



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

**In-Confidence**

# Department of Conservation Status Report

**Week beginning: 20 January 2020**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

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Seen by Hon Eugenie Sage  
**Minister of Conservation**

Productively released

# 1 Standing and Priority Items

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## 1.1 RMA advocacy

DOC's recent RMA work is as follows:

### Submissions

Te Whau Pathway, Auckland Council

- DOC lodged a submission on 12 December 2019 opposing the application from Auckland Council to construct a shared path and walkway along approximately 12km of the Te Whau River.
- We opposed the application on the grounds that:
  - It seeks a 20m wide envelope of potential mangrove clearance through several Significant Ecological Areas.
  - It includes the potential for loss of habitat for long-tailed bats, lizards and marine-feeding birds.
  - It includes the potential for loss of ecosystem connectivity in the marine environment, particularly saltmarsh. This saltmarsh supports a substantial population of banded rail.
  - The application is not in accordance with policy 11 of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement.
  - Proposed mitigation measures are considered inadequate.

### Other

Lake Taupo catchment – application by Waikato Regional Council for Streamlined Planning Process

- Waikato Regional Council has requested that the Minister for the Environment approve the use of a streamlined planning process to amend the policy and rules applying to nitrogen discharges in the Lake Taupo catchment.
- The proposed amendments update the software used to model nitrogen discharges from land uses (Overseer), and include process for transitioning existing consents into the new software. There are no changes to other rules, the overall policy framework, or the nitrogen cap that applies in the Taupo catchment.
- The Ministry for the Environment sought comment from DOC regarding your interest in the application for a streamlined process.
- After reviewing a draft of the plan change, DOC considered that no conservation values would be affected by this proposal and that, therefore, you would not have an interest in the application for a streamlined planning process.
- If the request for a streamlined process is granted, the plan change will be publicly notified, and DOC will consider whether a submission should be lodged at that time.

Contact:

## 1.2 Kauri dieback and myrtle rust

- Scion scientists have been monitoring myrtle rust impacts in the Rotorua region again this summer. At infected sites monitored, ramarama is showing sustained infections on seedlings and adult plants. Three climbing rata species are also showing infections.
- Scientists have raised concerns that bush fires in Australia will cause a new flush of post-fire growth in myrtaceae vegetation on a large scale. Myrtle rust

attacks the new growth of myrtle plants, so this flush of vegetation in Australia could cause a massive outbreak of myrtle rust. The consequence of this for NZ is that it could lead to much higher levels of myrtle rust inoculum being blown across to NZ before winter. This may lead to more infections and more areas exposed to the pathogen.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## 2 Updates

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### 2.1 Comprehensive resource management system review

- The Government announced a comprehensive review of the resource management system in July 2019. The Minister for the Environment has established a Resource Management Review Panel, led by Hon Tony Randerson QC, to report back by June 2020 on ways to improve environmental outcomes and enable better and more timely development in urban areas and elsewhere, within environmental limits. You provided the Minister for the Environment with some key issues for your portfolio that you wished the panel to give special consideration to [B-19-510].
- DOC officials are members of an interagency coordinating group, assisting the Ministry for the Environment with servicing the panel and with testing of Ministry advice to the Minister for the Environment.
- The panel released an Issues and Options paper in November 2019 and it has been conducting targeted engagement with groups it wishes particularly to hear from. The panel is holding hui in early 2020 to engage with Māori.
- In addition, the Minister for the Environment established three reference groups of experts in their field to assist the panel. Specific questions have now been posed by the panel for more detailed consideration by eight separate working groups, comprising officials, reference group members, some panel members and external experts. The output requested from these working groups is to help the panel with its deliberations.
- DOC officials are members of four of the eight working groups. Topics that are being addressed with DOC contributions span: environmental limit setting; integration between and within the legislation; climate change; and possibilities for spatial planning.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### 2.2 'Love this place' – campaign update

- DOC's summer visitor behaviour campaign, 'Love this place' is under way, with digital advertising, posters, collateral, and partner channels activated. The campaign went live in early December 2019.
- The behavioural messages are targeted to reach and influence domestic and international tourists visiting conservation sites that are under pressure. In addition to seeing advertisements near those sites, visitors will be able to see them at locations en-route, e.g., petrol stations, campgrounds and information centres.
- Digital advertising results to date are promising, with more than 500,000 impressions reached and a click-through rate of 3%, well above the Google

Display Network average of 0.5%. These results indicate that this targeted approach is reaching the right audience.

- Collateral is available for DOC visitor centres, iSITES, and partner channels, while free postcards have been distributed to more than 600 key tourist locations, including ferries, accommodation providers, and tourist attractions.
- To give the campaign cultural depth, two interviews with Māori tourism operators have been filmed, showing how to practise kaitiakitanga. These are currently being edited and will feature on DOC's digital channels in the coming weeks.
- This campaign will run until at least the end of March 2020, with a view to extending.
- Fire Emergency New Zealand's campaign in collaboration with DOC also appears to have had good pick-up, especially in light of Australia's tragic bushfire situation.

Contact: [REDACTED]

### 2.3 Molesworth Steering Committee extension of term - update

- The term of current members on the Molesworth Steering Committee runs until 30 June 2020. With the support of Molesworth Steering Committee Chair, DOC will be recommending an extension of their term to 30 June 2022.
- A two-year extension enables the committee to provide advice on the management plan review process (due to be approved by the end of 2021) as well as the transition to any new grazing licence/lease.
- The revised management plan for Molesworth will consider whether there is a future role for the Steering Committee and, if so, what its membership should be.
- Pāmu (Landcorp Farming) and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu have expressed their intent to replace representatives on the committee.
- We intend to write to the Nelson Marlborough Conservation Board to see if it wishes to appoint a standing board member onto the committee. This would be an opportunity to strengthen the committee's conservation representation.
- To provide continuity, we will be recommending that the remaining five members on the committee have their terms extended, including the current Chair.
- We will provide you with a briefing for your decision on appointments in February.

Contact: [REDACTED]

### 2.4 The Remarkables ski area access road

- NZSki is intending to start charging a \$10 fee for vehicle use of the Remarkables skifield access road during the summer months (16 December to 30 April each year).
- The access road to the ski area and DOC-managed land is not a public road. The start of the road is a public right-of-way easement across private land owned by NZSki, and the middle and upper sections are easements held by NZSki across public conservation land.
- Under the terms of the various easements, NZSki is entitled to impose a toll/fee for vehicles, although the fee cannot be charged until DOC has approved that the proposed fee is reasonable.

- We have agreed that the fee of \$10 return is reasonable on a trial basis for summer 2020, with the opportunity to review at the end of the season.
- The public still has free foot access to The Remarkables Conservation Area and Rastus Burn Recreation Reserve.
- Search and Rescue, Police, Queenstown Lakes District Council and DOC will continue to have free access when using the road on official business.
- The decision to impose a fee is likely to draw significant public interest. When NZSki initiated a temporary road closure in January 2015, concerns were raised with the Minister of Conservation and DOC by groups such as the New Zealand Alpine Club, Federated Mountain Club and Queenstown Climbing Club.
- DOC does not have the ability to change previous decisions around whether a fee can be charged as that decision was made when the easements were first signed.
- We are working with NZSki on the communications the company provides around the road closure, and have asked that the public be given reasonable notice.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## 2.5 Breakthrough in the protection of Northern short-tailed bats

- Recent good news is that the only known Northland communal roost tree for northern short-tailed bats (*Mystacina tuberculata auperica*) was found on 22 November 2019, in Omahuta/Puketi Forest, Bay of Islands. Tangata whenua will bless the site in the week beginning 10 February.
- The northern short-tailed bat is a sub-species found only in Northland and on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island, with the one secure population at present on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island, making the taxon extremely vulnerable.
- The finding of a main roost tree (possibly with hundreds of bats), and of satellite smaller roosts, is a huge breakthrough and means we can begin predator control and possibly avoid a Northland extinction of the species. While kauri dieback and potential resistance to use of aerial 1080 will influence how this work is undertaken, current best practice is large scale, and consists of ongoing control of rats, stoats, possums and cats.
- Planning, including engagement with hapu and marae of Omahuta/Puketi Forest, will begin in February.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## 2.7 Black-billed gull chick deaths, Lake Wairarapa

- On 11 January, a Birds NZ volunteer reported a mass mortality of black-billed gull chicks on the northern shore of Lake Wairarapa.
- DOC staff went to the site on the same day and collected 44 dead chicks.
- The chicks will be sent to Massey University in Palmerston North to try and determine the cause of death.
- The gull colony of approximately 140 adults has now disbanded.
- There is no evidence of predation, people or dogs near the colony. The colony is close to an unauthorised dirt bike track that was put in over Christmas, although we do not believe that dirt bike activity caused the chick deaths.
- DOC braided river species specialists have observed similar events in the Makenzie Basin this season.
- The current theory is that the chick deaths/colony abandonment is likely to be due to a lack of food.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 2.8 Unauthorised bulldozer use in Wairarapa Moana reserve

- DOC is involved in investigating unauthorised bulldozer use in a South Wairarapa District Council-managed reserve on the northern shore of Lake Wairarapa.
- A local motorcycle enthusiast used a bulldozer to extend an informal motorcycle track in an area of redundant pasture in the reserve.
- The new 'track' runs between the shore of Lake Wairarapa and Simmonds Lagoon, both of which are listed as outstanding wetlands in the Greater Wellington Council Regional Council Natural Resource Plan.
- We are assisting district and regional council staff to investigate a potential prosecution under the RMA, or local by-laws.
- The reserve (Wairarapa Lake Domain Recreation Reserve) is Crown-owned land with management vested in South Wairarapa District Council.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 2.9 Access to the Cape Kidnappers gannet colony

- In Status Reports 102 and 103 late last year, we provided you with updates on progress towards reopening the Cape Kidnappers track, and access from the beach to the gannet colony.
- The decision whether to re-open the track is heavily dependent on the Quantitative Risk Assessment (QRA) Report commissioned from Stantec, and the peer review by GNS.
- Following initial peer review recommendations by GNS, further work is to be undertaken on the risk assessment calculations, along with development of

a more focussed risk profile for the beach trip beside the cliffs. We expect the final report to be completed by the end of April.

- This situation does not sit comfortably with stakeholders, and a number of parties are keen to see access to the gannet colony re-instated.
- The operator/concessionair – Gannet Beach Adventures - using tractor and trailer units to take clients along the beach, has only recently resumed operation, going only as far as the Black Reef gannet colonies.
- There have now been several media items on this matter (on TV1, RNZ and the DomPost). Current risk ratings in the media, quoted from the QRA report, are the subject of further work, as indicated above.
- DOC is keeping the operator informed about the risk management approach being taken, and is reinforcing the message that the main risk for anyone wanting to visit the gannet colony comes from the landslide hazard of the cliffs along the beach, which is land managed by the Hastings District Council (HDC).
- We are also seeking to clarify how our concession requirements apply with the changed travel itinerary of the transport operator.
- In summary:
  - We are keeping the track to the reserve closed to discourage people from making the journey to the gannet colony via the beach.
  - Any decision to re-open the track will only be made once the QRA report is completed, and its implications understood in their entirety by HDC and DOC.
  - We are keeping stakeholders informed of progress on this issue.
  - We are working to make the transport operator aware of our concerns, notably the potentially fatal risks associated with travelling along the beach, and also determining whether DOC's concessions policy and procedures still apply with the changed transport itinerary.
  - Access to the DOC-managed cottage does not rely on travelling along the beach with the associated landslide hazard, and we have no reason to believe that the cottage has been used in an inappropriate manner.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 2.10 Fatality on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing

- A 75-year-old man died while hiking on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (TAC) on 10 January.
- The deceased was a visitor from Germany who was hiking with his son. We understand he suffered a heart attack near Red Crater and passed away shortly after.
- The incident was unrelated to the track, or track conditions, and the death has been referred to the Coroner.
- A rahui was placed on the TAC by Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro on 10 January and was lifted at sunrise on 13 January.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## 2.11 Mangapurua Track reopens

- You have been kept updated on progress to reopen the Mangapurua section of the Mountains to Sea trail since it was closed in March 2019.
- Following the death of a cyclist, who fell from a bluff while cycling the Mangapurua track in March 2019, we have completed work required to address significant landslips and fall hazards associated with six different bluff systems.
- New safety measures have been implemented, including the installation of temporary barriers along bluff sections and improvements to messaging of signage placed along this route. This section of the track has also been significantly widened and erosion damage repaired. While a more comprehensive set of capital improvements is programmed, including permanent handrails, additional culverts and new bridges, we are comfortable that the track is now safe for both cyclists and walkers.
- The track will be reopened on 17 January, but as a Grade 4 trail (it was previously Grade 3). The reopening approach has been agreed by NZ Cycle Trails and DOC, both parties having inspected the track on 11 January.
- The time taken to complete this work has been due to the complexity of improvements and the remote location of the site. We expect rockfall may continue after severe weather, and the track will be temporarily closed and inspected following significant rainfall, to ensure it is safe to use.
- Concessionaires and stakeholders have been kept informed on progress and have been urged to remind riders to respect signage and to ensure they are riding as safely as possible on this Grade 4 ride.
- Further improvements to the track will be undertaken over the summer months and we will keep you informed of any significant changes to the track.

Contact: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## 2.12 Concessionaires operating on Moutohora/Whale Island

- Immediately following the eruption at Whakaari/White Island in December 2019, DOC put in place a voluntary cessation of concession activities at Moutohora/Whale Island.
- This decision was made in respect of the tikanga due to the nature of the tragedy, rather than because of risk from eruptive activity, as Moutohora is approximately 30 kilometres from Whakaari.
- The decision to put concession activities on hold was reinforced by a rahui that was placed over the harbour and surrounding marine area by local iwi, Ngāti Awa, and the closing of Whakatane Harbour to all vessels after the event.
- When the rahui over the harbour was lifted, operators made the decision to recommence operations to Moutohora. We agreed with this reinstatement of services. While White Island Tours did not initially recommence tours of any type to Moutohora, we understand that the company recommenced trips to Moutohora on 16 January.

Contact: [REDACTED]



### 3 Director-General Engagements

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#### January

21 January MfE/DOC Leadership Team Hui, Wellington

27 Jan–14 Feb D-G on annual leave, Rachel Bruce acting

#### February

13 February Chief Executive's Environmental and Economic Forum, Wellington

18 February D-G Stakeholder BBQ, Wellington

19 February DOC/FENZ Leadership Team meeting, Fire and Emergency, Wellington

20 February State Sector Senior Leaders Retreat, Ohariu, Wellington

21 February NZ Conservation Authority, DOC, Wellington

#### March

3–4 March SLT Retreat, Pounui

### 4 Addendum

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This section includes content that is sensitive or is being considered by the Minister of Conservation or other Ministers. This information is not being released proactively.

Subject headings of content in this section are:

- Ngāti Rangitihī
- Lake Taylor tenure review
- Godley Peaks tenure review
- The Grampians tenure review
- Predator Free 2050 Tools to Market update



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# **Department of Conservation Status Report**

**Week beginning: 27 January 2019**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

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Seen by Hon Eugenie Sage  
**Minister of Conservation**

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# 1 Standing and Priority Items

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## 1.1 Lead three Destination Management Plans (Milford/ Piopiotahi, Mackenzie/ Aoraki, Tongariro)

### Milford / Piopiotahi

- Following funding approval from the International Visitor Tourism and Conservation Levy, progress on stage two of the project has continued.
- Six proposals from an open Request for Proposal process were received and evaluated.
- Negotiations with the preferred supplier, Stantec, have been completed and a contract to undertake the research, consultation and develop a masterplan has been issued.
- Work will begin on the masterplan in the last week of January 2020. DOC will be closely supporting and reviewing the work as it progresses.

### Mackenzie / Aoraki

- We are continuing to engage with Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua, Te Rūnanga Waihao, and Te Rūnanga o Moeraki.
- We are expecting to receive a formal invite in the next month to talk with Rūnanga. This would begin to design how we work together in Treaty Partnership on this project. Continued positive progress in this space could signal a move towards a re-start for this project.
- Senior DOC staff and Mackenzie District Councillors and the Chief Executive are meeting on 31 January to discuss alignment and future progress on this project.

### Tongariro

- At the November hui between DOC and iwi, Ngāt Rangī, Ngāti Hikaro, Uneuku, and Ngāti Haua raised the need for the four iwi to agree their values, aspirations and method of working together.
- It is understood that the inter-iwi alignment needs to be underway before a structure for Crown/Iwi decision-making and scope of the project can be fully developed.
- This approach is understood to be vital to authentically work with our Treaty Partner. It is anticipated that there will be a delay progress on this project while we support iwi to undertake their discussions.
- We have requested to hear back on progress on the inter-iwi discussions in February 2020.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 1.2 RMA advocacy

No updates this week.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 1.3 Kauri dieback and myrtle rust

No updates for kauri dieback or myrtle rust this week.

Contact: [REDACTED]

## 2 Updates

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### 2.1 Subantarctic season update

#### Logistical changes

- The planned summer 2019/2020 subantarctic field season is one of the Aquatic Unit's busiest seasons in recent years and involves six teams going to three sets of islands/island groups to work on a range of species.
- This season has had several challenges, mostly around difficult weather and strong winds, which led to initial delays in trips departing. These delays were compounded by the chartered vessel experiencing mechanical issues.
- These issues have necessitated a reorganisation of the field season, which has had flow on effects, delaying the departures of both the Antipodean albatross and Auckland Island sea lion teams, as well as the pickups for the remainder of the field teams at the end of the season.
- Extensive work has been undertaken to minimise disruption and ensure the integrity of data and conservation intervention, while maintaining high standard of health and safety. Contingencies have included mobilisation of an additional transport vessel.
- Delays to the Antipodean albatross work is unfortunate and will result in reduced demographic information and the need to defer tracking of juveniles until next season. However other work, including the most critical element of adult female tracking, will still be undertaken this season, albeit delayed.
- The reduction of data collected may result in criticism by some stakeholders.

#### Campbell Island

- We are receiving regular updates from the field teams at Campbell Island.
- Weather conditions at the island are adverse and pup mortality, particularly at Davis point, is higher than seen in previous years.
- To date about 180 dead pups have been observed. Necropsies have been performed on a subset of these animals to determine cause of death – exposure appears to be the leading factor.
- We are monitoring the situation and working with Treaty Partners as the season evolves.
- We will provide you with a more extensive briefing on the field season in due course.

Contact:

### 2.2 Freshwater site restoration update for the Environment Select Committee (to answer a post-hearing question)

- The Environment Select Committee has asked what sites DOC has identified as having the most potential to restore freshwater biodiversity and what DOC's plan for delivery is. An answer is required by 29 January.
- We have prepared a draft answer noting progress made on our freshwater stretch goal work.
- Within the Freshwater catchments workstream, under Bio18 to restore 14 priority river catchments, 11 river catchments have been confirmed within DOC. Three Southland river catchments have been identified as potential sites and are still to be confirmed subject to partner readiness work.
- River rangers are now in place to coordinate the work in five catchments (Rangitata, Lower Waitaki, Waikanae, Arahura and Te Hoiere/Pelorus). They are working with Treaty Partners, territorial authorities, stakeholders and

community groups to identify the current level of information available and begin collaborative planning for the catchment restoration work.

- We have increased our technical, RMA and science capability. The ranger for the Hotoe/Mahurangi catchments in Auckland will start on 28 January.
- Projects underway this year include engaging with partners in the planning phase, on-the-ground work such as native fish habitat restoration, and several research initiatives including some social science work in one catchment and bank erosion and the role of gravel in other catchments.
- However, while we do the preliminary work establishing partnerships, the only catchments that have been announced formally or informally are the Hotoe, Rangitata, Arahura, Waikanae and Te Hoiere (Pelorus). Therefore, there are potential risks in releasing information on all 14 river catchments. To mitigate this, only those catchments where conversations have already been had with key partners have been listed. We will prepare messaging to respond to any queries on this topic.
- We are happy to work with you to make any further formal announcements, and can provide you a more comprehensive briefing on any aspects of this work.

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2.3 MBIE Destination Planning Guidelines

- The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has developed Destination Planning Guidelines, which describe what Destination Management is and how to go about creating a plan.
- The purpose of the Guidelines is to provide a practical tool to assist people and organisations who have a role in supporting, growing and developing the tourism economy within their region, district or community.
- We input into the development of the guidelines and in general we support them.
- We have raised a concern with MBIE that this tool is likely to stimulate interest in creating collaborative plans requiring DOC input in locations that do not align with our current priorities or resource. We will continue to manage this risk.
- At present MBIE are preparing material for the Minister of Tourism. They anticipate public release of the documents around the end of February.

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_



### 3 Director-General Engagements

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#### January/February

21 January MfE/DOC Leadership Team hui, MfE, Wellington  
27Jan–14 Feb Lou on Annual Leave, Rachel Bruce Acting DG  
13 February Chief Executive's Environmental and Economic Forum, Wellington  
18 February DG Stakeholder BBQ, DOC Wellington  
19 February DOC/FENZ Leadership Teams meeting, Fire and Emergency, Wellington  
20 February State Sector Senior Leaders Retreat, Ohariu, Wellington  
20 February NZ Conservation Authority, DOC, Wellington  
20 February NZer of the year Awards, Cordis, Auckland

#### March

3–4 March SLT Retreat, Pounui  
19 March Environment NGO Forum, DOC Wellington  
20 March Senior Leaders hui, Wellington

Proactively released

## 4 Addendum

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Subject headings of content in this section are:

- Biosecurity incursion response
- Timber removal enquiry
- Taranaki Mounga Project update
- Godley Head Gun Emplacements – celebration of reopening

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