



OIA23-0601

5 March 2024

Greg Smith  
fyi-request-24261-f13c9eb0@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Greg Smith,

Thank you for your email of 27 September 2023 requesting information relating to a report of a snake discovered in a Waihi mine. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

On 26 October 2023, MPI extended the time limit to respond to your request to 23 November 2023. On 23 November 2023, MPI informed you of its decision to grant your request.

You requested the following:

*I seek information pertaining to recent rumors circulating in the public domain that allege the discovery of a live snake in the underground OceaniaGold mine located in Waihi, New Zealand.*

*Specifically, I request the following information:*

- 1. Any reports, documents, or correspondence, including emails and memos, related to the alleged discovery of a live snake in the underground OceaniaGold mine in Waihi. This includes any reports submitted by OceaniaGold or any other relevant parties.*
- 2. Any investigations, inquiries, or assessments conducted by MPI or any other government agency in response to the reported incident, including findings, conclusions, and recommendations if available.*
- 3. Any communications, including but not limited to letters, emails, or phone records, between MPI and OceaniaGold regarding this alleged incident.*
- 4. Any records of actions taken or contemplated by MPI in response to the alleged discovery of a live snake in the OceaniaGold mine, including any compliance or enforcement actions.*
- 5. Any information regarding the steps taken by OceaniaGold to prevent future occurrences of live snakes or similar incidents in their mining operations.*
- 6. Any communication or guidelines provided by MPI to mining companies, including OceaniaGold, regarding the management and prevention of wildlife or pest species within mining facilities.*

Biosecurity New Zealand takes the threat of a snake population establishing in New Zealand very seriously. This is why we have a multi-layered biosecurity system that involves strict import requirements, checks at the border, and surveillance. It is also why we have trained personnel to handle detections safely and effectively.

Our biosecurity system has proven very effective to date in preventing a snake population from establishing in New Zealand.

Alerts from the public are an important part of the biosecurity system. They allow us to act quickly to eliminate biosecurity threats.

On 5 August 2023, Biosecurity New Zealand was alerted to a live snake that had been discovered in the OceanaGold facility in Waihi. Workers at the site had already secured the snake at the time of the notification, and a trained snake handler collected the snake to take it to Auckland Zoo to be euthanised. The snake was identified as a non-venomous carpet python, and there was no evidence of further snakes. The snake is believed to have entered New Zealand inside a shipment of material from Australia.

Please find the relevant laboratory report included with this letter as Appendix One and the relevant email communication included with this letter as Appendix Two. Please note that various internal emails mentioned the discovery of the snake, but those that were not substantively concerning the discovery of the snake have been excluded from our response.

The journal article *Is “Cooling then Freezing” a Humane Way to Kill Amphibians and Reptiles?* was attached in the email correspondence and can be found through the following link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4571096/>. Additionally, the AVMA *Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals* was attached in the email correspondence and can be found through the following link: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/avma-guidelines-euthanasia-animals>.

The invoice that is referenced has been withheld under section 9(2)(b)(ii) of the OIA—to *protect information where the making available of the information would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who is the subject of the information*. The draft document provided to Auckland Zoo has been withheld pursuant to section 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA—to *maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions*.

Some information in the appendices has been withheld pursuant to the following sections of the OIA:

- s9(2)(a)—*to protect the privacy of natural persons*.
- s9(2)(g)(i)—*to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions*.

MPI is satisfied that in the circumstances of this case, the withholding of the information is not outweighed by other considerations which render it desirable in the public interest to make the information available.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Ministry for Primary Industries at [Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz). Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143 or at [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fleur Francois".

Fleur Francois  
**Director, Diagnostic and Surveillance Services**