

14 February 2024

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 16 January 2024, in which you asked for:

- 1. Any information about how the Department of Conservation determines walking times on the tracks it maintains across the country?*
- 2. This should include any information (including any formula) pertaining to a national approach to determining walking times, or else the specific process or formula used by regional areas if no method is used consistently across the country.*
- 3. Any information relevant to why a national approach for walking track times is not used, if this is the case.*

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

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

- 1. Any information about how the Department of Conservation determines walking times on the tracks it maintains across the country?*

Walking times on tracks, managed by DOC, are determined locally by Ranger staff. Times are based on the predominant users expected to walk the track, and the associated track category. The track users (DOC calls them 'visitor groups') and associated track categories that DOC uses are in Standards New Zealand's *2004 Tracks and Outdoor Visitor Structures Handbook* and are set out below:

Visitor group (used by DOC)	Track category
Short stop travellers	Short walk
Day visitors	Walking track
Backcountry comfort seekers	Great Walk
	Easy tramping track
Backcountry adventurers	Tramping track
Remoteness seekers	Route

The 2004 handbook sets out the requirements for signs at track junctions and track entrances, including whether times and distances, or just times are required for each track category. The handbook does not, however, state how times are to be determined.

Each track caters for a specific predominant visitor group and has been assigned an associated track category. Local staff walk the track and try and put themselves in the shoes of the predominant visitor group the track caters for to estimate the track times. These times may be adjusted over time if conditions on the track change significantly. The adjustment can be easily made on the DOC website, but it is likely to take longer to replace times on track signs.

- 2. This should include any information (including any formula) pertaining to a national approach to determining walking times, or else the specific process or formula used by regional areas if no method is used consistently across the country.*

There is no national approach to determining walking times, other than use of the 2004 handbook's visitor groups and track categories.

- 3. Any information relevant to why a national approach for walking track times is not used if this is the case.*

The use of the 2004 handbook ensures there is some structure around determining track times. A national approach is not used because it would be very difficult to apply or audit in a consistent way across the country. There will always be some subjectivity when estimating track times and it would be difficult to eliminate this.

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

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Nāku noa, nā

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Catherine Wilson
Director, Heritage and Visitors
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai