



19-E-0820, 19-E-0821 DOC- 6185440

31 January 2020

Sarah Carter
Via fyi.org

Dear Ms Carter

I refer to your official information requests of 20 and 21 November 2019 for information about the animals washed up on West Coast beaches.

I will respond to some of your questions out of order for ease of reference.

Your request of 20 November 2019:

Test results and methods

You asked for:

- 1. All test results for all samples taken - all agencies and results as sent to DOC prior to press release 20/11/19*
- 2. Methods used for testing*
- 3. Sample types (eg muscle, bone etc)*
- 4. Requested tests from DOC to the laboratories conducted on the carcasses*

All the results requested and received by DOC are available on our website, along with the testing methods and sample types:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/oia-responses/tiakina-nga-manu/>

We are therefore refusing this part of your request under section 18(d) of the OIA, as the information is publicly available.

Storage and transport of the samples

You asked for information on the following:

- 5. Storage and or transport of the carcasses between the beach area and the laboratories- please note of frozen, chilled etc.*

Six rats and one weka were collected on 9 November 2019 and stored in the freezer. On 11 November 2019, one rat and one weka were sent to Massey University by overnight courier in chiller packs and five rats were sent by the same method to Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research.

An additional four rats were collected on 11 November 2019, and stored in the refrigerator. One rat was sent that day by overnight courier in chiller packs to Massey University. The remaining three rats were sent to Massey University the

next day, 12 November 2019 (they were collected after the courier cut-off for same day pick-up).

Correspondence relating to the rat carcasses

You asked for:

5. Any Correspondence relating to the press release between DOC and the media relating to the deaths

6. Any correspondence relating to the apparent 'suicide' and or the 'floods' that supposedly caused the deaths and the methods of their decline.

7. Please also provide correspondence/phone calls etc relating to the 600 odd carcasses between DOC staff and between DOC staff and the laboratories concerned between 1/11/19 to 20/11/19.

We note that as the incident occurred on the weekend, initial communication was conducted by phone. The Director, Western South Island and Director, National Operations spoke on the phone. The Director, National Operations then spoke to two science advisors seeking advice on sampling of rats for testing.

We are providing you with 314 pages of emails and 19 text messages. We have withheld the names of individuals from these documents under sections 9(2)(a) and 9(2)(g)(ii) of the Official Information Act 1982 to protect their privacy and to prevent any improper pressure or harassment of officials or employees. In making this decision, we have taken into account the public interest considerations set out in section 9(1) of the OIA.

Your request of 21 November 2019:

Permission for burial of the rats

You asked:

1. Was permission sought for the burial by anyone? Please include internal DOC permission sought as well as external land owners and or anyone else. Please provide all correspondence/communications.

2. Who from? Please provide their relationship with the land used for burial.

3. Was that a personal or departmental request? Please provide any correspondence/communications.

4. Did the person/entity giving permission for the burial receive any information/notification relating to potential toxins/poisons that may be in the carcasses? Please provide any correspondence/communications.

5. If so, what toxins/poisons and why were they in particularly noted/informed of? Please provide any correspondence/communications.

8. Please provide any internal and external communications /correspondence relating to any follow up on the burial.

The Department consulted the Buller District Council and the West Coast Regional Council on the disposal of the rats. As a cautionary approach, the Department advised the councils of the possibility that the rats had been exposed to 1080, as this was the only pesticide used by the Department in the area. The Department received permission to bury the rats on West Coast Regional Council land, and both councils were happy with the proposed burial approach.

We also attempted to consult with the Ministry of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency, but were unable to make contact on the weekend.

We are providing you with the one email chain relating to the burial.

Guidelines for disposal of the rats

You asked:

6. What are the rules and regulations relating to the burial of potentially hazardous waste that DOC is required to follow?

7. How were these rules and regulations implemented in this burial?

The burial followed the manufacturer guidelines for disposal of 1080 bait (attached), as it was at least 60cm deep, was in a bioactive layer of soil, was not accessible to scavenging birds, and there was no risk of groundwater contamination.

We note that it was not practicable to bury the bodies at a landfill approved for hazardous wastes, as the nearest such landfill was over 200 kilometres away and not open on weekends. Further, the landfill requires three working days' notice of delivery, meaning it would not be possible to dispose of the animals in this way for at least 5 days.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact me at this email address.

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

Yours sincerely



Hilary Aikman
Director National Operations
For Director-General