

Reference: 20240111

19 March 2024



Dear 

Thank you for your Official Information Act (OIA) request, received on 20 February 2024. You requested:

1) *Whether it was relying on hearsay (assumed Common knowledge) or peer reviewed science as the basis for its prediction that storms will grow stronger and more frequent as a result of climate change?*

2) *If relying on peer reviewed science, can Treasury please release the documents that disclose which reports were considered and when, so as to prove that the relevant science was actually reviewed prior to making the above statements, rather than assembled hastily now as a post OIA request justification.*

3) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood this passage from the IPCC AR6 advising that the number of extreme storms (Cat 4/5) will either reduce or stay the same in a warming world: "For a 2°C global warming, the median proportion of Category 4–5 TCs increases by 13%, while the median global TC frequency decreases by 14%, which implies that the median of the global Category 4–5 TC frequency is slightly reduced by 1% or almost unchanged (Knutson et al., 2020). Murakami et al. (2020) projected a decrease in TC frequency over the coming century in the North Atlantic due to greenhouse warming, as consistent with Dunstone et al. (2013), and a reduction in TC frequency almost everywhere in the tropics in response to +1% CO2 forcing." - UN IPCC AR6 Report, March 2023, WG1 Chapter 11, pg 1590*

4) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood this peer-reviewed research: "Through the natural climate shifts of this period — Roman Warm Period, Dark Ages Cold Period, Medieval Climate Anomaly, and Little Ice Age — it is shown that storm frequency decreases as temperature increases." [i] — Auger et al, Quaternary Science Reviews, 2019 (see also non-reviewed Climate of Fear Part 1 for NZ observational data on point)*

*[i] Jeffrey D. Auger, Paul A. Mayewski, Kirk A. Maasch, Keah C. Schuenemann, Andrew M. Carleton, Sean D. Birkel, Jasmine E. Saros, 2000 years of North Atlantic-Arctic climate, Quaternary Science Reviews, Volume 216, 2019, Pages 1-17, ISSN 0277-3791, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2019.05.020>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277379118309107>)*

5) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood this passage from the IPCC AR6 on cyclone intensity in a warmer world: "TCs are also measured by quantities such as ACE [accumulated cyclone energy] and the power dissipation index (PDI), which conflate TC intensity, frequency, and duration (Murakami et al., 2014). Several TC modelling studies (Yamada et al., 2010; H.S. Kim et al., 2014; Knutson et al., 2015) project little change or decreases in the globally accumulated value of PDI or ACE, which is due to the decrease in the total number of TCs."* - UN IPCC AR6 Report, WG-1 Chap 11, March 2023, pg 1591

6) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood subsection 11.7.2.4 of IPCC AR6 that advises the only increase in southern hemisphere storms in a warming world is in the Southern Ocean (mostly south of Australia and India in the latitudes 40S-60S).* - UN IPCC AR6 Report, WG-1 Chap 11, pg 1593

7) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood the only New Zealand study to date on historical storm frequency and intensity in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1868-1890, "Climate of Fear" by Ian Wishart, which revealed NZ endured a Cyclone Bola-sized event every year on average in that time, and a Cyclone Gabrielle-sized event every four years on average?*  
<https://ianwishart.com/2023/03/climate-of-fear/>

8) *Whether, before advising Government, it read and understood this passage in IPCC AR6 confirming there was much higher cyclone frequency and intensity 200 years ago in the Tasman Sea than there is now, and that Australasia appears to enjoying much fewer cyclones in a warming world (essentially confirming Climate of Fear): "A similarly reliable subset of the data representing TC landfall frequency over Australia shows a decreasing trend in Eastern Australia since the 1800s (Callaghan and Power, 2011), as well as in other parts of Australia since 1982 (Chand et al., 2019; Knutson et al., 2019). A paleoclimate proxy reconstruction shows that recent levels of TC interactions along parts of the Australian coastline are the lowest in the past 550–1500 years (Haig et al., 2014)." - UN IPCC AR6 Report WG-1, Chapter 11, pg 1586*

9) *How does Treasury reconcile the observations from the IPCC that there is likely to be fewer cyclones overall in a warmer climate, and even a possible drop in the total number of extreme cyclones, with its advice to the Government: "These severe weather events are only going to get more frequent and worse. We're experiencing the best weather we're going to see in our lifetimes, now."*

9) *In short, can Treasury provide documentary evidence that any of its staff have been formally tasked prior to this OIA with reading the complete IPCC AR6 Report (not just the Summary for Policymakers) to inform its official advice on arguably the leading economic issue of our time, and if so what advice emerged from a complete reading?*

## **Part 1 and parts 3 – 9**

As they stand, these questions do not meet the threshold for 'official information' being requested under the Official Information Act 1982. Official information is information held in some form by an agency or Minister of the Crown. Where a request requires a

Minister or an agency to form an opinion or provide an explanation, and so create new information to answer the request, this is not deemed official information under the OIA.

In regards to the last part of your request asking for 'documentary evidence', the Treasury does not hold documented evidence recording that staff have read the complete IPCC AR6 report. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) OIA – that the information requested is not held by the Treasury or Minister and we have no grounds for believing that the information is held by, or more closely connected to the functions of, another department, Minister or organisation.

In considering the IPCC AR6 report Treasury officials have focussed on sections that are most relevant for understanding the projected climate impacts that are specific to New Zealand.

## Part 2 - Information publicly available

The Treasury has published a document that discloses what reports we have considered for understanding the expected future physical impacts of climate change. The following information is covered by your request in part 2 (particularly Table 3.2 on page 26). This information is publicly available on the Treasury website:

Date	Document Description	Website Address
April 2023	Climate Economic and Fiscal Assessment 2023	<a href="#">Ngā Kōrero Āhuarangi Me Te Ōhanga: Climate Economic and Fiscal Assessment 2023   The Treasury New Zealand</a>

Accordingly, I have refused your request for the document listed in the above table under section 18(d) of the OIA – the information requested is or will soon be publicly available.

As further context, the published Climate Economic and Fiscal Assessment 2023 summarised the Treasury's present understanding of the economic and fiscal implications of climate change. Table 3.2 specifically includes information on projected changes to selected climate variables for New Zealand. That information is primarily sourced from Chapter 11 of the IPCC's sixth assessment report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. The wider report is informed by a range of other information sources, including the first National Climate Change Risk Assessment prepared by the Climate Change Commission.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Treasury website. This reply addresses the information you requested. You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision.

Yours sincerely

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Manager, Climate Change