

8 August 2024

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 13 June 2024, in which you asked for information for your work on *Vanishing Nature*. This letter responds to your request for information on DOC's partnerships.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). On 17 June 2024, we extended the timeframe to respond to your request to 31 July 2024, as allowed under section 15(A), due to the large quantity of information sought and the consultation necessary to make a decision.

### **Amendments to your initial request**

On 14 June 2024, you spoke to Carole Lillico, Manager Strategic Partnerships, about your request on DOC's partnerships. In this conversation, you clarified what you were seeking:

- *information on all partnerships listed on the DOC website<sup>1</sup> and all others within the specified timeframe not listed there;*
- *not just commercial partnerships but any partnership between DOC and third parties, including large landscape scale partnerships;*
- *in-kind contributions where partnerships are non-commercial; and*
- *information on conservation outcomes gained from each partnership.*

On 9 July 2024, you met with my team who advised you on the difficulties in researching and collating the information due to evolving partnership definitions and strategies over the requested ten-year period (beginning 2014/2015), and how the information is held within DOC. During the meeting, you signalled that you did not have sufficient information about DOC's partnerships to enable you to further narrow the scope of your request, but agreed to limit the information sought to the following:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-partners/>

- *a list of all partnerships listed on the DOC website and all others within the specified timeframe not listed there; and*
- *a synopsis of each partnership, its purpose, its value, the conservation outcomes it provides, and brief descriptions of key documents relating to each partnership.*

I would like to note that you did not provide a clear definition of the term 'partnerships', however, you indicated in both our conversations with you that understand partnerships to include all formalised relationships between DOC third parties. Therefore, I have decided to provide further context on your request and partnerships in DOC more broadly.

## **Partnerships and relationships within DOC**

DOC is one of many organisations that form part of the natural resources sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are a wide range of other mandated and concerned parties who share our goal to protect and restore nature<sup>2</sup>. The cost of delivering conservation has increased substantially over the last ten years, with programme costs increasing disproportionately to DOC's available funding. Given these budget constraints and the range of our statutory roles, it is critical that DOC works in partnership with others to achieve our strategic outcomes for conservation.

DOC has a long history of establishing partnerships with a range of third parties including commercial and community-based partnerships. Our approach has evolved over time and, as such, the term covers a wide range of meanings. You'll see that there are many different types of partnership which is reflective of the different groups we work with. We have observed a growing interest to be involved in supporting conservation work. The list of partners on our website you requested information on reflects several different partnership strategies over the last ten years.

These strategies are influenced by wider statutory, organisational or political context, which has resulted in different partnerships approaches both nationally and regionally. Historically, DOC Operations staff managed partnerships on behalf of the organisation. This continues today at a regional level; with the national Strategic Partnerships team I am responsible for managing high value partnerships that are national in scope or have potential for national replication.

In the last 10 years, this multi-layered approach delivered over several strategic frameworks have led to a range of methods for establishing, reporting, and measuring impacts and progress. Due to this complexity, it is difficult to provide information on these partnerships in a consistent manner across a 10-year timeframe.

DOC's approach to partnerships has and will continue to evolve over time to reflect emerging needs and opportunities, as well as regional nuance. DOC maintains multiple relationships with various partners. When meeting my team on 9 July 2024, you noted a public perception that DOC manages partnerships holistically and across functions. However, in my view it is

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/our-purpose-and-outcomes/>

essential to clearly separate our partnership work from DOC's concessions and regulatory functions, as this more closely reflects on how our partnerships are managed in reality.

With respect to your request for information on the value of our partnerships, I would like to note that it is generally difficult to measure the full impact these have. While aspects of direct benefits to conservation can be measured, the holistic long-term benefits are more complex and difficult to capture. This is especially true of the large-scale land and seascape collaborations DOC is a member of.

### **Decisions on your request**

Please find attached a list of partnerships as requested, which includes a synopsis of each partnership and description of key documents. We have endeavoured to illustrate the intention and benefits of these partnerships in a way that will be useful to your purpose. Some of these partnerships are no longer active, as highlighted through the status description. 'Commercial Partnerships' and 'Land and Seascape Collaborations' are marked as such, whereas those marked as 'Other' do not fit into these categories.

Some of those marked as 'Other' are better described as organisations which DOC has a current or historical working relationship with, rather than a formalised partnership; for example, Forest and Bird and Save the Kiwi are both non-government organisations and important relationships for DOC, with occasional one-off engagements on different issues, operational matters, or opportunities as they arise. 'Other' can also include community-level partnerships, regional partnerships, in-kind partnerships, or informal partnerships, amongst others.

DOC has a number of district-level relationships with many similar organisations which can have one-off or timebound engagements (akin to a permissions agreement). DOC does not have a single relationship holder with these organisations nor a central data base of information on the collective actions and outputs of these relationships. With respect to section 18(e) of the OIA we are unable to provide all the requested information for those partners, as there is no formal partnership agreement in place, nor does information on the collective value and benefits of this relationship exist.

The financial value (i.e. annual funding contributions) relating to individual partnerships is withheld in accordance with section 9(2)(j), to enable the Department to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, commercial negotiations. Knowing how much a third-party paid in partnership could prejudice our ability to negotiate the best value for conservation with others in the future, as this information could be used to negotiate lower figures. I have taken into account the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the OIA and determined that there are no public interests that outweigh the reasons for withholding.


We can, however, provide you with the approximate amalgamated total for the last ten years of partnerships listed in this request. We have calculated this figure to be approximately \$123,000,000. This includes direct funding from each partnership, and in some instances, but not all, in-kind contributions where we have that information available and quantified. Parts of this figure are included as an input into the Department's annual reporting. However, there will

be differences between the figure we have provided you for this request, and that which is captured in the Department's Annual Report as the scope of this list includes Land and Seascape Collaborations and Other partnership types which our annual reporting does not capture ([Annual reports: Corporate publications \(doc.govt.nz\)](#)).

With respect to your request for information on partnerships not listed on the website, I regret that I must refuse this part of your request as allowed by section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. This information is held at and managed by several different business groups across the organisation. In 2022/23, the number of community-level agreements held within our regional districts alone was 434<sup>3</sup>, with the actual number of formal regional and national partnerships over ten years likely in the thousands. I have borne in mind section 18B of the Official Information Act but concluded that use of this provision would not assist in this case, as we have already made reasonable efforts to assist you in clarifying the scope of your request.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

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

To request further information on the partnerships listed or copies of the associated documents, please email [uia@doc.govt.nz](mailto:uia@doc.govt.nz). I would also like to offer a conversation to discuss this response and determine if there are any other ways we can help to support your work on *Vanishing Nature*. 

Nāku noa, nā



David van der Zouwe  
Director Strategic Partnerships and Investment  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

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<sup>3</sup> Page 73 of the 2022/23 DOC Annual Report:  
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/annual-reports/annual-report-2023/annual-report-2023-english.pdf>