



2 December 2025

Rt Hon Simon Upton  
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Ref: SRC-556

Tēnā koe Simon

## **Environmental research in the context of the science system reforms**

Thank you for your letters dated 17 October and 12 November 2025, and for the constructive discussion we shared regarding the future of environmental research within the Government's science system reforms. I am writing in response to some of the themes you raise in that correspondence.

### ***Integrity of decision-making***

I can confirm that the draft Science, Technology & Innovation Bill embeds in legislation the principle that ministerial powers do not extend to influencing decisions on individual science activities. While the Minister will set high-level strategic priorities for the system through the Pillar Investment Plan, the Bill explicitly prohibits Ministerial direction relating to specific research proposals or the allocation of funds to particular individuals or projects. This safeguard mirrors the limitation currently contained in section 8(3) of the Research, Science, and Technology Act 2010, ensuring that Research Funding New Zealand (RFNZ) will operate at arm's length from ministers in respect of project-level funding decisions.

### ***Investment in environmental outcomes***

I acknowledge your concern about the adequacy of investment in environmental research. The environment is one of four pillars of national importance under the new framework, alongside economy, health and society, and advanced technology. The Prime Minister's Science, Innovation and Technology Advisory Council (PMSITAC) is considering how best to allocate funding across these pillars, from within existing funding baselines.

My officials are working with environmental agencies to align public investment with government environmental priorities. The Strategic Science Investment Fund, which supports key environmental science at Public Research Organisations (PROs), has been extended until 2028. Dedicated resources may be allocated to environmental outcomes within this pillar. Final funding decisions have not been made, but without additional funding, trade-offs and prioritisation (including de-prioritisation) of activities will be necessary.

### ***Preserving core capabilities***

As part of the reforms, my officials are working to gain a better understanding of the true cost of research activities so that we can better design the funding system, including for research infrastructure and critical science services.

I note your call for transparency in allocation criteria and for safeguarding essential research capability. RFNZ will publish clear criteria for resource allocation across the four pillars, and MBIE is working closely with PROs and other providers to identify and preserve core capabilities. This work is reflected in current Statements of Core Purpose and will inform the design of investment plans.

### ***Meeting with PMSITAC***

Thank you again for meeting with Dr John Roche and myself on 14 October 2025, as deputy chair and chair of PMSITAC respectively. As an Officer of Parliament with statutory oversight of the system of agencies and processes that the Government uses to manage the environment, your input to the science system reforms is integral to this process.

We appreciated the opportunity to discuss how the Government's new priority-setting and funding mechanisms will support the maintenance and enhancement of public-good environmental research capability. We value your oversight and expertise, and welcome continued engagement as the reforms progress.

I understand you have had a constructive meeting with PMSITAC since our meeting. I am advised that they were receptive to your concerns, and endeavour to make you aware of any funding reprioritisation decisions.

Thank you again for your contribution to this important process. I look forward to continuing our dialogue as the reforms progress.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shane Reti', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon Dr Shane Reti MP

**Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology**