


15 December 2022



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your Official Information Act (OIA) request to the Department of Conservation, received on 17 November 2022 in which you asked for:

- *Copies of any advice DOC has on the threats to and future of the whitebait fishery and any management proposals that are being considered.*
- *Please include any information assessing the impact of threats to habitat including deforestation, draining wetlands, use of Glyphosate, 1080, brodifacoum and other poisons etc and any information which considers why this season was particularly bad.*

On 24 November 2022,  emailed you requesting you clarify and refine parts of your request. We received no response from you to that email.

In the absence of clarification and refinement from you, we have decided to grant your request in part. As your request is written, it includes all information held by the Department since its formation in 1987. This information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research and is therefore refused under section 18(f) of the OIA. Information on threats to the whitebait fishery is publicly available through journal references. As noted in our clarification email to you, we believe the information you are most likely seeking pertains to the last 5 years of information and advice relevant to management changes to whitebait. You may wish to submit a new request if this is not an accurate interpretation.

In 2018 a summary of current knowledge and information gaps on migratory galaxiids and whitebait was published, and this is available on our website: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/science-publications/conservation-publications/land-and-freshwater/freshwater/conservation-ecology-and-management-of-migratory-galaxiids-and-the-whitebait-fishery/>. This includes information on the threats to whitebait and its management.

Management proposals that have been considered are contained in a discussion document which can be accessed on our website under <https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/2018/improving-whitebait-management/>. As a result of public consultation on that document New Zealander's expressed their views on management and issues that affect whitebait and those are accessible also on the DOC website through the



following link - <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/fishing/whitebaiting/whitebait-regulations-consultation/>.

Furthermore, we do not hold formal advice on why some whitebaiters are catching less than others this season. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the OIA. However, to provide context regarding whitebait runs, there is general agreement and perception among whitebaiters and scientists that there are large fluctuations in whitebait runs from year to year; and that different regions experience good and bad seasons in different years (Goodman 2018, linked above). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The final response that was sent to the newspaper is contained in Appendix 1.

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

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 Official Information Act.

Nāku noa, nā

[REDACTED]

Amber Bill  
Director Biodiversity System & Aquatic  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



## Appendix 1 – Final response to King Country News

*Please attribute to Ray Scrimgeour, Senior Ranger Community, Waikato:*

“DOC staff have heard many comments from whitebait fishers on King Country rivers and streams that the 2022 season has been a poor season in terms of whitebait catch. We don't have good information to compare this sort of anecdotal comment with previous years, but I have heard similar comments over the past 30 years.

“Reported catch rates can be very variable even amongst experienced fishers working comparable stretches of river with similar methods. Not all whitebait fishers use weight as their measure of success and some whitebaiters have said they had a good season despite lower than hoped for catch weights. Some people have kept very detailed records of their whitebait catch over many years. If those people are happy to share that information with DOC, email [whitebait@doc.govt.nz](mailto:whitebait@doc.govt.nz). We would be very happy to be entrusted with that valuable data.”

*Please attribute to Emily Funnell, Freshwater Species Manager:*

“Nationally, we've had reports of a good season in some parts of the country and not so good in other places. Whitebait numbers have always been subject to yearly variations due to sea conditions, migrations and other lifecycle factors.

“Unfortunately very little long-term data exists on whitebait fishing, such as where whitebaiters operate and how much they catch. To address these gaps, DOC is conducting a whitebaiting survey, which closes on 18 November. We've also counted whitebaiters and fishing methods down by the river and conducted aerial surveys of the more remote spots.

“The results of all this research will be available by early 2023. The data collected provides a snapshot of whitebaiters, why and where they whitebait, and what gear they use. This information marks a point in time and covers a range of opinions and attitudes.

“I encourage whitebaiters to take part in the voluntary, anonymous online whitebaiting survey at [www.doc.govt.nz/whitebaiting](http://www.doc.govt.nz/whitebaiting). Participants can choose to go into a prize draw for a \$100 fishing store voucher.”