

6 March 2024

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 29 January 2024, in which you asked for:

All reports, advice and correspondence relating to the reasons for this outage. The explanation given to the public was high demand. I am seeking to understand whether there were other factors also at play, including human error or malicious actions.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982. On 27 February 2024 we extended the timeframe to respond to your request to 8 March 2024 due to the consultation necessary.

On 20 April 2023 the Department's booking system experienced issues as bookings opened for the 2023/24 Milford Track season. This resulted in the system slowing down, with many users having difficulty completing bookings.

As part of our opening process, we scale up server capacity in anticipation of the additional demand from users. We also operate a live support call with our vendor (Tyler Technologies, who host and manage the technical aspects of the system) and key staff, so issues can be raised and resolved as quickly as possible. In the case of the Milford opening, the vendor identified an issue and were able to resolve it and restore system performance by early afternoon. Subsequently the vendor advised us that the issue was caused by a minor change to the system introduced in September 2022.

Following the receipt of a Root Cause Analysis document from the vendor (which is released as part of this request) we made the decision to proceed with opening bookings for the remaining Great Walks starting on 26 April 2023. As we were about to open bookings for the Abel Tasman Coast Track, we experienced similar performance issues, and decided to postpone the release. This was seen as the best course of action given the user feedback following the Milford track issues.

A second Root Cause Analysis report (also released) was provided by the vendor which identified a related but separate issue to the first.

Following a thorough system review, fixes, and load testing, the remaining bookings opened without further incident in July and August 2023.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *All reports, advice and correspondence relating to the reasons for this outage.*

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	22 February 2024	Emails and reports on the reasons for the booking outage.	Released in part

I have decided to release the relevant parts of the documents listed above, subject to information being withheld under section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people.

In making my decision, I have considered section 9(1) of the Official Information Act and determined there are no public interests that outweigh the grounds for withholding. You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

2. *The explanation given to the public was high demand. I am seeking to understand whether there were other factors also at play, including human error or malicious actions.*

While the underlying issues were only revealed because of high demand, the demand was not the direct cause of the issue. The availability search process would have been performing inefficiently even in times of low demand.

We are not aware of any specific human error leading to the issues. The incident did highlight some shortcomings in processes, significantly the lack of performance testing prior to opening, which has since been added as a deliverable in our contract with the vendor.

There is also nothing to suggest any malicious action was taken that contributed to the issues. 'Bots' and malicious activity are often speculated to impact our booking openings, but we have never seen evidence of this. Demand is extremely high for a limited number of spaces on the Great Walks, and so we do see spaces being reserved almost immediately, particularly over the summer holiday period.

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

If you would like to discuss this response with us, please contact the Department's media team by email to media@doc.govt.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



Catherine Wilson
Director, Heritage and Visitors
Department of Conservation / *Te Papa Atawhai*