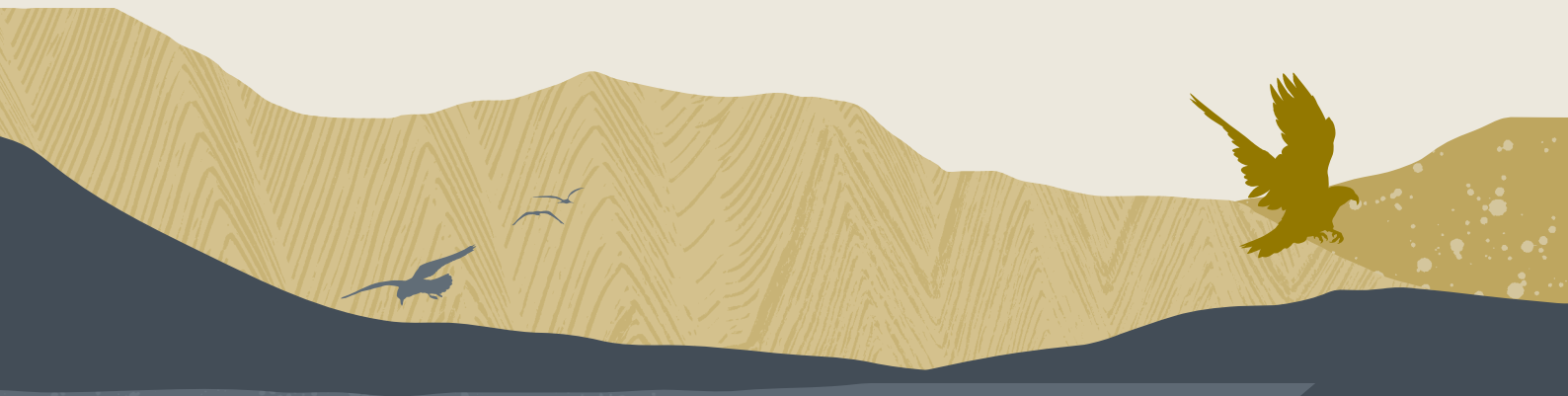


Briefing to the incoming Minister of Conservation



November 2023



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

Produced in-house by the Department of Conservation

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this briefing is to support you in your portfolio responsibilities for Conservation. It provides summaries of your new portfolio, key roles and responsibilities, and some of the current strategic conservation issues and priorities across your portfolio.
2. The Department of Conservation (DOC) is ready to provide you with further advice as needed. DOC is here to support you to deliver your priorities and to be an effective steward of the conservation system.
3. Once DOC has confirmed your immediate needs and priorities, we will provide you with more detailed information and advice. DOC is also considering implementation of the new Government's priorities and has identified other topics that may need your early attention.
4. This briefing starts with a summary of the portfolio and the current context for conservation, followed by an outline of your responsibilities and a summary of current and live issues. It concludes with some information about actions likely to be needed from you in the short term, key contacts at DOC and other helpful reference material.
5. Alongside this briefing, DOC anticipates early meetings with you to understand your initial priorities, and to determine how officials can best work with you and your office.

Priorities for conservation

DOC will provide you with advice and support to deliver your priorities

- **Deliver a new Great Walk along the existing Waiau-Toa/Molesworth trail**

6. New Zealand's Great Walks are premier tracks that pass through diverse and spectacular scenery, are well formed, and are accessible from major hubs. DOC has previously undertaken work considering new Great Walks at several locations, including at the existing Waiau-Toa/Molesworth trail.
7. DOC will provide advice on the steps to establish a Great Walk, the challenges to be worked through, and the broader context of funding and maintaining DOC infrastructure.

- **Establish a 'huts of recreational importance' partnership**

8. It is widely acknowledged that a number of DOC's 967 backcountry huts are aging and have maintenance issues. DOC will provide advice on options to establish huts of recreational importance, including partnership models and current programmes of work that could be leveraged to help deliver this priority.
9. DOC is developing options to address visitor use and demand across the visitor network, including backcountry huts, to support decisions on infrastructure funding.

- **Enable long-term concessions and faster concessions processing**

10. Concessions authorise a range of activities on public conservation land and waters, including guiding, filming, aircraft landings, grazing and beekeeping. The system is widely recognised as being under severe strain and requiring change.
11. DOC has made it an organisational priority to reform the concessions system to speed up processing times and address the current backlog. To fully address some underlying issues, policy change, including potential legislative change, may be required.

- **Boost biodiversity through specific programmes (including re-committing to Predator Free 2050, wilding pine control and rehabilitating wetlands)**

12. DOC has work underway to develop a detailed picture of priority areas for investment in biodiversity, which will help inform future investment. There are opportunities to review the Predator Free strategy and set priorities, and to make decisions about continued investment in the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme. DOC is working to scope opportunities for wetland restoration and how this can best be incentivised to support biodiversity, climate and resilience objectives.

- **Expand marine reserves, integrating oceans management, updating the Marine Reserves Act and changing how marine protected areas are created**

13. DOC recently delivered the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Bill and led previous work on updating the Marine Reserves Act. DOC hosts the interagency Oceans Secretariat that delivers government priorities around oceans management. Reform in this area is a high priority for conservation and advice on options is under development.

- **Resource management reform and rapid infrastructure development**

14. There are opportunities for a reformed resource management system that drives effective, efficient development in the right places while protecting the environment. Your role in the resource management system includes national policy oversight for coastal marine areas. DOC will work with you to understand your ambitions for resource management reform and the role of conservation in that. DOC works closely with other agencies to better enable development in appropriate places, including for renewable energy.

- **Establish a Hunting and Fishing portfolio, with a focus on ‘herds of special interest’, preventing game animals, trout and salmon from being designated as ‘pests’, and other work to support the interests of hunters and fishers**

15. DOC is ready to support establishment of the new Hunting and Fishing portfolio and has prepared a separate briefing for the incoming Minister with advice on key portfolio issues and opportunities. DOC will support coordination between Conservation, Hunting and Fishing, and Oceans portfolios.
16. Once DOC has worked with you to clarify your full set of immediate priorities, you will receive briefings with more detailed information, options and advice.

DOC will continue to address the broad set of challenges facing conservation

17. Despite significant efforts and areas of progress, the state of nature in New Zealand is in decline and significant habitats and species are at risk. New Zealanders, including businesses, are increasingly seeing the declining state of New Zealand’s natural environment as a critical issue to tackle. There are strong domestic and international commitments to improved outcomes and rising public expectations. Events like Cyclone Gabrielle are bringing home the importance of healthy forests, wetlands and stable land to the country’s economy and society, and the key role of conservation in delivering thriving and resilient natural systems and biodiversity alongside robust resource management and nature-positive climate settings.
18. As Minister of Conservation, a large portion of New Zealand’s land, water, special places and species are managed within your Conservation portfolio. This means broad and deep responsibilities for:
 - protecting threatened native habitats and species, heritage, and wild spaces
 - providing access to recreational opportunities and tourism facilities central to New Zealanders’ identity, economy and wellbeing
 - managing large areas of land and water: being a good neighbour, steward and Treaty partner
 - being an efficient and effective regulator and supporting the safe and sustainable use of conservation assets.
19. Choices are made daily between these priorities, in the face of competing demands to address increasing unmet pressures from extreme weather, rising temperatures, tourism and the encroachment of predators. The Government has an important role to play in determining the balance to be struck across these priorities over time, and the focus for the conservation system and DOC within it.

Reversing nature’s decline requires better control of predators, wild animals and weeds, as well as ongoing species recovery and management

20. Effective control of predators (eg rats, possums, stoats), wild animals (eg deer, goats, pigs) and weeds is central to reversing the decline of nature, achieving domestic goals and meeting international commitments. Currently, we only control these threats on a small fraction of conservation land and are losing the battle. For example, DOC delivers 1080-based predator control on around 7.5% of public conservation land annually. Changing this will require several things to happen, including:
 - prioritisation to protect the most important values and ensure a cost-effective approach; there needs to be a considered balance between work to suppress predators, wild animals, weeds and aquatic pests to protect ecosystems and species, versus a focus on the elimination of key pests where this is feasible and can be maintained

- expanding landscape-scale predator control with tools already in use and turning the tables by using additional tools such as genetic technologies and automation that can increase reach
- enlisting third-party resources and capability through partnerships and new funding sources to increase capacity.

Improving outcomes for nature requires shifting resources from recreational assets to biodiversity in the short term, or finding ways to increase revenue or funding

21. DOC currently dedicates significant staff time and other resources to maintaining visitor assets, including a resource-intensive backcountry network and significant tourism assets that DOC does not recover full costs from. This reduces funding for biodiversity efforts. The current visitor network is not sustainable. Work is underway to provide options for Ministers to address this, including reducing its size, addressing congestion, and reviewing when and how much the Government charges both providers of services (concessionaires) and visitors.

Portfolio overview

The conservation system

22. Conservation is carried out by a broad network of statutory, community, iwi/Māori, private landowner, regional council and non-governmental organisation (NGO) groups. DOC is the lead government agency in the system and performs a wide range of roles to protect land, species, ecosystems and cultural heritage for conservation purposes and for the benefit of New Zealanders now and in the future.
23. DOC also has a statutory role to advocate for and promote the benefits of conservation of natural and historic resources; that is, to be a voice for conservation.
24. Other key institutions with national roles and functions under the law include the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA), New Zealand Fish & Game Council, Conservation Boards and the Game Animal Council (for further information, see Appendix 1).
25. The conservation system includes statutory institutions and instruments – including General Policies for Conservation and National Parks, and regional conservation management strategies and plans. These institutions and instruments require broad participation and establish the boundaries, priorities and rules for the system within legislation and policy.
26. Conservation outcomes are affected by trends partially or wholly outside the Government's control, such as the changing climate and population growth. Outcomes are also affected by policy in areas including land use, resource management, climate change, biosecurity, forestry, fishing, tourism, farming and energy.

As the Minister of Conservation, you have responsibility for a large portion of New Zealand's land, water and most treasured assets, managed by DOC

27. DOC assists you by managing many of New Zealand's unique species, habitats and places. This includes about 8.7 million hectares of land – nearly a third of New Zealand's land area and nearly half of the South Island – 4.5 million hectares of water, 14,407 species of plants and animals, 21,853 visitor assets, and 15,000 km of track. The map overleaf details the coverage of public conservation land and waters. See Appendix 2 for a summary of Conservation's regional footprint.
28. DOC works alongside communities to manage public conservation land and waters, conserve natural and cultural heritage, protect native species on and off conservation land, implement Treaty settlements, and manage visitor assets including tracks and huts. As such, DOC is New Zealand's largest provider of visitor activities and manages the largest portfolio of heritage assets. The graphic on page 10 illustrates some of DOC's activities and responsibilities and how they have grown over time.

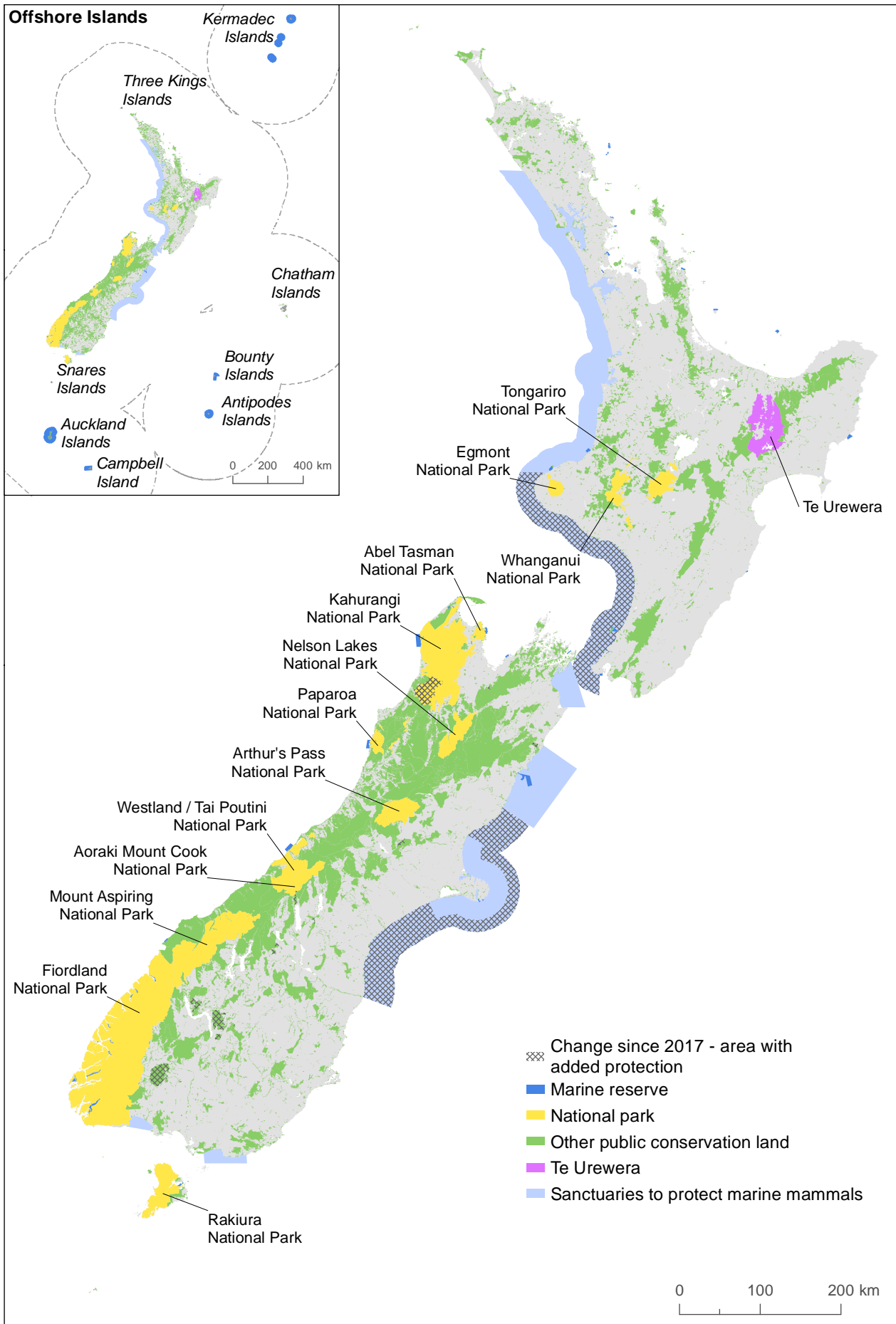


Figure 1: New Zealand's public conservation land and waters

DOC's role has grown substantially since it was created in 1987 through to 2022

	Then	Now
 Public conservation land	8 million hectares – 30% of the country	8.7 million hectares – 32% of the country
 Marine mammal sanctuaries	1.4 million hectares (1988)	3.4 million hectares
 Marine reserves	700,000 hectares (1995)	1,768,900 hectares (2021)
 Ramsar sites (wetland sites designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention)	3 Ramsar sites listed, bringing the total to 5 (1990)	10 (including 3 UNESCO)
 Nature Heritage Fund	Established 1990	349,000 hectares private land purchased
 Species recovery plans	8 (1991), beginning with kōkako, kiwi, kakī/black stilt, ngutu kākā/kākābeak and 3 species of skinks	64
 Management planning	First national park management plan (1988) First conservation management strategy approved (1992)	17 conservation management strategies 13 national park management plans 19 conservation management plans
Community		
	606 working days, 373 volunteers (1989)	36,923 working-day equivalents
Species		
 Kākāpō	Total population of 43 (1990)	197 birds
 North Island kōkako	330 breeding pairs (about 1000 individual birds)	1600 pairs (2021)
	South Island kōkako thought extinct	A possible recording on the Heaphy Track (2022)
 Chatham Island black robin	5 birds, with one breeding pair (1980)	290 adult birds
 Takahē	189 (1987)	440 (2021)
 Whio/blue duck	6 captive-bred whio released into Egmont National Park in 1987; 3 were still alive by 1988 and 1 juvenile had been produced (release of captive-bred endangered birds in the past only rarely successful)	15 pairs, 18 single and 17 juvenile birds (Egmont National Park, 2020) 863 breeding pairs (2021) – note that half the whio/blue duck breeding pairs were lost following Cyclone Gabrielle
 Kakī / black stilt	97 (1989)	170 adults (April 2021)
Tangata whenua		
	First Treaty settlement that involved conservation redress was the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998	79 individual Treaty settlements
	Ngā Whenua Rāhui established 1991	281 agreements protecting 182,775 hectares (2020)
Pest and weed control		
 Island pest eradication	Eradication of possums and weka on Codfish Island / Whenua Hou (1988) Mice removed from 2 islands (Allports and Mana) (1990) Rats eradicated from Double Island / Moturehu (Mercury Group), The Noises, and Matiu/Somes island (1990)	Over 100 pest-free islands
Visitors		
 Tracks	3500 km (1990)	14,673 km
 Signage and branding	DOC green and gold branding, including signs (1990)	20,000-plus signs in system
 Historic reserves	97	150

The current state of conservation and progress on outcomes

Nature is central to New Zealander's prosperity and wellbeing

29. Natural heritage is central to New Zealanders' identity – the kiwi, the silver fern and people's connection to the outdoors. Māori have distinct and unique relationships to the environment, and to taonga (treasured) species and places.
30. New Zealand makes an important contribution to global biodiversity, with an estimated 80,000 species of native animals, plants and fungi found here. Many of these are threatened and deeply reliant on active management and protection for their ongoing survival. We have responsibilities to protect this for the future.
31. Nature and natural systems provide us with key ingredients of life: clean air, fresh water and food. Natural processes provide the conditions for food production, such as pollination, soil formation, irrigation and nutrient cycling – supporting industries that are central to New Zealand's export economy. Healthy natural systems also provide resilience to extreme weather events through climate and water cycle regulation, flood protection, and soil stabilisation, and are therefore critical for communities and economic activities such as agriculture. These benefits are collectively referred to as ecosystem services.
32. A growing body of evidence shows the wellbeing benefits of spending time outdoors. Public conservation land and waters are also a central part of New Zealand's tourism and recreation offering. In 2019, tourism on public conservation land and waters provided an economic value of \$4.1 billion nationally, accounting for 21% of the tourism industry. Indications are that this level of activity is returning, with Great Walk bookings almost back to pre-COVID-19 levels.
33. New Zealand's clean image and its natural environment are key parts of the country's international brand – supporting export sector demand and attracting migrants and investors. Public conservation land and waters directly support industries such as mānuka honey, low-impact livestock grazing, the wild meat industry, and recreational hunting and fishing.
34. Many of the most precious places for indigenous biodiversity are found on public conservation land but also on sheep and beef farms and Māori land. At-risk species and habitats are also found across the country.

Where we focus resources we see progress, but we don't have the capacity to protect nature everywhere

35. Nature loss is a global challenge, and one in which New Zealand has a prominent role to play. This country has one of the highest proportions of threatened species and one of the highest extinction rates in the world. As the largest land manager in New Zealand, with a responsibility for many of New Zealand's most precious places, DOC's work on the land we manage makes a big difference in terms of land stability and predator control and is central to conserving places, ecosystems and species.
36. We have proven that when we manage threats such as predators, and restore habitats, nature comes back. We have managed to improve the threat status of some species; for example, the North Island brown kiwi has improved from 'At Risk – Declining' to 'Not Threatened'.
37. This has meant that New Zealand has, at times, been a world leader in conservation: we know what works and how to do it. However, with current resourcing and tools, we can only manage a small fraction of habitat and species – for example, by investing in killing predators and wild animals. On much of the rest, threats are gaining ground, threatening conservation, primary production and amenity values.

Outside areas of intensive management, nature is in decline

38. Despite all we are doing to try to protect and restore habitats and assist species, nearly 4000 native species are either at risk or threatened with extinction. When species are lost from New Zealand, they are often lost from the whole world, and many are only holding on in small numbers because of intensive management.
39. Only a small proportion of New Zealand's forests are being actively managed for predators and weeds and therefore forest health and land resilience is in decline overall. Many of the remaining wetlands are in poor condition and some natural systems such as lowland forests and wetlands are underrepresented on public conservation land.
40. About 30% of New Zealand's plant and animal species are found at sea, and around 50% of the country's marine plants and animals are found nowhere else on Earth. However, only 0.4% of the area of New Zealand's marine environment is within highly protected marine reserves. New Zealand has agreed to a new global target to protect 30% of the marine environment by 2030.

Management of visitor assets, tracks and heritage sites is inadequate

41. DOC now manages more assets than we can afford to maintain in the long term. This gap is getting larger due to a growing backlog of planned maintenance work, and the ongoing transfer of low-value, high-cost assets to DOC. Consistent underinvestment in the renewal and replacement of assets is reaching a critical level. 9(2)(f)(iv)
[REDACTED]
42. Inflation is eroding the level of services DOC can deliver in some areas and is contributing to the cost of maintaining a large and aging asset base. This asset base has grown over time. For example, the length of track being maintained has grown from 11,000 km to 15,000 km over the last 14 years.
43. Investment in heritage assets has tended to be deprioritised in favour of critical actions to protect threatened species or failing visitor infrastructure, or to respond to weather events. This is contributing to asset maintenance work becoming reactive rather than planned.

Escalating pressures from extreme weather, fire and flood are making the conservation job harder

44. Work is underway to align long-term planning and investment to meet pressures from increasing extreme weather, fire and flood risk driven by climate change. However, within current resources it will not be possible to address all these impacts.
45. Climate change is a significant, escalating risk to New Zealand's ecosystems and outdoor recreation and heritage sites. Extreme weather in the last year demonstrates the scale of the challenges ahead - with the expectation that this kind of event will become a much more regular occurrence. Until recently, DOC's 10-year average spend on visitor assets for reactive events was around \$3 million per year. In comparison, DOC's response to the southern South Island flooding event in 2020 alone took \$13 million over 4 years, Cyclone Dovi in 2022 cost \$12 million to repair visitor infrastructure across two regions, 9(2)(f)(iv)
[REDACTED]
46. Changes in weather patterns and land and sea temperatures are affecting species faster than they can adapt. Fire and flood risks are also growing concerns - creating challenges that species and habitats have not evolved for and landscapes and infrastructure are not resilient to. New Zealand's forests do not need fire and do not survive it, unlike forests in more fire-prone countries.

47. Climate change also increases biosecurity risks, threatening both vulnerable native species and export industries and livelihoods. For example, following Cyclone Gabrielle, we lost half of the whio / blue duck breeding pairs, erasing 10 years of progress.

This means the Government faces choices about conservation priorities

48. There is an opportunity to embed clear targets for biodiversity protection in New Zealand and prioritise resources to achieve these targets. The biodiversity investment planning system DOC is developing will inform your decisions on targets for delivering the most urgent and high-value biodiversity work within our fiscal envelope, based on the Government's strategic objectives and priorities.
49. As the size of our current visitor network is not sustainable, there is a need to consider options to right-size it, address congestion, and review where, when and how much is charged.
50. While hunting of introduced species is central to managing wild animals on public conservation land, desired population sizes for hunting can be in conflict with what is needed to protect forests and allow them to regenerate. For example, the species mix in forests is changing due to the effect of browsing animals.
51. Activities like mining, aquaculture and renewable energy generation (eg wind farms) can have a significant impact on wildlife and habitats, even when not on public conservation land and waters. Priorities such as decarbonisation of New Zealand's energy supply are key to reducing climate impacts, and there are opportunities to accelerate sustainable aquaculture; DOC can play a critical role in advising how accelerated development can occur in ways that minimise biodiversity impacts and benefit nature.

Decisions are needed on building a more sustainable funding model

52. Conservation assets and responsibilities have increased significantly over the years, not always with the resourcing to maintain them. DOC is developing advice for you on a more sustainable activity and asset base under a range of funding scenarios.
53. Fixing these issues will free up more resources to deliver critical conservation work on the ground, but this alone will not solve the funding challenge. The Government will need to consider the costs and benefits relating to growing versus maintaining or reducing conservation assets and services.
54. A broader review of the role of third-party funding in meeting the future sustainability of DOC, including through user-charging, is required.
55. Parts of the business sector are working to take natural capital into account and address nature-related risks to and from their activities. This interest, and the broader philanthropic interest in nature restoration, presents opportunities to advance conservation and close funding gaps, alongside appropriate public investment.
56. DOC has a long-established and growing range of formal partnerships with third parties such as businesses and NGOs that bring in additional resources to deliver more conservation. The Government could seek to expand on this and clarify the future role of third-party investment in conservation funding. A wider cross-government discussion on opportunities to cultivate sources of finance for investment in natural capital is also timely.

There is work to do to build a conservation system that is fit for the future

57. The conservation regulatory system is sometimes too difficult to engage with, including backlogs in processing applications and delays in conservation management planning. Legal uncertainties also create delays and lead to frequent challenges to decisions. A range of improvements are in progress to address some of these issues. You will have choices as to the relative priority and weighting of effort placed on improving the system within existing settings versus reforming the legislation.

58. Treaty settlements have altered DOC's management responsibilities and expectations, bringing new opportunities, challenges and changes in costs. While there are examples of strong, effective Māori-Crown partnerships in conservation, there is some way to go to gain clarity on what 'good' looks like, develop approaches that balance Māori and Crown interests effectively, and then resource and deliver those consistently. Along with operational improvements DOC has underway, options require policy consideration by Ministers.
59. There is a significant amount of legislation within your portfolio, which provides ways to achieve outcomes for nature and heritage conservation, and for better recreational and tourism use of New Zealand's resources. There are weaknesses with some of this legislation, and much is old and dated; you will need to prioritise what you choose to address.
60. A major overhaul of the resource management system was initiated by the previous Government but not implemented. This Government has announced its intention to repeal the recent reform, and the choices it makes about how to proceed in this area will have implications for conservation. A first principles review of the Wildlife Act is also underway and you will have choices about how to proceed with this. There is also new marine protection legislation at select committee to create new types of marine protected areas in the Hauraki Gulf region.
61. There are further potential opportunities for legislative reform, such as addressing challenges with existing marine protection legislation, trade in endangered species and legislative changes to address challenges with conservation management more generally. DOC will advise you further on options to prioritise the legislative programme.

There are links between Conservation and other portfolios

62. The Conservation portfolio contributes to several cross-government areas of work. This means that you as Minister, and DOC following your direction, will be meeting with other Ministers and agencies and making joint decisions on these areas, including the negotiation of priorities and work programmes.
63. There will be opportunities for you to influence the direction of work outside your portfolio through these connections – for example, to ensure that the resource management system delivers good conservation outcomes and that investment in natural systems is a key part of New Zealand's response to climate challenges.
64. You will also work closely with the Minister for Hunting and Fishing, as a number of the policy priorities for the Hunting and Fishing portfolio intersect with the Conservation portfolio. This includes proposals relating to herds of special interest and huts of recreational importance.
65. You are a decision-maker for aspects of oceans and fisheries, the resource management system and Treaty negotiations, and you will receive joint briefings regularly in relation to these.
66. Key current areas of wider interest for the Conservation portfolio include:
 - climate change adaptation and mitigation – for the role that nature and public conservation land and waters play in our response, and because of the risks to these things
 - resource management, including infrastructure development
 - oceans and fisheries, including aquaculture
 - Treaty settlements and Crown-Māori relations
 - tourism
 - energy, including renewable electricity generation and offshore wind, and other large projects
 - biosecurity – which is key to avoiding, eliminating and managing predator incursions and reducing the pressure on indigenous systems. For example, if avian flu reaches New Zealand, the effect on native bird species could be severe.

The international policy context

67. Globally, nature and ecosystem services face growing pressures, threatening human prosperity and wellbeing. Over recent years, there has been international recognition of the need to act to reverse the decline of nature.
68. In December 2022, New Zealand signed up to a new global pact to reverse biodiversity loss: the Global Biodiversity Framework (the GBF) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (the CBD). This was ratified by 196 countries and, among other things, the signatories have agreed to a new global target of protecting 30% of land, inland waters and oceans by 2030.
69. This term of Government presents opportunities and strategic choices for Ministers around how to work towards New Zealand's new international obligations, including for implementing the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (ANZBS) and determining a strategic approach to marine protection.
70. DOC leads New Zealand's engagement on several international agreements that enable countries to work together on global conservation issues, including relating to priority issues for New Zealand such as seabirds. A summary of international agreements is provided in Appendix 4.

Your portfolio responsibilities

The Minister of Conservation has critical roles in driving the conservation system

71. The Minister of Conservation provides stewardship of the conservation system by:
 - establishing priorities for DOC
 - providing leadership and direction on local and global conservation issues
 - providing recommendations to Cabinet on legislative, policy and funding settings for conservation
 - working with Ministerial colleagues to influence related work programmes on climate change, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, tourism, resource management and more.
72. As Minister, you also have a large number of statutory responsibilities relating to conservation land and waters and wildlife. For example, you have responsibilities in relation to:
 - acquiring land for conservation purposes and recommending the creation of national parks
 - establishing marine mammal sanctuaries and marine reserves
 - granting concessions for activities on public conservation land
 - carrying out statutory functions under the current Resource Management Act 1991
 - granting permits for activities affecting protected wildlife under the Wildlife Act 1953
 - granting authorisations relating to hunting and fishing – for example issuing wild animal control plans under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977.
73. You also have statutory responsibilities in relation to:
 - international relations by deciding positions and objectives for negotiations under international environmental agreements
 - conservation entities, including appointments and monitoring for over 70 entities that contribute to conservation outcomes
 - setting DOC's strategic direction and performance expectations, and monitoring and reviewing our performance, including the efficiency and effectiveness of Vote Conservation expenditure administered by DOC.

Some of your decision-making responsibilities have been delegated by successive Ministers

74. You will be asked to determine what decisions you wish to delegate to the Director-General of Conservation. Several statutory Ministerial responsibilities are routinely delegated to the Director-General, with further delegations from the Director-General to DOC staff (eg decisions on some concessions). This ensures that decisions are made at the appropriate levels to prioritise your time, maximise efficiency and effectiveness, and support timely decision making.
75. Where the Director-General considers a delegated matter is of sufficient national interest or importance, you will be asked whether it should be referred to you for decision, regardless of any standing delegation.

You are responsible for a series of Acts that set out roles and responsibilities of actors in the conservation system

76. Key legislation includes the Conservation Act 1987, which established DOC and sets out our key functions. The Conservation Act was developed to promote the conservation of New Zealand's natural and historic resources. There is also specific legislation for wildlife, reserves and national parks.

77. Conservation legislation establishes a hierarchy of Conservation Boards and the NZCA, an independent body appointed by the Minister of Conservation. The Authority has powers to approve formal management plans binding DOC, and also serves to advise the Minister.
78. DOC's mandate is also set by a statutory planning framework that supports the overarching legislation: the Conservation General Policy, the General Policy for National Parks, and the strategies and plans that flow from these policies – all these documents provide mandatory rules on what is legally allowable at places.
79. Legal challenges are significant and increasingly common. This is due in part to the significant regulatory decision-making roles of the Minister and DOC under numerous Acts, the aging legislation that is not integrated nor fit for purpose for today's activities, and the strong requirement in the law to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi when administering these Acts.
80. Appendix 5 lays out the legislation administered by DOC and other legislation that includes functions for the portfolio.

DOC's role

DOC has broad functions that support the delivery of conservation

81. DOC's functions include land and asset management, regulating access and activities, eradicating predators, protecting and restoring nature, supporting recreation and tourism, providing education, and advocating for conservation.
82. This means prioritising resources between often competing activities and drivers. For example:
 - protecting and advocating for nature and ensuring safety, while fostering recreation and supporting tourism
 - resourcing on-the-ground work that delivers immediate and visible results, while investing in the underpinning systems, relationships and facilities needed to be effective in the future
 - meeting the requirements of a large land manager (eg fencing, fire risk, predators – even where conservation values are low), while prioritising action on threats to nature and key species.

DOC manages a range of relationships with Treaty partners

83. Māori have a distinct and unique relationship to the environment, including conservation land and waters and the species within. For centuries they lived on what is now public conservation land or relied on the resources within for their livelihood. Many tūpuna (ancestral) mountains, rivers and lakes are managed by DOC.
84. The Conservation Act 1987 (section 4) creates a particular and strong responsibility for DOC to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Successive decisions by the courts are continuing to clarify the extent of these responsibilities and confirm a significant role for the Conservation portfolio in responding to Māori rights and interests. This is reflected in DOC's organisational strategy which affirms a commitment to being an honourable Treaty partner.
85. In this context, DOC is required to understand the impact of our work and decisions on local Māori interests, priorities and aspirations. DOC relies on good local, regional and national relationships to foster the necessary partnerships and seeks to work in good faith. This aims to create more durable conservation outcomes, including extending these beyond public conservation land, as well as meeting our obligations.
86. Māori interests vary across New Zealand, requiring DOC to adapt the delivery of conservation to the local context. This creates considerable complexity for operations, policy and regulatory decisions.
87. Giving effect to the principles of the Treaty requires substantial resource and capability for both DOC and Māori. This includes supporting a growing range of partnerships, and management and consultation arrangements with iwi. Local variation and responsiveness must be balanced with ensuring alignment and consistency with legislation, policy and operational settings. Increasingly, Māori aspirations and the Crown's policy settings are in tension.
88. Treaty settlements have been the major driver of partnerships between the Crown and iwi groups in relation to conservation – with settlements typically creating mechanisms and entities to facilitate how the Crown and iwi work together to manage land and other assets and deliver conservation outcomes. Appendix 6 provides a snapshot of significant Treaty relationships and settlements as they relate to conservation.
89. As Minister of Conservation, you play a central role in Treaty settlement negotiations for the Crown and can expect this to be one area of focus in your work, alongside Crown policy on contemporary conservation settings relating to Māori rights and interests.

Current conservation strategy and programmes

DOC delivers on a range of government strategies and programmes

90. DOC operates within government to deliver a range of national strategies and programmes that support conservation and recreation outcomes. This is alongside core conservation activities in the regions. Key strategies and programmes are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Key government strategies and programmes funded through DOC

KEY GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES	DESCRIPTION	ACHIEVEMENTS
Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2050	<p>The strategic framework for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity, particularly indigenous biodiversity from 2020 to 2050.</p> <p>DOC is the lead agency for implementing the ANZBS and is focused on putting in place appropriate governance and leadership. Interagency technical working groups and a monitoring and reporting working group have been established.</p>	<p>The first implementation plan for the ANZBS was drafted in 2022, providing a stocktake of actions across government to contribute to the objectives of the Strategy. Many actions are long term, and in July 2023, an assessment of progress found that 8% of the 204 actions are complete and 84% are ongoing.</p>
Heritage and Visitor Strategy	<p>The strategic framework for management decisions and goals for DOC in the heritage and visitor system.</p>	<p>The number of New Zealanders and international visitor who went on a Great Walk reached 47,380 in 2022/23, an 18% increase from summer 2021/22.</p>
KEY PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION	ACHIEVEMENTS
Predator Free 2050	<p>Aims to deliver a predator-free New Zealand by 2050. DOC is the Government's lead agency for the Predator Free 2050 programme. Funding received by DOC for collective delivery of the strategy in 2023–2024 was \$8.416 million.</p> <p>DOC's National Predator Control Programme is a critical part of Predator Free 2050. For 2022/23 it received \$31.024 million.</p> <p>Predator Free 2050 Ltd is responsible for directing Crown investment into the programme. For 2023/24, it received \$5.91 million from Vote Conservation, \$23.62 million from Jobs for Nature and \$2.7 million from the Provincial Growth Fund.</p> <p>The Tools to Market Programme invests \$1.4 million annually in the accelerated development of new and existing predator control tools and technology to achieve Predator Free 2050.</p>	<p>In 2022–2023, DOC undertook 583,874 hectares of predator control. This was to maintain 1.8 million hectares of public conservation land under sustained predator control, giving protection for many native species. Overall suppression has been increased by 1 million hectares and the project is on track to meet its interim goal of eradicating possums or mustelids from a New Zealand city by 2025 (Wellington).</p> <p>Other highlights include development of a scenario modelling tool with Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, and planning for strategic eradications on Rakiura/Stewart Island and the Auckland Islands.</p> <p>Since launching, Tools to Market has completed three rounds of procurement, funding 15 projects in total. Four new tools are on track to be commercialised across the 2023/24 financial year.</p>
Wild Animal Management Programme	<p>Manages populations of deer, goats, pigs, tahr and chamois in priority conservation areas. Funding received for 2023/24 was \$12.830 million from Vote Conservation departmental output expense funding.</p>	<p>During 2022/23, DOC delivered 47,712 hectares of deer management and 196,285 hectares of additional goat control in priority areas.</p>

Continued on the next page

KEY PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION	ACHIEVEMENTS
Threatened species management programmes	Species-specific programmes to protect native wildlife, including kākāpō, takahē and whio / blue duck.	Kākāpō numbers have increased from 197 to 248 in the 2022 breeding season. 73 kākāriki karaka / orange-fronted parakeets were reintroduced to Arthur's Pass National Park. There was a 340% increase in whio / blue duck numbers in Kahurangi since a DOC whio survey in 1998–2000, until Cyclone Gabrielle hit
Kauri protection	DOC has responsibility for managing kauri protection on public conservation land. In 2014, DOC received a \$5.486 million increase to its baseline for kauri track maintenance, advocacy and pig control. Biosecurity New Zealand leads kauri protection and set up an agency, Tiakina Kauri, to implement a National Pest Management Plan for the protection of kauri. In 2022, Tiakina Kauri allocated \$480,000 to DOC for development of a pig management framework over 5 years.	A National Pest Management Plan came into effect on 2 August 2022. The Plan sets out mechanisms to increase protection for kauri, as well as 10 rules to help protect kauri from the kauri disease pathogen. In 2022/23, DOC has supported implementation of the Plan, maintained its network of kauri tracks and hygiene stations, completed a surveillance programme, and carried out pig control and baseline monitoring.
Queen Elizabeth II National Trust	A fund aimed at identifying and implementing the protection of biodiversity on private land. Funding received for 2023/24 was \$4.27 million from Vote Conservation non-departmental expense and \$2.10 million from Jobs for Nature.	100% of all new covenants approved secure protection of one or more of the four national priorities for biodiversity protection on private land and/or add to a protected corridor or protected landscape.
Ngā Whenua Rāhui	A fund and programme aimed at protecting the natural integrity of Māori land and preserving mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Funding received for 2023/24 was \$9.959 million.	In the 2022/23, year 125,601 hectares of land were being treated for goats, 24 predator control operations were undertaken and security was improved for seven acutely threatened species.
Jobs for Nature	A programme aimed at helping to revitalise communities through nature-based employment and stimulate the economy post COVID-19. For 2023/24, it received \$73.24 million from Vote Conservation – departmental expenses (\$48.76 million of which relates to contracted payments for third party projects); and \$52.71 million of non-departmental expenses (including Predator Free 2050 and QEII National Trust funding above).	Over the life of the programme so far, more than 5600 people have found nature-based employment and more than 5 million hours of conservation work has been delivered across the country.
National Wilding Conifer Control Programme	A programme to ensure a collaborative, coordinated and effective approach to national wilding pine management. DOC sits on the governance group alongside other agencies, community trusts and regional councils. Will receive \$7 million from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy in 2023/24.	In 2022/2023, DOC treated 125,999 hectares of land for wilding conifers.

DOC's departmental strategy

91. DOC's work is guided by the biodiversity and heritage and visitor strategies mentioned above. DOC's own departmental strategy (see Appendix 7) was reset in May 2022, reinforcing the primary reason for DOC's work, which is the conservation of nature. It also recognises that the conservation of nature provides benefits to the economy, and New Zealanders' wellbeing and identity.
92. The renewed emphasis on DOC's core role is strongly aligned with conservation legislation and the intent of DOC as expressed at its creation in 1987.

Conservation funding

You are the responsible Minister for Vote Conservation, totalling \$880.3 million in 2023/24

93. DOC is the department responsible for administering this Vote. (See Appendix 8 for an overview of Conservation finances.)
94. As the responsible Minister, DOC will advise you over the course of the financial year on your role in and decisions needed on:
 - March and October Baseline Updates
 - Estimates and Supplementary Estimates
 - Late In-Principle Expense Transfers (IPET) in June
 - Select Committee Estimates Examination material
 - the Budget process.
95. Financial budgets and performance targets are set out each year in the Estimates of Appropriations.
96. DOC is part of the Natural Resources Cluster pilot established by the Government in the lead up to Budget 2022, under which agencies hold separate appropriations but have a shared funding arrangement to work towards common priorities.

Vote Conservation is made up of several kinds of funding

97. The Conservation portfolio is funded by the Government (88% of funding), Crown revenue and third-party revenue. Third-party revenue comes from the International Visitor Levy, concessions, partnerships, and products and services (huts, campsites, Great Walks, visitor centre network).
98. These funds are collectively used to look after nature (land, water and species) and structures (visitor infrastructure and special places that have shaped New Zealand's history), and to fund DOC's functions.
99. Funding sourced from third parties is estimated each year depending on forecast levels of activity. DOC needs to manage its work effort to match actual funding in any given year.

Conservation funding is mostly spent on departmental outputs, reflecting that DOC is an operational department and the core model is government delivery

100. Vote Conservation has two components that, combined, make up DOC's 'baseline': departmental and non-departmental appropriations. As the names indicate, they differ in who ultimately spends the money. Around one-fifth of Vote Conservation funding is passed on to other groups for specific projects (this is non-departmental funding).

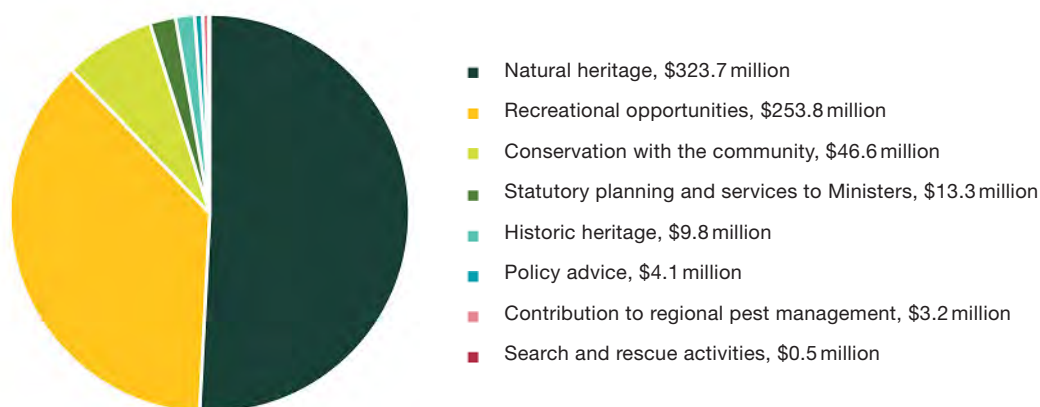


Figure 2: Departmental output appropriations 2023/24

101. DOC's departmental output appropriations are currently broad in scope. Departmental output appropriations (as shown in figure 2) increased by \$58 million, from \$652 million in 2022/23 to \$710 million in 2023/24. This included additional funding provided by the Government to boost predator control and fund marine protection; to address organisational cost pressures, including inflation and wage pressures, and management of visitor assets; and to tackle damage from the 2023 North Island weather events.

Funding has grown in recent years but is on course to decrease substantially

- 102. Vote Conservation has increased from around \$500 million in 2018/19 to a peak of around \$880 million in 2023/24. It is due to decrease to \$728 million by 2026/27 as the Jobs for Nature and other programmes conclude. This will represent a 21% decline from current funding.
- 103. Although increases in Vote Conservation have been substantial, much of this funding (with the exception of the Budget 2022 uplifts) has not been for core DOC activity but has been provided to fund others, such as the time-limited Jobs For Nature funding (\$485 million over 5 years).
- 104. Border closures because of COVID-19 led to the loss of significant revenues from international visitors and concessionaires. Domestic lockdowns further limited DOC's ability to generate revenue from recreational and tourism charges. DOC had to make savings from core business of \$28 million to manage the lower revenue streams, and these revenue streams are yet to return to pre-2019/20 levels.
- 105. Prior to COVID-19, third-party-sourced revenue from concessions represented 32% of total third-party revenue. This had fallen to 13% by 2021/22. DOC has been successful in increasing revenue from donations and sponsorship to offset the impact of declines elsewhere. However, this revenue is ring fenced for specific purposes and cannot be used to support wider conservation outcomes.
- 106. The increases in departmental and non-departmental appropriations since 2019/20 visible in figure 3 below have been driven by the COVID-19 Economic Reset and Recovery funding received at Budget 2020, including the Jobs for Nature initiatives and the Wildlife Institutions Relief Fund, and initiatives funded through the Budget 2022 Natural Resources Cluster process.
- 107. As the COVID-19 Recovery and Wildlife Institutions Relief funding are time limited, the graph below shows decreases to appropriations by 2024/25.

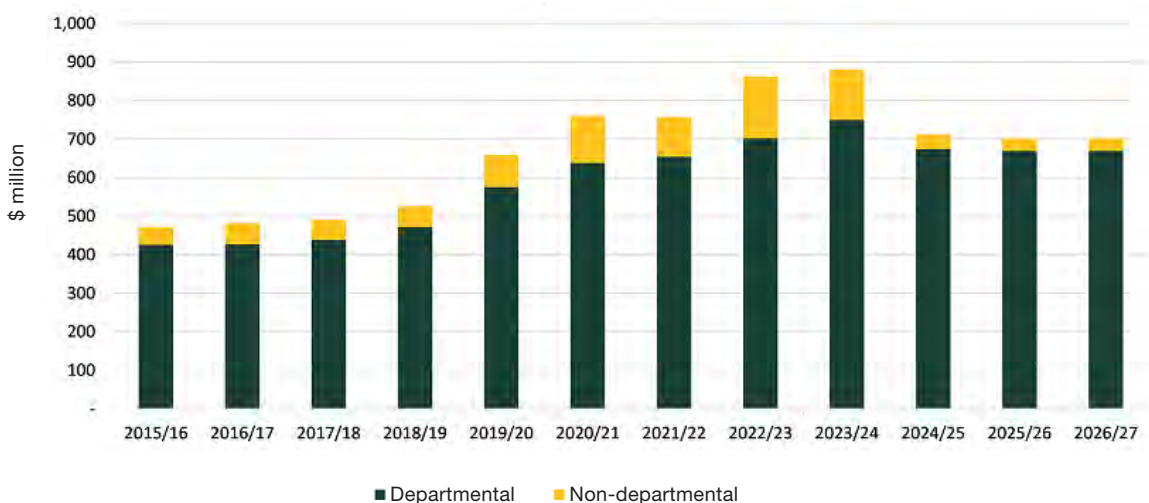


Figure 3: DOC operating and capital appropriations

There are significant pressures on Conservation portfolio resources, despite some funding increases

108. DOC manages one-third of the country's land area with 0.44% of government spending. Assuming an even spread of departmental funding across land and water, DOC has around \$56 per hectare to work with. Agreed output targets are generally being met, yet many conservation outcomes are in decline.
109. Responsibilities under the portfolio have grown over time (eg with the addition of new land and assets), but not necessarily with corresponding additional funding. For example, in Twizel, public conservation land has doubled over the last 20 years from almost 143,000 hectares to 310,000 hectares – primarily through tenure reviews – without any increase in funding.
110. Costs, especially those due to workforce, price increases and extreme weather, are growing. Meanwhile, the conservation asset base is aging, and there is a backlog of deferred expenditure.
111. DOC has significant work underway to ensure that it can deliver value for money and value for nature. This includes:
 - establishing a taskforce to identify efficiencies
 - introducing a new operating model that will also support streamlining of systems and processes
 - undertaking a Financial Sustainability Review to analyse spending against DOC's work to provide Ministers with information to make choices about future conservation outcomes, trade-offs and investment (see following section)
 - preparing for advice on Budget decisions for 2024 and beyond.

Current priority issues and work programmes

112. This section provides a summary of some of the main topics you will engage with in your role as Minister.
113. DOC is engaged across government and with stakeholders on all the topics below and will provide further advice at your request or as needed to keep you informed and seek your direction or decision.

Biodiversity – stopping and reversing the decline in nature

Context

114. Nature underpins much of New Zealand's economy, providing critical services such as clean air and water, and food. However, New Zealand's biodiversity (the species within ecosystems) is under significant pressure, with ecosystems declining and nearly 4000 native species either at risk or threatened with extinction. Where DOC takes targeted conservation action, we see marked improvements in biodiversity health.
115. The scale of threats to biodiversity requires resources to be focused on the most critical and impactful outcomes and activities to ensure we make a difference where it's needed most.
116. There is a balance to strike between *recovery interventions* to save species (such as kākāpō) and ecosystems (such as coastal dune systems) in urgent need of recovery; and *preventative interventions* to maintain healthy land, freshwater and marine environments to prevent further decline.
117. Investments in key programmes, such as Predator Free 2050, wild animal management, national predator control, national freshwater and marine ecosystems, wilding conifer control, threatened species recovery, and kauri protection, reflect a balance to ensure recovery and the ongoing integrity of biodiversity.

Key issues and opportunities

Prioritising effort to manage biodiversity threats and challenges

118. There is an opportunity to be clear on how to prioritise resources and the best mix of interventions to manage species and habitats to achieve targets and protect special species and places.
119. A lack of reliable data is a major barrier to action. Many of New Zealand's treasured species have a threatened species classification of Data Deficient, meaning there is not enough information to assess their risk of extinction.
120. Two work programmes are underway in DOC to support this.
 - Development of a multi-year biodiversity investment planning system to enable the Government, DOC and our partners to make better informed decisions on biodiversity investment. Through the system, DOC will set targets for delivering the most urgent and high-value biodiversity work within our fiscal envelope, based on the Government's strategic objectives and priorities.
 - A review of our monitoring and reporting system to improve how DOC's monitoring and reporting informs our biodiversity, heritage and visitor functions and builds our evidence base.
121. In addition, a review of the Predator Free 2050 strategy will be required in 2024 and Cabinet decisions will be sought on the priorities for the period 2026–2030. The review will provide an opportunity to consider the relative balance, value for money and priority of the programme and the eradication goal against other conservation efforts, as well as improvements to how the programme is delivered.

Setting national targets for biodiversity protection

122. The ANZBS provides the overall strategic direction for biodiversity for the next 30 years. As party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and under the Global Biodiversity Framework, New Zealand is required to have a national biodiversity strategy and to submit this along with a range of other plans.
123. DOC is currently leading a process with other agencies to review the existing goals in the ANZBS against global targets agreed to under the GBF. This work presents an opportunity to prioritise action and ensure consistency in how we manage biodiversity across the country. It has links with other portfolios, including fisheries, forestry, agriculture and biosecurity, and a joined-up approach is crucial for its successful delivery.
124. DOC will provide you with advice on the alignment of our biodiversity goals with the GBF, options on whether to amend these, and an implementation plan for achieving 2030 goals and 2050 objectives in the ANZBS. You will have choices about priorities for action and the level of ambition sought through targets, as well as choices around funding for any actions. Expectations of higher targets are significant. Targets need to be approved by mid-2024 to meet our international requirements.

Working in partnership, including for co-funding conservation work

125. Biodiversity is not restricted to public conservation land and waters. Many significant ecosystems and species occur on farmland and other private and Māori land. The development of new approaches to working in partnership, including to attract investment, provides an opportunity to shift the dial for biodiversity.
126. Officials are investigating new approaches to reward and incentivise the protection and restoration of biodiversity, including the development of market-based mechanisms. Public consultation on the potential and feasibility of a Biodiversity Credits System closes in early November. DOC will provide you with advice on the feedback from consultation and options for next steps. DOC will advise you on how to consider this, alongside the many other approaches being promoted to address the financing gap for investment in nature.
127. DOC is working on a strategy to set out the proposed future approach to partnerships, including the policy, financial rules and risk management approach. DOC will provide you with advice on options around opportunities in this area and the direction you could take, including if you want to grow this source of funding.

Improving outcomes for biodiversity through legislative change

128. Some legislative reform aimed at improving biodiversity outcomes is well advanced or nearly complete. DOC will seek your direction as to the most appropriate way to progress this work.
129. Work is underway to repeal and replace the Wildlife Act 1953 with the aim of clarifying the interface between the protection of species and cultural, customary, commercial and recreational values. Work to date (with the support of an independent expert advisory group) and public engagement has focused on defining the key issues that need to be addressed in the current Act, including:
 - the lack of appropriate tools to adequately protect indigenous species
 - barriers to the fulfilment of some Treaty of Waitangi obligations
 - the lack of coherency with other conservation and natural resource legislation and regulatory tools, and currency with modern biodiversity protection needs and conservation practice.
130. The development of policy options for a new legislative framework is underway with input from an independent advisory group, the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG). Members of the SOG bring diverse skills and expertise in tourism, science, game animal management and

governance, te ao Māori (the Māori world view), conservation, law, and environmental policy. A key area the SOG are providing advice on is a framework for managing indigenous and introduced species.

131. **9(2)(f)(iv)** [REDACTED]
132. Legislative reform to improve marine protection in the Hauraki Gulf is outlined in the 'Oceans and marine policy' section below.

A financially sustainable Conservation portfolio

Context

133. DOC is undertaking an in-depth review of its expenditure to provide advice to Ministers on actions DOC and Ministers can take to put DOC on a sustainable future funding path. This work was initially driven by a Treasury-led baseline review as part of Budget 2022. However, the tighter fiscal environment and wider focus on efficiency, effectiveness, value for money and savings make this work more pertinent.
134. This Financial Sustainability Review is being delivered in two phases over 2023 and 2024. Phase 1 is complete and took a deeper look at DOC's current expenditure, performance and cost drivers, as well as potential options for further exploration in Phase 2.
135. The review has confirmed that the current size and scale of DOC is unaffordable on current baselines, and that significantly more (and more cost-effective) conservation work is needed to meet Conservation portfolio goals.
136. DOC is already making changes to its operating model to improve efficiency, effectiveness and productivity. Work is also underway to advise on savings that may be requested.
137. There are strategic choices for Ministers to match the scope and scale of DOC's work to the Government's objectives for conservation and DOC's future funding envelope. DOC will provide you with separate, detailed advice on the outcomes of Phase 1 of the Review, an update on the work DOC is already doing to be more efficient, and options for how to proceed from here.

Key issues and opportunities

138. Key issues and opportunities identified so far through the Financial Sustainability Review include that:
- DOC has a broad range of functions and expectations that have increased over time, without a comprehensive review of its funding or role
 - current work is not enough to drive improvement in outcomes, and recent funding increases are not reflected in increases in the outputs DOC measures
 - there are opportunities to improve performance – including through different service models and prioritisation of resources – and better reporting of that performance, including the focus of outputs delivered
 - workforce, inflation and assets have been driving an increase in costs and will reduce the ability to maintain current outputs over the next 4 years, without changes to and investment in DOC's operating model
 - DOC faces significant future demands to deliver more. Further prioritisation, and potentially investment, will be needed to address New Zealand's conservation objectives, build resilience and transition to financially sustainable visitor experiences.

Oceans and marine policy

Context

139. Oceans and coasts are central to New Zealanders' identity, wellbeing and prosperity. However, activities on land and at sea, and their cumulative effects, are negatively affecting New Zealand's coasts and oceans. Many species are in trouble: 22% of marine mammals, 90% of seabirds and 80% of shorebirds are at risk or threatened with extinction.
140. There are also important economic activities within the oceans. Fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, oil and gas, and transport all play an important role, and there are new emerging interests such as renewable energy (eg offshore wind farms) and seabed mining.
141. Oceans issues span several agencies and Ministerial portfolios (including Conservation, Oceans and Fisheries, Environment, Foreign Affairs). A coordinated approach is important to achieve marine conservation outcomes.
142. DOC hosts an interagency Oceans Secretariat alongside the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). DOC has previously supported the Minister of Conservation and other Ministers with responsibilities across significant oceans policy (the Minister of Conservation, Minister of Oceans and Fisheries, and Minister for the Environment). DOC looks forward to a discussion with you on the role of the Secretariat, including how DOC can best support you and your colleagues to ensure strategic coordination on cross-cutting oceans issues.
143. You will receive a separate Oceans introductory briefing, alongside other Oceans Ministers, from the Oceans Secretariat.

Key issues and opportunities

Marine protection

144. A new global target of 30% protection of land, inland waters and oceans by 2030 has been agreed on by parties to the CBD. Though this is a global target, there is a significant expectation that New Zealand will demonstrate a greater contribution towards it. Currently, how New Zealand's marine protection network is classified – and, therefore, which parts of it contribute to the global goal – is a contentious issue. Parties to the CBD are expected to report back next year on their contributions. A key decision for Ministers will be how to report back to the CBD Secretariat.
145. You have a role in the development of new marine protection in the Hauraki Gulf, Kermadec Islands and the southeast of the South Island.
 - The Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Bill was referred to the Environment Select Committee in August 2023. As the Bill progresses, you will have policy decisions to make concerning the final package of protection measures.
 - Six new marine reserves have recently been approved for the southeast South Island and confirmation (gazettal) of these areas is expected by mid-2024.
 - DOC is developing advice on an application for Hākaimangō-Matiatia Marine Reserve (northwest Waiheke Island) from the Friends of the Hauraki Gulf Inc. This is expected to be finalised in the first half of 2024 and presented to you for a final decision.
 - DOC has been supporting MfE-led work to progress the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary. Next steps for the proposal are to be decided, following a vote in June by mandated iwi organisations to not support the current proposal. If the proposal goes ahead, DOC will lead implementation.

146. The protection measures outlined above are regionally significant but will not contribute significantly to greater national oceans coverage. Ambition for greater national oceans coverage will require new marine protected areas to be developed.
147. Ministers also have choices about how to ensure that the legislative framework for protection is efficient and effective. Existing legislation (the Marine Reserves Act 1971) is ineffective and processes to establish new protection are lengthy and contentious, often taking around 10 years. Legislative reform may offer an opportunity for less contentious, faster and more efficient processes.

Using and developing the marine environment

148. The urgent pressure to decarbonise has led to increased interest in offshore renewable energy, such as from wind. There is also growing interest in accelerating sustainable new aquaculture developments.
149. DOC works closely with other agencies to ensure that the full suite of objectives around oceans management are effectively met and that potential impacts on marine wildlife are well managed. Areas of focus include developing an offshore renewable energy regulatory framework, establishing regulatory and other opportunities to accelerate aquaculture development, and addressing the ongoing impacts of bottom trawling.
150. DOC recommends a continued focus on joint agency policy work across these areas to develop approaches that meet the Government's objectives with the least negative impact on conservation outcomes. For example, in aquaculture development, DOC and MPI are working closely to develop options to support aquaculture acceleration that is sustainable.

Climate change – implications for the Conservation portfolio

Context

151. Increased extreme weather frequency and intensity, fire, and sea level rise have significant implications for DOC's roles in managing species, habitats and visitor attractions. As the climate changes, we will need to take action to make space for species and habitats to move into and adapt, and potentially to accommodate the movement of communities and infrastructure – for example, in response to sea level rise.

Key issues and opportunities

Supporting the Government's climate response

152. DOC engages across government to ensure that climate policy supports the restoration and protection of nature. New Zealand's native forests store 1.8 billion tonnes of carbon. Protecting and expanding these forests (along with restoring wetlands on public conservation land and other low productivity land) is arguably one of the biggest contributions that New Zealand can make to climate change on a global scale. There is potential to store an estimated 698 million more tonnes of carbon on public conservation land, which could also help deliver greater resilience to the impacts of climate change-driven extreme weather, floods and fire. DOC is working with others to understand the pressures wild animals are creating on the carbon stored in forests.
153. There are several key opportunities for the Conservation portfolio in the wider climate response.
 - Review of the Emissions Trading Scheme provides an opportunity to look at how the scheme can support private landowners to restore native forests, including on erosion-prone land to protect downstream communities. An MfE-led Cabinet paper is due to report back in December to discuss options for progressing this work.

- Reform of the resource management system, the development of a dedicated climate adaptation Act and immediate responses to extreme weather events are an opportunity to develop systems that prioritise the use of nature-based solutions to flood protection and carbon storage, which also provide habitat development and protection. MfE, MPI and DOC are developing joint advice on the opportunities, benefits and costs of restoring native forests and wetlands.
 - The development of new approaches to reward and incentivise the protection and restoration of biodiversity, including a possible Biodiversity Credits System, has the potential to deliver carbon removal, climate resilience, and nature and water quality outcomes.
 - The restoration of public conservation lands and waters and native ecosystems could contribute to resilience to extreme weather events – for example, by restoring native forest on erosion-prone land or forests and wetlands in flood-prone catchments.
154. Advice is being led by MfE on policy for adaptation, which includes being clear on roles and responsibilities, and the policy for funding. DOC is developing advice on the role public conservation land could play in the adaptation response, particularly through the disposal of land or the acquisition of land for the purpose of managed retreat.

Addressing climate risks in DOC's operations

155. DOC has developed a Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan (CCAAP) to address climate risks in our own operations. However, the actions the Plan proposes are currently unfunded.
156. DOC's Emissions Context and Reduction Plan (ECRP) sets out initiatives to reduce emissions, as well as looking at how people who use public conservation land (including concessionaires) can reduce theirs. This work programme is aligned with the Carbon Neutral Government Programme, which requires DOC to set greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in line with a reduction pathway that will limit global warming to 1.5°C.
157. DOC will seek your direction on priority investments and potential disinvestments for initiatives in the CCAAP and ECRP. For example, DOC is highly dependent on helicopter use – a high emissions activity – to carry out conservation work and the management of recreational assets. There are no direct substitutes for helicopters for some of these activities, so reducing emissions from helicopter use may mean ceasing some activities if an alternative operating model cannot be found.

Cyclone recovery

Context

158. The 2023 Auckland flooding event and Cyclone Gabrielle caused widespread damage to public conservation land, visitor assets, biodiversity and cultural heritage across the North Island. In total, 1.48 million hectares of public conservation land were affected, with impacts including damage to more than 450 visitor and recreational sites and 18,000 assets.

Key issues and opportunities

159. DOC received an appropriation of \$12.6 million following Cyclone Gabrielle to rebuild recreational infrastructure and address biodiversity loss. 9(2)(f)(iv) Current funding levels are not sufficient to address the longer-term impacts of such weather events on top of other pressures.
160. Cabinet has requested an update on the options for prioritising and funding DOC's regional recovery work in the context of its wider fiscal pressures. Should you choose to proceed with this update, it provides an opportunity to seek agreement to a sustainable, longer-term approach to DOC's recovery efforts and priorities.

Regulatory systems and stewardship

Context

161. The purpose of the conservation regulatory system is to support conservation by educating, regulating and enforcing for good outcomes, while also supporting other outcomes (such as allowing for economic opportunities or key infrastructure development).
162. The regulatory system regulates what activities people can undertake on public conservation land and waters, and how they interact with wildlife. This is done through developing statutory plans, issuing and monitoring permissions (eg concessions), and ensuring that the right regulations and legal protections are in place.
163. The conservation regulatory system is under severe strain and requires change. The system is often characterised by a slow, costly and complicated concessions process, a backlog of permission applications, and a lack of national consistency in regulatory decision-making and enforcement work. Appendix 9 provides further information on the regulatory system.

Key issues and opportunities

164. A range of operational, technology and legislative improvements are in progress to address some of these issues. However, significant further focus is required.
165. You have a choice as to the relative priority and weighting of effort placed on improving the system within existing policy (eg clarifying and ‘codifying’ existing legislative and regulatory settings, determining settings relating to the preference to be accorded to Māori in the system, increasing cost recovery) and improving the legislative framework (ie changing/updating existing legislation), and the mix of work and initiatives that are undertaken within this.
166. In many cases, improvements will require additional investment to be fully realised and you have choices as to how these can be funded – for example, through changes in policy settings for third-party funding/revenue collection.

Working to address permissions processing times, including concessions

167. The permissions system regulates the way in which people interact with public conservation land and waters. Concessions are a type of permission that regulates most economic activity and are the permission type that DOC receives the most applications for. DOC administers around 7400 active permissions at any one time, including over 4000 concessions.
168. There is a persistent backlog of permission applications (including concessions) being processed for a decision. As at 30 September 2023, the number of permission applications awaiting a decision was 1141. This includes 688 concession applications pending a decision, up 32% from 30 September 2022. Of the 1141 applications awaiting a decision, approximately 656 have been awaiting a decision for more than 4 months.
169. DOC has a plan in place to manage this backlog. The plan comprises lifting processing capability and establishing new practices and guidance, including standard terms and conditions. By the end of 2023, DOC plans to have made decisions on an additional 180 backlogged concession applications while continuing to process new incoming applications.
170. DOC is beginning work on the development of new workflow software. This will replace the current system, which relies largely on manual processing and data management. This will help prevent future backlogs.

Driving improved economic and environmental outcomes through the concessions regime

171. Concession allocation processes are not always undertaken in a strategic or consistent way. A more proactive approach to concession allocations would provide more clarity to applicants and could drive improved economic and environmental outcomes through encouraging competition. While competitive allocation can be encouraged within the current

legislative framework, DOC has identified legislative amendments that would support greater use of competitive allocation mechanisms.

172. The pricing of concession rents and royalties is difficult, contentious, and often leads to lengthy disputes. Further work on how to price concessions, including a review of the legislative framework, would provide greater certainty to businesses and reduce costly disputes.
173. There is also an opportunity to achieve better environmental and biodiversity outcomes through expanding the use of conditions included in concession agreements and improving concession monitoring processes. For example, in places like Tongariro Crossing, the visitor experience and improved conservation outcomes can be protected through considered visitor management.
174. The Milford Opportunities Project (MOP) has highlighted these issues and is an opportunity to test new approaches. MOP is currently identifying policy and regulatory options for concessions in Milford Sound/Piopiota. This includes the case for change, whether operational or legislative changes are required, and implications for the wider concessions system. The current plan is to develop options for public consultation in early 2024.

Working to identify options to improve management planning within the existing planning framework

175. There is a significant backlog of statutory planning documents that are overdue for review or development. The pipeline of work is increasing as documents reach the end of the statutory 10-year timeframe and become due for review and as new documents are added because of Treaty settlements. The system is not adequately meeting DOC's responsibilities under the Conservation Act.
176. The planning system sets out what activities people can and cannot undertake in conservation areas. Therefore, the current state of the planning system is contributing to the inefficiency and lack of clarity in concessions processes.
177. DOC has work underway to implement operational improvements within the current legislation. DOC will need to engage closely with Conservation Boards as this work progresses, as Boards have a legislative function in the approval and implementation of planning documents.
178. This work, as well as independent work by conservation system stakeholders and public consultation on the management planning regime undertaken by the Government in 2022, raises broader questions around the overall planning system, such as the ongoing role of current statutory documents (eg the General Policies) and the purpose of existing associated governance structures.
179. Work to identify other possible approaches outside the current framework, and the benefits and costs of these, is not well advanced.
180. In making management decisions, the Conservation and National Park General Policies, conservation management strategies, and conservation management plans (including freshwater fisheries management plans and sports fish and game management plans) must be complied with. These regulatory instruments are approved by different decision-makers and under statutory processes which include consultation and public notification.
181. Ministers determine any Conservation General Policies, and the NZCA sets the National Park General Policy and approves conservation management strategies and plans after having regard to any recommendations from the Minister of Conservation. This complex regulatory framework provides a number of checks and balances designed to ensure that expertise and stakeholder engagement is brought to bear in implementing the law and managing conservation areas and natural and historic resources.

182. The regulatory framework also provides a hierarchy and cascade of controls which limit policy options, mean that change can be slow and place a high administrative burden on the regulatory system. Therefore, a wider government review may be desirable in the medium term.

Giving effect to the principles of the Treaty and managing Treaty settlement obligations

183. As discussed in the portfolio overview above, the Conservation Act 1987 creates a particular responsibility for DOC to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

184. However, there are challenges around what the legislation provides for versus our Treaty partners' aspirations, which brings complexity. For example, the processes for planning, concessions and land management are set out in legislation that pre-dates significant developments in Treaty settlements and jurisprudence, creating difficulties in administering them efficiently and effectively.

185. In some instances, there will be benefits from adopting a more standardised approach on how to apply the principles of the Treaty across DOC's regulatory system.

186. DOC is currently undertaking partial reviews of the Conservation General Policy and General Policy for National Parks to ensure that our Treaty responsibilities are visible and easy to understand within those policies. 9(2)(f)(iv)

187. There are several key issues that are frequently raised by Māori or identified by DOC's operational staff that relate to how to give effect to the principles of the Treaty or advance Treaty partnerships. These are outside and not addressed by the scope of the work under the partial reviews. Some of these issues can be addressed through improving operational policy and guidance. Others require choices by you and Ministerial direction (including across portfolios to ensure a consistent Crown approach).

188. The key issues that most commonly arise in our work where the Government has choices to provide direction are:

- the extent of empowerment of Treaty partners through decision making, ownership, vesting, management and administration
- access to resources, cultural materials and the ability to undertake customary activities
- access to economic opportunities, including affording Treaty partners a degree of preference
- the remuneration of Treaty partners involved in regulatory processes
- the paying of fees by Treaty partners applying for and operating concessions.

Developing a package of legislative reform to support improvements across the regulatory system

189. Some legislative reform aimed at improving regulatory processes is well advanced or nearly complete and DOC will seek your direction as to the most appropriate way to progress this work. Details of all Bills in progress are provided in the 'Bills in progress' section on page 38. DOC considers that further options for improvements to the legislative framework for concessions and management planning, including around how to give effect to Treaty principles, may be desirable.

Resource management

Context

190. The resource management system is critical for effective conservation management and delivering the ANZBS. It regulates the protection of biodiversity on and off public conservation land, establishes and can protect the values of water bodies and landscapes, manages the coastal and marine area, and protects historic/cultural heritage.
191. Key roles for the Minister of Conservation in the resource management system are to set national direction for the coastal marine area and to deliver broader conservation outcomes.
192. DOC officials work closely with MfE, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and MPI on matters including offshore wind energy development and open ocean aquaculture.
193. The resource management system has been under reform since 2017, as the Resource Management Act (RMA) has neither adequately protected the natural environment nor enabled development where and when needed. The Natural and Built Environment and Spatial Planning Acts (NBA and SPA) became law in August 2023. The previous Government's reforms were not implemented and DOC officials will seek an early opportunity to discuss the Government's plans for resource management and the role of conservation within that.

Key issues and opportunities

194. Enabling development and better protection of the environment can both be achieved. The key to this is to ensure that both are reflected clearly in the purpose of the legislation and that the Government's priorities are expressed through national direction that is informed by an understanding of the constraints necessary to provide protection.
195. National direction drives the resource management system, including the shaping of spatial plans. Spatial planning requires investment to understand the resources in a region that national direction might give preference to developing, and the places or values that national direction requires to be protected. Renewable energy development, energy transmission systems, transport networks and aquaculture are enabled by spatial planning.
196. DOC will work with you to understand your ambitions for resource management reform and the role of conservation. DOC considers that there are several core components that should be included in any reformed system. These include the following:
 - *Spatial planning*. Spatially defining long-term statutory strategic objectives for a region can support both effective development outcomes via greater certainty and administrative efficiency, as well as improved biodiversity and other environmental outcomes.
 - *Identifying 'limits and targets'*. Environmental limits and targets define how much resource can be used / development can take place. Specifying environmental limits provides certainty to users of the system.
 - *Places of national importance*. Identifying specific places of national importance, such as those with significant biodiversity or heritage, can both protect these and enable greater certainty for development (ie by clearly defining 'where not to go'). Redefining levels of significance could reduce the number of areas subject to these provisions, but at the risk of affecting some biodiversity or other values. Alternative non-regulatory methods, such as incentives, biodiversity credits or supporting landowner covenants, can also provide for biodiversity, climate response or freshwater values.
 - *Enabling protection and development*. Spatial planning, provision of information and greater coordination across government can support the effective use and development of resources and improve environmental outcomes.

Tourism and economic development

Context

197. Tourism activities on public conservation land and waters provide significant benefits to the New Zealand economy. DOC has several core roles that interact closely with tourism – as a land steward, provider/manager, regulator and advocate. DOC’s work is supported and limited by DOC’s statutory functions, which include fostering the use of natural and cultural resources for recreation and allowing their use for tourism if that use is not inconsistent with the conservation of those resources. (See Appendix 10 for a summary of how DOC ensures that New Zealanders benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism.)

Key issues and opportunities

Ensuring that New Zealand's world-class, iconic places are a drawcard but also have better protection

198. Visitor numbers are increasing again following COVID-19, with some sites coming under pressure once more, threatening conservation values, the standard of the visitor experience, and the perception of New Zealand’s world-class, iconic natural and cultural attractions.
199. Destination-level work towards addressing visitor pressures is currently underway at Milford Sound/Piopiotahi and the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. This includes the Milford Opportunities Project (MOP), which was established to preserve Milford Sound’s World Heritage status and cultural and conservation values, and to improve the overall visitor experience. As noted in the ‘Regulatory systems and stewardship’ section above, feasibility testing of options to address visitor pressure in Milford is being conducted by an independent Board and Unit and will be completed by 30 June 2024. The MOP Board and Unit reports to a Ministerial Group consisting of you, as lead Minister, and the Ministers of Tourism and Transport.

Developing a sustainable and resilient visitor network that supports great visitor experiences

200. Connecting visitors with natural and cultural heritage on public conservation land and waters is becoming increasingly challenging. DOC has a large and aging visitor asset base, including 1082 visitor buildings and huts, 4 quarantine stores, 15,886 structures, 17 visitor centres, 118 amenity buildings, 151 storage units and 92 offices. Many of these assets were inherited by DOC when it was formed in 1987, and approximately 50% of huts are over 30 years old. While many huts, lodges and cottages were originally built to accommodate staff working in wild animal control and for the forest service, progressively over time these facilities became available as recreation facilities for activities such as tramping. The cost of maintaining these aging assets in a fit-for-purpose state for recreational use is being driven higher by the impacts of extreme weather events: DOC’s storm damage costs have risen to around \$5.5 million this year, compared with \$1.2 million on average in the 4 years previous. Climate change is expected to drive more damaging extreme weather activity in future years.
201. DOC is working on options to make a deliberate shift towards a network that is more sustainable in meeting visitor needs. Without a change in funding model, it will need to be smaller. The Financial Sustainability Review that is currently underway will inform advice to you about strategic decisions concerning the network.

Optimising revenue from DOC’s visitor network

202. Cost recovery is one tool DOC can use to better manage its network. DOC receives revenue and income through facilities such as Great Walks, campgrounds, venues, huts and lodges. Current prices and user charges do not reflect the full operating cost because DOC has previously set prices based off ‘willingness-to-pay’ thresholds to ensure that financial fees do not unduly limit public access.

203. There is an opportunity to take a more strategic approach to charging for the use of DOC's visitor network. Further advice on choices for optimising cost recovery and other charges will be provided to you in the next year.

Modernising the concessions regime

204. As noted in the 'Regulatory systems and stewardship' section above, there are opportunities to improve allocation processes, to introduce effective pricing for concessions, including for tourism operators, and to achieve better environmental and biodiversity outcomes through conditions on concessions (as applied to concessionaires for the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, for example). Getting the settings right for concessions involving large infrastructure and private sector investments is also an area requiring further policy work.

Supporting the tourism industry to reduce its carbon footprint

205. There have been calls from the sector itself for DOC to use its market influence to support sector transformation by setting higher conservation requirements as part of its regulatory system. There is an opportunity for DOC to incentivise or require third-party operators on public conservation land to take steps to reduce their emissions through the regulatory system – for example, through conditions on concessions.

Hunting and fishing

Context

206. DOC has multiple roles that relate to the interests of hunters and fishers, including commercial hunters and tourism operators. Some roles relate to the management of species that are hunted or fished, regardless of where they are located. Other roles relate to the management of land on which those animals are located and recreational and commercial activities on that land.
207. The species of interest to hunters and fishers for which DOC has primary roles are:
- wild animals – deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats, feral pigs
 - sports fish – trout, salmon and some other introduced freshwater fish
 - game birds
 - whitebait.
208. While these animals are valued by hunters and fishers, they can also significantly impact other interests (including biodiversity values), there can be conflicts between the interests of different hunters and fishers, and the hunting or fishing of native species is not supported by everyone. DOC seeks to manage its multiple roles in a way that meets the statutory purposes while also providing for the interests of hunters and fishers. This requires us to take a strategic approach to long-term management and work closely with interest groups.
209. Hunting and fishing management roles also sit with public entities created under legislation DOC administers – fish and game councils established under the Conservation Act, the Game Animal Council established under the Game Animal Council Act 2013, and the NZCA and Conservation Boards created under the Conservation Act.

Key issues and opportunities

210. Although they may make up a relatively small part of the Conservation portfolio in terms of expenditure and statutory decision making, hunting and fishing matters have a high profile and require careful management. There is a high risk of decisions being judicially reviewed.
211. Issues that are likely to arise in the short term are:
- the need for greater control of wild animals to reduce their impacts on native species and habitats

- a desire from some hunters for different approaches to the management of some wild animals
 - the need to improve the way commercial hunting activities are managed, including improvements to the benefits these operations deliver for animal control
 - changes by Fish & Game to improve its governance practice.
212. DOC understands that the following matters are priorities for the incoming administration.
- Progressing herds of special interest under the Game Animal Council Act, and providing a greater role for the Game Animal Council over game animals and hunting promotion.
 - Considering the application of the Biosecurity regime to wild animals.
 - Ensuring the protection of managed access to public land for hunting and fishing.
 - Creating partnerships between DOC and volunteer clubs to maintain and manage backcountry huts.
 - Supporting mahinga kai and Māori food gathering.
 - Developing further national management plans for wild animals.
 - Strengthening the work of Fish & Game, and the representation of hunting and fishing sectors in conservation governance.
 - Reviewing the Wild Animal Recovery Operator and Aerially-Assisted Trophy Hunting systems.
213. DOC will work with the Minister responsible for hunting and fishing to take forward the Government’s ambitions in this area. DOC has prepared a separate briefing that covers this portfolio in more detail.

Stewardship land reclassification

Context

214. ‘Stewardship’ is a category of public conservation land that is effectively a holding status until the values of the land are assessed and an appropriate classification is applied. Around 30% of public conservation land is held in stewardship – over 2.7 million hectares or 9% of New Zealand’s total land area.
215. In May 2021, the previous Government announced its plans to speed up the reclassification of stewardship land by:
- establishing two national panels of independent experts to reclassify land on the West Coast and in the Northern South Island within the Ngāi Tahu takiwā
 - undertaking legislative amendments to streamline the reclassification process.
216. A Ngāi Tahu-appointed mana whenua panel is working alongside the two national panels. An agreement was signed by former Minister Hon Kiritapu Allan and the Ngāi Tahu Kaiwhakahaere (leader) outlining the process through which the two panels would work together. 9(2)(f)(iv)
217. In May 2022, DOC publicly notified 504 draft recommendations for pieces of stewardship land on the West Coast. 9(2)(f)(iv)
218. DOC is continuing to hold discussions with the eight Te Taihuhu (top of the South Island) iwi as to how they would like to engage in this process. 9(2)(f)(iv)

Ruapehu Alpine Lifts

Context

219. Ruapehu Alpine Lifts Limited (RAL) was placed into liquidation by the High Court on 21 June 2023. RAL holds concessions to operate Whakapapa and Tūroa ski fields on Mount Ruapehu in Tongariro National Park. Any new operator will have to apply for a new concession through a process that requires iwi consultation under section 4 of the Conservation Act and public notification.
220. In mid-August 2023, the liquidators of RAL wrote to prospective bidders to request they submit their bid to take over RAL's assets and operations by 31 August 2023. Four bids were received, all of which requested some form of Crown support.
221. A bid was anticipated from Te Ariki Tā Tumu Te Heuheu on behalf of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, but Ngāti Tūwharetoa wrote to Ministers and officials to advise that they would not bid for RAL's assets, do not support a private commercial tender for the purchase of RAL and would prefer to work with the Crown to develop an acceptable transition plan that would operate until the successful conclusion of the Tongariro National Park settlement negotiations.
222. On 2 October 2023, Cabinet agreed to provide funding to support next steps.

Risks

223. Given some of the positions expressed by iwi regarding a commercial operation on Mount Ruapehu, there is a risk of a prolonged concession process, legal challenges and additional costs to the Crown to keep running the ski fields prior to the completion of any transaction.
224. If new operator(s) do not take on the ski fields, costs to remove infrastructure and remediate the land will fall to the Crown. The financial risk to DOC for managing and then removing all RAL infrastructure is significant.
225. In the event of liquidation, DOC as land manager would become the de facto manager of RAL's remaining assets (including buildings and lifts) and associated infrastructure (such as wastewater, volcanic warning systems and electricity), along with security and health and safety obligations.

Future decisions

226. 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
227. The decision to grant any concession will fall to the Minister of Conservation or their delegate in line with the Conservation Act.

Chateau Tongariro (Whakapapa)

Context

228. Chateau Tongariro (the Chateau) is a category 1 Heritage New Zealand listed building in Tongariro National Park that was previously operated as a hotel. The former lessee, KAH New Zealand Limited (KNZ), closed the hotel in February 2023, terminating their lease, and the building has been managed by DOC since March 2023.

229. 9(2)(h) [REDACTED]

Risks

230. Costs for managing the building are significant. Costs in 2022/23 totalled over \$290,000 and costs in 2023/24 expected to exceed \$1 million.
231. DOC is working with Heritage New Zealand, which believes the building is one of the most important historic buildings in New Zealand at present and wants to see the building preserved. This will require significant investment due to the low seismic rating (15% NBS) and the current poor condition of the building.

Future decisions

232. Options will need to be developed (including possibly seeking new owners) for Ministers to make decisions.

Bills in progress

233. Several Bills are well advanced or nearly complete and DOC will seek your direction early as to the most appropriate steps to take, including the option of doing no further work on them.

Bills before Select Committee

Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Bill

234. This Bill aims to contribute to the restoration of the health and mauri of the Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana by establishing new marine protected areas within this region and acknowledging customary rights within seafloor protection areas and high protection areas.

235. The Bill was referred to the Environment Select Committee in August 2023. Public submissions on the Bill closed on 1 November 2023. As the Bill progresses, you will have policy decisions to make concerning the final package of protection measures.

Draft Bills that are close to completion

Conservation Management and Processes (CMAP) Bill

236. The CMAP Bill makes targeted amendments to relieve pressure on the regulatory system by enabling a more efficient, transparent and user-friendly concessions process. The Bill, on which drafting is nearly complete, also includes other minor and technical amendments to create administrative efficiencies and to ensure that legislation is up to date. It also incorporates changes to streamline stewardship land reclassification processes.

Trade In Endangered Species Bill

237. Drafting of a Bill to repeal and replace the Trade In Endangered Species Act is also well advanced. The Bill aims to address inconsistencies, technical issues and unclear definitions that have made it difficult for operational staff to implement the Act clearly and efficiently.

Crown Minerals (Restricting Access for Mining on Conservation Land) Amendment Bill

238. Following the previous Government's decisions to progress the policy of no new mines on conservation land, development of the Crown Minerals (Restricting Access for Mining on Conservation Land) Amendment Bill began in January 2023. The Bill has been substantially drafted.

239. The Bill aims to prevent mining activities that are inconsistent with the biodiversity, cultural, historical and scientific values of public conservation land administered by DOC, in a way that is consistent with rights provided for in Treaty settlements.

240. The Bill would roughly double the area of public conservation land that is protected from most mining activities. The draft Bill includes a carveout for mining that may uncover pounamu. This provision was included in the Bill following targeted engagement with Ngāi Tahu in the first half of 2023.

Immediate priorities and key upcoming decisions

241. This section provides a snapshot of key dates and immediate priorities for the portfolio. DOC will brief you on all these topics when you require further information.

242. The following items are currently on the Conservation policy work programme or are decisions that must be made within your first 100 days. Once you have discussed your priorities for the work programme with DOC, including manifesto commitments, some of these items may change.

Key decisions and priorities

TOPIC	DESCRIPTION	DRIVER	TIMING
Things that need to be done in 2023/early 2024			
Delegations	Several statutory Ministerial responsibilities are routinely delegated to the Director-General, with further delegations from the Director-General to DOC staff (eg decisions on some concessions). There is a delegations framework that has been in operation since 2014 and has been endorsed by successive Ministers of Conservation. You will be asked to confirm delegations to the Director-General.	Statutory responsibilities	December 2023.
Financial Sustainability Review	DOC has been working throughout 2023 to identify strategic choices for Ministers and actions we can take within current funding to shift onto a more sustainable funding path. This review is being delivered in two phases over 2023 and 2024. Phase 1 is complete and took an initial look at DOC's current expenditure, performance and cost drivers, as well as potential options for further exploration in Phase 2.	Financial review	You will be briefed on Phase 1 in December 2023.
Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Bill	The Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Bill was referred to the Environment Select Committee in August 2023. Public submissions on the Bill closed on 1 November 2023. As Minister of Conservation, you may need to facilitate the Committee's consideration of the Bill. DOC will be available to support you through this process.	Select Committee process	Timing dependent on when Environment Select Committee is formed.
[REDACTED]	9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
9(2)(f)(v) [REDACTED]			
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

Key people at DOC

244. Led by Director-General Penny Nelson, the Senior Leadership Team, along with the support team in your office and relevant managers and subject matter experts, will be the main DOC officials you interact with on a week-to-week basis.

245. The Senior Leadership Team's details are as follows:



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Entities in the conservation system

There are over 70 government-associated entities in the Conservation portfolio. You will engage with entities for many reasons, including seeking and receiving advice from them, carrying out your statutory functions, and progressing your conservation priorities. DOC assists you in your role as responsible Minister, including the monitoring and management of the Crown's interests in entities and advising you on making appointments to all but a very few.

DOC will provide you with an early briefing on conservation entities, their accountability requirements, governance, appointment processes and funding.

Government-associated entities

The diagram opposite summarises the entities in the conservation system. These comprise:

- 20 Reserve Boards
- 15 Conservation Boards
- 13 fish and game councils
- 11 advisory committees
- 8 Treaty settlement committees
- the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA)
- the Game Animal Council
- Predator Free 2050 Ltd (PF2050)
- Queen Elizabeth II National Trust.

Monitoring and oversight of conservation entities

DOC monitors and advises you on the performance of three conservation entities. These comprise:

- the Game Animal Council
- Predator Free 2050 Ltd
- Queen Elizabeth II National Trust.

DOC also supports you in appointing members to almost all of the conservation entities. DOC will provide you with further advice on upcoming appointments, engagements and issues relating to conservation entities.

In the 2023/24 financial year, these received around **\$45 million** of Vote Conservation funding. This varies from year to year.



This diagram provides an overview and examples of entities in terms of their public accountability requirements.

While no entities in the Conservation portfolio are defined as ‘Crown entities’, the Public Finance Act 1989 makes some of them subject to reporting and financial obligations under the Crown Entities Act 2004; for example, to provide an Annual Report for you to present to the House of Representatives.

Entities in the conservation system

Entities associated with government in the conservation system are diverse in function and purpose, reflecting why they were established, and the social and political context at the time.



Non-governmental organisations play prominent advocacy, research, funding and delivery roles in conservation. DOC will support you with advice for your various engagements with them.

Government-associated conservation entities

The New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA)

The NZCA / Te Pou Atawhai Taiao O Aotearoa advises the Minister and the Director-General on priorities at a national level. The NZCA is closely involved in conservation management planning and advises on national initiatives. The NZCA is serviced by DOC.

Funding: DOC funds board fees and associated operational costs; DOC also provides secretarial support. The NZCA has no financial delegations.

Predator Free 2050 Limited

This Crown-owned charitable company leverages philanthropy to achieve the predator free 2050 goal. You and the Minister of Finance are the shareholding Ministers, and DOC monitors the company's performance.

2023/24 funding: \$32.23 million via Vote Conservation (including \$27.32 million from Jobs for Nature and the Provincial Growth Fund).

Game Animal Council

The Game Animal Council has a range of functions in relation to game animals, including advising the Minister and raising awareness of the views of the hunting sector. The Council's performance is monitored by DOC.

2023/24 funding: \$800,000 from Vote Conservation.

Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII)

QEII is an independent charitable trust that partners with private landowners to protect sites on their land with covenants. Trust performance is monitored by DOC.

2023/24 funding: \$11.54 million via Vote Conservation (including \$7.27million from Jobs for Nature)

Conservation Boards

There are 15 Conservation Boards representing local communities and iwi in regions around the country. The Boards contribute to the management of conservation areas and the development of local statutory planning.

Funding: DOC funds board fees and associated operational costs; DOC also provides secretarial support. The Boards have no financial delegations.

Fish and Game Council

There is one national and 12 regional fish and game councils. The primary role of the councils is to manage sports fish and game resources for recreational interest.

Funding: The national and regional councils are funded through licence fees.

Ngā Whenua Rāhui Komiti

This committee advises you on two funding programmes designed to protect the natural integrity of Māori land and the preservation of mātauranga Māori.

Funding: Komiti operating costs of \$60,600 from Vote Conservation.

Te Urewera Board

Te Urewera Board speaks as the voice of Te Urewera and provides governance in accordance with the principles of the Te Urewera Act 2014.

Funding: Vote Conservation contributes 50% of the Board's operational budget: \$153,862 in 2023/24.

The Milford Opportunities Project (MOP) Board

The MOP Board is a Ministerial advisory committee, which advises joint Ministers on the feasibility of the Milford Opportunities Project. Unlike all other government-associated entities listed here, it is not established under statute.

Funding: \$14.068 million funded from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) COVID-19 Recovery fund, from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2024.

Nature Heritage Fund Committee

This Committee makes recommendations to you for funding the protection of indigenous ecosystems on private land through either direct purchase or covenanting.

Other examples of government-associated entities

- Whakapaukorero, and Te Awa a Te Atua Joint Advisory Committee
- Taupō-nui-a-Tia Management Board
- Hauraki Gulf Forum (DOC funds a proportionate part of administrative and servicing costs)
- Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee
- Te Tapatoru ā Toi Joint Management Committee
- Kaikōura Marine Guardians
- Guardians of Lakes Manapouri, Monowai and Te Anau

Examples of non-governmental organisations active in conservation

Treaty partners

- Iwi leaders' group
- Te Ohu Kaimoana
- Post-settlement governance entities (PSGEs)
- Hapū, iwi

Recreation stakeholders

- Mountain Safety Council, New Zealand Alpine Club, Backcountry Trust and Federated Mountain Clubs
- Recreation Aotearoa – Te Whai Oranga
- New Zealand Deerstalkers Association
- Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa Outdoor Access Commission
- Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trails

Environmental stakeholders

- Forest and Bird
- Greenpeace
- World Wildlife Foundation (WWF)
- Predator Free 2050 Trust
- Environmental Defence Society
- Save the Kiwi
- Zero Invasive Predators
- Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research
- International Union for Conservation of Nature
- Jane Goodall Institute New Zealand
- Environment Law Initiative
- NEXT Foundation

Industry stakeholders

- National Business Partners (eg Fonterra, Air New Zealand, Genesis, Fulton Hogan, Dulux and Meridian)
- Sustainable Business Network
- Federated Farmers
- Tourism Industry Aotearoa
- NZ Māori Tourism – He Toa Takitini
- Sustainable Business Council and BusinessNZ
- Trojan Holdings
- RealNZ
- Ngāi Tahu Tourism
- OSPRI
- Seafood NZ
- Straterra
- Minerals West Coast
- Aotearoa Circle

Conservation's regional footprint

DOC manages natural, recreational and cultural assets around the country

We have stewardship responsibility for:

Public conservation land, which covers 8.7 million hectares – nearly a third of New Zealand's land area; this includes 13 national parks, 36 conservation parks and hundreds of reserves

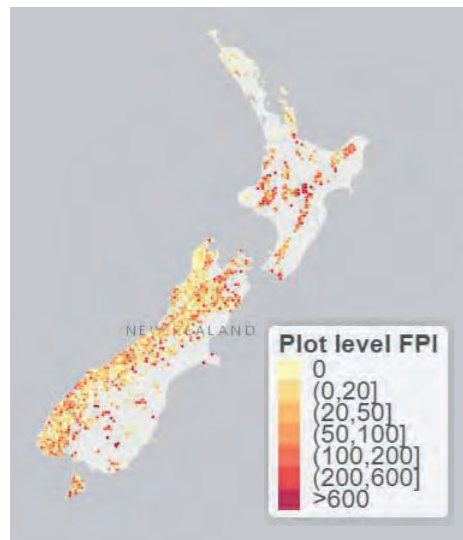
- DOC is responsible for around 220 larger offshore islands, and hundreds of smaller islands and rock stacks. The islands are spread over 2800 km – from the almost subtropical Kermadec Islands to the subantarctic Campbell Island group.
- Around 30% of public conservation land is held in stewardship. Stewardship land was allocated to DOC when it was formed in 1987 and is a category of public conservation land that is effectively a holding status until its values can be assessed and an appropriate classification applied.
- Since DOC was established, an additional 40,000 hectares of stewardship land has come under DOC management through processes such as tenure review.

Public conservation waters, including 44 marine reserves, 7 marine mammal sanctuaries, a whale sanctuary and a seal sanctuary. These total more than 5 million hectares.

Heritage sites on public conservation land. DOC manages the largest heritage portfolio in the country – about 600 archaeological and/or historic sites, including iconic sites such as Cape Reinga/Te Rerenga Wairua and the Otago Rail Trail.

DOC's Monitoring and Reporting System

DOC's Monitoring and Reporting System provides timely, robust information on the state of components of ecological integrity and visitation across public conservation land.



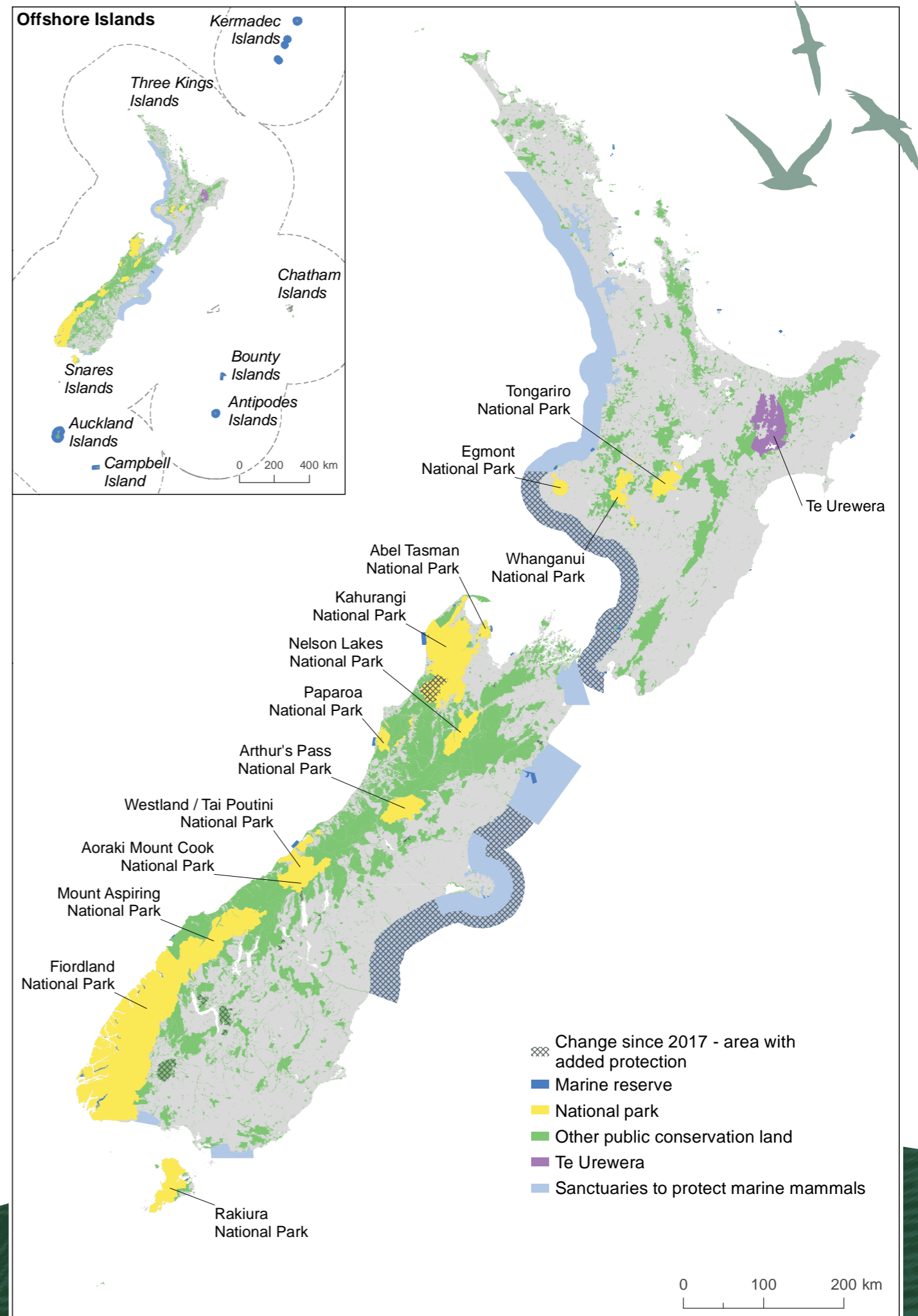
Average observed ungulate faecal pellet indices (FPIs) at monitoring plots; most recent data

For example, a large number of sites are monitored for deer and goats by calculating a faecal pellet index, which helps estimate their relative abundance. DOC's monitoring showed that the index nearly doubled between 2013 and 2022.

The National Monitoring and Reporting System currently collects information on:

- native mammals – pekapeka/bats
- introduced mammals – deer, goats, pigs, rabbits, hares, possums
- native birds
- both native and exotic plants.

DOC also undertakes monitoring at a local or ecosystem/species specific level for a wide variety of work programmes. DOC is working with the Ministry for the Environment and regional councils to improve the consistency and coverage of biodiversity reporting.



DOC's operational role

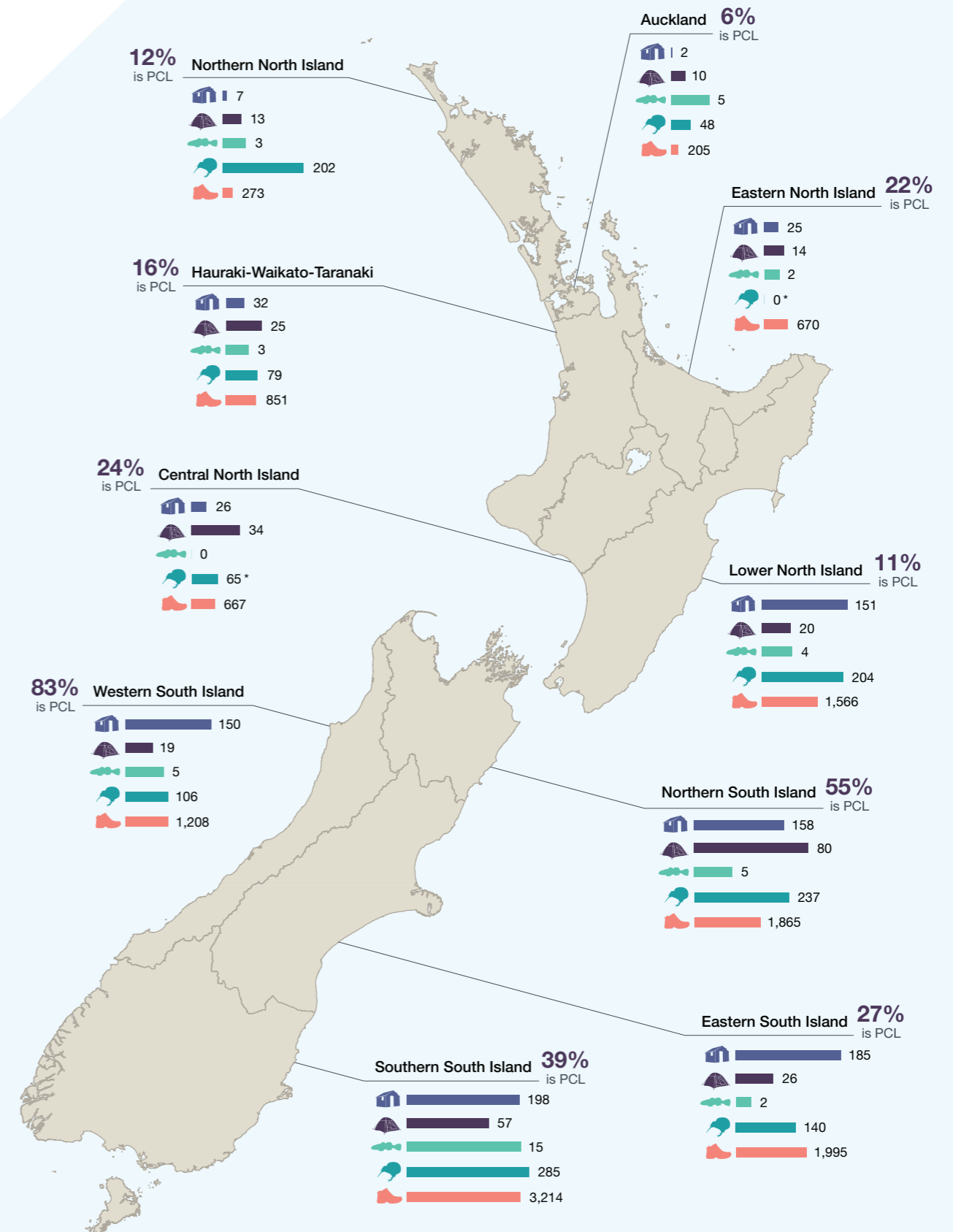
Making a difference for nature

New Zealand's native species and ecosystems are vulnerable to many threats and must be managed to ensure that they are not at risk of extinction.

- DOC uses a range of strategies and tools to manage threatened species. For example, recovery groups have been established for some species that are highly threatened and have complex management needs. DOC has 19 active recovery groups covering 139 threatened species. Examples include the hoiho/yellow-eyed penguin, five species of kiwi and one species of tuatara.
- In 2022, DOC undertook predator control across 516,297 hectares at 18 sites throughout the country, giving protection for many native species, including the tūturiwhatu/southern New Zealand dotterel, takahē, kea, kiwi, whio/blue duck, kākā, long- and short-tailed bats, *Powelliphanta* snails, kākārīki karaka/orange-fronted parakeet, and Archey's and Hochstetter's frogs.
- During 2022/23, DOC delivered deer management over 229,533 hectares (comprising 181,821 hectares of core DOC work and an additional 47,712 hectares enabled by Budget 2022 funding). DOC also delivered goat control over 1,228,000 hectares (1,031,715 hectares of core work and an additional 196,285 hectares through Budget 2022). For example, the Taranaki Mounga project involved a collaboration with DOC, iwi and the community to fully eradicate goats, successfully restoring the forest understorey.
- During 2022/23, DOC treated 100,613 hectares of land for weeds. Invasive weeds can destroy native plant communities, transform natural landscapes, provide hiding places for pest animals and carry diseases.
- Intensive management of kākākō led to a bumper breeding season in 2022, with kākākō numbers increasing from 197 to 248.
- In 2023, DOC reintroduced 73 kākārīki karaka, a taonga species for Ngāi Tahu, to Arthur's Pass National Park.
- A National Pest Management Plan for the protection of kauri from kauri disease came into effect on 2 August 2022. The Plan sets out mechanisms to increase protection for kauri, as well as 10 rules to help protect kauri from the pathogen that causes the disease.

Connecting people with nature

- 47,380 New Zealanders and international visitors went on a Great Walk – an 18% increase from summer 2021/22.
- International visitors returned to nearly 65% of pre-COVID-19 summer arrivals; 50% of them visited national parks, and 49% went to beaches.
- 9 out of 10 international visitors reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their visit.

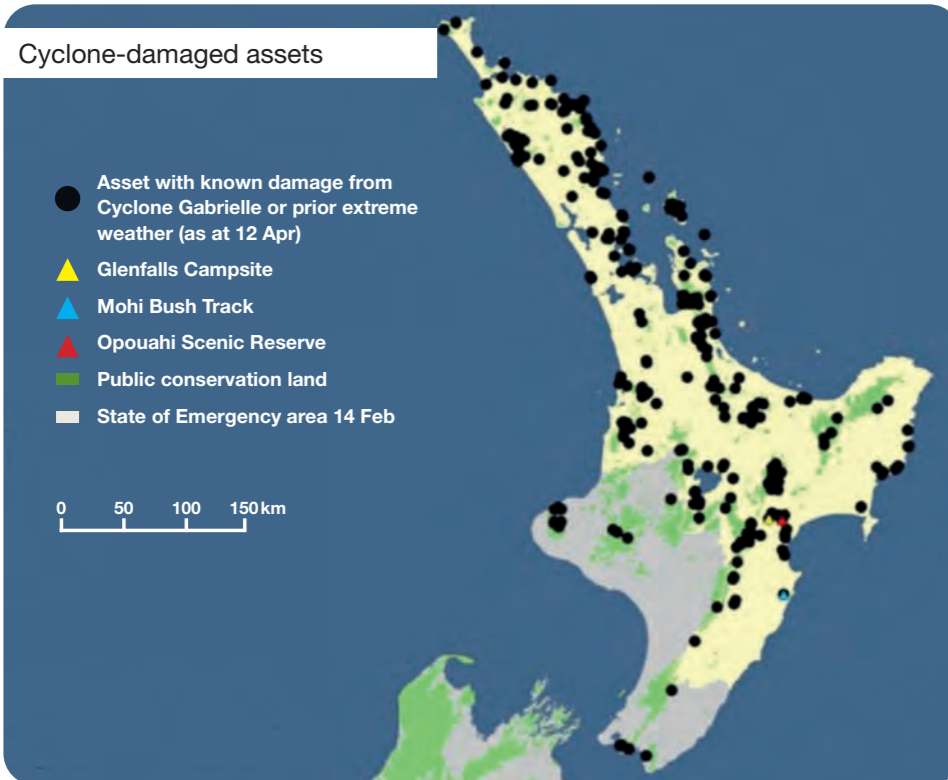


* Eastern North Island was previously a part of Central North Island and has since been reclassified. Numbers for this area are reflected in the Central North Island data.

KEY: Open huts, Open campsites, Marine reserves, Planned work for threatened or at risk species, Open tracks (km)
PCL: public conservation land

Cyclone Recovery Taskforce update

Impact analysis



157 sites and species directly impacted and a further 90 sites and species where chronic impacts are likely.



17 campgrounds across Northland, Auckland, Coromandel, and Hawke's Bay affected by flooding, slips, tree fall and damage to access.



More than 240 tracks damaged across the North Island, mostly affected by slips and tree fall.



28 roads damaged, including many that provide access to backcountry areas, as well as biodiversity sites.



6 accommodation facilities damaged across both public huts and staff accommodation.



More than 28 structures damaged, including bridges, stairs, boardwalks and wharves on offshore islands.

Current situation

- Since the cyclone, DOC has **re-opened 80%** of sites closed initially, such as:
 - Huka Falls track in Taupō
 - Hakarimata Walkway in the Waikato
 - Several tracks in the Kauaeranga valley in Hauraki.
- **20% of sites closed following the cyclone remain closed;** for example:
 - Cape Reinga, Northland (campsites, tracks, beach access)
 - Cathedral Cove Walk, Coromandel
 - Uretiti Beach Campsite, Northland
 - Pakihi Track, East Coast (closed to mountain bikers)
 - Karangahake Gorge, Bay of Plenty.

Heritage

The distribution and density of recorded archaeological sites* impacted by Cyclone Gabrielle.



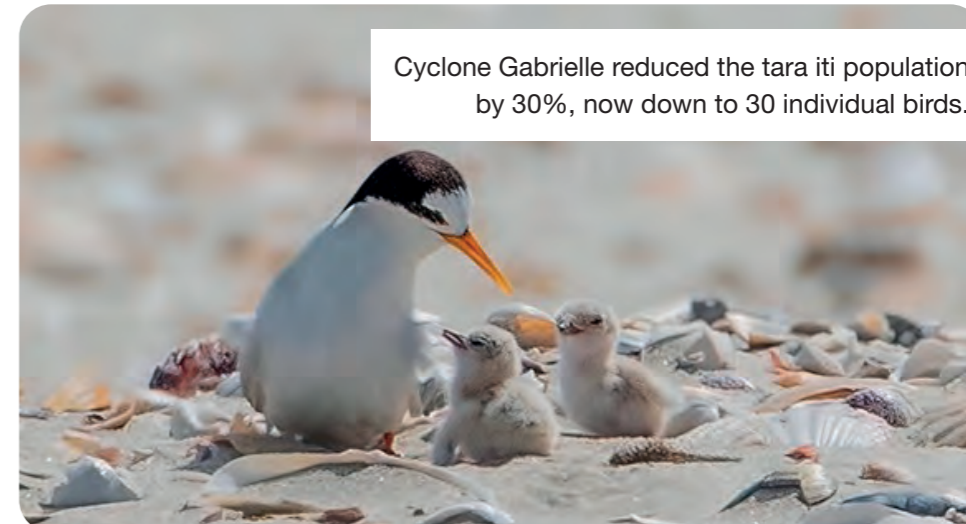
* Not only public conservation land

Visitor safety



180 landslides were identified at Cathedral Cove, including rockfall, landslide and creep events.

Biodiversity



Cyclone Gabrielle reduced the tara iti population by 30%, now down to 30 individual birds.

What is at risk?

- Higher likelihood of species extinction at **96 locations**.
- Elevated potential for intrusion at **30 sites**.
- Increased possibility of ecosystem disruption at **17 sites**.

Costs

- Until recently, DOC's 10-year average spend on visitor assets for reactive events was around **\$3 million** per year. The response to the southern South Island flooding event in 2020 took **\$13 million** and 4 years, and Cyclone Dovi in 2022 affected two regions at a cost of **\$12 million** to repair visitor infrastructure.
- Following Cyclone Gabrielle, the Cyclone Recovery Taskforce has spent or allocated all of the **\$12.6 million** appropriated in Budget 2023 that is available to December 2023. **9(2)(i)(iv)**
 [Redacted] Around 80% of assets damaged have now been fixed, much of which was completed with core funding.
- Further work is required to detail costs and choices for each of the areas of visitor assets, biodiversity and cultural heritage that were damaged by 2023 weather events, and DOC's ability to meet these

Appendix 4: Overview of international agreements

AGREEMENT	PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE OF AGREEMENT
International agreements where DOC is the LEAD AGENCY	
Conservation of natural and/or cultural heritage is the main priority in these agreements; DOC is responsible for leading the negotiation, implementing conservation outcomes, and coordinating with other government agencies and stakeholders.	
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)	Regulates trade in endangered species that are listed in three appendices, which identify species facing varying degrees of threat from trade.
World Heritage Convention (WHC)	Protects the world's natural and cultural heritage that is of such universal value that its conservation is of global interest.
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention)	Provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources, including through the designation of suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance.
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals	Promotes cooperation on the conservation of migratory species (terrestrial, marine and avian) over their entire geographic ranges.
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	Seeks to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature, especially biological diversity and, where resources are used, to ensure that this occurs in a wise and equitable manner.
Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)	Seeks to conserve albatrosses and petrels by coordinating international activities to mitigate threats to their populations.
East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)	Seeks to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)	Open to all members of the United Nations (UN), members are committed to building IPBES as the leading intergovernmental body for assessing the state of the planet's biodiversity, its ecosystems and the essential services they provide to society.
International agreements where DOC is a CONTRIBUTING AGENCY	
The conservation of natural and/or cultural heritage is an important priority in these agreements, but New Zealand may have broader interests at stake; DOC contributes, via the lead agency (generally MFAT or MPI), to New Zealand's input into these agreements, including through the provision of technical advice.	
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	This UN Convention promotes the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of any benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.
International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (IWC)	The IWC Convention (negotiated in the 1930s and 40s when commercial whaling was still active) has mixed objectives: seeks to conserve whales from over-exploitation, but also provides for the orderly development of the whaling industry.
The Antarctic Treaty and its Protocol on Environmental Protection	The Treaty established Antarctica as a place used for peaceful purposes only; ensures freedom for scientific investigation and international cooperation to achieve this, and sets aside disputes over territorial claims. The protocol promotes protection of the Antarctic environment.
Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)	Part of the Antarctic Treaty System, the CCAMLR provides the legal framework for conserving marine living resources within the Southern Ocean around Antarctica.
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)	Seeks to promote sustainable resource management and ensure the sound development of natural resources in the Pacific.
Regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) and related conventions	New Zealand is party to RFMOs, including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) and the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT).
Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement ('High Seas Treaty')	A new UN Treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in these areas beyond national jurisdiction (not yet in force).
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – parent agreement to Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol	The objective of all three agreements under the UNFCCC is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system, in a timeframe that allows ecosystems to adapt naturally and enables sustainable development.

Appendix 5: Our legislation

Table 1: Legislation administered by DOC and other legislation that includes DOC functions

LEGISLATION ADMINISTERED BY DOC	OTHER ACTS UNDER WHICH DOC HAS FUNCTIONS
Canterbury Provincial Buildings Vesting Act 1928	Treaty of Waitangi Settlement Acts (an Act for each settlement concluded)
Conservation Act 1987	Biosecurity Act 1993
Freedom Camping Act 2011	Crown Forest Assets Act 1989
Harbour Boards Dry Land Endowment Revesting Act 1991	Crown Minerals Act 1991
Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000	Crown Pastoral Land Act 1998
Kaikōura (Te Tai o Marokura) Marine Management Act 2014	Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017
Kapiti Island Public Reserve Act 1897	Fisheries Act 1996
Lake Wanaka Preservation Act 1973	Forests Act 1949
Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978	Land Act 1948
Marine Reserves Act 1971	Local Government Act 1974
Mount Egmont Vesting Act 1978	Local Government Act 2002
National Parks Act 1980	Maori Land Amendment and Maori Land Claims Adjustment Act 1926
Native Plants Protection Act 1934	Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011
Ngāi Tahu (Tūtaepatu Lagoon Vesting) Act 1998	Natural and Built Environment Act 2023
Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Act 1977	Public Works Act 1981
Queenstown Reserves Vesting and Empowering Act 1971	Resource Management Act 1991
Reserves Act 1977	
Stewart Island Reserves Empowering Act 1976	
Subantarctic Islands Marine Reserves Act 2014	
Sugar Loaf Islands Marine Protected Area Act 1991	
Trade in Endangered Species Act 1989	
Tutae-Ka-Wetoweto Forest Act 2001	
Waitangi Endowment Act 1932–33	
Waitangi National Trust Board Act 1932	
Waitutu Block Settlement Act 1997	
Wild Animal Control Act 1977	
Wildlife Act 1953	

Papatūānuku thrives

Toitū te marae a Tāne-Mahuta, Toitū te marae a Tangaroa, Toitū te tangata – If the land is well and the sea is well, the people will thrive

We are an honourable Treaty partner

In achieving our purpose and outcomes, we give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi by actively partnering with whānau, hapū and iwi to protect and sustain our shared natural and cultural heritage

Our outcomes

Ecosystems and species across Aotearoa are thriving from mountain to sea

- A full range of ecosystems on land, water and sea are protected and enhanced
- Indigenous species are not threatened with human-induced extinction
- Landscapes, ecosystems and species are resilient to climate risk

Public conservation land and waters are maintained and improved for future generations

- Conservation land and waters benefit from fewer pests and reduced pressures
- We understand whānau, hapū and iwi priorities
- Cultural heritage is managed and protected
- Our actions support Aotearoa to mitigate and adapt to climate change

Connection with nature and cultural heritage enriches people's lives

- The health and wellbeing of whānau, hapū, iwi and communities are linked to the health of nature
- From the city to the wilderness, people connect with nature and our cultural heritage
- New Zealanders care for and take action to preserve our special places and species
- A range of sustainable recreational experiences encourage New Zealanders to enjoy the outdoors

DOC is a great organisation

- We work as one to deliver on our strategy
- Our people thrive and grow
- We have regard to whānau, hapū and iwi priorities in our decision making
- We have the capability to be an honourable Treaty partner
- Mātauranga Māori informs all our work
- We are trusted and known as being good to work with
- We are excellent at managing finances and our assets
- We keep our people and visitors safe

Our principles

Nature-centred

Treaty-anchored

Intergenerational

Climate-focused

Impactful

Kaimahi-centred

Our roles

Protecting land, species, ecosystems and cultural heritage for conservation purposes

Managing threats and adverse impacts

Being a voice for conservation

Connecting people to nature

The conservation regulatory system



Overview

The conservation regulatory system regulates what individuals, businesses and other organisations can do on public conservation land and waters and how they interact with flora and fauna across the country.

It supports better conservation outcomes through planning, education and enforcement. Many of DOC's day-to-day interactions with the public are through the regulatory system.

27 Acts | **24** regulations and bylaws | **60** notices and orders | **79** Treaty settlements

Function A: Statutory management planning

The planning system determines what can and cannot be done on public conservation land and waters by guiding regulatory decision making and setting rules for DOC's operational delivery.

2 general policies set national-level direction and policies.

16 conservation management strategies (CMSs) set regional level objectives

12 national park management plans (NPMPs)

17 conservation management plans

Overdue planning documents are a key issue

27 are due for review (incl. 11 of 12 NPMPs)

10 have been due for review for 10+ years

8 are due for development as part of Treaty settlements

Overdue planning documents may constrain acceptable economic uses (eg growing demand for more bike tracks), leave Treaty settlement obligations unfulfilled and create inconsistencies between levels of the planning system.

Stakeholders have called for change, and an independent review of the planning system has recently been delivered.

There are opportunities to do things differently through reducing the number of documents, streamlining their content and creating common features across documents.

The framework can be modernised and simplified within the current framework, but significant reform may require legislative change.

Function B: Marine reserves

The Marine Reserves Act 1971 enables the setting up and management of marine reserves, which provide the highest level of marine protection in New Zealand.

44 marine reserves are managed by DOC, covering **9.5%** of New Zealand's territorial waters and **0.4%** of all New Zealand's waters.

Protection planning processes have been lengthy and contentious (sometimes as long as 10 years). Reforming marine protected areas legislation could provide for more flexible tools, and less contentious and more efficient processes.

Marine protection processes underway

Southeast Marine Protection (SEMP)

- In October 2023, the Government approved the creation of six new reserves along the southeast coast of the South Island under the Marine Reserves Act 1971.
- Next steps: Gazettal and Order in Council.*

Proposal: Marine reserve for Waiheke

- An application has been received for a new marine reserve at Waiheke under the Marine Reserves Act 1971.
- Next steps: DOC is preparing Ministerial advice on the application.*

Hauraki Gulf Marine Protection

- A novel approach is being taken to providing protection using bespoke legislation due to limitations of the Marine Reserves Act 1971.
- The Bill creates **19** new protection areas in the Hauraki Gulf, including extensions to two existing marine reserves
- Next steps: Bill currently with Select Committee.*

Function C: Trade in endangered species

Permits and certificates are required to trade in endangered species managed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Trade in Endangered Species Act 1989.

40,900 species covered by CITES

175 permits issued per year (all within 20 working days)

3668 surrenders issues and **265** seizures made by CITES officers in 2022/23

Function D: Monitoring and compliance

Across New Zealand, DOC staff undertake planned and proactive monitoring of activities, including whitebait compliance patrols, concessionaire inspections, marine reserve compliance, and the protection of wildlife, flora and fauna.

DOC staff have the power to issue fines and infringement notices, stop vehicles and boats, and search and seize items. If a compliance issue is serious, DOC can also bring legal proceedings and seek convictions.

National compliance activity in 2022/23

- 10** offences awaiting prosecution
- 128** warning letters sent
- 193** infringement notices issued

Key issue: **70%** of the national compliance team is currently funded by time-limited International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy funding, which is due to expire in June 2024.

Function E: Resource management processes

Under the Conservation Act 1987, DOC has a role in protecting conservation values by engaging in resource management planning and consenting processes.

The Minister of Conservation is also responsible for the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) and the approval of regional coastal plans developed by regional councils.

DOC is currently involved in **32** plans and **43** consent processes. Another **64** Resource Management Act processes are awaiting further engagement. There is high demand for DOC's involvement in these processes.

These are resource-intensive and public processes, requiring DOC to prioritise based on the potential impacts on the priority conservation values outlined in our strategy, the values in the NZCPS or the effects on our own land management.

Over time, DOC expects the highest value to come from involvement in planning processes over specific consents.

Function F: Statutory land management processes

Various statutory processes manage the control and status of public conservation land. These include land acquisitions, exchanges, covenants and classification (such as reclassifying stewardship land).

- 600** processes completed in 2022/23

Function G: Permissions

DOC's permissions system regulates the way in which people can interact with public conservation land and waters, and protected species through a range of permits, leases and other authorisations.

The range of permissions includes concessions, wildlife permits, mining authorisations, marine reserve permits, marine mammal permits, and research and collection permits.

The 'Permission types and processing' information on the next page provides an overview of these and key processing metrics.

Opportunities to improve the regulatory system

Regulatory processes are currently an issue for many stakeholders. Key issues include lengthy and unclear processes, some of which stem from legal ambiguities in the current framework.

There are opportunities in the regulatory system to:

- reduce ambiguity and churn by taking a more proactive and standardised approach to processing and allocating concessions
- make processes more user-friendly and transparent through communicating with users more and adopting new technologies
- reduce ambiguity and processing times by developing clearer policy and guidance on Treaty obligations in regulatory processes, including rights and interests regarding concessions
- increase cost recovery and update pricing frameworks for concessions to ensure that they reflect current market rates
- develop ways to reduce and better manage Crown risk and liabilities relating to significant third-party infrastructure on public conservation land
- develop commercially sound allocation mechanisms and settings that provide more clarity and certainty for large investments
- improve the amount of monitoring across permissions and the wider regulatory system to improve compliance.

Concessions types

Concessions regulate most economic activities on public conservation land and waters and are the permission type that DOC receives the most applications for.

Type	Examples	Term
Permit (no rights over land)	Guiding, filming, aircraft landings, research	Up to 10 years
Licence (non-exclusive rights over land)	Grazing, beekeeping, telecommunications infrastructure	Up to 30 years (or 60 years in exceptional circumstances)
Lease (exclusive rights over land)	Accommodation facilities, boat sheds	
Easement (access)	Access, utilities through public conservation land	

Processing complex concessions is a major issue

Some concession applications are taking two or more years to process. At 30 September 2023, **13%** of the concession applications awaiting a decision were received in 2020 or earlier, and a further **6%** were received in 2021. This is a major concern for key stakeholders and DOC.

The applications taking the longest are often for the most economically significant opportunities. Decision making is being prolonged by dated systems and an absence of clear policy and processes around allocations, renewals and managing third-party infrastructure.

Tackling these prolonged processes requires:

- addressing ambiguity and managing risk through system-level policy settings and plans
- modernising processes and IT systems to create efficiencies and redirect resourcing to more complex issues.

Concessions revenue and fees

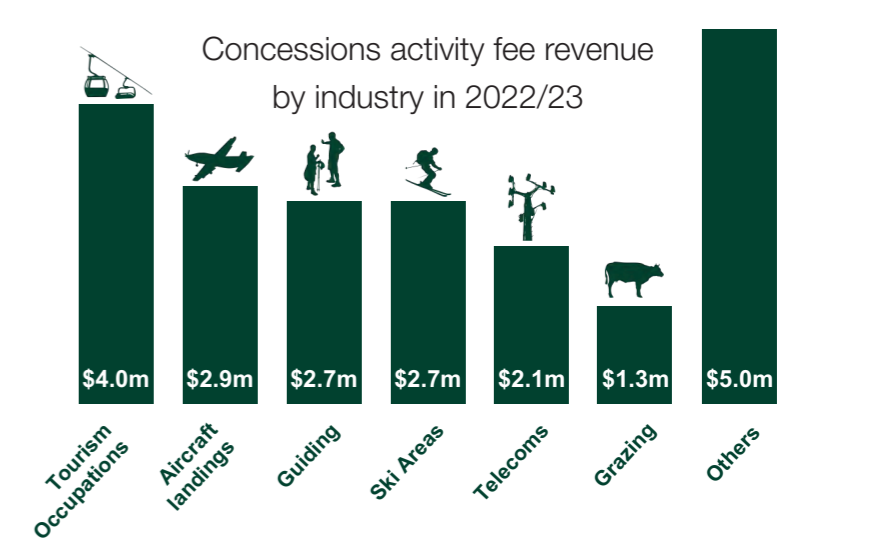
Concession activity fees

The Conservation Act 1987 provides the Crown with the ability to set rents and royalties for the use of public conservation land at the market value.

In the 2022/23 financial year, concession activity fees contributed **\$20.6 million** in Crown funding to conservation.

Note: Commercially sensitive

9(2)(b)(ii)	



Cost recovery fees

DOC also charges for the costs of processing concession applications, as well as managing and monitoring active concessions.

Cost recovery settings are being reviewed.

Spotlight on easements fees and charges

Often farmers and infrastructure providers require an easement over public conservation land.

Stakeholders have raised concerns over the fees and charges for these easements. DOC has agreed to obtain updated external advice on this issue.

Case study: Cape Sanctuary

DOC commissioned a report by independent reviewer David Shanks to consider complaints made about kiwi handling practices and deaths at Cape Sanctuary in 2016/17. The review identified past mistakes and current deficiencies around how DOC authorises and monitors Wildlife Act authorities.

The report made 16 recommendations to improve DOC's compliance monitoring and internal assurance processes. DOC accepts the recommendations and has identified a suite of work to address them.



Permission types and processing (as at 30 September 2023)

Overview

There is currently a backlog of applications for permissions awaiting a decision. Across most permission types, the number of applications awaiting a decision has increased since this time last year.

 **7365** active permissions

Processing applications

 **1141** awaiting a decision  **26%** from 30 September 2022

 **656** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **162** completed per month (12-month average)

 **182** received per month (12-month average)

DOC has a plan to manage the backlog of applications awaiting a decision and help avoid this occurring in the future. This involves:

- lifting processing capability
- establishing a new practices and guidance
- developing standard terms and conditions for specific activities where possible
- developing new workflow software to replace the current system, which relies largely on manual processing and data management
- setting targets and monitoring performance.

Concessions – Conservation Act 1987

Permits, licenses, leases and easements are required for the use of public conservation lands and waters (incl. businesses).

 **4344** active concessions

Processing applications

 **688** awaiting a decision  **32%** from 30 September 2022

 **347** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **104** completed per month (12-month average)

 **118** received per month (12-month average)

 **115 working days** average processing time

One-off activity type concessions (eg film permits)

50% within 1 month | **80%** within 1.5 months

Ongoing concessions (eg leases)

50% within 4.5 months | **80%** within 10.5 months

Wildlife permits – Wildlife Act 1953

Permits are required to interact with wildlife (to catch, hold, release or kill).

 **869** native species covered by the Act

 **1958** active wildlife permits

Processing applications

 **218** awaiting a decision  **45%** from 30 September 2022

 **167** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **26** completed per month (12-month average)

 **32** received per month (12-month average)

 **123 working days** average processing time

50% within 4 months | **80%** within 8 months

Marine mammal permits – Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978

Permits are required to undertake commercial activities involving marine mammals, or to take, hold, import or export marine mammals.

 **202** active marine mammal permits

Processing applications

 **43** awaiting a decision  **43%** from 30 September 2022

 **27** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **5** completed per month (12-month average)

 **6** received per month (12-month average)

 **101 working days** average processing time

Marine reserve permits – Marine Reserves Act 1971

Permits are required to undertake activities in marine reserves.

 **26** active marine reserve permits

Processing applications

 **3** awaiting a decision  **73%** from 30 September 2022

 **2** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **1** completed per month (12-month average)

 **1** received per month (12-month average)

 **149 working days** average processing time

Research and collection permits – Conservation Act 1987

Permits are required to collect samples (eg soil, plants, rocks, invertebrates) or undertake research on public conservation land.

 **370** active research and collection permits

Processing applications

 **65** awaiting a decision  **21%** from 30 September 2022

 **51** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **13** completed per month (12-month average)

 **12** received per month (12-month average)

 **84 working days** average processing time

50% within 4 months | **80%** within 7 months

Mining authorisations – Crown Minerals Act 1991

Authorisations are required for access to undertake mining on public conservation land. Decisions for large-scale mining activities are usually made jointly with the Minister of Energy and Resources.

 **91** active mining permissions

Processing applications

 **45** awaiting a decision  **22%** from 30 September 2022

 **36** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **5** completed per month (12-month average)

 **6** received per month (12-month average)

 **102 working days** average processing time

Other permissions – various Acts

Other permissions include fish passage permits, pest control permits entry permits, and Sounds Foreshore permissions.

 **374** other active permissions

Processing applications

 **79** awaiting a decision  **13%** from 30 September 2022

 **26** awaiting a decision for more than 4 months

 **7** completed per month (12-month average)

 **8** received per month (12-month average)

 **129 working days** average processing time

Ensuring that New Zealanders benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism

We provide facilities in every corner of New Zealand

Conservation is big business in New Zealand – one-third of the country is set aside as national parks or other conservation areas, and there are millions of people who visit and enjoy these special places.

Our network

-  **967** huts
-  **12** Tohu Whenua
-  **10** Great Walks
-  **15,000 km** of tracks
-  **339** campgrounds
-  **17** visitor centres

Accessibility

- **80%** of public conservation land is open for hunting
- In 2022, **45%** of DOC-managed places were experiencing visitor growth
- **50%** of international visitors visit a national park each year
- **80%** of New Zealanders visit a protected natural area each year

Ensuring that DOC gets the best return from investment

DOC has to balance what we provide.

Internal research shows that for the same level of investment, DOC can construct **1 Great Walk** or **29 short walks/day hikes**.



Short walks service the needs of New Zealanders more, while a **Great Walk** encourages/supports international tourism.

Case study: Local communities rely on what we provide

DOC plays a pivotal part in regional economies, as shown when the Heaphy Great Walk was damaged during Cyclone Dovi in February 2022. The closure of the Great Walk had significant impacts on the local economy, accommodation providers and hospitality businesses. The repairs to the Great Walk required significant reinvestment by DOC.



\$1.8 million bridge replacement costs



\$6 million lost in regional gross domestic product (GDP)



75% drop in visitor numbers



90% drop in turnover for some businesses

DOC is vital for the national and regional economies



We enable 1000 tourism businesses to operate on public conservation land and waters.



We enable businesses to provide a range of activities, such as skiing, boating, filming and guiding.



In 2023, tourism-related concessions accounted for approximately **\$13.3 million** of Crown concession revenue.



The economic value of the tourism sector on public conservation land is about **\$4.1 billion**

It is becoming harder to provide our services

Climate change is forcing DOC to change how we manage our assets

- 300 of DOC's coastal assets are at risk due to rising sea levels.
- The average storm damage budget has risen to around **\$5.5 million** compared with **\$1.2 million** in the 4 years previous.
- Cyclone Hale and Cyclone Gabrielle caused an estimated loss of **\$3.0 million** in regional tourism expenditure and **\$1.6 million** in tourism GDP due to cancelled DOC accommodation bookings.

Our assets are costing us more to maintain and replace

- Each year, only **50%** of DOC's capital expenditure can be used to keep the visitor network functioning and in its current state.
- **9(2)(f)(iv)**
- Our assets have a book value of **\$278 million** but replacement costs are double this with rising material costs and inflation.
- Over **60%** of our visitor asset base currently have no net book value on our balance sheet. The extent of future investment required will provide an opportunity to reshape the visitor network to align and support future needs. In the interim, with such a large and aging asset base, we have to remain constantly vigilant to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and appropriately safe for visitors.

Visitor demand is shifting

- New Zealanders want shorter experiences closer to where they live.
- International visitor numbers are returning to pre-COVID 19 numbers more quickly than expected.

We are changing our visitor network to adjust to the shifting context by ...

Developing a future visitor network that connects more visitors to nature

- This programme of work will develop, implement and sustain a strategically aligned and financially sustainable visitor network.
- This will ensure more direct focus on setting investment direction, with clear must-have priorities and active management of assets that do not meet the standards.

Supporting communities to thrive

- We are working at key destinations such as Tongariro and Milford Sound/Piopiotahi.
- We are working regionally and with stakeholders to ensure that communities benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism, while improving both places and experiences.





 Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



