



It's our World Heritage

Nationwide Support Grows for 'Save Fiordland' Campaign

Wednesday, 27 June 2012

Press Release: Save Fiordland

Packed Crowd Braves Winter Weather to Show Support for Campaign Opposing Tunnel and Monorail Proposals

Last night in Te Anau, a standing-room crowd spilled out into the corridors of the venue where a public meeting was held to rally supporters of a campaign to save New Zealand's UNESCO World Heritage Wilderness Area. The worst winter weather of the year did not prevent numerous out-of-region supporters from attending, in addition to the big turnout from locals.

Speakers included representatives from the Southland Conservation Board, Forest and Bird, as well as veterans from the successful 'Save Manapouri' campaign from 40 years ago.

Also in attendance was a representative from the Executive of the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, who reminded the crowd that his organization – with 17,000 members across NZ - has been working for over 80 years to create and protect this country's National Parks and World Heritage Areas, and pledges to work with and support 'Save Fiordland' in its campaign to preserve the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Wilderness Area.

Political support for the 'Save Fiordland' campaign includes meeting attendee David Kennedy of the Green Party, who spoke in opposition to both the tunnel and monorail proposals. Similar support has also been conveyed by Labour Party Conservation Spokesperson for Conservation Ruth Dyson, and the Mana Party.

Meeting attendees who spoke were passionate, and unanimous in their opposition to both proposals, which were described as reckless, unnecessary, and unwanted. There is an emerging consensus spreading nationwide and overseas, that these and other future proposals need to be opposed by whatever means necessary, in order to defend this special wilderness, and the UNESCO World Heritage Status which is a major drawcard for tourists to this country. One speaker reminded the crowd that New Zealanders have an added responsibility to the rest of the world, to preserve this country's UNESCO World Heritage Areas.

Public comments reflected anger that despite the provisions of the Conservation Act, and despite public consultation processes to create the National Park Management Plans and the Conservation Management Strategies, and despite the international obligations that UNESCO World Heritage Status confers on New Zealand as a signatory to the World Heritage Convention - the Department of Conservation (DoC) has inexplicably still allowed the project proposals to progress this far. Significant inconsistencies were pointed out by several speakers, which show that both proposals run contrary to these Park Plans and Strategies, and the core values enshrined within them. Many speakers lamented DoC's apparent abandonment of its historic role as the public defender of New Zealand's precious wilderness areas.

Questions from audience members included why the tunnel and monorail proposals are even on the table, when there already exists – in the Milford Road – a first-class and world-renowned route to Milford Sound, which offers a journey that for many visitors equals or even surpasses the destination. Alternative travel options could use this existing route – such as a 'Park and Ride' system which an independent study found to be the best alternative, over other proposals which include the tunnel and monorail.

Save Fiordland's next steps include forming an incorporated society, continuing to raise funds, and coordinating efforts with campaigners in Glenorchy and beyond. While the group's primary wish is for DoC and the Minister to rule against the proposals' granting of concessions, they are preparing for the possibility that either or both concessions will be granted – in which case a legal challenge would be mounted to defeat the proposal(s) in the courts.

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