

Nigel Gray

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Ref: OIAD-6124

Tēnā koe Nigel

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 22 February 2026, in which you stated and asked for:

“..the following information for the period 1 January 2021 – present.

1. *Briefings and Key Messages*

Copies of any briefings, talking points, or key-message documents prepared for senior leadership or elected officials that relate to:

- *forestry slash events*
- *erosion or sedimentation linked to forestry*
- *public communications about forestry impacts*

2. *Communications Strategy and Perception Management*

Copies of any communications plans or strategy documents that include reference to:

- *“stakeholder messaging”*
- *“public perception”*
- *“communications risks”*
- *“industry engagement”*

where these terms relate to forestry or forestry-related environmental impacts.

3. *External Input Into Public Statements (Refined Clause)*

Copies of any final versions of public statements (including press releases, website updates, advisories, or social media posts) relating to forestry that were reviewed, edited, or approved by any external party.

For each such document, please also provide:

- a) the name of the external party involved*
- b) the nature of their input (e.g., review, edits, approval)*
- c) the date on which their input occurred*

This request does not seek drafts, internal discussions, or emails — only the final published versions and the record of external input.

4. *Meetings With Forestry-Sector Representatives*

A list of all meetings held since 1 January 2021 between your agency and:

- *forestry industry representatives*
- *forestry lobby groups*
- *PR or communications firms acting for forestry interests*
- *the Forest Owners Association*
- *Te Uru Rākau / NZ Forest Service*

For each meeting, please provide:

- *date*
- *attendees*
- *subject or purpose of the meeting*

I am not requesting minutes or detailed notes — only the meeting list.

5. *Conflict-of-Interest Declarations*

Copies of any conflict-of-interest declarations made by staff involved in:

- *forestry-related policy*
- *forestry compliance or enforcement*
- *environmental monitoring relating to forestry*
- *forestry-related public communications “*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

We note that you made the same request (or a very similar one), at the same time, to the Gisborne District Council, the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the New Zealand Transport Agency under the OIA or the Local Government Official Information and Meeting Act 1987, as applicable. A mix of responses has been provided to you by these other parties.

On 18 March 2026, we extended the timeframe to respond to your request to 30 April 2026. This was to ensure the Department would be in a position to make a decision on and prepare a proper response to your request as consultation with relevant parties was necessary.

On 30 April 2026, we provided a partial response and decision letter under section 15(1)(a) of the OIA. The decision component of this letter was only to the extent that the Department held information within the defined scope of your request with respect to parts 1, 2 and 4 of your request. We also noted more time was required to prepare the Department’s response for release.

Before proceeding to the Department’s response, we have provided some relevant contextual information and outlined our approach to your request.

Obligation to provide official information

A distinction under the OIA exists between a request for information already known to and held by an agency (official information); and a request to an agency to form an opinion or provide an explanation or comment and thus create new information to answer the request (not official information).

There is no obligation on an agency, such as the Department, to form an opinion, provide an official position, or create information to answer a request or question – or respond to commentary. Consequently, the Department’s responses will generally not provide any perspective or view and will be specific to fact only.

Department of Conservation

The Department is the government agency charged with conserving New Zealand's natural and historic heritage: About us: New Zealand Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/>. Its purposes are set out in its governing legislation – the Conservation Act 1987 (Conservation Act). The Department administers and manages public conservation land (PCL) - that principally contains indigenous flora and fauna - with a view to protecting and restoring nature.

The Department also has responsibilities under many laws to protect and preserve New Zealand's unique species, environment, and heritage. It encourages and promotes compliance; while also raising an awareness that illegal take, use, or damage relating to New Zealand's forests, waters and species is not acceptable. See: Acts, regulations and bylaws we enforce: Compliance and law enforcement | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/compliance-and-law-enforcement/acts-regulations-and-bylaws-we-enforce/>

We note that when the Department was established in 1987, certain former State forest land became protected areas (under section 61, Conservation Act), or was allocated and deemed to be held for conservation purposes (under section 62, Conservation Act).

Classification of PCL

The PCL that the Department administers and manages has different layers of protection, depending on which category or status it holds under various legislation.

Conservation categories are established under the Conservation Act, National Parks Act 1980, Reserves Act 1977, and the Wildlife Act 1953. Please refer to: Categories of conservation land: Managing conservation | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/managing-conservation/categories-of-conservation-land/>. Examples include National Parks, Conservation Areas, wildlife areas, and reserves.

Clearly defined land classifications provide clarity for users of PCL, both recreational and commercial, and reduces the risk of legal challenge of decisions about the land's management. Depending on the classification, some activities, including entry, require permission from the Department.

Indigenous/Native forests

New Zealand is comprised of approximately 26.8 million hectares, of which about one-third is PCL. The Crown owns most areas of native forests. In addition to the Department, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) also manages Crown lands that include many iconic lakes and rivers, and significant parts of the South Island's high country pastoral land.

The Department manages about 5.2 million hectares of New Zealand's tall indigenous forests for the conservation of biodiversity, heritage, and recreation. Most of this Crown-owned forest is protected in national parks, scenic reserves, and other conservation areas.

New Zealand's native forests are considered to have economic, environmental, cultural and recreational value, but are not considered to be planted production forest.

While most of New Zealand's indigenous forests are on PCL, a portion is located on privately-owned land – including land owned by certain iwi (some due to treaty settlements).

Forestry industry

The forest industry typically refers to planted production forest. See: [New Zealand's forests | NZ Government | https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/new-zealand-forests-forest-industry](https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/new-zealand-forests-forest-industry)

New Zealand's forestry industry is largely based around sustainably-managed plantation forests. About 90% of these plantation forests are radiata pine, with the remainder comprised of Douglas fir, eucalyptus, and other softwood and hardwood species.

Commercial logging of native forests is effectively banned on PCL in New Zealand - with strict, sustainable management regulations in place for private land under the Forests Act 1949. Most indigenous logging was phased out by 2002. See: [Rules for harvesting and milling native \(indigenous\) timber | NZ Government | https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/native-indigenous-forests/harvesting-milling-native-indigenous-timber/rules-for-harvesting-and-milling-native-indigenous-timber](https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/native-indigenous-forests/harvesting-milling-native-indigenous-timber/rules-for-harvesting-and-milling-native-indigenous-timber).

More recently, there has been some discussion and engagement connected to afforestation on Crown land. There is yet to be any final decisions related to this subject. The relevant 'workstream' is led by MPI. The Department's involvement to date stems from the fact that it administers and manages PCL.

Approach to request

We noted your interest in external influence(s) over public communication and decision-making with respect to the forestry industry and engagement with forestry-sector representatives. When determining what the forestry industry means in a New Zealand context and how this applies to official information held by the Department, these interests have been taken into account, along with the way you have set out the five parts forming your request.

This approach has allowed us to respond to your request, as otherwise a wider interpretation would amount to substantial collation and research, and we would therefore have had to refuse your request under section 18(f) of the OIA due to substantial collation.

In addition to determining what information it holds, the Department must also decide how the information will be released. Section 16 of the OIA allows information to be made available in several ways in response to a request.

Information can be provided in a summarised form – particularly where relevant information is being drawn or extracted from more than one source, or extracted from a source that also contains other information that is out of scope of the request at hand. Please note the Department has decided to provide certain information you have requested in a summarised form, as part of some its responses below.

Limits to information available

The Department's approach to the native forests it administers and manages is not as planted production forest. Work is usually focused and/or connected to conservation, protection, restoration, sustainable use, pest control, climate change and/or carbon storage. For instance:

- [The land domain - a Biodiversity in Aotearoa factsheet](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/biodiversity/biodiversity-in-aotearoa-report/biodiversity-factsheets/biodiversity-factsheet-land-domain/) | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/biodiversity/biodiversity-in-aotearoa-report/biodiversity-factsheets/biodiversity-factsheet-land-domain/>
- [Climate change and conservation: Our work](https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/climate-change-and-conservation/) | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/climate-change-and-conservation/>
- [Carbon storage in native ecosystems:](https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/climate-change-and-conservation/carbon-storage-in-native-ecosystems/) | <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/climate-change-and-conservation/carbon-storage-in-native-ecosystems/>

Consequently, it has taken some time to research and review the Department's records across relevant teams to identify what may be held by the Department within scope of the five parts making up your request.

While every effort has been made to identify and provide you with what the Department holds given our approach to your request, we note limitations to the availability of information for a range of reasons. Over time there have been revised policies and processes, different record keeping practices (including naming protocols), new information management systems, and staff turnover.

As well, the search engine connected to the Department's current information management system produced results in the hundreds, depending on the search terms used (that proved to include a number of false positives).

Department's response

Your request is comprised of five parts.

The period applicable to your request is 1 January 2021 to 22 February 2026 (being the date of your request).

Where we note information is not held, or information has not been located following searches, those parts of your request are refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information does not exist and/or despite reasonable efforts, the information has not been found.

Briefings and Key Messages

No briefings, talking points, or key-messaging documents prepared for senior leadership or the Minister of Conservation specifically about to forestry slash events; erosion or sedimentation linked to forestry; or public communications about forestry impacts have been identified.

A small amount of content within one piece of advice that is within scope has been found, that I have decided to release as an excerpt (in line with section 16 of the OIA). Details for Item 01 are outlined in the attached Schedule of documents.

In addition to the information being released and listed in the attached Schedule of documents, I include the following two excerpts below:

- Excerpt from *D-G Meeting Brief for external meeting* under the heading *Nature based solutions for climate resilience and biodiversity restoration*, 11 May 2023:
“The opportunity – to work across the NRS [Natural Resource Sector] to establish a coordinated plan to deliver on nature-based solutions for climate resilience and biodiversity restoration. [R]eport back on NBS and the forestry slash enquiry report could be a key point for locking in NBS priorities an actions, how can we ensure we’re well-placed to pick up resulting actions, and align with private sector efforts where appropriate.”
- Excerpt from *Weekly bullets for Penny* under the heading *Things to be aware of*, 5 December 2023:
*“The report of the independent investigation into **forestry slash, woody debris and sediment in Tai Rāwhiti and Wairoa** is out. The report has some useful commentary throughout regarding the need for greater consideration of biodiversity values. The section on Economic Incentives and Constraints is particularly worth reading – page 28-30. *Outrage to optimism (environment.govt.nz)*”*

Communications Strategy and Perception Management

Limited information that included reference to forestry and/or forestry industry *and* “stakeholder messaging”, “public perception”, “communications risks” or “industry engagement” has been located.

I have decided to release two documents as illustrating the approach to certain issues. Details for Items 02 and 03 are outlined in the attached Schedule of documents.

External Input Into Public Statements

While the Department does consult and/or inform other parties where our work affects them, the information and documents related to this type of engagement would not equate to ‘public statements’ - noting the type of information you listed for this part of your request.

Earlier advice supplied on 30 April 2026 is reiterated. We have not identified final versions of public statements relating to forestry issued solely by the Department that involved review, editing or approval by external parties.

Meetings With Forestry-Sector Representatives

We identified meetings with forestry industry representatives; forestry lobby groups; the New Zealand Forest Owners Association; and MPI/Te Uru Rākau | NZ Forest Service. The list of meetings prepared is Item 04 in the attached Schedule of documents.

You will note that most of the Department’s engagement with the forestry sector is due to PCL neighbouring or being downstream from planted production forests; monitoring the spread (or otherwise) of pest plant and animal species; and/or understanding the role of various forestry-sector representatives/parties.

We did not locate details of any meetings that were with PR or communications firms acting for forestry interests.

Conflict-of-Interest Declarations

I reiterate earlier advice supplied on 30 April 2026 for this part of your request. A search was undertaken to locate declared conflicts of interest by staff of the type you expressed an interest in - that is, staff involved in forestry-related policy; forestry compliance or enforcement; environmental monitoring relating to forestry; or forestry-related public communications. None were located.

Please note that if a declaration or declarations had been located, a copy or the copies would likely have been withheld under sections 9(2)(a) and 9(2)(ba)(i) of the OIA, to both protect the privacy of natural persons and information which is subject to an obligation of confidence where the making of the information would likely prejudice the supply of similar information and it is in the public interest that such information should continue to be supplied.

As noted previously, the Department does have appropriate policies and processes in place should such a type of declaration need to be made by staff.

Official information within the scope of your request

I have decided to release the relevant parts of the documents listed in the attached Schedule of documents, subject to information being withheld due to being out of scope and/or being under one or more of the following sections of the OIA, as applicable:

- personal contact details of officials, under section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people;
- commercially sensitive information, under section 9(2)(b)(ii) – to protect the commercial position of the person who supplied the information, or who is the subject of the information;
- information provided in confidence, under section 9(2)(ba)(i) – to protect information where release would prejudice the ongoing supply of similar information; and
- free and frank expression of opinion, under section 9(2)(g)(i) – to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs.

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

Further, due to the broad nature of the Department's work, this may not be a full record of all documents that might be captured by parts 2 and 4 of your request from 1 January 2021 to 22 February 2026. However, collating further information for these parts of your request, for the noted time frame, would require a substantial commitment of staff time and resource, in order to complete the necessary review and assessment of any potentially relevant documents – including those created outside the Department's main information management system. Consequently, I refuse to provide information beyond that which is provided, per section 18(f) of the OIA, based on the grounds that substantial research and collation would be involved. I have borne in mind

section 18B of the OIA but concluded that use of this provision would not assist in the circumstances.

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 OIA.

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

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'T' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Tim Bamford
Director, Terrestrial Biodiversity
Department of Conservation | *Te Papa Atawhai*

Schedule of documents

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
01	19 August 2024	Excerpt: <i>Department of Conservation Status Report for the Minister of Conservation – Recent highlights: Camera trial assesses forest canopy</i>	Released in part
02	23 July 2021	Letter (to <i>Te Uru Rākau</i>): Application for Sustainable Forest Management Permit	Released in part
03	28 October 2022 to 8 November 2022	Email string: <i>FOR ACTION: Forestry Contact from MPI – requesting engagement</i>	Released in part
04	Identified between January 2021 and February 2026	List of meetings between the Department of Conservation and forestry-sector representatives	Released in 'full'