



Hon. Dr. Shane Reti

Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology

Parliament Buildings

Private Bag 18041

Wellington 6160

11 August 2025

Dear Dr Reti

You will be aware of my prior interest and ongoing investigation into publicly funded environmental research.

I examined the issue in depth in my 2020 Review of the Funding and Prioritisation of Environmental Research in New Zealand.¹ Since then I have maintained an on-going interest in the state of public good environmental research. It plays a vital role in underpinning much of the Government's ability to manage natural resources along with its contribution to our many and varied land-based industries.

As the next step in my investigation, I am compiling a detailed inventory of all environmentally related research that is funded through various channels administered by the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment. Your officials have been very helpful in this regard. The research I am interested in spans everything from highly applied, mission-specific research to truly fundamental science funded by the Marsden Fund. I will be using this inventory as a benchmark against which to measure any changes in funding for environmental research, broadly defined, that flow from the reforms you are currently pursuing.

Funding allocated to research can tell us what work is being undertaken but not so much about the workforce that is undertaking that research. New Zealand's remote bio-geographical setting means that research conducted in other settings cannot always or easily be applied to our particular problems and challenges. The human capital we have invested in, to understand and interpret our corner of the biosphere, is not easily replaceable and the modest scale of our research capability means that we will often be literally one-scientist deep when it comes to specialised knowledge in fields of importance to us here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I would like to meet with you to discuss two matters:

- (1) How you are going about identifying critical human capital that is currently employed working on environmental research and what steps you are taking to ensure that workforce is secured.
- (2) How you are ensuring that any changes to public science funding mechanisms will safeguard essential, long term environmental research.

¹ <https://pce.parliament.nz/publications/environmental-research-funding-review/>

To assist me with my enquiries, and before we meet, I would appreciate receiving any guidance you, the Prime Minister, or your officials have provided to the Prime Minister's Science Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PMSTIAC) on how environmental research should be prioritised and how funds should be allocated. This request is made pursuant to section 19 of the Environment Act. I know I can count on your assistance.

With kind regards

Simon Upton

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata

Cc. Jonathan Franklin, Senior Ministerial Advisor, Office of Hon Dr Shane Reti