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Conservation House
18-32 Manners Street
Wellington 6011
www.doc.govt.nz

Ref: OIAD-5846

9 December 2025

Tēnā koe [redacted]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 12 November 2025, in which you asked for the following information regarding AI usage:

> ***"AI and digital automation spend***
>
> 1. *A list of all projects, pilots or procurements undertaken by your agency use between 1 January 2023 and 31 October 2025 involving:*
>   - *Artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning*
>   - *Natural-language processing, transcription or summarisation tools*
>   - *Automation, robotic process automation (RPA) or digital assistants*
>   - *Predictive analytics or decision-support algorithms*
>   - *Agentic AI*
> 2. *For each, please provide:*
>   - *Project name and description*
>   - *Vendor or delivery partner (if any)*
>   - *Total cost to date and funding source*
>   - *Total budget*
>   - *Current status (active, completed, paused, cancelled)*
>   - *Whether it was developed in-house or procured externally.*
>
> ***Broader technology-productivity initiatives***
>
> 3. *Any reports or analyses since 1, January 2023 quantifying how technology investment (AI, automation, digital infrastructure) has contributed to productivity or efficiency improvements within your agency.*
> 4. *Any comparative or benchmarking data used to measure those gains."*

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

Support for Public Service uptake of Artificial Intelligence

Public service agencies are encouraged to take up the opportunities offered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) when used in ways considered safe, transparent and responsible, and which effectively balance risks with potential benefits. Please refer to Approach to work on Artificial Intelligence (25 July 2024) for more information.

The Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) has developed a Public Service AI Framework to support agencies to grow their maturity in the effective and safe use and governance of AI. The GCDO is progressively developing its support for agencies, including a not yet released Public Service AI Assurance Regime.

AI has been introduced within DOC to enhance user support and enable staff to focus on core conservation and nature-related work. DOC manages significant volumes of data across multiple systems, which can make information retrieval challenging.

In 2024, we launched the **Shared Services Project**, designed to provide a centralised platform for all user support needs. This includes requesting IT assistance, accessing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and guidance on completing tasks. The integration of AI has streamlined information discovery, helping ensure a consistent approach across the organisation.

To govern the responsible use of AI, DOC has implemented a range of policies focused on **privacy protection**, **fairness**, and maintaining **human oversight in decision-making**. AI tools are used strictly as guidance, and all outputs are verified to mitigate the risk of errors.

We also take proactive measures to safeguard sensitive and private data by ensuring such information is never entered into AI systems.

DOC, like other agencies, is developing its maturity to safely use and govern AI. However, some AI use at DOC became well established prior to the release of the GCDO framework.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. ***A list of all projects, pilots or procurements undertaken by your agency use between 1 January 2023 and 31 October 2025***

   A list of AI projects, pilots or procurements undertaken by DOC between 1 January 2023 and 31 October 2025 is available in **Attachment 1** to this response. More broadly speaking however, DOC uses a range of AI technologies covering the following use cases:

   - **Machine vision and image recognition** – for detecting animals and filtering camera footage. DOC commonly uses the open-source AI model Megadetector, which is locally hosted on specific DOC computers, and Spyfish Aotearoa, which is a collaborative project with Wildlife.ai.
   - **Audio classification** – for identifying native species calls. DOC commonly uses the open-source AviaNZ, and open-source Kaytoo, which is locally hosted on DOC computers.

- **Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)** – for interpreting complex statutory documents. This is a bespoke solution, hosted on DOC's Amazon Web Services, using Neo4j and OpenAI and only looks at documents already in the public domain.
- **Generative AI** – for searching, drafting, summarising, and ideation tasks. Microsoft Copilot and Microsoft Teams Premium are commonly used, along with AI within our enterprise workflow solution, ServiceNow.

3. Any reports or analyses since 1, January 2023 quantifying how technology investment (AI, automation, digital infrastructure) has contributed to productivity or efficiency improvements within your agency.

4. Any comparative or benchmarking data used to measure those gains

In relation to these two questions, DOC is still relatively early on in its usage of AI. At this point, we have not undertaken any formal work in this area. Consequently, any feedback on the impact of technology investments on productivity has been anecdotal rather than evidence based.

As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA as the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

One of the key deliverables within the Shared Services initiative has been the creation of a centralised support platform that consolidates all inquiries and provides advanced search functionality for accessing instructions and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) policies which is expected to provide consistency in approach and functionality that we provide to our end users. As the search functionality continues to evolve, we expect more accuracy and quicker turnaround times for our users.

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 DOC's website.

[redacted]

Nāku noa, nā

[redacted]

Richard Kay
Chief Information Officer
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

ATTACHMENT 1

Project Name	Description	Vendor/ Delivery Partner	Cost to date	Total Budget	Funding Source	Current Status	In-house or Procured Externally
Shared Services Improvements Project (DOC Connect)	**Note:** *The only AI feature of the new system was the enablement of staff to ask questions and get answers using AI from policies, SOP and user guides loaded in the system Shared Services project designed to provide a one stop shop for support and assistance for all DOC users.* Phase 1 focused on priority business services in legacy system Assyst that were consistently used and of high business value. Processes were reviewed and redesigned to work better for those fulfilling requests and easier for those making requests. This phase was to implement meaningful and measurable service improvements rather than just a "lift and shift". Phase 2 will build on the improvements made in phase 1 and continue to enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of our internal services. This includes lower priority processes and further enhancements in DOC Connect to improve workflows.	Datacom Deloitte's	$1,982,718 **Note:** *this figure is representative of the entire project, rather than the AI component alone. We are not able to extrapolate a further breakdown.*	$2,867,657 **Note:** *this figure is representative of the entire project, rather than the AI component alone. We are not able to extrapolate a further breakdown.*	Sourced through capital intentions	Active	Mostly In-house with some Vendor assistance
Desktop AI image classification	Developing New Zealand based image classification models to significantly increase the processing efficiency of trail camera imagery. This improves the capability of trail cameras as a detection tool for target pests.	Ecoassist/ AddaxAI	$20,300	$20,000	International Visitor Levy (IVL)	NZ Invasives V1 (complete) Alita incorporation to AddaxAI platform (complete) NZ Invasives V2(Active)	Largely external but data curated in-house

Project Name	Description	Vendor/ Delivery Partner	Cost to date	Total Budget	Funding Source	Current Status	In-house or Procured Externally
Edge processing and remote notification for camera trapping	Exploring the use of edge processing to utilise hardware at site in the field capable of classifying camera trap data and remotely notifying managers of species interactions in near-real time.	Conservation X Labs	$8200	$10,000		Complete	Largely external but data curated in-house
Image Processing Platform	The research, development and commercialisation of an AI-Enabled Image Processing Platform for still images and video captured using RGB, Infra-red or thermal devices. It is designed to reduce the time spent on image classification and improve AI identification of pests.	Cacophony Project Charitable Trust	$275,000	$275,000	Tools to Market Programme.	Complete	Procured Externally
Bilbo	An NZ-specific AI-enabled image classifier that automatically annotates Tracking tunnel card images	WekaResearch	$50,000	$60,000	National Predator Control Programme budget.	Active	In house
Alita	A NZ-specific AI-enabled image classifier that automatically annotates camera trap images with the presumed species in the image.	WekaResearch	$88,100	$88,100	National Predator Control Programme budget.	Complete	In house
Co-Pilot implementation	Provide Co Pilot licences to assist with managing workloads.	Microsoft/ Datacom	$87, 657	$87,657	Operating	Complete	Procured Externally
AI search capability	AI-Powered Helpdesk Agent Discovery Statutory Documents AI Search	Maker Tech	$67,600	$67,600	Sourced through Project Funding	Complete	Procured Externally