

## Engagement summary

The Milford Opportunities project working group met with more than 100 stakeholders in September/October 2018 to discuss the project and what has been done so far, and to find out people's thoughts and opinions on the issues facing the sound and the surrounding area.

Stakeholders included recreational boaties, including members of the Southern Sport Fishing Club and the Fiordland Recreational Conservation Trust; members of the Te Anau Community Board, the Fiordland Marine Guardians, members of Destination Fiordland, which included businesspeople from Milford, Te Anau and Queenstown, pilots, and the general public at a drop-in session. Meetings have also been held with iwi, the conservation board and those working and living in Milford.

A meeting with commercial fishing companies is still to be held.

Invitations were sent to Destination Queenstown and the Milford Community Trust, but unfortunately no one could attend at that time. Further meetings will be organised. Meetings for other stakeholders, such as iwi and national organisations, including central government, are taking place or being organised at the moment.

Every meeting began with an introduction to Milford Opportunities and a summary of the research and work that has happened in the first eight months. It was highlighted by group members the need to consider the other work being done at the moment, including the park management plans, and also to engage properly to ensure this is done properly.

## Themes

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Common themes emerged very quickly, with everyone acknowledging there were issues and we needed to deal with them. It was highlighted that this is not the first time Milford has been looked at and it was essential that this project delivered on the issues.

Many suggested charging for some part of the experience, whether it be a toll road or access into the sound for visitors. Better information online is essential particularly around travel times, facilities, parking etc. Tourists are woefully unprepared for both the road and the situation in Milford itself.

Many highlighted the need to ensure New Zealanders had access as Milford was their place as well as the visitors. It is important Kiwis are not squeezed out.

## Specific group summaries

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For the recreational boaties, the key issue was around ensuring there was adequate and appropriate parking for people using the area, both for short-term and longterm visitors. There were also concerns around Deep Water Basin, which included the facilities available at the White House and the maintenance of such and the ramp use and safety around that.

Solutions suggested including improving the White House with users paying for that, and then having a system of swipe cards or other such options for usage.

The ramp needs to be either widened or another one built away from the commercial users.

Destination Fiordland member businesspeople said tourists do not pay to keep the road open or look after the conservation estate so there needs to be a charge on the road. The story needs to be told better – more information needs to be out there around driving times/best time to travel, and it needs to be ones story

from everywhere including Queenstown and from the tourism companies. There needs to be lots of information eg limited petrol and the isolation as people don't realise how isolated Milford Sound is.

It is important to look at the footprint in Milford and future proof it so the whole project needs to be sold well and take New Zealanders along with it. There are third world elements to Milford at the moment and staff accommodation both at Milford and Te Anau is very tight.

A structured approach to transport is needed and an idea is to incentivise people getting on a bus eg using marketing to say take a break from driving. This will also help with getting people at different times during the day, as will adjusting pricing. Is a cap needed on free independent travellers or on Milford itself?

The question was asked about whether we are trying to conserve what MS is rather than overload it. What is enough – if you look at the big parks in the US and their structured approach, there are some good ideas there.

More people coming through Te Anau is great and more people spending time in Te Anau is also great so the future of Te Anau and Milford Sound is linked totally. We need to ensure Te Anau has more things to do at all times of the year and it has the facilities to cope with the increase, including things like more money for ambulance services.

Accommodation is a big issue in Te Anau as we are at a stalemate if people can't find a place to live – we need high density housing. We need to look at the marketing of Queenstown to Milford and change that as well to get more people in Te Anau, but if businesses start up, there are risks of being able to survive through winter in Te Anau

There needs to be more made of the journey – what can you stop and see on the way in/out of Milford, and encourage people to come in the off peak season.

The project needs to ensure continued engagement with everyone and that there is feedback from that. We also need to talk to the visitors when they go in there and find out what they think.

Te Anau Community Board members believed a road levy would be beneficial, not only for management of the road and Milford but also for investment back into our community. In order for people to have a great experience, there needs to be sympathetic infrastructure and what's in there needs to be enhanced. However, we don't want Te Anau or Milford to be another Queenstown as they are different.

Information is key as well, with some websites' driving times from Queenstown to Milford an hour out. More signage and information is needed.

The public drop-in session saw people suggesting capping numbers, and highlighted the fact that we have been here before and we need to deliver. Whatever came out of this project needed to align with Department of Conservation management plans and maybe in the future, Milford is not do-able in one day from Queenstown.

The pilots group said there needs to be an action plan as we go along because we are in trouble if this process takes 10 years. More than 20 million people go to Venice yearly and they handle it so we need to look at examples overseas and how attractions are managed.

The boat cruises dictate timings of visitors, and we need to create options for visitors for all day. We need to reduce cars but we need to have a place to park planes and buses. The airport can be used for about 160 days in the year, but we need to be smarter and have facilities at the airport, such as a toilet. About 10% of visitors to Milford come via a plane or helicopter.

The project needs to have close links with the Queenstown Milford Users Group and put together a plan as to what numbers we are going to fly in. Continued air services are a must and they can offer other services such as flights into valleys and other experiences.

Landings concessions expires in 2021 and allowed landings are already decreasing (2004 15,000 landings, 2017, 10,000 landings). There are four fixed wing companies and four helicopter companies and these companies have a significant investment in Milford particularly in relation to aircraft. The costs are high to land in Milford and perhaps people could fly in and use Knobs Flat as an alternative.

Most fly to reduce the timeframe to get to Milford to get on a boat but 90% get back off in Queenstown thinking the scenic flight was the best thing.

Doing nothing will kill Milford and it is essential to get the real value out of Milford – currently it is grossly undersold.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians spokesman said there was pressure on the Fiordland Marine area (FMA) and their focus was on the coastal plan v NDMPS.

The issues are with managing cumulative effect rather having to deal with individual cases and the key areas are around fishing, mooring and volume of both commercial and recreational vessels and how this damages the environment.

We need to be able to protect the “china shops” in the fiords and manage the increasing trends, including expeditionary cruise ships which can stay in Fiordland for a week.

There is a big opportunity for the guardians right now with the pressure on marine areas from Puysegur up past Milford and we need to be part of the coastal plan. Milford is the easiest and most used access to Fiordland marine areas and there is a steady increase in recreational vessels out there.

The guardians are not here to stop things, but to manage and more controls are needed to make consents reasonable, including looking at the cumulative effect, rather than just the individual consent.

Milford residents and workers said the working group should spend a few days and nights at Milford in order to understand the place better. People’s livelihoods are at Milford and it is their home

Suggestions were made that campervan numbers needed to be reduced, and park and ride was essential. Safety concerns on the road are more about the drivers than the vehicles and rentals should not be allowed to travel on the road during winter. Only professional drivers should be on the road and this might mean that the road could stay open longer and more often. Reduced speed limits, rumble lines and passing lanes are needed.

People need more things to do during their time here, as do the residents, so some of the old tracks should be reinstated and a walking path from the sound to the first bridge could be created. A public water fountain fed by the Bowen Falls where people can fill their water bottles for free was suggested, as was not allowing people to leave rubbish in at Milford. They should be told to take it out and leave at Te Anau.

Visitors are enthralled by the kea but maybe have specific feeding stations with better food where people can gather to see the birds, eg. Bowen Falls.

Thought needs to be given about the great walks as well, including booking huts online, whether the walks can be managed year round and how the reverse direction on the Milford track could be done better.

It is essential better information is got out to visitors regarding car parking, camping, accommodation, etc. Social media needs to be utilised more and it would be really great to see an app produced that gives up to date information on Milford and it could include a ride-sharing app. Interactive/responsive/live signage needed that is continually being updated is needed.