

07 July 2023

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 12 June 2023 requesting information relating to Motutapu Island and weeds. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (“OIA”).

You requested a range of information which I will respond to below.

By way of context for my response the Department of Conservation (“the Department”) is managing a backlog of maintenance work on Motutapu. The discovery in May 2020 of the first of three stoats on Motutapu led to a lengthy and labour-intensive biosecurity response that did not end until November 2021. During this period our island staff had less capacity to tackle maintenance work on the island as they were diverted to work on the biosecurity response. COVID-19 lockdowns during the same period placed further restrictions on work programmes and contributed to a backlog of maintenance and management work on Motutapu that we are now working our way through with support from Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki and community volunteer groups.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *Who is responsible for administering weed management on Motutapu Island?*

Most (1,457ha) of Motutapu Island is administered by the Department of Conservation as a recreation reserve under section 17 of the Reserves Act 1977. The Department is the primary agency responsible for administering weed control within this reserve.

A small (3.85ha) portion of the recreation reserve is occupied by the Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust under a lease agreement. The Trust is responsible for managing weeds within this site.

Under their Treaty settlement three areas of land on Motutapu were transferred to Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, to be managed by them as reserves. 50ha was transferred as a historic reserve, to be managed under section 18 of the Reserves Act. Two areas (totalling 2.5ha) were transferred to be managed as recreation reserves. Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki are responsible for managing weeds in all three of these reserves.

The Department has a relationship agreement with Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki which applies to the islands of Motutapu and Rangitoto. We consult and co-operate with each other in relation to all work undertaken on both islands.

- 2. How many complaints in relation to weeds on the island have been received both via the 0800DOCHOT line, the feedback link on the website and from any other source in the last two years? What action has been undertaken as a result of any complaints?*

In the two years prior to June 2023, the Department of Conservation has received three complaints about weeds on Motutapu. These were an email from Auckland Council to a Departmental staff member regarding moth plant on Motutapu being visible from Rakino Island, an email sent to the [aucklandnorthhead@doc.govt.nz](mailto:aucklandnorthhead@doc.govt.nz) mailbox regarding moth plant and other species on Motutapu, and an email to the Department's Auckland Visitor Centre about moth plant visible in forest patches on Motutapu. We responded to each complaint in writing.

We did not undertake any specific new work as a result of these complaints. Rather our focus was on continuing to implement our weed control programme, and support Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki and others working on the island to undertake weed control under their work programmes.

- 3. Was there a complaint made in relation to the potential spread of wind-borne moth vine seeds to Rakino Island? What was the outcome of that complaint? What action was taken by whom and where.*

The Department received five complaints about the potential spread of moth plant seeds from Motutapu to Rakino Island on five occasions, between January and September 2021. In response to the first four of these complaints control of moth plant was undertaken in June 2021 on Motutapu at Waikalabubu Bay. This was the site of the closest infestation to Rakino. The moth plant control was undertaken by a team employed by Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki.

- 4. Is Jobs for Nature active on Motutapu Island and what is the scope of this work specifically?*

Jobs for Nature funding administered by the Department has been allocated to Motutapu Island under a funding agreement with Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd. An entity owned by Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki. The scope of work funded under this agreement is as follows:

1. Weed control of moth plant on Motutapu. Other weeds to be controlled include gorse, woolly nightshade, apple of Sodom, veldt grass, snapdragon vine, mile-a-minute and climbing asparagus.

2. Repairs and maintenance of farm and island infrastructure including fencing, water reticulation and other assets as agreed with the Department.

Employees whose roles are funded by the Jobs for Nature funding agreement may also cover general duties and team support when required. These employees are to receive training and development opportunities in the fields of environment, ecology, horticulture, archaeology, biosecurity, dog handling, weed and pest control and in operating machinery relevant to these fields.

Information about this grant can be obtained from the Department's website: [www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/jobs-for-nature--mahi-mo-te-taiao/projects-funded-by-jobs-for-nature/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/jobs-for-nature--mahi-mo-te-taiao/projects-funded-by-jobs-for-nature/)

5. *How much money in total has been allocated to any third party via the Department of Conservation across the last three years in relation to weed control including Jobs for Nature if applicable? How much and who was provided the money or budget or grant? Does it all come under the umbrella of Jobs for Nature? Does Motutapu Restoration Trust receive any budget or grants?*

The Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust was granted \$35,000 for moth plant control in their lease area under an agreement which came into effect in July 2021. The initial allocation of this funding took place in 2016, however the Trust was unable to use it at that time due to circumstances beyond their control. This money was granted from the DOC Community Fund following a successful application from the Trust. The DOC Community Fund is separate to the Jobs for Nature programme.

Information about grants allocated under the DOC Community Fund can be obtained from the Department's website: [www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/funding/doc-community-fund/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/funding/doc-community-fund/)

Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd. was allocated \$1,000,000 of Jobs for Nature funding by the Department in May 2021. This was to fund the work programme described in my response to Question 4 above, and its scope includes but is not limited to weed control. The funding agreement does not identify the proportion of funding for each specific category of work to be delivered, so it is not possible to state what amount of this funding was allocated specifically for weed control. This project is the only Jobs for Nature funding allocated directly to Motutapu.

The Motutapu Restoration Trust successfully applied to the DOC Community Fund in 2018 and was allocated \$50,000 for weed control on Motutapu over one year. Spending of this grant was delayed for reasons outside of the control of the Motutapu Restoration Trust, and work funded by this grant is due for completion this year.

In 2015, the Motutapu Restoration Trust successfully applied to the Department of Conservation Community Partnerships Fund and received \$115,000 over two years for weed control on Motutapu. This Deed of Grant for this funding was signed by both parties in 2016.

The Motutapu Restoration Trust did not apply for Jobs for Nature funding. The Trust has received grants from other funds administered by the Department as described above. The Department has also supported the Trust's efforts to obtain funds from various other funding sources. This has included facilitating the Trust's running of the DUAL multisport event on Motutapu as a fundraising venture.

6. *If a budget has been allocated for weed control on Motutapu to another third party how much exactly has been allocated across the last three years and how much has been spent in total? If it was under the umbrella of Jobs for Nature then please advise? If it was for any other third party then please advise?*

As I described in my responses to Questions 4 and 5 above, \$1,000,000 of Jobs for Nature funding has been allocated to Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd. for the period 31/5/2021 to 31/5/2024. As I noted above this funding is not exclusively for weed control and it is not possible to specify the proportion of this funding that is specifically for weed control. The payment structure is by quarterly instalments in advance, with the following allocations over the past three financial years (all figures exclusive of GST, if applicable):

2020/2021: \$333,000

2021/2022: \$333,500

2022/2023: \$266,500

For the 22/23 financial year ending March 2023, \$500,000 has been paid out from Jobs for Nature, and the total amount expended to date has been \$459,000.

The funding of \$35,000 granted to the Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust for weed control, described in my response to Question 5, has all been spent.

The DOC Community Fund grant to the Motutapu Restoration Trust of \$50,000 over one year, for weed control on Motutapu, was not able to begin until late 2022 due to factors beyond the control of the Trust. The most recent update from the Trust (May 2023) indicates an amount of \$419.00 is still to be paid, after which the grant will have been fully expended.

7. *If a budget has been allocated for weed control on Motutapu to another third party such as Jobs for Nature, how is this being measured? Have any key performance indicators been met and what evidence is there of this? Have any key performance indicators not been met? Is this work being monitored by DoC on Public Conservation Land? If not why not? Please provide a precis of outcomes achieved in relation to weed control given that the Department of Conservation is responsible? What area on Motutapu has been weeded as part of DoC administered funding to themselves or any third party and who determines where the weeding will occur? If Jobs for Nature has a role in weeding, what area have they been responsible for and what has been specifically achieved?*

As I described above the Jobs for Nature funding allocation to Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd. for work on Motutapu is the only Jobs for Nature project on Motutapu.

For this project key performance indicators for weed control are in the form of quarterly deliverable milestones for hectares of weeds controlled. Performance has been reported on

up until the period ending 31 March 2023, and is measured on the basis of figures supplied by Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd.

For the reporting period ending on 31 March 2023, no key performance indicators (deliverable milestones) for weed control had been achieved by the project and the project is not on target to meet the project’s overall weed control target of 730ha. Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd has proposed a decrease to the weed control target as a variation to the funding agreement. Reasons cited by Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai for the project not achieving weeding milestones were the difficulty experienced with recruiting employees to work in the relative isolation of Motutapu, and COVID-19 restrictions that were in place during 2021 that led to a delayed start to the project.

The work is being monitored using figures supplied by Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd. Hectares of weed control achieved compared with the project’s deliverable milestones are summarised as follows:

Reporting period end.	Cumulative weed control target.	Actual cumulative area controlled
30 June 2022	270ha	116ha
30 September 2022	340ha	169ha
31 December 2022	410ha	179ha
31 March 2023	480ha	195ha

I also described above the grant to the Motutapu Restoration Trust of \$50,000 over one year for weed control on Motutapu from the DOC Community Fund. The Deed of Grant has specific key performance indicators in the form of weed control objectives the project intends to achieve in the project area (being that area known as “Central Gully”) by the end of the funded project:

- Moth plant – fewer than three mature vines found per hour of auditing.
- Woolly nightshade – no more than three mature plants found per hour of auditing.
- Wandering willie – zero plants found per hour of auditing.
- Wild ginger – no more than one seedling found per hour of auditing.
- Brush wattle – fewer than three trees over 12cm diameter found per hour of auditing.
- Chinese privet – no more than one mature plant found per hour of auditing.
- Gorse – ten largest patches are thinned and planted with native shrubs to eventually shade the remainder out.
- Rhamnus – no more than one shrub over 1m tall remaining per two hours of auditing.
- Pampas – no more than one mature plant found per two hours auditing.

As I noted above the work required to spend this grant money could not begin until late 2022, due to factors beyond the control of the Motutapu Restoration Trust. The project is not yet complete. As the Trust has not yet provided its final report it is not possible to provide you with information about whether or not the Trust successfully met its targets.

As I noted above, the Motutapu Restoration Trust had also been the recipient of an earlier grant in 2016 from the Department of Conservation Community Partnerships Fund, which

allocated \$115,000 over two years for weed control on Motutapu. Key performance indicators for this project were as follows:

- At least 95% of mature moth plant vines will be destroyed in Central Gully over the term of the contract.
- All wattles over 120mm diameter will be killed in Central Gully over the term of the contract.
- A minimum of 90% of Rhamnus, Chinese privet, woolly nightshade and gorse plants of shrub size and above are killed in Central Gully over the term of the contract.

The effectiveness of weed control against these outcomes was to be measured by the Trust undertaking monitoring of the work completed by their contractor. The final report for this project, received in 2018, stated that a revised target for moth plant was agreed to during the term of the project, due to the sheer density of moth plant vines encountered in the project area. The revised moth plant target was achieved, as were the targets for wattles and Chinese privet. Targets for Rhamnus, woolly nightshade and gorse were not met, due to the Trust's contractor having insufficient hours remaining in the contract to complete this work.

I also noted above that the Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust was granted \$35,000 for one year from the DOC Community Conservation Fund. The funding was allocated in 2016 and the agreement became effective in 2021. The objectives of this project were to reduce and/or eliminate moth plant in four areas within the Trust's lease area to prevent native vegetation being displaced and to prevent moth plant spreading to adjacent areas. Moth plant control was undertaken adequately in two of the key areas, begun in a third area and not undertaken in a fourth area.

The final report submitted from the Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust identified a number of matters that collectively hindered them from achieving the project outcomes. These were a prohibition by the Department on the Trust's use of volunteer labour for this work during that period of time, the time taken for the funding to be approved, delays in the production of a weed management plan to guide the work, and difficulty in reaching some vines/pods due to steep terrain, unstable trees and the height above ground of many moth plant pods.

For each of these projects, monitoring of results has been based on reporting by the funding recipients. The Department has not had capacity to formally monitor weed control by other parties, however, Department staff do meet with recipients and undertake informal staff observations.

Decisions on where to undertake weed control for each of these projects were made by the funding applicants with advice from Department staff.

The area of weed control achieved by each of these projects comprises the 195ha achieved to date under the Jobs for Nature grant to Te Haerenga o Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Ltd., the approximately 83ha of the Central Gully area where the Motutapu Restoration Trust are active, and the 2.77ha where the Motutapu Outdoor Education Trust undertook moth plant control at three sites in their lease area.

8. *Has the Department of Conservation received notification/s from any other inner Gulf Islands that the weeds on Motutapu are contributing to the overall spread of weeds such as moth vine to other islands within the Hauraki Gulf? Who notified the Department of Conservation, what action was taken and what are the current measures in place as a result?*

As I advised in my response to Question 3 above, the Department received five complaints in 2021 about moth plant on Motutapu being a potential seed source for Rakino Island. One complaint was received from Auckland Council staff, and the other four complaints were from members of the public. I am unable to disclose the identity of the complainants for privacy reasons.

Complaints were received both directly and indirectly. We received one of the complaints via Auckland Council and in another case via the office of Chloe Swarbrick MP. As I advised in my response to Question 3 above, some moth plant control was undertaken by Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki on Motutapu in 2021 in response to complaints received by the Department regarding this.

As I advised in my response to Question 2, the projects that the Department has supported through Jobs for Nature and the other funding grants described above are part of the weed control programme on Motutapu. With the exception of moth plant control undertaken at Waikalabubu Bay in 2021, we have not commissioned any weed control work specifically in response to complaints we have received.

Departmental staff have received verbal comments from Waiheke Island residents regarding the possible dispersal of moth plant in either direction between Motutapu and Waiheke. The Department recognises that weeds can be transferred between islands by humans, birds, wind and other factors, but the extent to which this is happening is difficult to quantify.

9. *How does the Department of Conservation explain the appalling state of weed control on the island in high public user zones and popular walking tracks and what action is underway to remedy that?*

The description of the state of weed control on Motutapu as “appalling” is a matter of opinion. I have described the work that the Department has funded in recent years in my responses above. I have also provided you with context for my response, in which I explained that the capacity for Departmental staff to undertake weed control on the island was severely restricted in 2020 and 2021, leading to a backlog of work which we are currently working to address.

The Department acknowledges the island has very visible infestations of a number of weed species. This is being addressed primarily by working with Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki and community volunteer groups to enable them to assist with controlling weeds, as described above.

10. *Does the Department of Conservation acknowledge that weeds may be toxic to animals and people? If so, what action is currently underway to ensure that native species are not being impacted? How can the Department of Conservation be sure that a weed such as the toxic moth vine is not affecting native animals on Motutapu?*

The Department is aware that many plant species designated as weeds have documented toxic properties. For example, the National Poisons Centre website identifies a number of weed species that are toxic to humans (see article on [www.poisons.co.nz](http://www.poisons.co.nz)). The level of toxicity is not however the sole factor that determines the Department's weed management programme on Motutapu, nor on any other site we administer. A range of factors are relevant when determining weed control priorities.

The funding support being provided to Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki and community volunteer groups working on Motutapu for weed control is the primary means by which the Department is seeking to control weeds on the island.

The Department holds no information specifically about whether or not native animals on Motutapu are being affected by moth plant.

11. *Is there a weed plan of sorts for the island or does this come under the Auckland City Council weed plan? If there is a separate plan please provide me with a copy of this report and advise how long the report has been in force?*

The *Auckland Regional Pest Management Plan 2020-2030* prepared by Auckland Council applies to Motutapu and other Hauraki Gulf Islands which are part of the Auckland Region. This plan includes both plant and animal pests and can be viewed on the Auckland Council website at [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/topic-based-plans-strategies/environmental-plans-strategies/Pages/regional-pest-management-plan.aspx](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/topic-based-plans-strategies/environmental-plans-strategies/Pages/regional-pest-management-plan.aspx)

The Department is preparing a specific weed plan for Motutapu which is expected to be finalised by the end of 2023.

12. *The walking tracks in particular are poorly signed. This is not attributable to weather or covid events. It's attributable to poor regular maintenance. Why and what is being done and what is the timeline to remedy this? If nothing is being done, what volunteer and support agencies have been approached?*

The Department is currently undertaking an audit of visitor assets and the track network on Motutapu. A key purpose of the audit is to realign and update all signage to meet current track and safety standards. The Department currently has 109 signs on Motutapu of which approximately 75% are either at end-of-life, are out of date or are in disrepair. The Department aims to complete the signage audit by the end of June 2024.

The audit will provide evidence to support funding bids for the 2024-2025 financial year to undertake the necessary work to replace and upgrade signage on the island.

13. *What is the timeline to reopen any tracks that are currently closed. If no timeline is available what action is being taken to ensure there is a timeline formulating on behalf of the public and tax payers?*



Two tracks on Motutapu are currently closed, which are the Mullet Bay Track and the Rotary Centennial Loop Track.

The Mullet Bay Track no longer meets the New Zealand standards for a track of this type. A decision on whether or not to invest in upgrading and re-opening this track has not yet been made and no timeline is available for when this track might be reopened. In the meantime we are not maintaining the track.

The Rotary Centennial Loop Track is closed due to slips and windfalls resulting from Cyclone Gabrielle in February this year. An initial geotechnical assessment was completed in May and a report has been supplied to the Department. We are assessing the advice and recommendations in the report and will develop a work programme for remediation and repair of the track, including any funding bids. Until this work has been done the Department is not able to specify a timeline for reopening of the track.

*14. Given that amount of work required, what is the Department of Conservation doing to foster and acknowledge volunteer work. Are there volunteer networks established and if so how is the Department of Conservation looking after these community groups and acknowledging them so that they feel valued on Motutapu Island. Please provide me with recent examples.*

In 1994 the Department of Conservation initiated the formation of the Motutapu Restoration Trust. This organisation is the primary volunteer network active on Motutapu.

In addition to the funding grants to the Trust that I have referred to above, the Department has fostered the Motutapu Restoration Trust's volunteer work numerous ways. These include enabling the Trust to establish a large on-island nursery to raise eco-sourced plants for revegetation planting, facilitating the Trust's introduction of native species to the island, enabling the Trust to restore and use buildings and other infrastructure on the island, and working with the Trust to hold the annual DUAL multisport event on the island, which is a major fundraising activity for the Trust.

A current example of helping volunteer networks feel valued is the Department's participation in the #BigShoutOut campaign [The Big Shout Out – National Volunteer Week](#) for the recent National Volunteer Week, to help value and celebrate volunteer work such as that undertaken by the Motutapu Restoration Trust. The Department celebrated and recognised volunteers through its social media channels and elsewhere.

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



[Redacted]

Nāku noa, nā

[Redacted]

Andrew Baucke  
Regional Operations Director, Auckland  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*