this has ended.

NRT funded the "Oranga (Wellbeing)" research theme for a total of \$4.2 million over approximately 3.75 years. A description of the theme is available here: [Oranga – Wellbeing – Biological Heritage NZ](#). This programme was coordinated by Te Tira Whakamātaki.

The Oranga theme included a subproject entitled *Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne (the language of the domain of Tāne)* which included bioacoustics research involving sounds played in kauri forests, including whalesong. The project was a collaboration between researchers and the Pawarenga community in the Far North, and included mātauranga Māori and western science techniques. Total funding for the *Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne* project was \$521,453, over approximately 3.75 years. The research project was led by Auckland University of Technology (AUT).

People responsible for funding decisions

Decisions to fund kauri dieback and myrtle research were taken by Ministers under the previous government in 2018.

The MBIE Deputy Secretary Labour, Science and Enterprise holds the responsibility for investment decisions for SSIF Programmes.

Project funding for the NRT SSIF platform was devolved, which means it was contracted to a host organisation, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, who administered the funding under the guidance of an independent governance group, and in line with a contract from MBIE. MBIE's contract with Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research for the platform investment included targets for mātauranga Māori research, and for engagement with Māori communities, reflecting the priorities in the [Kauri dieback](#) Science Plan of that time.

Funding decisions for specific Ngā Rakau Taketake projects (including the “Oranga (Wellbeing)” research theme and subprojects) were made by the New Zealand's Biological Heritage governance group (also known as the Mana Rangatira Governance Group): [Our People - Biological Heritage NZ](#). The Biological Heritage NSC was a long-term programme responsible for research to improve New Zealand's biodiversity and biosecurity. It was part of the National Science Challenges which were established in 2014 and finished in June 2024. The New Zealand's Biological Heritage governance group is no longer operational.

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.

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 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 endorsed annually by the Biological Heritage governance group. The groups making and advising on investment decisions are listed [on their website](#).

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](#)

We trust you will find this information helpful.

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.

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.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. C. Drage'.

Trevor Drage
Manager Strategic Investments
Science System Investment and Performance