

19 April 2023

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation (the Department), received on 30 March 2023 in which you asked, in relation to the West Coast Wind-Blown Timber (Conservation Lands) Act 2014 (the Act), for:

any information relating to the assessment of the impact of the harvesting, including environmental and economic impact, made at the time or since.

Following a phone conversation with the Department on 5 April the Department provided you a link to a publicly available Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) report on the economic impact of the harvest. It was agreed that this dealt with the economic impact part of your original request.

An email was sent by the Department to you on 6 April refining the balance of your request to the following six questions. These questions were suggested by the Department as they had been answered in a previous OIA and meant an efficient process for providing you the best summary information.

1. *The number of applications to extract windblown timber from PCL.*
2. *The methods of extraction used.*
3. *The location and land status of the extractions on the PCL.*
4. *Any assessments of environmental effects.*
5. *Any monitoring that occurred during extraction.*
6. *Any ongoing monitoring for site recovery.*

You agreed by email to this refined request on 11 April. Your request refers to the West Coast Wind-blown Timber (Conservation lands) Act 2014. The information provided relates to all authorities granted by the Department in the West Coast region to access wind-blown timber produced by Cyclone Ita. This includes three approvals that were granted outside of the Act.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:



1. *The number of applications to extract windblown timber from PCL*

A total of 36 applications were received by the Department for authorities to extract windblown timber resulting from Cyclone Ita. Of these applications:

- 34 were made under the West Coast Wind-blown Timber (Conservation Lands) Act 2014. These applications resulted in authorities being granted to take timber from 32 sites on Public Conservation Land (PCL) across the West Coast region. (Two sites were not harvested under their first authority and were subsequently applied for by a different operator – explaining the difference between the number of applications and number of sites).
- One was made under section 42 of the Reserves Act (1977) for timber to be taken from the Waitaiki Historic Reserve that is vested in Mawhera Incorporation under the Ngāi Tahu Settlements Act.
- One was made for timber to be taken from a privately owned forest that is under a Conservation Covenant, as allowed by a condition of the covenant agreement.

In addition to the 34 sites applied for by others, the Department disposed of logs recovered during road clearance immediately following Cyclone Ita. This was publicly notified under Section 28 of the Conservation Act (1987).

Overall, these applications resulted in approvals being granted by the Department for a total of 35 sites in the West Coast region for the taking of wind-blown timber resulting from Cyclone Ita. These 35 sites are listed in Item 3, Table 1, Appendix 1 and mapped in Appendix 2.

2. *The methods of extraction used*

Please see extraction methods column in Item 3, Table 1, Appendix 1

95% of the Cyclone Ita timber extracted under authorities granted by the Department was flown by helicopter from the forest. This was mostly done as whole logs by a heavy lift 'Huey' (Iroquois) helicopter. Where the logs were of a large diameter or if a smaller squirrel helicopter was used then logs were cut length ways into halves, quarters or flitches before being flown. One operation milled timber in forest with a portable mill and flew cut timber in packs with an R44 helicopter.

Approximately 5% of the total timber harvested under authorities granted by the Department was extracted using cables from machinery located on existing roads. This was allowed where wind-fallen trees were within 50 to 100m of existing roads and could be dragged by cable with no more than minor environmental effects.

3. *The location and land status of the extractions on the PCL*

Please see land status column in Item 3, Table 1, Appendix 1 and maps in Appendix 2.

Damage to forests from Cyclone Ita was extensive across the West Coast region with the largest affected areas on PCL north of Westport.

Most (24) of the 35 sites approved by the Department for the extraction of Cyclone Ita timber occurred in central Westland between the Taramakau River and Whataroa. Ten sites were in the Grey Valley with only one site north of Westport.

The distribution of authorised sites reflects the distribution of accessible lowland mature rimu forest with clusters of operations concentrated around the southern Grey Valley, Lake Kaniere, Ross and Harihari.

The highest value timber in the north of the region was either outside of the areas designated in the Act or uneconomic because of flight distances, accessibility and timber quality.

4. *Any assessments of environmental effects*

All sites were visited during the early stages of harvest operations to ensure that authorised methods were being followed and that impacts were as anticipated in the Environmental Principals, Guidelines and Management Approach (document 2). Most operations were visited multiple times. Records of observations were recorded.

Particular attention was paid to operations using cables from machinery located on existing roads and the one operation that used an in forest portable mill.

It was quickly determined that effects of all methods of extraction were minor.

5. *Any monitoring that occurred during extraction*

All sites were visited during the early stages of harvest operations to ensure that authorised methods were being followed and that impacts were as expected. Most operations were visited multiple times. Records of observations were recorded.

10% of logs were audited against operators returns to ensure that the quantity and quality of timber being extracted was as described.

Health and safety audits were undertaken on every visit and random drug and alcohol testing was undertaken periodically.

6. *Any ongoing monitoring for site recovery*

As discussed on the phone, early in the implementation of the project the Department received advice from Landcare Research on how to quantitatively measure the environmental effects of the timber harvest enabled by the Act. They advised that given the between and within sample variation between harvest and non-harvest sites that the number of replicates required for any meaningful study was large and that any such study carried a moderate risk of providing limited understanding. It was decided to not proceed with this work and to instead invest the money generated by the Act in a variety of conservation initiatives, mostly around weed control.

It was intended to record qualitative effects of harvest and in particular the weed ecology of harvested vs non harvested sites. This work was started in Feb 2016. A draft report on this work is attached (item 1). This document records half of the baseline weed monitoring work that was completed. This work and report was not completed.

The following 3 documents are released in full.

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
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1	March 2016	Draft report of Wind-blown Timber Act Weed monitoring; provided as part of the Departments answer to question 6 around ongoing monitoring.	Released in full.
2	September 2014	Environmental Principals, Guidelines and Management Approach followed in the implementation of the Act; provided as context to questions 2 and 4 around environmental impact assessments and methods of extraction.	Released in full.
3	No date	List of sites in appendix 1 and maps in appendix 2.	Released in full.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and enclosed documents may be published on the Department's website.



Nāku noa, nā



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Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai