



4 April 2025

Ref: DOIA-REQ-0010624-Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons

Tēnā koe Privacy of natural persons

Thank you for your email to the office of the Hon Nicola Willis, which was transferred to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on 21 February 2025 by the office of the Hon Dr Shane Reti requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

It is reported that MBIE funded a kauri dieback cure involving whaleoil, and whale breath. Please forward a copy of the funding application, and details of the applicants, and ministry officials who approved the application. Do the responsible officers still work for any government, local government, or NCO?

On 21 March 2025, MBIE extended the time available to respond to your request under section 15A(1)(b) of the Act until 4 April 2025.

As background to our response to your request, your email refers to information in 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 bioacoustics project involving kauri trees which included whalesong, and the wider Kaupapa Māori research theme programme of the Ngā Rakau Taketake platform, 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. 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.
- Ngā Rakau Taketake finished in March 2024, and the National Science Challenges finished in June 2024. MWLR, 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:

1. *It is reported that MBIE funded a kauri dieback cure involving whaleoil, and whale breath. Please forward a copy of the funding application, and details of the applicants, and ministry officials who approved the application.*

We are providing information on the applications and decisions in relation to:

- The Ngā Rakau Taketake platform
- The specific projects within that platform that your question references

The Ngā Rakau Taketake Platform

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 Budget 2019 funding. The Biological Heritage NSC hosted and implemented the platform over a 5-year period from May 2019 to March 2024. A copy of the MBIE contract, including variations, and the contracted Platform Plan (application) 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 MBIE Deputy Secretary Labour, Science and Enterprise holds the responsibility for investment decisions for SSIF Programmes.

The specific projects within that platform that your question references

- 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 (https://bioheritage.nz/about-us/our-people/?_group=mana-rangatira), and they made the decision for the non-government organisation (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 has information on the Oranga project ([Oranga Programme | Te Tira Whakamātaki](#)).
- The Oranga theme included five research subprojects:
 - Research Aim 1: Te Whakaora a Ngā Kauri - Rongoā Solutions for Kauri Dieback
 - Research Aim 2: Te reo o te waonui a Tāne - The language of the domain of Tāne 2
 - Hapū Solutions for Myrtle Rust
 - Te Mana Motuhake a Ngā Kākano - The Sovereignty of Seeds
 - Critical Friend - Evaluation, Measurement, Writing
- The subproject below appears relevant to your request, as it references whales in relation to kauri dieback. MBIE is not aware of any research specifically investigating whale oil or whale breath funded through Ngā Rakau Taketake.
 - Te Reo o te waonui o Tāne (The language of the domain of Tāne), also known as Research Aim 2 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 subproject.
 - Detailed descriptions of the methodology for this project, applicants, and research team, are in the attached document (**Annex 1 Te Mauri Annual Workplan, pages 17-19**).
 - In addition, the research project Te Whakaora a Ngā Kauri (Rongoā Solutions for Kauri Dieback), also known as Research Aim 1, included a one-year research project investigating whether enzymes from the gut microbiome of whales could be used to degrade the cell walls of the pathogen that causes kauri dieback, *Phytophthora agathidicida*. The project used a mix of western science approaches and Mātauranga Māori. The University of Waikato led the research in conjunction with Māori kaumatua. This project is also described in Annex 1. MBIE understands that the project was reviewed after one year and did not progress to a full research project.

Please note some information in Annex 1 has been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

2. *Do the responsible officers still work for any government, local government, or NCO?*

As noted above, 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, MWLR, who administered the funding under the guidance of an independent governance group, and in line with a contract from MBIE. MBIE's contract with MWLR 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](#).

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.

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

Annex 1: Te Mauri Annual Workplan