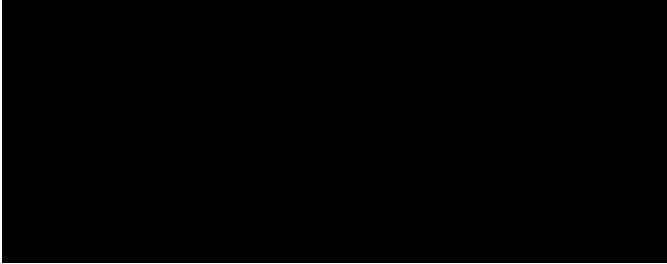


8 May 2026



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your letter to the Minister of Conservation dated 7 April 2026 regarding whitebait and last year's decision to change the conservation status of Inanga from 'At Risk-declining' to 'Threatened – Nationally vulnerable'. In your letter you requested the following information:

1. What is the estimated Inanga spawning area on the West Coast (from Kahurangi Point in the north to Awarua Point in the south) and what evidence or data does the Department of Conservation have that Inanga spawning area on the West Coast has declined in the past 10 years.
2. What is the estimated Inanga spawning area in Fiordland and what evidence or data does the Department of Conservation have that Inanga spawning area in Fiordland has declined in the past 10 years.
3. What data does the Department of Conservation have on the increase in Inanga spawning area due to its work, including that with other local and voluntary groups, in establishing new spawning environments such as Wadeson Island (Hokitika), Cobden Island (Greymouth), Punakaiki and others.

You were informed on 9 April that your request was to be transferred to the Department of Conservation in accordance with section 14(b)(ii) of the Official Information Act 1982.

We have considered your request and our responses are listed below.

For clarity, species assessments under the New Zealand Threat Classification System (NZTCS) are undertaken by experts, both from within the Department and externally. Of the 13 expert panellists and authors of the [Dunn et al. 2025](#) NZTCS 46 report, only four were from DOC.

1. National conservation status and spawning area estimates

The NZTCS conservation status used in New Zealand applies to the whole country, not to individual regions. The recent change in the national conservation status of īnanga is not because new declines were found, but because the assessment panel changed how they interpreted the criteria.

Specifically, the updated approach now looks at the smallest area the species relies on at any stage of its life cycle. For freshwater fish like īnanga, this is their spawning sites, where eggs are laid, rather than the wider areas where adult fish live.

The reasoning and method for estimating how much spawning habitat īnanga use is explained in Dunn et al. (2025). The method is based on earlier research showing that each river catchment is likely to contain at least a very small spawning area (estimated at 0.01 hectares). This estimate was agreed on by experts and then multiplied by the number of catchments listed in the Freshwater Ecosystems of New Zealand ([FENZ](#)) database.

There are important uncertainties with this method. In some catchments, the real spawning area will be larger than 0.01 hectares, while in others it may be smaller or even absent. The FENZ database may also include catchments that do not have permanent streams or do not support īnanga at all. In addition, some places where īnanga live, such as the Chatham Islands, are not fully mapped.

Despite these limitations, the method allows an estimate to be made for a specific area by multiplying the number of catchments by 0.01 hectares. Using this approach, the total estimated area of īnanga egg-laying habitat on the West Coast you asked about is 4.8 hectares. Changes in spawning area were not assessed as part of the 2023 īnanga conservation review.

2. Estimates for Fiordland

Using the same method, the estimated area of īnanga spawning habitat in Fiordland is 14.8 hectares. However, this is very likely an overestimate. More than half of the FENZ catchments listed for Fiordland do not have streams shown on maps, which means īnanga are unlikely to be present there.

If only catchments that clearly contain streams are included, the estimate drops to 6.5 hectares. Even this figure is probably too high, because many Fiordland streams are very steep, short, or have waterfalls that make it difficult or impossible for īnanga to reach spawning sites.

3. Restoration work and monitoring

As you note, there has been significant work on the West Coast to improve īnanga spawning areas and adult habitat. Much of this work has been led or supported by community groups.

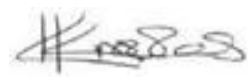
Because of this collaborative approach, monitoring has often been limited. In many cases, increases in spawning habitat have not been directly measured and instead have been assumed based on the size of the restored area.

The Department plans to improve how these areas are measured in the future so that we can provide more consistent and robust estimates of spawning habitat extent over time.

We value the role that whitebaiters, including the West Coast Whitebaiters Association, play in helping DOC to manage a sustainable whitebait fishery for all to enjoy. If you would like to discuss this response with us further, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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

Nāku noa, nā



Kirstie Knowles
Director Marine and Freshwater Biodiversity
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai