

24 February 2021

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, received on 26 January 2021 in which you asked a number of questions in relation to permits and operations on Rangitāhua/Raoul Island:

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

On how many occasions did DOC receive a permit application for research, science and tourism on the Kermadec Island/Rangitāhua in 2019 and 2020?

The Department received two permit applications in this period.

On how many occasions were permits declined, and for what reasons?

No permits were declined in 2019 or 2020.

The Department is still considering one permit application for guiding, with a decision due to be made within the next month.

On how many occasions were permits declined because of, or partly because of, objections raised by iwi?

None. No decision has yet been made on the live permit application.

Does DOC automatically decline an application to land on Raoul Island if there is an objection from iwi?

No, our Treaty partners may raise concerns and/or interests of a cultural matter with any application. Those concerns and/or interests are taken into consideration before a decision is made.

Section 4 of the Conservation Act 1987 requires DOC to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi in our work to promote the conservation of New Zealand's natural and historic resources.

Section 4 does not create a power of veto for iwi or hapū over the granting of permits, nor does it prevent the granting of concessions to non-iwi applicants. All applications must still be considered in their own context and on a case-by-case basis.



Can you please provide any reports, briefings, reviews, memos, correspondence on safety and risks of landing on Raoul, prepared as a consequence of the White Island tragedy?

While there are no specific reports prepared as a consequence of Whakaari/White Island, this is because the health and safety of our staff and visitors to Raoul Island is of the utmost importance, and the Department is currently in a 'Stop for Safety' for our operations, due to a number of circumstances prior to Whakaari/White Island. I would like to make the following points which have relevance to the question you ask.

Firstly, a medivac was undertaken successfully in 2019 but on reviewing the process the Rescue Coordination Centre indicated that the way in which this medivac had been conducted would not be possible again due to civil aviation rules. Secondly, whilst carrying out work to look at how the island could be re-supplied in the safest way in the future (the traditional method of using the derrick was no longer possible) and a landslide hazard assessment was contracted to GNS. This report highlighted high-risk situations and areas.

During the period March 2020 and October 2020 work was undertaken on safety plans for Raoul and the biodiversity strategy and operating models to deliver these. The temporary stop for safety was called because the safety issues of medical evacuation and general emergency evacuation had not been resolved.

In March 2020 a re-supply was planned where an exchange of staff was to take place. However, with the arrival of COVID-19 in New Zealand and the timing of the re-supply, the Department could not guarantee that those staff being landed were COVID-19 free. In March all staff were returned to New Zealand with the intention of returning in November 2020.

Finally, the Whakaari/White Island tragedy occurred which reinforced the Department's earlier decision to look more closely at its medivac and general evacuation procedures. It was agreed that a more robust system for both medivacs and general evacuation was needed.

Can you please provide any correspondence from researchers, conservationists, scientists or tourism operators relating the declining of an application to land/visit Raoul Island.

As no permit applications were declined during 2019 and 2020, there is so such correspondence.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and enclosed documents may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā

Sue Reed-Thomas
Director Operations Northern North Island
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai