

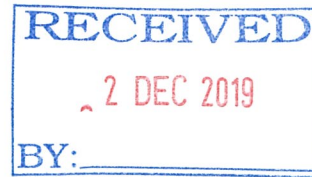
# Hon Eugenie Sage

Minister of Conservation  
Minister for Land Information  
Associate Minister for the Environment

Minita mō Te Papa Atawhai  
Minita mō Toitū Te Whenua  
Minita Tuarua mō Te Taiao



25 NOV 2019



Simon Upton  
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment  
PO Box 10 241  
Wellington 6143

Dear Simon

Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2019 regarding the threat of toxoplasmosis to Māui and Hector's dolphins.

I agree that the deaths of Māui and Hector's dolphins from toxoplasmosis warrants urgent action and will carefully consider your suggestions. I am carefully considering the options for improving the protection of the dolphins, and areas where increased actions should be implemented to ensure their recovery. Action on toxoplasmosis is very much part of my deliberations.

I acknowledge that the description of options to manage toxoplasmosis in the Threat Management Plan consultation document was brief, compared to options to manage the fisheries threat. The Department of Conservation advises me that there are major knowledge gaps in terms of the efficacy, practicalities and costs of potential management actions to address the risk from toxoplasmosis. These knowledge gaps suggest there is a critical need for targeted research to inform effective management.

From the information I have been provided it would appear there is a need to identify the source of toxoplasma oocysts in the marine environment (i.e., whether these come from unowned or owned cats, and spatial patterns of loading), and then prioritise actions appropriately. This requires an improved understanding of the toxoplasma genotype responsible for dolphin deaths, and identification of "hotspots" of toxoplasma contamination in marine and freshwater environments at a scale that is useful to inform management.

I am equally mindful that there is a need not to lose sight of the need to take action if there are pragmatic management measures that could be undertaken now.

I agree that to aid decision-making in establishing and implementing an action plan collaboration with international experts will be essential, and that toxoplasmosis research and management is likely to have broader benefits with regard to public health, agricultural production and conservation. Engagement with national and international researchers,

government agencies and organisations across multiple sectors, and the identification of alignments and synergies will be very important.

Although Minister Nash and I are still to take our decisions on the review of the Threat Management Plan, I can confirm that to keep momentum on addressing the risk from toxoplasmosis, a Toxoplasmosis Strategic Science Advisory Group (SSAG) is in the process of being set-up. The SSAG will provide high-level recommendations to the Hector's and Māui dolphin Threat Management Plan Governance Group on the requirements for strategic science prioritisation and aid in the coordination of research programmes focused on understanding and managing the effects of toxoplasmosis. It is possible that your officials may wish to observe the discussions.

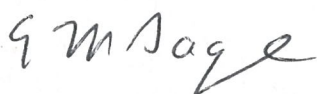
As you suggest, it is essential that enough resourcing is urgently allocated to toxoplasmosis to ensure that we can respond to this threat rapidly and effectively. Substantial funding, which would be in addition to that used to address other threats, is currently being sought to enable the implementation of the Toxoplasmosis Action Plan.

As you indicate, engagement and collaboration with tangata whenua and a wide array of stakeholders (including local government, Ministry for Primary Industries, Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Health, SPCA, National Cat Management Strategy Group and eNGOs) will be vital.

I expect that discussions on addressing toxoplasmosis will be contentious for several reasons. As the department works with other government departments and stakeholders to develop and implement a work programme, I would of course be interested in hearing your further views on priorities or new, additional pathways to address the risk from this disease.

Once again, thank you for writing to let me know of your concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'E Sage', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon. Eugenie Sage  
**Minister of Conservation**