

11 June 2026

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 21 May 2026, in which you asked:

1. *What Artificial Intelligence is your Ministry considering implementing in the next year?*
2. *What aspects or parts of the business will it be implemented? ie how will the AI be used*
3. *Will its implementation reduce the workload or staff numbers?*
4. *What safety and security protocols has it had to pass to be considered acceptable for implementation?*

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

The Department is currently exploring the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies to support and enhance its operational effectiveness and service delivery. While AI has the potential to improve efficiency, decision-making, and administrative processes, any consideration of its use is at an early and carefully managed stage. The Department is taking a cautious, risk-based approach that prioritises privacy, security, transparency, and alignment with public sector expectations. At present, no decisions have been made that would materially alter staffing levels, and any implementation would be subject to robust governance, assurance processes, and compliance with relevant standards and policy frameworks.

AI is evolving rapidly. Accordingly, the responses set out below reflect the Department's current priorities and intentions at the time of this response. As this work progresses, the initiatives ultimately implemented may differ from those currently envisaged.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *What Artificial Intelligence is your Ministry considering implementing in the next year?*

The Department is currently considering two key AI initiatives for implementation over the next 12 months.

The first is the development of a single, organisation-wide chatbot. This is intended to integrate with the Department's core enterprise systems and support users across all business units. The chatbot is in the early stages of development and is being designed using a modular approach so it can be adapted as AI technologies continue to evolve.

The second initiative, AI for Conservation, focuses on AI enabled traps, environmental sensors, trail cameras, weather monitoring stations, and autonomous drone systems. Collectively, these

tools aim to enhance the capability to monitor ecosystems and wildlife in a more scalable, accurate, and efficient manner.

At present, these initiatives remain in the proof-of-concept phase and are undergoing structured assessments to determine their operational viability and long-term value. In particular, the evaluation is focused on their potential to deliver near real-time data collection, support automated species identification, and generate actionable insights. These capabilities are expected to significantly improve decision-making processes, enabling more targeted and timely interventions, and ensuring that resources can be deployed more efficiently and effectively when and where they are needed most.

In addition to these initiatives, AI functionality is expected to be progressively introduced through the Department's enterprise systems and other software tools, as these products increasingly incorporate AI as a standard feature.

2. What aspects or parts of the business will it be implemented? ie how will the AI be used?

The organisation-wide chatbot is intended to integrate with the Department's key enterprise systems and support use across a range of business functions. It will enable users to ask questions and locate information more efficiently by drawing information from multiple systems through a single interface, with the aim of providing a more streamlined user experience.

AI for Conservation aims to improve the detection, identification, and monitoring of pest species in the field. These tools will be used by staff to support more timely and targeted pest management by improving the quality and speed of data collected to inform operational decision making.

3. Will its implementation reduce the workload or staff numbers?

The Department's current focus is on the potential for AI to support staff in carrying out their work. However, as these initiatives are still at an early stage, the Department has not confirmed any potential future impacts on workload or staffing levels. Therefore, this aspect of your request is refused in accordance with s18(e) of the Act as the information does not exist.

4. What safety and security protocols has it had to pass to be considered acceptable for implementation?

The Department's use and development of AI is guided by New Zealand [Public Service AI Framework](#), issued by the Government Chief Digital Officer. The framework sets out the principles that agencies are expected to apply when considering, developing, and implementing AI, including the principle of safety and security.

In addition, relevant government guidance in this area continues to develop. For example, the Ministry for Regulation's [AI guidance for regulators](#) was updated on 25 May 2026 and provides further practical guidance on the responsible use of AI.

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) may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard Kay', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Richard Kay
Chief Information Officer
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai