

15 June 2026

Conservation House
18-32 Manners Street
Te Aro, Wellington, 6011
doc.govt.nz
Ref: OIAD-6480

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 15 May 2026, in which you asked for:

"I am writing to raise a formal concern regarding DOC's upcoming aerial 1080 operation scheduled to begin today, 14 May over the Blue Mountains, West Otago.

I understand the operation was postponed from January due to a lack of predator population.

1. I request DOC to release all information pertaining to the assessment of predator numbers currently in the area of NZ native forest within the proposed dropzone, in particular, but not limited to actual ground monitoring undertaken by DOC or any relevant other.

2. I request DOC's explanation as to why it is within its framework to manage predator species in private plantation forestry projects, of which are estimated to make up about 70% of this dropzone area.

I request this under the official information act."

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

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

- 1. I request DOC to release all information pertaining to the assessment of predator numbers currently in the area of NZ native forest within the proposed dropzone, in particular, but not limited to actual ground monitoring undertaken by DOC or any relevant other.*

The 2026 Blue Mountains 1080 predator control operation is primarily to protect the highly threatened mohua population from stoat predation. Mohua numbers improved after the last aerial 1080 operation in 2019 but have steadily declined in recent years. They are now at the lowest levels ever recorded.

I am sharing with you the most recent Blue Mountains mohua monitoring report, from November 2025. If you refer to the summary graphs on page 8 of the report, you will see that mohua numbers improved following the last Blue Mountains aerial 1080 operation in 2019, but have steadily declined since then, apart from a localised improvement in 2024, due to field trial using experimental 1080 sausage baits. The 1080 sausage bait field trial was completed over a fraction of the Blue Mountains site in 2024. This produced promising stoat control results, and a localised

improvement in mohua numbers, however this new tool does not yet have ACVM registration, so is not available for widespread use in 2026 or 2027.

The current 1080 operation was originally planned to occur in early 2026, to control rats as well as possums and stoats. However, rat numbers remained low over summer, so rat control was not needed, only possum and stoat control. The period of greatest vulnerability from stoats occurs in late autumn and early winter, so DOC delayed the operation until May 2026, to avoid unnecessary disruption to hunters and other members of the public over summer and autumn.

Although rat numbers are currently low, stoats were still at dangerously high levels. The 2026 operation was triggered because mustelid monitoring has exceeded 10% for the last 4 summers. This is above the level that will allow the Blue Mountains mohua population to survive, as is shown by the steady decline in mohua numbers. The table below sums up annual stoat monitoring results since 2022.

Table 1: Annual February Blue Mountains stoat monitoring results:

2022	24%
2023	66%
2024	61%
2025	15%
2026	10%

The most recent possum monitoring in the Blue Mountains occurred in April 2026. Possum numbers were recorded at 8-9% Residual Trap Catch (RTC). That means possum numbers are above trigger levels for control and are high enough to provide a vector for stoat control through secondary poisoning.

In total 154 separate possum encounters were recorded across 27 cameras for 20 nights that they were out. An encounter is defined as a possum or stoat image that is both preceded and followed by at least five minutes without additional images of that species. Possums were spread fairly evenly throughout the block. With 22 of the 27 cameras detecting possums over the 20-night survey. Those results roughly translate to: 0.28 possums per camera per day, or 1.99 possums per camera per week, or ~9% RTC.

2. *I request DOC's explanation as to why it is within its framework to manage predator species in private plantation forestry projects, of which are estimated to make up about 70% of this dropzone area.*

DOC has included private land in the 2026 Blue Mountains aerial 1080 predator control operation with the agreement of the relevant landowners. The reasons for doing this are:

- DOC has the responsibility to ensure the survival of protected wildlife on public conservation land in the Blue Mountains, particularly the nationally significant mohua population.
- Publicly funded predator control work delivered by DOC must be designed to be effective, so will include private land where necessary.
- You will appreciate that neither mohua or stoats recognise land tenure or distinguish between public and private land.
- Stoats have very large home ranges. Individual stoats regularly travel distances of several kilometres. That means stoats must be controlled across the entirety of the mohua range in the Blue Mountains to be effective.
- For these reasons the 2026 Blue Mountains aerial 1080 operation covers a large, contiguous area, regardless of land tenure, that is expected to effectively control stoats for as many mohua as possible, while minimising stoat reinvasion.

Please be aware that your estimate of the proportion of public vs private land is incorrect. The operation includes 9,381 hectares of public land (73%) and 3,473 hectares of private land (27%).

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	Nov 2025	Mohua monitoring report	Released in part

I have decided to release the relevant parts of the document listed above, subject to information being withheld under the following section of the Official Information Act, as applicable:

- section 9(2)(g)(ii) – to protect Ministers, officials, or employees from improper pressure or harassment.

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 attached documents may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ben Reddiex".

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