



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Our ref: 19-E-0254
File ref: 5940708

24 May 2019

T Benseman
fyi-request-10215-9738bf8a@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear T Benseman

Thank you for your Official Information Act (the Act) request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), dated 27 April 2019. You have requested the following:

"Please advise the origins and any other associated/related info of the Native, Protected Whio Blue Ducks released onto Mt Taranaki. Of the many that have died since 1080 poison drops, is there a map showing where these deaths occurred? As DOC admits in writing that 1080 poison is a teratogen, and that Whio are eating so much 1080 that their poo is pouring down the rocks discoloured by 1080 bait dye, have you studied the breeding capability of these poison exposed Whio to see if the survivors have been adversely effected by 1080 poison, if so please send the study. If not can you explain why instead of the 210 birds released breeding and increasing, they are in fact plummeting in numbers? Could it be that the 5 fold increase in rat numbers DOC and Landcare has noticed after a 1080 drop (an increase that is ongoing for up to 6 years), is having an effect on Whio numbers thru expanding stoat numbers as stoats thrive on rats and then go hungry when rats die off late winter? When you notice that some DOC staff are spending large sums of taxpayers money moving birds into an area and then poisoning them in large numbers and otherwise bringing about their demise via inflated pest numbers, do you have a strategy to single out these individuals and discipline them and fine them and then bring a halt to such extreme activities?"

We do not accept the position you have taken on a number of issues in your correspondence to us. We work hard to protect whio and we have strong evidence that indicates our conservation work is making a positive impact on the population. We have a monitoring plan in place to ensure the continuing welfare of these important birds and we acknowledge that it is in the public interest to provide information which will inform and engage the public on this work. For this reason, we have provided a response to part of your request, outlined below:

"Please advise the origins and any other associated/related info of the Native, Protected Whio Blue Ducks released onto Mt Taranaki. Of the many that have died since 1080 poison drops, is there a map showing where these deaths occurred? As DOC admits in writing that 1080 poison is a teratogen, and that Whio are eating so much 1080 that their poo is pouring down the rocks discoloured by 1080 bait dye, have you studied the breeding capability of these poison exposed Whio to see if the survivors have been adversely effected by 1080 poison, if so please send the study."

Material previously provided under the Act has been misrepresented on social media in support of the sorts of assertions you appear to be making in the remainder of your request. On that basis, and before considering those aspects of your request further, we would like to invite you to discuss your reasons for wanting this information. While we are happy to respond to genuine requests for information, we consider aspects of your request could be construed as vexatious. We would like to give you the opportunity to comment on this. In making this offer to you, we are extending the time limit in which we will make a decision on your request by 15 working days, to 14 June 2019.

Background to your request

The department's involvement in the conservation of New Zealand's native wildlife is a matter of national importance. Ensuring that the public are properly informed about the merits of the use of 1080 in our predator control programmes is essential to our achieving our biodiversity goals. On that basis we thought it might be helpful to provide some background to the use of 1080 in our predator control programmes.

About 80% of our bird species are at risk of extinction. The biggest threat to our wildlife is predation by introduced pests such as rats, stoats and possums.

We know from the monitoring that we conduct that using 1080 in our predator control programmes increases both the survival rates and likelihood of species reaching breeding age.

There are many ways we monitor species before and after pest control. Some of the most compelling results have come from comparison work.

We know that before pest control, for every three breeding pairs of whoio only two whoio ducklings made it to fledgling. After predator control the number of whoio ducklings to make it to fledgling rose to six ducklings.

For kiwi, without predator control only 5% of kiwi chicks hatched in the wild will survive until they are old enough to breed – their 4th birthday. In comparison, when we use 1080 to control predators up to 60% of kiwi chicks hatched in the wild will survive to breeding age.

We have monitored more than 600 kiwi during and after 1080 operations over the last 10 or more years, and none have been killed by 1080.

1080 presents very little risk to the environment. It dilutes very quickly in water and is almost undetectable in waterways a short time after a poison operation. It does not bio-accumulate in soils, invertebrates or plants, including those used in cultural harvest. Its use is strictly regulated and openly communicated.

Much of New Zealand's wild spaces are steep and densely vegetated. They are either impossible or impractical to access by foot, making aerial operations the most effective method.

Aerial 1080 operations are fast and cost effective for protecting large areas. Ground-based pest control is considerably more costly and is not practicable in many cases. Labour, equipment and transport costs also make such operations in large remote areas impractical.

The science supports the use of 1080

DOC relies on external, independent scientific advice to assess risks associated with 1080 use. A wealth of scientific data has been collected over more than 60 years confirming that, when used in accordance with New Zealand regulations, 1080 presents little risk to humans or the environment.

DOC maintains a thorough 'information review' of all 1080-related scientific research. The information contains references to all the scientific information we use to inform our decisions. The document is available on request.

We draw heavily on robust science conducted by independent research agencies such as Landcare Research, the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), Cawthron Institute and Universities in New Zealand and abroad. Much of this science is published in international scientific journals and quality checked by the peer review process in which independent experts verify accuracy and quality.

The use of 1080 in New Zealand is strictly regulated

Strict health and environment regulations control all 1080 operations. There are 15 separate pieces of legislation that govern toxins use in New Zealand, ensuring a high

There are presently no other practical alternatives to 1080

We need to use 1080 to protect our native species. There are currently no practical alternatives to aerial 1080 pest control over vast, remote and rugged terrain. We collaborate with others in researching new technology, such as self-resetting traps and genetic techniques. If we were to stop and wait for an alternative, progress would be lost, and many native species would face a grim future.

Your questions and our responses are below.

Question 1

"...origins and any other associated/related info of the Native, Protected Whio Blue Ducks released onto Mt Taranaki."

The work required to provide you with the information you seek would involve a considerable effort to compile. The department holds a large amount of information relating to whio released in Egmont National Park, and it would take much time and resource (i.e. impair efficient administration) to supply this. As such, I have provided you with a summary in accordance with s16(1)(e) and 16(2)(a) of the Act. This summary is included below.

The department's Operations team supported by the Central North Island Blue Duck Trust and Whio Forever have worked tirelessly on re-establishing a self-sustaining whio population in Egmont National Park where they had been functionally extinct due to predation. The majority of the whio population in Egmont National Park has been re-established predominately through the release of birds reared in captivity. There have also been a small number of wild whio released as well as whio reared from eggs taken from precarious nests within Egmont National Park which have subsequently been released as fledglings. For more information related to whio, please see the department's website: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/blue-duck-whio/>.

Question 2

"...is there a map showing where these deaths occurred?"

There are no known 1080 related deaths of whio. I am therefore not able to provide you with the information you seek, and your request is refused under s18(e) of the Act as the information does not exist.

Question 3

"...have you studied the breeding capability of these poison exposed Whio to see if the survivors have been adversely effected by 1080 poison, if so please send the study."

I am not able to provide you with the information you seek under s18(e) of the Act as the information does not exist. No such study exists. However, staff annually undertake comprehensive breeding surveys of whio. The last two years have proven to be the most successful breeding seasons with 58 recorded ducklings surviving to adulthood in 2017 and 45 in 2018. This is a significant increase from the 12 recorded ducklings surviving to adulthood in 2011 when this monitoring regime began.

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 Act.

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

Yours sincerely


David Speirs
Director Operations
Hauraki Waikato Taranaki Region

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