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16 April 2025

Ref: OIAD-5009

Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your requests to the Department of Conservation, received on 7 March 2025 and 12 March 2025 respectively, in which you asked:

- *Could you please tell me how many complaints have been received in the past 12 months regarding track conditions?*
- *How much has been spent on the Rakiura track in the past two years and in what areas?*
- *What is the department's 5-year funding and work plan for the track?*
- *Could you also please tell me what the 23/24 and 24/25 budgets are for maintaining the Rakiura Track and how much of those budgets have been spent?*
- *Could you please include in the OIA request a copy of Dale Chittenden's May 2022 \$425,000 application to the Stewart Island Visitor Levy?*

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

The Department's Visitor Network

Currently we are facing a range of challenges with managing our vast Visitor Network. We manage 15,400 kilometres of tracks across New Zealand, including the Rakiura Track (which is 32 kilometres).

The Great Walks do not presently cover their costs, which are increasing due to inflation and the growing number, severity and impact of weather-related events. We have a strategic plan for the Great Walks to address the challenges they face.

Rakiura Track | Great Walk

Our strategic plan for the Great Walks includes the development of a five-year plan for the Rakiura Track to ensure we are offering a special and unique experience. This plan is still under development and the costs are yet to be finalised.

The Rakiura Track has challenges with some sections of the track at times having muddy conditions. The soil is peat soil and all gravel needs to come from mainland New Zealand. Our website prepares trampers for the deep muddy sections and changeable weather, which makes this track different to the other 'Great Walk' experiences we offer.



The Department's response

Our responses to your questions are set out below.

Complaints received in the past twelve months on the condition of the Rakiura Track?

There are several channels for the Department to receive formal feedback (or complaints) on our products or visitors' experiences.

I have set out only those items considered to be a complaint:

- Website feedback forms – One response expressing disappointment.
- Customer Service Centre – No complaints received.
- Social media – No complaints received.

Amount spent on the Rakiura Track in the past two years, including in what areas and the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets and spend (to date) for maintaining the Rakiura Track

The Operational Expenditure (OPEX)/budgets can vary from year to year. The financial year runs from 1 July through to 30 June each year. The budget and expenditure for the last two years are set out below:

- *2023/24 Budget* - approximately \$265,000, 130% of this was spent.
- *2024/25 Budget* – approximately \$271,000, 41% has been spent to date (most of the work is undertaken in April towards the end of the Great Walk's season.)

We do not record the costs to the level of detail required to be readily able to fully answer that part of your question about expenditure in specific areas. However, our operations team estimated that over the last two years it has spent approximately \$100,000 on hardening the middle section of the track (most muddy section) and general maintenance on the track. A small section of track was resurfaced using gravel last season and this season we are clearing drains, trimming vegetation and 'corduroying' wet sections. A gravel operation took place this year on 16 April near Port William. While not part of the Great Walk, a programme is in place to improve the Chocolate Swamp section of boardwalk.

Please note OPEX is not the only costs associated with operating Rakiura Track | Great Walk (or any other Great Walk). Other costs include Depreciation, Crown Capital Charge and Overhead allocation (support costs – such as the booking system). We estimate it costs on average at least \$650,000 per annum to operate the Rakiura Track | Great Walk.

Department's five-year funding and work plan for the Rakiura Track

As noted earlier, the five-year plan is still under development. Consequently, I have decided not to release the draft plan and withhold it in full, under the following sections of the OIA, as applicable:

- advice still under consideration, section 9(2)(f)(iv) – to maintain the current constitutional conventions protecting the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers and officials,
- free and frank expression under section 9(2)(g)(i) – to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs.

Applications made to the Stewart Island Rakiura Visitor Levy Fund in 2022

I have decided to release copies of the two withdrawn Stewart Island Rakiura Visitor Levy Fund Applications, dated 30 March 2022 (attached), subject to information being withheld under one or more of the following sections of the OIA, as applicable:

- personal contact details, including 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,
- commercially sensitive information, under section 9(2)(i) - to enable a Minister of the Crown or any department or organisation holding the information to carry out, without prejudice or disadvantage, commercial activities, and
- confidential information, under section 9(2)(j) – to enable the Crown or any department or organisation to negotiate without disadvantage or prejudice.

In making my decisions, 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.

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.

If you would like to discuss this response with us, please contact Steven Kerr, Principal Commercial and Revenue Advisor, by email to skerr@doc.govt.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



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