

7 March 2024

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Tēnā koe Matt

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 14 February 2024. We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

We understand you recently submitted a similar request to the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). DOC is a collaborating partner in the national fight against Kauri dieback disease. As the lead agency for Kauri protection, we support the statements provided to you by MPI (reference number: OIA23-0414) and hold no additional information relating to questions one and two of your request, as outlined below.

- 1) *What evidence exists that Kauri Dieback (= high number of symptomatic Kauri in a forest) is caused by Phytophthora agathidicida and mostly spread by people with their walking boots. Please don't just refer to articles. I want a short & clear description of the evidence.*
- 2) *Can you give me a list of New Zealand scientists who still believe in the idea that Kauri Dieback is caused by Phytophthora agathidicida and mostly spread by people with their walking boots.*

MPI's response to OIA23-0414 is available at the following FYI link:

<https://fyi.org.nz/request/23506/response/88933/attach/html/3/OIA23%200414%20A%20response%20to%20your%20request.pdf.html>.

Your questions and our responses are listed below regarding the remainder of your request.

- 3) *Is DOC aware that some people (e.g. Nick Waipara, Mels Barton, Edward Ashby) spread crass incorrect information?*

With reference to section 18(g) of the OIA, DOC does not hold any information in relation to this part of your request, nor do we believe it to be held, or closely connected with the functions of another agency.

- 4) *Is DOC aware that the same people who spread incorrect information (see question before) are the propagators of the closures not only of the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park (Auckland Council) but also DOC administered public spaces like Goldie Bush and Okura Forest?*

As per my response to question three, DOC does not hold any information in relation to this part of your request, nor do we believe it to be held, or closely connected with the functions of another agency (section 18(g) of the OIA refers).

5) More than one third of New Zealand population lives in Auckland. Is DOC aware how dire the situation is for Aucklanders looking for enjoyment, recreation, and healing in nature? Can you please provide a timeframe for the reopening of Goldie Bush, Okura Forest, Te Henga Walkway, Albany Scenic Reserve.

I acknowledge that both Goldie Bush, Okura Bush and Te Henga walkways were all popular destinations for Aucklanders when they were open. I appreciate your frustration that these tracks are no longer open for people to enjoy.

With reference to section 18(e) of the OIA, unfortunately, I cannot provide a timeframe for the opening of Goldie Bush, Okura Bush, or Te Henga walkways. Information about the reason for the closures is provided in response to question six below.

6) Are the current closures of public spaces on DOC land due to kauri dieback
a) precautionary ("We don't know what is going on so we are for now closing it, but if the scientists are coming to new conclusions then we will reopen")
b) final ("That Phytophthora agathidicida is the main driver of Kauri Dieback and people are the main spreaders is confirmed")

Unfortunately, I am unable to answer your question, as DOC does not use the criteria you have described in 6a) and 6b) to assess whether public conservation land with kauri present should be closed.

However, I can advise you that the four sites you referred to in question five are currently closed for different reasons. Te Henga Walkway and Okura Bush Walkway are both currently closed as they were severely damaged by Cyclone Gabrielle. DOC has sought specialist advice on the storm damage and is currently assessing the future of these tracks.

Goldie Bush Walkway is currently closed as some sections of the track network are not maintained to the current best practice for standards for tracks in kauri forests. Furthermore, a rāhui was placed over Goldie Bush by Te Kawerau ā Maki in 2018, and this has not yet been lifted. DOC supports this rāhui and is working with the iwi to understand their concerns and develop a plan for the tracks that addresses these.

Albany Scenic Reserve was formally closed in early 2015 by the then Minister of Conservation. The kauri disease pathogen, *Phytophthora agathicida* (PA), had been detected in the reserve, and heavy evidence of dying trees was observed. The tracks in Albany Scenic Reserve were assessed as part of DOC's kauri dieback mitigation programme in 2017. However, it was determined that mitigation of the tracks to the best practice standards for tracks in kauri forests at the time would be hard to achieve. DOC is maintaining the closure of Albany Scenic Reserve and does not intend to reopen this reserve to the public in the foreseeable future.

- 7) *Is DOC aware that all evidence actually points to*
- a) *environmental stress as the driver of kauri dieback (especially droughts)*
 - b) *Phytophthora agathidicida is already in the country for at least hundreds of years and therefore has already spread to all areas where the soil conditions are conducive for its survival.*
 - c) *Phytophthora agathidicida is causing no deaths to kauri but is only a secondary pathogen invading dying kauri.*
 - d) *People do not spread Kauri Dieback (because they only transport the pathogen to areas where it cannot survive AND the pathogen is not the decisive factor for kauri death)*

DOC is aware that there are a range of views regarding Kauri dieback disease and is committed to an evidenced-based approach in protecting Kauri on public conservation land.

- 8) *Is DOC aware of any attempts to intimidate scientists to speak openly about kauri dieback? Is DOC aware of any obstacles for scientists to openly discuss their findings and conclusions regarding kauri dieback?*

With reference to section 18(g) of the OIA, DOC is not aware of any intimidation of the research community regarding Kauri dieback disease, nor do we believe it to be held, or closely connected with the functions of another agency.

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

If you would like to discuss this response further, you can contact us via kauridieback@doc.govt.nz.

More information on kauri protection and the pathogen causing kauri dieback disease is available at the following website: www.kauriprotection.co.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



Ben Reddiex
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Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai