

Peer Review Memo

100% Review of Masterplan Document - Milford Opportunities Project

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1.0 SCOPE

This report is an independent review of the Milford Opportunities Project – a Masterplan for Piopiotahi. The opinions in this report are to ensure the masterplan meets the following objectives or assumptions:

1. That the assumptions in the plan are reasonable for implementation or recommendation purposes
2. That the information in the background reports support the masterplan recommendations in a reasonable manner
3. To highlight any potential fatal flaws of the plan, noting that this plan does not strictly work within the current legislative constraints
4. That what is proposed in the Masterplan will result in a world-class experience that truly is fitting of Kipling's assertion that it is the "8th wonder of the world"

2.0 BIO

John Festarini is currently the Director of Quebec Waterways at Parks Canada. He first joined the national park agency in 2015 as the Associate Director of Ontario Waterways where he was primarily responsible for operation and maintenance of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site, Ontario's only UNESCO World Heritage Site. Between 2018 and 2019, John served as the Park Superintendent for both Bruce Peninsula National Park and Fathom Five National Marine Park which are part of the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve. Following that time, he served as a Senior Advisor to the Senior Vice-President of Operations at Parks Canada advising senior management and field operations on the implementation of the Nature Legacy Agenda, a Government of Canada's initiative to meet the country's international commitments under the UN Convention on Biodiversity.

Prior to his time with Parks Canada, John worked with the Canadian Coast Guard and most notably served as the National Manager for Aids to Navigation Program. Prior to his tenure in the public service, John worked in the information technology sector at both IBM and Dell. Over the course of his public and private sector career, he has gained a considerable amount of experience and training in program and project management, service delivery, operations, relationship management, as well as strategic policy and planning.

3.0 DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this document are my own. They do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of my employer and should not be misconstrued as such.

4.0 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This peer review was conducted from my unique perspective as a federal public servant, one who has managed internationally significant protected areas that have experienced exceptional levels of visitation in both the recent (over-tourism) and current (pandemic) context. It is informed by the Milford Sound Opportunities Project Masterplan at 90% completion. Supporting technical documents and background material was referenced to inform this review.

The level of effort on this project to date is very apparent. The technical reference and background material are thorough and the homework completed by subject matter experts is clearly demonstrated. Taking all of this information and boiling it down into a coherent Masterplan is no easy feat. After carefully reviewing the Masterplan and referencing the available material, it is my opinion that all the details and solutions are there, but it lacks clarity and conciseness. After reading it all, what do you want me to get behind?

When building a highly anticipated plan that involves so many important partners and stakeholders, I've sometimes gotten lost trying to make sure everyone **feels heard** in the plan. But I believe I've found success by focusing on making sure everyone **sees themselves** in the plan.

Milford Sound is a microcosm for many global protected places that experience too much love. It's easy to understand why. It's a natural treasure with rich cultural history. But like all those places that are loved too much, this plan focuses too much on how it will make things better for the visitor to love it. The plan absolutely needs to respond to visitor needs, and I think it does an excellent job in doing so. But it almost forgets to promote how it will embrace the cultural and ecological values and bring the vision to life.

I can appreciate big and bold ideas, and there are plenty in this plan. The visitor use management strategies presented in this plan are evidence-based and measurable. Most importantly, the plan is adaptable and scalable. This is helpful to respond to uncertainty around future implementation budgets, legislative or regulatory changes, and even buy-in from partners and stakeholders.

This plan has tackled the key issues related to tourism pressures and presented effective solutions that will go a long way in addressing the realities and complexities of Milford Sound. The local context is clearly understood and evidenced by the extensive research, consultation and analysis undertaken prior to this plan being put together.

I know from my experience that the concepts proposed will work and they are world-class solutions to an international problem, but yet I still find the plan hard to swallow. I believe it's there's so much there it's hard not to be overwhelmed. The vision is so simple and powerful – *as it was, forever* – and yet I'm not convinced you can realize it with this plan. There are two key pillars in there, natural environment and cultural heritage, that aren't staked out quite clearly enough. I would challenge the project team to ask themselves, in all of the pillars, principles, concepts and outcomes, what is this plan actually doing to protect and present this place for the future.

The ancient Haudenosaunee in North America lived by the Seventh Generation Principle which is based on a philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. That's a principle. Spreading visitation is not. It is something you do because of the Seventh Generation Principle. It's an objective, perhaps, which you can encourage and manage. It's just not bold or innovative. It's what every other place is doing that is busy. So why are you doing it? To preserve it for seven generations? That's a principle to live by! A visitor, a resident, a partner, a stakeholder can

get behind that and instantly connect with the place because they are part of something bigger. I want to be part of that story! I can see myself in this plan now!

Do the Ngai Tahu have a principle that their ancestors lived by that extols the importance of protecting nature? For many indigenous peoples, their cultural history IS their natural history. I would argue that's where the plan could be bolder and more focused. Show me how those two are also intertwined. That's the story of Millford Sound.

I've often heard that the single biggest challenge I would face as a manager of a national park is trying to "strike the right balance between protecting and presenting a place". I disagree with that notion. The single biggest challenge I have faced, that many national parks face, and in particular ones like Fiordland face, is protecting it. A principle I live by is that every decision should be informed by ecological integrity first. If you don't protect a place, you have nothing to present.

I'm honing in on principles because I think that's where you can make the most important change to this plan. And more generally, I would argue the plan is weighed down with 7 pillars, 5 objectives, 4 principles (or 7?), 10 concepts, addressing 14 key issues. I see an outline of a framework there, but it's not really coming together for me. Plus I'm not really inspired by this plan. Yet, it really is a good visitor use management plan, if that was the ultimate goal.

Objective 1 – The Assumptions in the Masterplan are reasonable for implementation or recommendation purposes

In general, yes. But questions around governance and legislative changes need answers. I wonder if it might help to show what is doable under the current context. Certainly as a manager I could see what is in my direct control. That's what I want to focus on.

What the plan does well is present concepts which can be implemented alone or in combination with others. Each of the concepts are sound and do respond directly to the first few key issues. However, most of the issues are from a purely visitor/human perspective. I firmly believe that most important issues this place is facing is #4 – *it being void of Ngai Tahu identity* – and #5 – *the compromising of conservation values*. Yet, they are ranked lower than issue #3 – *all day trip*. Sounds like a first world problem to me. If you built a plan around addressing #4 and #5 alone, the rest of the answers will still come but from a more coherent and focused perspective.

Objective 2 – The information provided in background reports support the Masterplan recommendations in a reasonable manner

I commend the team for such comprehensive and detailed analysis and planning. Just the technical references and background material alone show substantial work that informs substantive solutions. This work is truly impressive! But as things get synthesized, some things can get completely lost. Trying to boil all of this down and into one Masterplan is no small feat. The technical reference and background material are thorough and the homework was completed by subject matter experts. The information is clear. I can understand how the project team arrived at their concepts. The assertions are reasonable as are the recommendations themselves. My only constructive criticism here is try and bring to life all that stuff to the forefront a bit more through visuals and telling a better story about how you go to this point.

Objective 3 – Are there any fatal flaws to the plan?

No, but it is easy to envision its eventual demise. The plan essentially proposed to build itself out of a problem. It will absolutely work because the place has so much opportunity to do so. But is it a plan for the next 50 years? I'm not sure. Will the answer be to keep building, process-

engineering, spreading visitation? Perhaps. If so, then a good principle might be that effective visitor use management must be a proactive and adaptive process. Now more than ever people are flocking to nature. What happens if the context changes tomorrow and visitation returns with a vengeance? Will I need to shelf this plan? You want to be able to show the client that the strategies and tools presented are responsive and flexible. In particular, it may need to acknowledge that at some point, you have to accept that you can't keep building yourself out of a problem. Resource conditions may deteriorate to the point where visitor use must be either be capped or restricted.

Other principles to operate under to demonstrate your commitment to your vision could be that western science is always informed by traditional knowledge of the Ngai Tahu. And if one or both are missing, then the precautionary principle applies. I remember an Elder from the Saugeen Ojibway Nation say to me once, "John, the hares are all brown now. They used to be white when I was young." That information is important and it speaks to people directly when presented from that perspective.

Objective 4 – What is proposed in the Masterplan will result in a world-class experience.

Milford Sound is already a world-class destination and by virtue of that fact, it should always offer a world-class experience. Interestingly, it is the exceptional visitor use of the place that has impacted the experience in a negative way. Will the implementation of the Masterplan result in an improved experience? There is no doubt! In particular, the corridor approach and expanded definition of what is the destination will go a long way in ensuring that world-class experience. But what makes this place unique? What can I experience here that I won't anywhere else? There are Fjords in Norway and Indigenous Culture in Canada. I truly believe what can and will set this plan apart is that it is authentically Aotearoa New Zealand. When people abroad think of NZ, they think Maori and nature.

The infrastructure and the solutions will work, but they lack specificity around how visitors will be able to personally connect with the natural and cultural heritage of the place. It begs the question, how did the Ngai Tahu travel or live in this area before it was colonized by European? Could visitors truly experience that along the way? Can protection and presentation occur by having Ngai Tahu share their traditions and teaching with others? Can I go there and learn to hike, camp, fish or paddle? You want people to leave and not just think, wow, that place was stunning and I'm so happy I got my Instagram shot. You want them to leave with something meaningful that they will carry with them for the rest of their life. In a nutshell, I believe you need to really demonstrate how the visitor will personally connect with a place (see themselves in this plan) to say it will result in a world-class experience for folks.

Fortunately, you don't underestimate the importance of the basic service offer that everyone needs and wants. 90% of complaints at a national park relate to lack of toilets, lack of trash bins, and lack of water stations. If you don't get those right, the experience is compromised. I really think you got these basics down with a carefully thought-out plan that is focused on the visitor.

5.0 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Be to be true to the vision – and it's such a beautiful one! You can do this by placing more emphasis on the importance of presenting the cultural heritage of the Ngai Tahu (key issue #4) and protecting the natural environment (key issue #5).
2. Tighten up the number of pillars you have (or at least group like items). I couldn't quite tell you what they all are. You want people like me to remember these. They have to be snappy and easy for someone to recall and regurgitate.
3. Find a way to make people see themselves in this plan. Hit people right in the feels with those principles. It has to be something inspiring. Be ready to lay down principles you would live your own life by!
4. Stand by your concepts (visitor use management options). They are sound, they are realistic, and under the right conditions and time/money, they are achievable. Just be ready to really show people that they are adaptable, scalable, responsive, and flexible. You don't want this plan to end up collecting dust on my shelf.