

15 July 2025

Conservation House
18-32 Manner Street
Te Aro, Wellington, 6011
doc.govt.nz

Ref: OIAD-5333

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 16 June 2025, in which you stated:

I am astonished by this initiative by the Department of Conservation to actively remove large numbers of native species from a fully protected marine reserve, because of some perception that the fluctuation in urchin numbers is somehow unnatural and needs to "managed." Surely, a key function of marine reserves is to act as ecological baselines for comparison with areas that are impacted by activities such as fishing - so in this regard this marine reserve has been compromised. As a marine scientist that has applied for permission to undertake sampling in marine reserves, I have dealt with detailed scrutiny over small sample sizes, yet in this case massive quantities of animals have been removed with express purpose of causing ecological changes - I simply don't understand the remarkably contradictory nature of the Department's behaviour, especially in terms of the Act itself which is for the "purpose of preserving them in their natural state as the habitat of marine life for scientific study".

I would like to request all material relating to the permit that allowed this activity to proceed, especially the criteria against it was assessed in relation to the legal obligations of the Marine Reserves Act, which I presume are included in the briefing to the decision maker in the department.

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

For clarity, we have interpreted your request as being for information provided, or evidence used, to support the decision to undertake trial removals of long-spined sea urchins from the Poor Knights Marine Reserve. This includes evidence provided to Fisheries New Zealand.

The long-spined sea urchin is considered a native pest, which the Department of Conservation has a remit to manage under the Biosecurity New Zealand Pest Management National Plan of Action 2011. The Department does not need to apply for permits it would otherwise grant. Therefore, only a permit from Fisheries New Zealand was acquired for the trial removals of long-spined sea urchins at the Poor Knights Marine Reserve.

Careful consideration was taken in relation to these trials. To ensure due diligence, the Department evaluated the technical and cultural advice relating to the removals, and a decision to proceed was made by the Director Operations Northern North Island and Director Biodiversity System and Aquatic as joint decision makers. The Department's current focus is on monitoring the progress of the trials. No management actions are planned at this time.

The following documents fall within the scope of your request and are attached:

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	24/08/2022	Technical Advisors Advice on destructive urchin grazing at the Poor Knights Islands	Released in full
2	09/12/2022	Director Memo Decision on Urchin Trial Removal Programme	Released in full
3	18/01/2023	Special Permit Application Form - <i>Centrostephanus rodgersii</i>	Released in part
4	08/02/2023	SP731-2 Special permit Feb 2023	Released in part
5	April 2023	Summary of Poor Knights urchin removal experiment 1 - April 2023	Released in full
6	April 2023	Summary of Poor Knights urchin removal experiment 2 and 3 - April 2023	Released in full
7	November 2023	Update on the Poor Knights urchin removal experiment 6 month follow-up - November 2023	Released in part
8	03/03/2025	Director Operations Memo Decision on Urchin Removal at the Poor Knights	Released in full
9	06/05/2025	Special Permit Application Form - Project 6 Phase 2 – centro PKI	Released in part
10	06/05/2025	SP731-5_DOC_6 May 2025	Released in part

I have decided to release the relevant parts of the documents listed above, subject to information being withheld under the following section of the Official Information Act:

- personal contact details of members of the public, under section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people.
- vessel names and call signs, under section 9(2)(g)(ii) – to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through protection of employees from improper pressure or harassment.

Some information is also out of scope of your request, as it relates to topics other than that for which you have asked.

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Official Information Act 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 Official Information Act.

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



Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirstie Knowles'.

Kirstie Knowles
Director Biodiversity System and Aquatic
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai