

## **Alternative Milford Access does not make good conservation sense or good economic sense**

The granting of concessions for the private, exclusive use of public conservation land by the tunnel and monorail applicants, is under consideration following their approval in principle by DOC's Southland Conservator, Barry Hanson.

Given their precedent setting nature, decisions made are generating an understandable level of public interest.

The PM and Tourism Minister John Key, the Minister for Conservation Kate Wilkinson and the Director-General of Conservation Al Morrison are avoiding comment, asking us to 'respect the statutory decision-making process underway'. This in spite of DOC not respecting its statutory obligation to do the same.

If the tunnel and monorail proposals had been properly and carefully considered within the parameters of the relevant legislation, namely the Conservation and National Parks Acts, Fiordland and Mt Aspiring National Park Management Plans and the Southland-West Otago Conservation Management Strategy, these two previously rejected, recycled proposals would again have been declined at the application stage.

Save Fiordland Inc. was formed because due process was not followed. Members of the society who have been through the concession process know what is involved. They helped write the management documents, through the public consultation process. Considered debate about the role of national parks, their management and what should be permitted occurred in Fiordland, Southland and Otago, within the life of both projects' planning stages.

Fiordlanders take seriously their traditional stewardship roles over the land and water. The Save Manapouri campaign of the early 70s is one example. Should either proposal be granted a concession, the irremedial environmental damage that will occur will threaten the World Heritage status of *Te Wahipounamu*, which includes Fiordland and Mt Aspiring National Parks through which the tunnel will be mined, and the Snowdon Forest Area through which the monorail will cut its swathe. The environmental damage and the scale on which it will occur does not make good conservation sense. Threatening our World Heritage status does not make good economic sense.

The obligations placed on New Zealand by UNESCO are to take measures necessary 'for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage'. The approval in principle of the two projects by DOC is a violation of those obligations.

The core business of the two proposers, Milford Dart Ltd and Riverstone Holdings Ltd is property development. They have a history of gaining concessions and consents for exclusive private use over public conservation land and selling them on to mainly overseas interests.

Infinity Investment Group, parent company of Riverstone, lists the monorail as one of its current projects. For one of its termini, years ago the group purchased the lease for an old lodge at Te Anau Downs, (not to be confused with Te Anau with its full tourism infrastructure, which the monorail bypasses by 30 km).

Promoted as a shortcut to Milford Sound, the journey from Queenstown to Milford involves a boat, bus, monorail, another bus and three new termini. Though shorter than the much enjoyed scenic road route by 80 kms, the number of transfers to reach Milford is at least quadrupled, meaning the journey will take longer overall. The human factor should never be underestimated in terms of needs and behaviour at each transfer stage.

Then there is Clause 5.3.1 of the Ngai Tahu Deed of Settlement. If a concession is granted for the monorail, Te Runanga O Ngai Tahu can also be granted a permit for development in the Greenstone Valley which physically sits between the tunnel and monorail projects.

Apart from the environmental damage, a plethora of businesses vying for a limited number of clients does not make good economic sense. Tourism numbers will not be increased, just diverted from experienced operators who know how tourism markets work. As with Japan, the broader Asian market needs time and quality tourism experiences that truly give time to travel through our land to mature into travellers who stay longer and spend more.

The issues are complex. But a simple fact is that losing our World Heritage status on which our already shaky tourism and trade '100% Pure' branding is founded, makes neither economic nor conservation sense.