



16 April 2025

Ref: DOIA-REQ-0012045-Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons

Tēnā koe Privacy of natural

Thank you for your email to the Office of Hon Dr Shane Reti, which requested, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

“But main question is.. how could the gathering of whale song and replaying it to Kauri trees cost anymore than a few \$1000? Have the current ministries investigated if? When? How? Etc? The money was spent and used?

And what are? Were? The outcome? And who benefitted? It's 100% fact that Kauri trees didn't.

Why should nzers be compliant and ok paying tax when such appalling abuse occurs??“

Part of the response to your request was transferred to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on 25 March 2025.

As context for the response to your request, your email appears to reference the following 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 Rākau Taketake).

Specifically, the media release references the research subproject 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne (The language of the domain of Tāne)', a subproject 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' subproject was \$521,453 over approximately 3.75 years.

Background

This subproject was 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 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](#).

As further background to your request:

- In 2018, the previous government decided to fund a myrtle rust/kauri dieback research platform (Ngā Rākau 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 the 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 Rākau 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.

Response to questions

Question 1: *“how could the gathering of whale song and replaying it to Kauri trees cost anymore than a few \$1000?”*

MBIE Response to Question 1:

As background, the ‘*Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne*’ project was one of five subprojects of the Oranga theme within Ngā Rākau Taketake. The subproject 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 soundscapes included whalesong. The project was a collaboration between researchers and the Pawarenga community in the Far North. MWLR subcontracted Te Tira Whakamātaki to coordinate the research under the Oranga theme, in line with decisions made by the Biological Heritage NSC. Te Tira Whakamātaki subcontracted Auckland University of Technology to deliver the ‘*Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne*’ subproject.

Total funding for the ‘*Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne*’ subproject was \$521,453 over approximately 3.75 years. MBIE does not hold a detailed breakdown of costs for the project. However, the website of Te Tira Whakamātaki includes some information on the types of costs for the project, including ‘sub-contractors, community and landowner costs, students, research equipment (i.e., sound stations) and delivery costs (i.e., travel): [Ra2 | Te Tira Whakamātaki](#).

The total cost for the Oranga theme (including all five subprojects) was \$4,027,020 over approximately 3.75 years. Details on the Oranga theme and subprojects are available at [Oranga – Wellbeing – Biological Heritage NZ](#).

Question 2: *Have the current ministries investigated if? When? How? Etc? The money was spent and used?"*

MBIE Response to Question 2:

MBIE's contract for Ngā Rākau Taketake required MWLR to deliver the science platform contracted by MBIE, report regularly to MBIE, and perform against a series of KPIs. No investigation by MBIE has occurred as MWLR delivered the Platform as contracted. In 2023, Government decided to end the myrtle rust/kauri dieback research platform funding, and the contract ended in March 2024.

The contract included 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 Key Performance Indicators 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](#).

MBIE holds a copy of the Annual Work Plan that was included in the Biological Heritage NSC governance group papers on 6 August 2020. Please find the Annual Work Plan in **Annex 1**. This document was an input into the decision-making of the Biological Heritage NSC governance group on funding. The document 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 3: *"And what are? Were? The outcome? And who benefitted? It's 100% fact that Kauri trees didn't. Why should nzers be compliant and ok paying tax when such appalling abuse occurs???"*

MBIE Response to Question 3:

All current outputs related to the 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' subproject received by the Biological Heritage NSC are publicly accessible: [Oranga - Wellbeing - Datasets - New Zealand's Biological Heritage Data Repository](#). This will be updated as additional publications are made publicly available. MWLR inform us that one peer-reviewed publication relating to 'Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne' is submitted and currently under review, and a further publication is accepted and under review.

Soundscape ecology is a western science discipline that studies how sounds relate to the environment and living organisms. Overviews of this area of research can be found here: [What is](#)

[soundscape ecology? An introduction and overview of an emerging new science](#) and here [Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape | BioScience | Oxford Academic](#).

Researchers in *Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne*, using soundscape ecology and incorporating local mātauranga developed self-sustaining sonic stations that record forest soundscapes and emit sounds. This work also trained soundscape technicians and has supported Māori communities to reconnect to their forests and the associated mātauranga.

The website of the lead contractor Te Tira Whakamātaki provides further information on the outputs to date of the *Te Reo o te waonui a Tāne* project here: [Ra2 | Te Tira Whakamātaki](#).

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.

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.

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



Trevor Drage
Manager Strategic Investments
Science System Investment and Performance