



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata
PO Box 10 241
Wellington 6140
Aotearoa New Zealand

Thursday 21 December 2023

Tēnā koe Simon,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 November 2023 regarding the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and the Department of Conservation's (DOC) involvement in the Otago deep-water alpine lakes investigation and management initiatives. We appreciate your continued interest in these nationally and internationally significant lakes and agree with the importance of mitigating deterioration of these alpine deep-water lakes.

You recommended our involvement in the Otago Deep Lakes Management Working Group and the Otago Deep Lakes Technical Advisory Group. I can confirm that MfE has committed to participating in the governance level Working Group, with Sara Clarke is our nominated member having been in close contact with Otago Regional Council (ORC) on these matters and will continue her participation in the new year. DOC Operations Director, Aaron Flemming, regularly engages with the ORC and their senior leadership team and is supportive of the initiatives underway for the Otago deep-water alpine lakes. A local delegate from DOC will be made available to attend future Working Group meetings. In addition, Dr Koji Muraoka (MfE) and Dr Craig Woodward (DOC) will support as members of the Technical Advisory Group from the new year.

Both agencies have been actively involved in various stages of this initiative, including providing financial support to form the community management plan and early engagement in the community events preceding the formation of the formal advisory group. We will need to continue to work closely together to ensure aligned approaches for initiatives for the deep-water alpine lakes in Otago particularly in our current fiscal context. For DOC, connecting with community groups such as WAI Wānaka is critical to achieve its goals for ecosystem and species protection both on and off Public Conservation Land. DOC and WAI Wānaka hold a community agreement, authorising WAI Wānaka's activities on public conservation land and waters. DOC has also contributed resources to these activities which include fencing, riparian planting and pest control.

Furthermore, DOC has provided technical expertise to help examine water quality in Roy's Bay and urban catchments and continues to collaborate with WAI Wānaka on work to manage the critically endangered Clutha Flathead Galaxias in the Cardrona Valley. DOC recognises that WAI Wānaka's application to the DOC Community Fund this year was unsuccessful. The fund was significantly oversubscribed with a total of 292 applications requesting over \$77 million (\$9.2 million available). WAI Wānaka narrowly missed out on this funding. DOC needs to carefully prioritise its use of resources to get maximum conservation outcomes nationally and without funding for a dedicated Lakes Programme, support for improving water quality in the Otago Alpine Lakes is not currently covered by our baseline funding.



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The cross-agency programme to establish the foundations for an improved environmental monitoring and reporting system is now underway, this programme responds to some recommendations from previous reports and is designed to tackle these challenges on a national scale - monitoring the right things, in the right places in consistent ways to understand the health of our environment and the effectiveness of our interventions. Richard Saunders, Chief Executive of Otago Regional Council, sits on the Governance Group for this programme representing the regional sector, along with ourselves and senior representatives from Stats NZ, LINZ, TPK and MBIE. Through this group we will be keeping a close watch on important case studies like these that encapsulate why we urgently need improvements to our monitoring networks and investment systems to enable better, more timely decision making.

We would be happy to meet with you and Richard to discuss these issues, or to respond to any further questions you may have. All the best for a relaxing festive break.

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

Natasha Lewis
Deputy Secretary
Strategy, Stewardship and Performance
Ministry for the Environment | Manatū Mō Te
Taiao

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

Stephanie Rowe
Deputy Director-General
Biodiversity Visitor & Heritage
Department of Conservation | Te Papa Atawhai