



It's our World Heritage

The Bad, the Worse and the Ugly Truth About the Boat-ATV-Monorail Proposal

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Press Release: Save Fiordland

'Sweet Deals for Mates' a Higher Priority For DoC and Government Than Protecting New Zealand's World Heritage Wilderness

The Bad:

The proposed monorail would carve a path of undeniable destruction through some of New Zealand's most beloved and pristine wilderness – an area so unique and special that it has been included in the UNESCO Te Wahipounamu – South Westland World Heritage Area. Where generations of New Zealanders have gone for recreation, tramping, and peaceful solitude, Riverstone Holdings Limited plans to deforest the old-growth Snowden Forest, build almost 30 km of concrete beam rail-line with numerous crossings over wild rivers, exclude the NZ public and disrupt an entire previously-undisturbed ecosystem - all for the sake of a private corridor for one private company, to take unaware tourists on an illogical short-circuit route to Milford Sound that has little to do with offering an optimal visitor experience.

The Worse:

That DoC has actually already given Approval-in-Principle to this proposal. The Minister for Conservation, Kate Wilkinson, has repeatedly misrepresented the true situation to the public and media, by insisting that the present stage of proposal evaluation was simply normal due process. The truth is otherwise: previous attempts to get developments such as this passed have always been stopped at the first instance, by a vigilant Department of Conservation and Ministry that were actually minding their respective watches. This time, DoC approved the previously-rejected and recycled proposal, with Southland Conservator Barry Hanson officially granting Approval-in-Principle, and with Minister Wilkinson following-up with 'notice of her intention to grant concessions'. The same misrepresentation of the truth about this approval has been repeated by local MP and Deputy Prime Minister Bill English, and Prime Minister and Tourism Minister John Key. Why does a reckless proposal such as this, which violates numerous existing covenants such as the National Park Plan and Conservation Act, get a 'YES' from DoC and the government this time?

The Ugly:

One of the most puzzling aspects of this proposal is that, while promoted as a 'shortcut to Milford Sound', the monorail terminus would actually be in Te Anau Downs – which is almost in the middle of nowhere, and leaving passengers with a further 1.5 hour bus trip to Milford Sound. Not to be confused with the bustling and full-service town of Te Anau which it bypasses by 30 km, Te Anau Downs is just a spot on the map, inside Fiordland National Park. There is but one existing amenity where the monorail is proposed to arrive: Fiordland National Park Lodge – owned by the Infinity Investment Group, which as it just happens, also owns this Fiordland Link proposal. In other words, Infinity – under the guise of 'Riverstone Holdings Limited' – has basically made a bid to run a private corridor through prime NZ wilderness, that would deliver Queenstown tourists straight to the door of their poorly-located and under-frequented hotel. For sheer audacity, this proposal deserves a 10 out of 10. It's almost funny – until you consider what this project would destroy forever. The ugliest and most disgusting truth of this development proposal is that DoC and the government didn't get the joke and stop this at the first instance. Or, maybe they're in on it – and the joke is just on the rest of us New Zealanders.

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