



26 November 2024

9(2)(a)

Dear 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email of 30 September 2024 requesting the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

I have provided responses to each of your questions below.

1. *What funding has been released from MFE to the Wahapu O Waihi for Restoration Purposes and Environmental Programmes in the wider Pongakawa/Little Waihi Catchment in association with the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, since 2021?*
2. *What are the workstreams and key deliverables for this funding, and timelines for the funding streams that have been delivered, and are intended to be delivered, between 2022 and 2027?*

I have identified four documents in scope of your request, as outlined in the document schedule below.

I am granting your request for these documents. However, additional time is needed to finalise these documents for release. The Ministry will provide these to you as soon as possible, on or before 6 December 2024.

Note that these documents will have some information withheld under the following sections of the Act:

- 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of natural persons
 - 9(2)(b)(ii) to protect information where the making available of the information would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information.
3. *The public understands there has been funding released for the purchase of land, and development of a Blue Carbon Project (as released to media earlier in 2024), with co-funding from Nature Conservancy: Therefore, could you please update details of progress on how these funds & philanthropic co-funds are being implemented or redirected now, and over the next three years? We understand now that Sea Level Rise and unintended costs of construction mean that the Blue Carbon Project will not be going ahead.*

In 2023, land was purchased with funding contributions coming from the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) and the Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC). Note that the project funding, including co-funding (Ministry funding, plus other sources) is managed by BOPRC. Other than what is outlined in the project work plan, the Ministry does not have oversight of how BOPRC manage the day-to-day operations of the project, including which sources of funding are used for which interventions.

4. *What source/funding pool, did the extra funding source come from that was made additional from Minister Hoggard. (agenda of Regional Council 12 Sept 2024)?*

The extra funding was a result of the Ministry identifying savings made from the Freshwater Improvement Fund appropriation, as 20 of 26 FIF projects had closed and came in under budget.

5. *What does the Ministry define as “Nature Based Solutions” ?*

The Ministry’s follows the definition of ‘nature based solutions’ that is outlined in *Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020*. That is, “solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, cost effective and simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience.” The Strategy can be found here: doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/biodiversity/anzbs-2020.pdf.

6. *Does the Ministry have a preference for edge of field mitigations such as constructed wetlands rather than whole of catchment remediation. In this case, the focus of the funding is at the end of a small catchment area (in this case – 27 Ha) is noted that the wetland drains 4.2% of the subcatchment - this appears to only be a small area (around 642 ha approx) on the low lying area, east of State Highway 2.*

The Freshwater Improvement Fund considers any applications that support the management of New Zealand’s lakes, rivers, streams, groundwater and wetlands. The purpose of the Te Wahapū o Waihi project is to restore the Waihi estuary and its catchment, and contains objectives that include wetland and wider catchment interventions, for example:

- By June 2026, up to 63.5 ha of wetlands will be created or restored in the Waihi Estuary Catchment, with a pathway identified to achieve a further 30.5 hectares beyond the grant term.
- By June 2026, at least 160,000 new native plants are planted along 16 km of waterway in the Waihi Estuary catchment through 32 new Environmental Programme agreements.

7. *What is the Ministry of Environments position on the use of public funds for Climate Mitigation (edge of field approaches) rather than Climate Adaptation, land use transition, and slowing the flow from the top of catchment to the bottom of a catchment?*

The Ministry is aligned with the Government’s climate strategy, which can be accessed here: environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/climate-change/about-new-zealands-climate-change-programme/governments-climate-strategy/. The Government has reiterated its commitment to meeting its climate change targets through mitigation to reduce the impacts of climate change and adaption to prepare for its future impacts.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Office of the Ombudsman of the decision to extend this request, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on their website at: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lorena Stephen'.

Lorena Stephen
General Manager – Partnerships and Investments
Ministry for the Environment | Manatū Mō Te Taiao