

01 June 2023

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, received on 04 May 2023. You described the following context for the questions:

Newsroom reports that DOC is considering closures and divestments as unsustainable costs mean it's struggling with a backlog of work on ageing and neglected huts, tracks, and structures. Documents released to Newsroom under the Official Information Act confirm what is already evident on the West Coast: that walking and biking tracks are neglected, overgrown and hazardous, the story says.

Firstly, some context about DOC's work across the country.

DOC administers New Zealand's largest recreation network including more than 14,000km of tracks, 326 campsites, approximately 950 backcountry huts and numerous heritage sites across one third of the country. Budget 2022 provided DOC with new funding of \$60 million over four years for visitor asset management. This work is underway and we regularly review our work programmes and re-examine our priorities.

DOC has a large and ageing visitor asset base and we are methodically working through our asset management programme. Some tough decisions may need to be made on which assets we replace and maintain, recognising the importance to New Zealanders of these assets in connecting people with our great outdoors. As yet no decisions have been made on what our future recreation network will look like. However, any decisions will include discussions with iwi and local communities including tourism operators.

Cyclone Gabrielle and other extreme weather events, such as Cyclones Dovey, Gita, Fehi and Ita, demonstrate the real impact of climate change on tracks and other visitor facilities, including the ongoing challenge to fund repairs. Any investment decisions need to include weather resilience and fit within DOC's wider asset management programme.

Please find the Department's responses to your specific questions below.

1. *Which DOC-administered West Coast walking and biking tracks fit into the category above?*

DOC does not use the terms 'neglected, overgrown or hazardous' when categorising assets. Our categories are: Walk, Track, Route, and either 'to standard' or 'not to standard'. There are 330 walks, tracks, and routes across the West Coast. Of these 18 are 'closed', one is 'part closed' and nine are categorised as 'non-maintained'. The reasons for a track being closed, part-closed, or non-maintained are identified in Attachment A at the end of this document.

2. *What does DOC plan to do about them and when? What is the estimated cost of the work required to bring them up to scratch?*

As mentioned earlier in this response DOC is examining what part of its visitor experiences can be managed into the future while meeting visitor expectations and needs, protecting natural and cultural heritage values, and remaining within our funding levels. This programme will improve our planning process and response to the impact of change in climate and visitor needs.

DOC's West Coast staff will continue with planned asset maintenance and repair work within the current baseline budget. In addition, the region will deliver reactive repairs and maintenance on a case-by-case basis. We prioritise our work programme by the number of visitors attracted to a site, site-based natural hazards and risk assessments, and our work plan and schedule. The cost of this across the Visitor and Heritage functions for the West Coast in 22/23 is \$5,364,104, to be delivered through 14,052 work hours. This planned work is similar to previous years, and can be delivered through the resources available.

3. *Which West Coast huts are suffering from neglect, what does DOC plan to do about them and when? What is the estimated cost for upgrading them?*

Currently there are no huts closed in DOC's Western South Island region. Huts are inspected to ascertain whether they meet DOC's Service Standards and Building Act requirements. There are a total of 145 huts, with 110 huts currently to standard and 35 below. Of the 35, two require high priority work, seven are awaiting inspection. This is a normal situation, as service standards require a range of minor maintenance work, such as a new ash bucket, toilet seat, or mattress cover which inspectors will identify. The two high priority work orders are for a water tank at Ces Clark Hut and for tie downs for Stan's Hut (tie downs refer to cables connecting a hut to the surrounding ground, providing additional resilience against, for example, strong winds). There are 5,761 planned hours of work required for huts, all of which will be funded from within the region's financial baseline.

4. *How many hours behind is DOC's maintenance on the West Coast?*

The Department does not consider work to be 'behind', as assets are constantly being monitored and reassessed as part of a cyclical programme of work. Where an

asset is not safe, it is closed. The estimated hours of work planned and to be scheduled over the coming 12 months are as follows:

Item	Hours
Tracks	14,052
Huts	5,761
Structures incl. bridges	4,435
Total	24,248

5. *What structures (i.e. bridges) on the West Coast need work, what does DOC plan to do about them, and what is the estimated cost?*

Across the West Coast there are 2,348 structures. Of these 899 are bridges and other structures in the High-Risk category which comprises cable structures and structures greater than 1.5m off the ground. Compared with other operational regions, the West Coast has a high proportion of cable structure due to the topography. There are currently 552 planned maintenance work items for High-Risk structures, to be delivered through 4,435 hours undertaken as per the planned asset maintenance schedule. This work will be funded from within the region's baseline budget.

6. *How many kilometres of tracks, how many campsites, how many back country huts, how many other buildings, and how many structures like bridges are in the West Coast conservation estate?*

Across the Western South Island region, DOC is the custodian of:

- 1298 kms of track
- 18 campsites
- 55 standard huts, 74 basic bivvies, 7 serviced huts, and 4 serviced alpine huts
- 374 buildings such as toilets, sheds, shelters, and other accommodation
- 833 bridges

7. *What impact have the heavy rainfall events over the past two years had on DOC's West Coast maintenance schedule?*

The severe rainstorms which have hit the West Coast over the past two years have had an impact on our planned work. One example, is, of course, the Buller flooding in July 2021. This affected the northern Buller tracks that are currently closed and exacerbated the Charming Creek slip. When an event such as this occurs, the Department reprioritises its work accordingly and revises work programmes including, in some instances, reassessing the extent to which work can be delivered. This is illustrated by the decision to 'non-maintain' some tracks which attract fewer visitors, such as the Denniston Track. The impact of Cyclone Dovey in February 2022 meant the Buller and Greymouth teams had to adjust 8 to 12 months of planned work.



8. *What was DOC West Coast's annual funding last financial year, what is it this financial year, and what will it be next financial year?*

DOC Western South Island baseline operating expenditure funding for Visitor and heritage work (excluding depreciation) since 21/22 was as follows:

- 21/22 – \$5,833,521
- 22/23 – \$5,542,994
- 23/24 – The budget is not yet finalised

Note that due to a change in the Department's accounting systems, the 2022 and 2023 figures are not an exact comparison.

Nāku noa, nā



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Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Attachment A

Closed tracks

PAPAROA	Fox River Caves Track - End Part	Kaikoura Earthquake large rock fall and slip, cave entrance not accessible, Geotechnical Risk Assessment completed
PORORARI	Inland Pack Track Historic Sections	Historic sections closed (replaced by new track)
WESTPORT	Britannia Track	Slips and washouts from Cyclone Dovi
WESTPORT	Denniston Bridle Track	Slips from Cyclone Dovi and other storms. Opening May 2023 to BCA / Route standard
GREYMOUTH	Bain Bay Walk	First ~700 m from the Mitchel's end open, then erosion and bridge removed
REEFTON	Kirwans Hut To Mont. Hut Track	Slips from Cyclone Dovi
REEFTON	Waitahu-Murray Connecting Track	Dangerous slips from Cyclone Dovi
REEFTON	Capleston To Kirwans Hut Track	Slips and unsafe structures from Cyclone Dovi
REEFTON	Big River-Inangahua Track	Slips between Golden Lead Stamper Battery and Progress Water-Race Track
REEFTON	Lankey Creek Track	Slips and unsafe structures from Cyclone Dovi
REEFTON	Inglewood Branch Track Part	Erosion undermining safety barriers to an open mine shaft
REEFTON	Lankey Creek Tram Track	Physically part of Lankey Creek Track, slips and unsafe structures from Cyclone Dovi
OTIRA	Cockayne Nature Walk	Hill slipping considered unsafe
FRANZ JOSEF	Canavans Knob Walk	Slips from Cyclone Dovi, repairs under way
FRANZ JOSEF	Moraine Track	Upper Franz Josef Valley track closed above Glacier Viewpoint due to visitor safety risk assessment
FRANZ JOSEF	Champness Rock Track	Upper Franz Josef Valley track closed above Glacier Viewpoint due to visitor safety risk assessment.
SHIPCREEK	Swamp Forest Walk	Subsidence along creek bank. Awaiting engineer's designs to repair.
WHATAROA	Gunn Ridge Route	Unsafe passage



Part closed tracks

WESTPORT	Charming Creek Walkway	Approx 3km closed as result of Geotech Report about hazard and risk, 6km open, mid-section closed, can walk from Northern & Southern ends to closed section, monitoring
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Non-maintained

GIBSON	Gibsons Beach Track	Kawatiri Coastal Trail build team and locals have cleared this
WESTPORT	Mt Glasgow Route	Low use
WESTPORT	Myra's Track	Low use
WESTPORT	Millerton Bath House Track	Track on road reserve and private land, bathhouse itself sits 2/3's on PCL.
WESTPORT	Denniston Township Walk	Low use
AHAURA	Hochstetter Dam Track	Minimal use but there is maintenance occurring at historic Hochstetter Dam
ARTHURS	Barrack Creek Route	Low use
ARTHURS	Mt Barron Route	Low use