



It's our World Heritage

DOC and Government Fail to Front Up on Granting of Approval-in-Principle to Wilderness Privatisation

Wednesday, 15 August 2012

Press Release: Save Fiordland

Public Misled Regarding Process, and Questions About Dubious Nature of Tunnel and Monorail Bids Remain Unanswered

While the fate of New Zealand's Te Wahipounamu UNESCO World Heritage Area remains under a cloud of uncertainty due to the Milford Dart and Fiordland Link Experience bids, the decision-makers at the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the Beehive are flatly refusing to front up and answer questions about the dubious nature of these development proposals.

Save Fiordland, the not-for-profit community organisation campaigning against the schemes, has invited DOC CEO Al Morrison, Prime Minister and Tourism Minister John Key, and Associate Conservation Minister Peter Dunne to meet with the group and discuss concerns regarding the process under which both development proposals have been granted Approval-in-Principle. All have declined to meet with the group, and all have given the same explanation that it would be inappropriate for them to meet while a final decision to grant concessions was still pending. Save Fiordland considers this to be a weak excuse to avoid fronting up to mounting questions about a faulty process, DOC's apparent abandonment of its traditional wilderness protection role, and evidence that this proposal will only benefit a privileged few.

What none of the decision-makers is willing to explain is why DOC Southland Conservator Barry Hanson said 'Yes' and granted Approval-in-Principle, and why Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson has since given 'notice of her intention to grant concessions' for both projects - with both decisions made prior to public consultation.

Private development company Milford Dart Ltd wants to dig access roads and an 11km coach tunnel under the world famous Routeburn Track in Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Park. Riverstone Holdings Ltd, another private development company, wants to construct its Fiordland Link Experience, a multi-modal transport link through conservation areas including the Kiwi Burn, Mavora Lakes area, and the Upukerora and Whitestone Rivers. Both schemes are in the Te Wahipounamu UNESCO World Heritage Area. Both developers argue that it is important that these schemes are granted to speed up and improve access between Queenstown and Milford Sound.

Other questions which remain unanswered are:

- Why DOC took the unusual step of putting two similar projects up for public consultation at the same time. Both of these are previously-rejected and recycled ideas. There is concern that two poor plans are being put on the table together, with the aim that one will be accepted as the 'lesser of two evils', when either of them would clearly fail the test of approval if judged in isolation.
- The Milford Dart tunnel runs alongside and crosses under the Routeburn Track – one of New Zealand's Great Walks and both a drawcard for overseas visitors and a traditional favourite of New Zealanders. Why would DOC allow for a development such as this to literally undermine one of its 'jewels in the crown'?
- The Fiordland Link Experience developer has applied to run a private-access corridor through a wilderness forest and over wild rivers, in order to bring tourists from Queenstown to...Milford Sound? No, not Milford, but rather an isolated spot that requires a further 1.5 hours of fossil-fuel bus transport to Milford Sound. Why, when the location is illogical and the only amenity is a single hotel? The obvious answer is that the hotel is owned by the same company that owns the monorail bid: Infinity Investments.
- Save Fiordland, like many New Zealanders, supports tourism development innovations that ensure prosperity for many – but which don't sacrifice the very environment that people are coming to see. There are better ideas such as the park-and-ride scheme using existing infrastructure: why aren't DOC and the government getting behind these, instead of the previously-rejected bids which they are suddenly now supporting?

While DOC and the government close ranks and refuse to commit to a timeframe for making final decisions on the proposals, and refuse to explain how and why Approval-in-Principle for these recycled rejects was ever granted in the first place, ordinary New Zealanders are left wondering if their traditional enjoyment of pristine wilderness is about to enter a 'Darker Future' of reckless destruction for the benefit of a select few.

For more information, please contact:

Robert Krausz
Save Fiordland Media Liaison
Tel: 03-249-8809
Email: tieke@xtra.co.nz

Daphne Taylor
Save Fiordland Chairperson
Tel: 03-249-7868 or 021-382-779
Email: billanddaphne@xtra.co.nz

Bill Jarvie
Save Fiordland Spokesperson
Tel: 03-249-7877 or 021-540-821
Email: bill.linda@xtra.co.nz