



## Editorial: A win for a pristine landscape

Last updated 05:00 22/07/2013

OPINION: Nick Smith made the right decision to reject the Milford Tunnel in Fiordland. The project would cut through both the Fiordland and Mt Aspiring national parks and leave half a million tonnes of spoil. This is no way to treat these prime conservation areas. As Dr Smith said, in this case "nature deserves the benefit of any doubt".

Let's hope that Dr Smith makes the right decision on the other proposal affecting conservation land down south, a monorail through a beautiful beech forest in Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Site. This project has no utilitarian value, unlike the tunnel, which would have halved the travel time to Milford Sound for 420,000 tourists a year. Instead, it is a Disney-style fun ride through a pristine forest.

Both cases arise because there is an obvious tension between conservation values and the brute realities of concrete and steel. National parks set the green bar very high, as they must. These are the great landscapes of New Zealand and the world, and they are not to be damaged. These are our wahi tapu, our sacred places.

The related economic argument pits the tourist appeal of the forest and the fiords against tourists' convenience. The tunnel would have cut the journey times. The monorail would allow tourists to whiz through the forest in their sealed pod of glass and plush. They would stop for a brief stroll in the world of reality.

Everyone agrees that New Zealand needs tourists. The industry is our single largest earner of overseas exchange, and New Zealand is not a wealthy society. But the question is: what sort of tourism best suits our country? The answer, surely, is tourism that shows off the genuine bit of our clean and green national reputation.

This in turn means that we must do everything to maintain what is clean and green and not further stain it. The vast mountain of rubble from the tunnel would have permanently damaged the Hollyford Valley. The new roads and portals would have been a blot on the landscape. Dr Smith even doubted whether the tunnel could be safely or economically completed.

The monorail, similarly, would mow down more than 60 hectares of forest, including magnificent old beech trees. Of course there was a kind of fun-ride attraction to the thing, at least if viewed from inside the pod itself. From outside, there would be a permanent steel track on concrete stands snaking through primeval forest, its whizzing caravan of gawkers an insult to the thing that brought them in the first place.

This surely is not the best way to show visitors our irreplaceable treasures. Proponents of the monorail argue that in their case the green bar is not set so high, because the monorail doesn't go through a national park. But it does go through a world heritage site, and the world will be interested to see which way the government jumps.

Dr Smith has a personal commitment to green values and has shown himself a much more robust friend to the environment than his predecessor. He did the right thing with the tunnel. So now he should keep following the light and reject the monorail.



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