

Policy work programme and key initiatives

Supplementary memo for the incoming Minister of Conservation | 8 February 2023

Purpose

This memo provides an overview of key elements of the conservation policy work programme and key initiatives/issues underway. Officials would like to meet with you to discuss your policy objectives for the remainder of this term, to update you on the work underway as it progresses, and to support your engagement with other Ministers. We will brief you further on these matters as and when required.

Your opportunity to deliver important changes within the conservation portfolio

The Government is making good progress on an ambitious programme of conservation policy work.

Out of scope

The most pressing Government priorities for the conservation portfolio during this term have been:

Out of scope

- Progressing the Milford Opportunities Project to better manage visitor pressures.

Out of scope

Conservation policy work programme and key initiatives/issues

The remainder of this briefing provides an overview of each of the key policy workstreams, as well as key current regulatory decisions and live issues within the conservation portfolio and our cross-agency work.

Each overview provides a summary of the work, information on your role, and the next steps.

These summaries do not provide detailed advice on these matters, nor is this an exhaustive list of our ongoing work. We will provide further advice on these, and other workstreams, as required.

Summaries of key work programmes and initiatives/issues

Out of scope

- Milford Opportunities Project 5

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Milford Opportunities Project

Summary of issue

- A record 870,000 visitors went to Milford Sound Piopiotahi in 2019 (the most recent figures before COVID-19), with tourism demand forecast to reach 1.1 million by 2050.
- Ongoing visitor pressure is likely to exacerbate congestion along the Milford Road Corridor, reduce safety, threaten conservation values in the Fiordland National Park, and place significant pressure on ageing infrastructure.
- Iwi, stakeholders, and the public generally agree that the management approach to Milford Sound Piopiotahi needs to change. However, there is a range of views on the right approach.
- The Milford Opportunities Project (MOP) Masterplan was launched in July 2021 and aims to ensure that *'Milford Sound Piopiotahi maintains its status as a key Aotearoa New Zealand visitor icon and provides a world-class visitor experience that is accessible, upholds the World Heritage status, national park and conservation values and adds value to Southland and Aotearoa New Zealand Inc'*.

Key facts and context

- The MOP is an opportunity to think about the integration between visitors, the environment and the economy in a different and innovative way that drives better outcomes for conservation, the region, and visitors.
- Key recommendations in the MOP Masterplan include rebranding the area as the epitome of 21st Century visitor experience including regenerative tourism, adding the cultural voice, decarbonizing the journey, introduction of a managed access and transport model, charging international visitors an access fee, establishing a new governance model, developing new experiences along the corridor, improving infrastructure in Piopiotahi, removing the Aerodrome, and banning cruise ships from Milford Sound.
- In 2022, the MOP Establishment Board and Unit was created by Cabinet to undertake feasibility testing of Masterplan recommendations to June 2024.
- The Board and Unit are hosted by DOC and report to the MOP Ministerial Group consisting of Minister of Conservation (lead), Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Transport. DOC, MBIE and MOT support the Board and Unit and provide separate agency advice to the Ministerial Group.
- The current stage of the project is supported by a \$15m budget from COVID-19 tourism recovery funding. The budget is administered by DOC.
- The MOP is a complex, sensitive, high-profile project, with significantly diverging positions among key stakeholders. Risks are being managed through regular stakeholder engagement and clear communication of progress and next steps.

Next steps and options

- The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has requested that the MOP Ministerial Group, which you lead, provide a progress report to Cabinet in March 2023.

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