

14 March 2023

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, received on 20 December 2022 in which you asked for:

- Any correspondence or reports since the 2nd September 2021, including emails and meeting notes between the Dept. of Conservation staff (and lawyers) and Ernslaw One staff related to the continued closure of the Blue Mountains forests to mid-week hunting access.
- Correspondence and meeting notes between DOC staff internally, and with Ernslaw One on options for resolution of midweek hunting access.
- Any items of correspondence provided to hunters or hunting groups updating them on the closure of mid-week access for hunting in the Blue Mountains RHA.
- Unless covered by the above, any material related to why midweek hunting permits have not, or cannot, be issued for RHA areas where vehicular access is not physically required to access the hunting block. Ie Chris's, Myles, Gorge Blocks.
- Total number of permits issued for the Blue Mountains in the 2018 calendar year and total number of permits issued in 2022 calendar year.

On 07 February 2023 we extended your request to 09 March 2023. This extension of time was necessary to ensure impacted third parties could appropriately be consulted on the release of material.

On 09 March 2023 we made a decision on your request and noted that additional time was required to prepare material for release. We also stated that this documentation would be provided to you no later than 15 March 2023.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *Any correspondence or reports since the 2nd September 2021, including emails and meeting notes between the Dept. of Conservation staff (and lawyers) and Ernslaw One staff related to the continued closure of the Blue Mountains forests to mid-week hunting access.*
 - Requested documentation (other than those withheld pursuant to Section 9(2)(h) of the Official Information Act 1982 to maintain legal privilege) are enclosed with this letter. For further information please refer to 'Table 1 – Schedule of Documents' on page 5 of our response
2. *Correspondence and meeting notes between DOC staff internally, and with Ernslaw One on options for resolution of midweek hunting access.*



- Please refer to the answer provided to question 1 of our response
3. *Any items of correspondence provided to hunters or hunting groups updating them on the closure of mid-week access for hunting in the Blue Mountains RHA.*

- There has not been any direct correspondence to individual hunters. We have however been liaising with representatives of some hunting groups as we have been trying to resolve the issue of restricted mid-week hunting vehicular access. Individual hunters that regularly hunt in the Blue Mountains Recreational Hunting Area (RHA) are well aware that there has only been restricted mid-week hunting opportunities available in the RHA over the past several seasons.

Blue Mountains RHA mid-week hunting permits are now available to the hunting fraternity provided they meet certain criteria that will enable them to be granted vehicular access via the public access roads. I understand that DOC Murihiku District staff member Alan Christie has recently advised you personally, and provided email responses, of how mid-week permits for the RHA, with vehicular access, can now be obtained.

Both the Blue Mountains hunting section on www.doc.govt.nz and the “Special Conditions” on the Blue Mountains Hunting Permit Application Form have been amended to clearly state that the individual hunter is responsible for obtaining any vehicular access required, recommending that this is obtained before applying for a mid-week hunting permit.

4. *Unless covered by the above, any material related to why midweek hunting permits have not, or cannot, be issued for RHA areas where vehicular access is not physically required to access the hunting block. ie Chris's, Myles, Gorge Blocks.*

- Mid-week hunting permits have always remained available for several of the hunting blocks, on the western side, that do not require vehicular access, being Glenburnie, Black Gulley, Whisky Gully and Brandy Gully.

There have also been several occasions where mid-week permits have been issued for hunting blocks on the eastern side. These have been on a case-by-case basis when the hunter has obtained access to the block via private land without the need to access the public access easement roads.

5. *Total number of permits issued for the Blue Mountains in the 2018 calendar year and total number of permits issued in 2022 calendar year.*

- We have been unable to locate the relevant records to be able to ascertain the number of permits issued for the 2018 calendar year. Your request for information concerning the total number of permits issued for the Blue Mountains in 2018 is refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act as this information does not exist.

From records available we can however advise that the number of permits issued for the following 2019 calendar year was 2,444. The number of permits for the 2022 calendar year was 1,131. These totals reflect both the applications through the ballot system and the ad hoc requests for permits via phone and counter enquiry.

The following documents are withheld in full under section 18(a) by virtue of having grounds to withhold under section 9(2)(h) of the Official Information Act as they consist of information subject to professional legal privilege.

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	17/06/2022 and 01/07/2022	Email exchange between Alan Christie and Senior Solicitor Susan Newell, providing legal advice in respect to Public Access Easements.	Withheld in full.
2	26/07/2022	Email from Susan Newell to Alan Christie providing further legal advice on DOC's role & responsibilities in respect to Public Access Easements.	Withheld in full.

Copies of documents identified for release are listed on page 5 of our response under the heading "Table 1 – Schedule of Documents"

All documents outlined in Table 1 are released in part subject to information being withheld under the following sections of the Official Information Act as applicable:

- personal contact details of officials, under section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people,
- advice subject to legal privilege, under section 9(2)(h) - to maintain legal professional privilege,

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Official Information Act and determined there are no public interests which outweigh the grounds for withholding.

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

[Redacted signature area]

Nāku noa, nā

[Redacted name]

David Butt
Acting Regional Operations Director, Southern South Island
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Table 1 – Schedule of Documents

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	13/10/2022	Email between DOC staff and Mr Hadland raising further concerns around access to the Blue Mountains Recreational Hunting Area	Released in full
2	Various	A series of email trails between NZ Deerstalkers Assoc., Otago Branch and Alan Christie & others regarding mid-week access for the Blue Mountains RHA.	Released in part.
3	Various	Email trails between Mark Beardsley, Service Designer, Policy & Visitors Unit, DOC and Alan Christie containing advice on hunting permit issues.	Released in part.
4	06/04/2022	Email between Judy Ward, Administration Manager, DOC and Alan Christie.	Released in part.
5	11/12 October 2022	Emails between Phil de la Mare, Ernslaw One and Alan Christie that includes comment regarding access to the Blue Mountains RHA hunting blocks.	Released in part. Redacted sections contain material not within scope of your request.
6	05/05/2022	Email from Sue Tuna, Business Support Officer, DOC and Alan Christie regarding access to hunting blocks in the Blue Mountains RHA.	Released in part.
7	21/06/2022 and 21/07/22	DOC's to response to letter from Ingrid Leary, Labour M.P. for Taieri, regarding mid-week hunting access to the Blue Mountains RHA.	Released in part.