

21 January 2026

Ref: OIAD-5859, -5879 & -5925

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

We refer to your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 17 November 2025, and the two further requests subsequently transferred to the Department by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) on 24 November 2025 and 2 December 2025 respectively.

When combined, the requests sought:

“..correspondence regarding the management of Te Urewera Legal Personality, including:

- Annual Priorities of Te Urewera from 2017 – 2025;*
- the new governance structure for Tūhoe-DoC relationship for the management of Te Urewera; and*
- any information and correspondence on the upcoming and previous independent reviews of Te Urewera legal personality required under Section 65 of the Te Urewera Act 2014. “*

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

Refinement

On 15 December 2025, following a request from the Department, you refined your request to the following documents and/or information:

- “Te Urewera Signed Annual Operational Plans from 2020-2025.”*
- “Te Urewera Annual Priorities from 2017-2025.”*
- “Te Urewera Independent Review requested under s 65 of the Te Urewera Act occurring in 2025.”*
- “The new governance structure for the Tūhoe-DoC relationship for the management of Te Urewera occurring in 2024/2025 as referred to in He Korona Whakataena 2024-2025 on page 15.”*

Extension and recommendation

On 15 December 2025, we extended the timeframe to respond to your refined request.

This extension of time was required to be in a position to make a decision on the refined request and prepare a proper response to the refined request - as these steps necessitated liaison, (further) collation, and consultation with relevant (third) parties, and this could not reasonably be undertaken within the original time limit.

At the same time, we noted the Department did not hold some of the information being sought and recommended you directly contact Te Urewera Board (TUB) and Tūhoe Te Uru Taumatua (TUT) – and provided you relevant contact details.

Partial transfer and referral

On 23 December 2025, part of the refined request (that is, the first two bullet points) was transferred by the Department to TUB for response.

On the same day, the Department referred a copy of your refined request to TUT and noted to you that any response and/or information released by TUT would be entirely at their discretion. (This is due to TUT is not being a statutory/public authority and thus not subject to the OIA.)

Context

We note information provided for contextual purposes to date has covered/touched on:

- legal personality/status for Te Urewera,
- governance and management of Te Urewera,
- involvement of TUB, TUT and the Department,
- review under section 65 of Te Urewera Act 2014 (TU Act), and
- He Tapuae – Tūhoe Service Management Plan (SMP).

Please bear this in mind when considering the Department's responses below.

Department's response

Responses concerning the remaining two bullet points of your refined request are set out below.

Review under Part 2, subpart 5 of TU Act

With respect to the third bullet point of your refined request, the requirements of subpart 5 of Part 2 of TU Act (including section 65) are the responsibility of the chair of the trustees of TUT (Chair) and the Minister of Conservation (Minister).

This subpart enables the Chair and the Minister to appoint a reviewer (or panel) to undertake an independent review of the governance and management of Te Urewera. The first or initial independent review was to occur five years after the settlement date. The timing of any subsequent independent reviews is by agreement between these two parties.

Regarding this part of your request, there has not been an independent review requested or agreed under section 65 of TU Act to occur in the 2025-26 financial year.

An initial independent review under this subpart of TU Act was commenced in 2019-20, but not completed. This was specific to an earlier period of governance and management of Te Urewera. The current approach by TUB, TUT and the Department is explained below.

Reference to a new governance structure for the Tūhoe-DoC relationship

Turning now to the fourth bullet point of your refined request, in which you referenced a section from *He Korona Whakataena 2024-2025* that referred to "a new governance structure for the Tūhoe-DOC relationship for the management of Te Urewera occurring in 2024/2025".

The statutory relationship and roles between TUB, TUT and the Department have not changed.

Each year, TUT and the Department jointly draft an Annual Operational Plan (AOP), which is then submitted to TUB for approval. In approving the AOP, TUB ensures alignment with Te Kawa o Te Urewera and TUB's annual priorities.

The AOP year runs from 1 April to 31 March, aligning with the Tūhoe tax year. TUB meets quarterly to consider governance matters relating to Te Urewera.

With facilitation and support from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), additional governance and coordination arrangements have more recently been established to foster stronger collaboration, clearer accountability, and improved focus/direction of effort and resources. These arrangements sit alongside the statutory governance and management framework for Te Urewera.

The processes include what is referred to as an Authorising Environment Committee (AEC) and this element is likely to be what led to the 'governance structure' comment being made in the section referenced by you. The AEC is a Deputy Chief Executive-level forum that provides an authorising environment for the Tūhoe-Crown Chief Executive (CE) Board.

The AEC operates under an agreed Terms of Reference, with its purpose being to implement and monitor the AOP and to support reporting to the Tūhoe-Crown CE Board. This Committee meets monthly and currently provides the primary forum through which the Department engages with TUT on operational matters, including matters outside the scope of the AOP.

The Tūhoe-Crown CE Board is led by MSD and meets approximately every two months. Its role is to provide Crown cohesion in responding to shared Crown-Tūhoe social service objectives. Its mandate derives from *He Tapuae: Strategic Management Plan (SMP)*. This initiative between the Crown and Tūhoe involves MSD, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health. The purpose is to develop a strategic pathway for the transformation of the social circumstances of the people of Tūhoe.

Membership currently includes the CE of TUT and the CEs of MSD, MBIE, Te Tari Whakatau, and the Department. While the Department is not a signatory to the SMP, its participation was subsequently confirmed by the Minister in recognition of the importance of the Department's relationship with Tūhoe in supporting Crown cohesion.

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 any attached document(s) may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā



Stace Farquhar
Kaihautu Treaty Relationships Advice and Oversight
Department of Conservation | *Te Papa Atawhai*