



19-E-0362/DocCM 6011173

15 July 2019

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

We refer to your official information request of 3 June 2019 for the following information:

To New Zealand Department of Conservation, I am looking at DOCDM-25427-1080 Pesticide Review (iii) and it states 1080 has sublethal effects on reproduction and is classified as a teratogen. Couple that with a previous OIA where a DOC ranger says he has seen 1080 poo -heaps of it on the rocks, from Native Whio Blue ducks. Couple that with the one time you ever tested a Kiwi scat and it came back positive for 1080.

SO I want to know why you are feeding 1080 to our endangered native birds and then playing dumb in the newspapers saying basically Gee, we don't know why they are having breeding problems. Is there a government or bureaucratic directive to DOC to deny 1080 is a major problem for our native species because the folks who make 1080 at 408 Heads Road in Whanganui, are also the people who supply your department with most of its funding?

Can you please provide proof that the two native birds mentioned above are not affected by 1080 poisons teratogenic effects? Please provide evidence such as tracking gps waypoints, photographs and field notebook entries.

We responded to your request on 28 June, notifying you that an extension was necessary to allow for proper consultation. We advised that a decision would be made by Monday 15 July.

Context to our response

After considering your request, and in the hope that it might assist your understanding of the Department's role in the conservation of our indigenous species, we are reiterating some contextual information we have previously provided to you. We then address your request for information about the two native bird species you have mentioned.

Our purpose

The functions of the Department are to manage for conservation purposes, all land, and all other natural and historic resources, held under the Conservation Act. To

achieve this, we run programmes to protect and restore native species and to provide opportunities for people to engage with these treasures. Our work also involves research and monitoring to ensure we achieve that purpose.

We rely on evidence-based research and science

In undertaking our conservation work, we rely on evidence-based research and science. We use that evidence to assess and mitigate the risks that arise in our work and we inform the public about these risks and benefits.

The evidence in support of 1080 in predator control in New Zealand is overwhelming.

Decades of research has found that the primary factor in the decline of our native birds is predation by introduced pest mammals, as reviewed here:

<https://newzealandecology.org/nzje/2911>

It is important to get the facts straight

As we have previously indicated to you, we are aware that on past occasions, information that has been provided by DOC under the Official Information Act concerning the use of 1080 has subsequently been edited and republished. This has been conducted in a manner that misrepresents the scientific evidence and facts around the use of 1080 in predator control programmes in New Zealand. Given that, we thought it important to clear up the facts around the request you have made as your request is based on a series of misapprehensions.

In this case, we can't be sure whose poo is whose

Your request seeks information about individuals of two specific bird species, kiwi and whio. In the information we have previously released, on which your request appears to be based, kiwi and whio poo was respectively collected or spotted by DOC rangers.

However, none of the information we hold about that poo identifies, nor can we be certain of, which individual kiwi or whio left their respective poo on those separate occasions.

You appear to be claiming that whio and kiwi have died from 1080 poisoning, but in fact there were no dead birds involved in either of these cases. As we have advised in OIAs before, no monitored whio or kiwi have ever been found dead from 1080 poisoning.

It follows that the specific information you seek does not exist and accordingly we have to refuse this aspect of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA.

While we do not hold the information you seek, we can offer the following in the hope it assists your understanding of the science that supports our predator control programmes.

Predators are the problem

Studies over many years have shown predation and habitat loss are the main causes of declining whio and kiwi populations. The resulting small population sizes and low genetic diversity mean whio and kiwi, along with other critically endangered species such as kākāpō, are vulnerable to inbreeding depression and possible long-term genetic impoverishment. This is the reason behind our translocation projects.

However, these problems are not the same thing as a teratogenic effect, which refers to birth defects. We have no evidence that 1080 has a teratogenic effect in birds nor any evidence of a correlation or causation between 1080 and reduced fertility in whio and kiwi. You might find the following paper assists your understanding of the issue: <https://newzealandecology.org/nzje/2067>

Whio breeding success

As we have advised in an earlier response to you, 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 using 1080 in our predator control programmes is essential to our achieving that crucial function.

DOC's predator control toolkit, which includes the use of 1080, is successfully protecting and increasing whio populations. Whio eggs, ducklings and nesting females are very vulnerable to predation by stoats, however monitoring has shown that more ducklings fledge in breeding seasons when aerial 1080 predator control has taken place. This information is publicly available on the department's website: www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/blue-duck-whio and on the Genesis Whio Forever site <https://whioforever.co.nz>

Recent reporting shows that the Egmont National Park Whio Establishment programme, after 1080 treatment, has been extremely successful, producing record numbers of ducklings and fledglings over the last 2 breeding seasons. In 2016/17 the proportion of breeding pairs was 71% with a fledging rate of 84%. In 2018/19 breeding pairs increased and the fledging rate was 88%. Similar results are in evidence at other whio management sites www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/blue-duck-whio/

Saving Kiwi with 1080

In the first longitudinal study of its kind, department researchers tracked hundreds of North Island brown kiwi and their offspring through four large-scale joint

OSPRI/DOC 1080 operations in Tongariro Forest over 22 years. The study was published in *Notornis*, the peer-reviewed scientific journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (also called *Birds New Zealand*). The article is available here: www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2019/aerial-1080-improves-kiwi-chick-survival/

The report shows unequivocally that using aerial 1080 to suppress possums, rats and stoats (killed when they eat poisoned pests) benefits kiwi. Stoat attacks are the leading cause of death for kiwi chicks and without pest control as few as 5% of chicks survive to adulthood.

Our research shows that aerial 1080 pest control significantly improves the survival of kiwi chicks for two years before dropping off when rat and stoat populations begin to recover to pre-control levels. This “space to breath” allows kiwi to survive to levels that can build their population.

We also monitored 142 radio-tagged kiwi through four aerial 1080 operations and none were poisoned. Results show that just over 50% of kiwi chicks in the 20,000-ha Tongariro Forest survived to six months old in the first breeding season after aerial 1080 treatment and 29% the year after. In the following three years, before the next five-yearly 1080 operation, kiwi chick survival halved to 15%, well below the 22% survival required to maintain this kiwi population. The research supported DOC shifting in 2014 to a three-year cycle of aerial 1080 predator control in Tongariro Forest to help the kiwi population grow.

Population modelling shows that to get the kiwi population to grow by at least 2%, which is the target in our new Kiwi Recovery Plan, we needed to increase pest control operations to once every three years.

Conclusion

Research such as that above consistently shows that the harmful effects of pest mammals on our native birds are overwhelming. The department’s monitoring and research programmes have clearly demonstrated that our predator control methods increase the reproductive success of our native bird species, including whio and kiwi.

To conclude, you have also asked:

Is there a government or bureaucratic directive to DOC to deny 1080 is a major problem for our native species because the folks who make 1080 at 408 Heads Road in Whanganui, are also the people who supply your department with most of its funding?

We would like to inform you, as we have done before, that there is no government conspiracy concerning the use of 1080. The department is funded by Vote

Conservation. Publications about our funding sources are publicly available here:
www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/corporate-publications/

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

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.

Yours sincerely



Amber Bill
Director, Biodiversity Threats
For Director General