

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 Taiāo



28 JUL 2020



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

Dear Simon

Thank you for your letter of 25 June 2020 raising concerns about the funding and coordination of the Toxoplasmosis Action Plan (the Plan), recently released as part of the review of the Threat Management Plan for Hector's and Māui dolphins.

I am pleased we share an interest in, and keen commitment to, seeing priority threats to the dolphins well managed. Addressing the risk from toxoplasmosis will be a challenge, as there are still knowledge gaps we need to fill. At the same time, we clearly need to take actions based on what information we have to hand. For these reasons, the Plan pinpoints key knowledge gaps and prioritised actions to trial and research, including feral cat control and riparian planting in catchments that flow into the core of Māui dolphin habitat.

Work to explore these knowledge gaps will continue to be coordinated by the Department of Conservation through the Toxoplasmosis Strategic Science Advisory Group (SSAG), established in November 2019. The SSAG will deliver a research plan following focussed science workshops, with participation by international experts, taking place later this year.

I agree that it is essential that enough resourcing is allocated to deliver on the Plan. In the short term, the department has committed a minimum of \$200,000 of initial funding for 2020-21 to the Plan. I expect that this money will allow the department to initiate an immediate package of measures including support for the scientific workshops, and coordinated action on trial programmes in priority catchment areas. It will also allow for an expansion of the necropsy programme and recovery of carcasses for examination.

In parallel to the above, officials from the department will explore opportunities within other programmes to either investigate the threat or to implement mitigation options. For example, as a result of the response to COVID-19, the Government has heavily invested in areas that may have synergies, such as freshwater restoration and predator control. Officials are aware that I expect these synergies to be fully explored and quickly utilised where relevant.

In starting the above key work now (research and actual mitigation, exploring for wider synergies and hosting workshops with input from overseas expertise) officials will soon be well placed to identify additional funding needs beyond what is currently allocated. I would expect them to put forward a recommendation at this point.

As you noted, collaboration across multiple agencies will be a challenge, and the process for exactly how this will work requires further development. New initiatives, such as the Jobs for Nature package, now need to be considered. The department informs me that it is exploring collaborations and pathways for engaging with other stakeholders, particularly through the SSAG process and the evolving composition of that group. Work is evolving in this area with a strong need, also, to further engage with tangata whenua.

I trust that my letter assures you that I have taken the threat seriously.

Once again, I thank you for your continued concern for this complex issue.

Yours sincerely



Hon. Eugenie Sage
Minister of Conservation