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Conservation House 18  
Manners Street Te Aro,  
Wellington

6011  
doc.govt.nz

Ref: OIAD-6173

10 April 2026

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your request to the Minister of Conservation, transferred to the Department of Conservation on 12 March 2026. You asked for:

- 1. all information showing the population sizes of the birds DOC is tracking as a matter of interest in their pest control activities over the past 10 years please - showing clearly population size trends.*
- 2. The scientific evidence used by the Department of Conservation as the basis for their advice to the Minister regarding the addition of feral cats to the target species list for Predator Free 2050.*
- 3. ... all information relating to the budget for adding feral cats to the eradication plans for pest free 2050.  
I'd like the budget information relating to the whole plan, alongside the budget for targeting cats specifically.*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982.

We previously responded to questions 1 and 3 in OIAD-5929 and OIAD-5931 respectively, and I understand you were dissatisfied with those responses. While I am still unable to provide a direct answer to your questions, I have endeavoured to provide additional context to explain why we are unable to respond and provide additional examples that may be of interest to you.

- 1. all information showing the population sizes of the birds DOC is tracking as a matter of interest in their pest control activities over the past 10 years please - showing clearly population size trends.*

DOC is responsible for 8.6 million hectares of land, nearly a third of New Zealand. We undertake a very large number of predator control projects and bird monitoring programmes. Bird monitoring uses a wide range of approaches for a wide range of purposes. For example, some focus on change in abundance over time, while others measure nesting success. There is no centrally coordinated database of monitoring results for all sites with pest control activities.

For this reason, within OIAD-5929, provided to you on 3 February 2026, we refused your request under section 18(f) of the OIA, as compiling the wide range of information from the wide range of sources would require substantial collation and research. We hold the position that section 18(f) is still warranted for this request.

Within OIAD-5929, we provided a reference list to studies which have been done, to understand how various species respond to predator control. However, I will now provide some additional examples and context.

DOC's National Predator Control Programme (NPCP) is a nationally coordinated programme, which controls predators on a sustained, rotational basis over 1.8 million hectares of public conservation land. Sites are prioritised at a national level based on what native species are at risk and the characteristics of the ecosystems at each site. The programme's Annual Report highlights monitoring results from the key species the programme protects. You can find these documents on our website at the links below:

- [2024 NPCP Annual Report](#)
- [2023 NPCP Annual Report](#)
- [2022 NPCP Annual Report](#)

The NPCP webpage also has details of a range of monitoring results for some native species. This webpage includes information on Kiwi, Kea, South Island kākā, Robin, long & short tailed bats, blue duck/whio, Rock wren/tuke, Yellowhead/mohua, & Rifleman/titipounamu. The various results cover a range of timeframes and summarise different monitoring projects. You can read these monitoring results here: [Monitoring results for native species: National Predator Control Programme](#)

Additionally, trends in the demographics of populations of kākā within the Waipapa Ecological Area in Pureora Forest Park have been monitored since 2000 – details of this study can be found here: [Trends in the demographics of populations of kākā 2022-2023](#)

DOC has been monitoring 16 native bird species in the Landsborough Valley since 1998 to understand the impacts of sustained predator control on birdlife. The study uses a technique called 5-minute bird counts, where bird experts spend several days listening for bird calls at 112 stations in the valley. Since monitoring began, native bird numbers have doubled, illustrating the benefits of extensive trapping and aerial 1080. You can read about monitoring in the Landsborough Valley here: [Recovery of native birds in the Landsborough Valley: National Predator Control Programme](#)

Additionally, below are monitoring report factsheets which summarise the status and trends of common and widespread bird species & nocturnal birds. This monitoring is not designed to measure pest control activities specifically but records long term population trends across the country.

[Status and trends of common and widespread bird species 2022-2023](#)

[Distribution of nocturnal birds on conservation land](#)

2. *The scientific evidence used by the Department of Conservation as the basis for their advice to the Minister regarding the addition of feral cats to the target species list for Predator Free 2050.*

DOC provided advice to the Minister recommending the addition of feral cats to the Predator Free 2050 (PF2050) target species list as part of a revision of the Predator Free 2050 Strategy following public consultation. A significant outcome of the consultation was the strong support for adding feral cats to the national target species list. Over 90% of submissions either directly requested this addition or raised it as an alternative approach PF2050 could take with the target species list.

We recommended adding feral cats to the PF2050 target species list as they are a major threat to native wildlife and their inclusion would incentivise research, improve access to funding, and support the development of national regulations for responsible cat ownership.

Feral cats are a significant predator in New Zealand's ecosystems, causing major impacts on native birds, bats, and lizards. They are also a vector for the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* (toxoplasmosis), which is a known cause of mortality in Hector's and Māui dolphins, as well as other native wildlife and livestock. DOC's understanding of the threat feral cats pose to our native wildlife is based on many years of observations, monitoring, and published research.

Examples of the research that informs this knowledge includes the following papers<sup>1</sup>:

***General reviews on the biology, management and impacts of cats in New Zealand:***

(Gillies & van Heezik, 2021; Glen *et al.*, 2023; NCMG, 2025).

***Reviews on the impacts cats have on specific groups of New Zealand native birds:*** (Dowding & Murphy, 2001; Innes *et al.*, 2010; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2015)

***Information on Toxoplasma gondii and its effects on New Zealand wildlife:***

(Howe *et al.*, 2014; Roberts *et al.*, 2021; Roe *et al.*, 2016; Roe *et al.*, 2013; Taylor *et al.*, 2023)

***More specific studies on the effects of feral cat removal, impacts of cats or accounts of depredation on specific New Zealand species:***

(Alley *et al.*, 2015; Borkin *et al.*, 2023; Bramley, 1996; Dowding & Murphy, 1993; Fitzgerald & Veitch, 1985; Gartrell *et al.*, 2023; Gillies & Clout, 2003; Gillies *et al.*, 2003; Harper, 2002; Imber *et al.*, 2003; Karl & Best, 1982; Kemp *et al.*, 2023; Massaro & Blair, 2003; Medway, 2004; Middlemiss, 1995; Pierce, 1987; Sanders & Maloney, 1999, 2002; Scrimgeour *et al.*, 2012; Strang, 2018; Tocher, 2006; van Heezik *et al.*, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Fulsome reference list provided in Appendix 1.

3. ... all information relating to the budget for adding feral cats to the eradication plans for pest free 2050.

Within OIAD 5931, provided to you on 22 January 2026, we outlined that there was no information held in relation to the budget for adding feral cats to the **Predator Free 2050 eradication target species list**. This is because the inclusion of feral cats on the target list was a strategic step rather than a planned work programme with its own funding stream. It was therefore refused under section 18(e) of the OIA as the information does not exist.

As noted in question 2 above, we recommended adding feral cats to the PF2050 target species list as they are a major threat to native wildlife and their inclusion would incentivise research, improve access to funding, and support the development of national regulations for responsible cat ownership.

The purpose of having a defined list of target species is to provide focus for the PF2050 programme – to incentivise the development of new tools and techniques, and to guide investment into large-scale test sites to trial new approaches. Previously, the funding available from various sources for PF2050 specific research and tool development was focused on species already on the target list. Now research and tool development for feral cats will also be eligible for this investment.

Now that cats have been added to the target list, DOC and the other organisations we work with on PF2050 will need to develop strategies for feral cat eradication. We have the opportunity to review existing PF2050 projects and sites that have been focused on rats, stoats and possums (for example, Predator Free South Westland), to potentially include cats. However, any costs associated with this work would need to be carefully considered, and funding would need to be allocated from the broader conservation funding pool.

*I'd like the budget information relating to the whole plan, alongside the budget for targeting cats specifically.*

We understand you are asking for the total Predator Free 2050 budget.

While DOC supports Predator Free 2050, it is not the sole agency or organization responsible. As previously mentioned in OIAD 5931, Predator Free 2050 is a nationwide initiative funded by a range of contributors, including local, regional, and central governments, iwi and hapū, community groups, research organizations, innovators, and philanthropic investors. Because funding comes from various sources and goes toward many different projects, DOC does not hold information on the total investment across New Zealand. We must therefore refuse this part of your request under section 18(g) of the OIA.

It is also challenging to determine the exact costs associated with DOC's contribution to Predator Free 2050. This is because much of DOC's core work—such as predator control, species management, and ecosystem restoration—not only supports Predator Free 2050 but also meets

other strategic goals, like protecting threatened species or advancing the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

DOC's funding is being invested in projects aimed at delivering the PF2050 Strategy, including developing tools and technology, undertaking landscape scale elimination projects, and supporting community-led projects. Much of this PF2050 funding is directly or indirectly targeting feral cats. For example:

- Developing meat baits which directly target carnivores including feral cats;
- Developing AI technology for identifying and targeting specific predators, including feral cats;
- Predator control and elimination operations that result in secondary poisoning of feral cats;
- Progressing the eradication of feral cats from Maukahuka/Auckland Islands and Rakiura/Stewart Island.

I can advise the following DOC funding dedicated solely to PF2050:

- In 2022, DOC received ~\$64 million over four years for the collective delivery of the Predator Free 2050 Strategy.
- DOC's also invests a further ~\$1 million per year in developing Predator Free tools via it's contestable Tools to Market fund.
- In 2025 the government invested an additional \$2.5 million of International Visitor Levy funding to deliver a predator control operation on Rakiura to protect the critically endangered pukunui/Southern dotterel. This operation focussed on the removal of feral cats from approximately 40,000ha, including a large portion of the remaining pukunui breeding sites. This project was also a critical step in the planning for full eradication of feral cats from Rakiura.
- In 2025 the government announced the closure of PF2050 Ltd, and the transfer of ~\$2.3M per year of additional government funding for PF2050 to DOC to administer.

You can read more about the work DOC invests in at [Our work: Predator Free 2050](#)

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.

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

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Reddiex".

Ben Reddiex  
Director Biodiversity National Programmes  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Appendix One

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