

Engagement summary

Members of the Milford Opportunities project working group met with about 60 stakeholders in November/December 2019 to update them on the project, why there had been a delay and to create a clear list of ideas for the sound and the surrounding area.

Meetings were open to the public and were held in Te Anau, Queenstown and Milford Sound *Piopiota*hi.

There was a level of frustration among those attending the meetings that this was taking too long and nothing was happening. A few believed the exercise of identifying what is working and what isn't, along with the ideas of the area, was not worthwhile because it had been done before. However, others found it valuable to identify key ideas for the area.

Responses to questions

All three groups' responses have been summarised in each question as there were many similar responses. The most frequent responses have been summarised at the top of each set of answers.

What is working well in Milford Sound *Piopiota*hi?

- Milford Road Alliance maintenance commitment to road maintenance is excellent (and appreciated), road status online notification in Te Anau is excellent, communication of road status at Lower Hollyford Road intersection gates (when closed) has improved, management of tunnel, road status updates a day before – a lot of support for the processes and work done
- Milford Sound Tourism parking area staff do a fine job, good use of them as wardens and giving directions, digital signage a positive as well. Parking for coaches is also better.
- Praise about the boat terminal, scheduling and the work the harbour master does
- Fiordland National Park, including Milford Sound *Piopiota*hi, is a world class destination – the scenery (and sand flies) are outstanding, along with the native vegetation around Freshwater Basin foreshore. Foreshore Walk is a beautiful, local and valuable foreground to Milford Sound and enables a good flow of people.
- Community spirit and the cohesiveness of the community were remarked on, along with staff accommodation and the work of the medical team and fire station and how the emergency response is co-ordinated.
- Airways and the work at the airport tower were supported by several.
- The visitor flight experience was superb.
- Other elements receiving positive feedback included: the Bowen Falls boat, the spread to early cruises ex Te Anau, the Milford Track, the hydro plant, fuel delivery, weka and putangitangi (paradise duck) are breeding in the perimeter of Freshwater & Deepwater Basins, providing accessible wildlife encounters, the high standard of constant upgrades to Milford Sound Lodge, the updated Lobster Company facilities, the airport carpark shuttle as a two-bus operation, and the international promotion of Milford Sound *Piopiota*hi.

What doesn't work in Milford Sound *Piopiotahi*?

- Management of the sound – too many agencies involved and the fees and concessions are too high, particularly when the infrastructure is not reliable, getting initiatives under way hamstrung by red tape, self-regulating structure of Milford Sound Tourism with two dominant owners and players inevitably leads to self-interested management decision making; future planning – co-ordination (SDC, DOC, ES, NZTA, MNZ, iwi, Govt)
- Parking during summer - new machines and charges – customer dissatisfaction, large lines in terminal, inaccurate data, too expensive, complex to use; Lake Mistletoe car parking entry location is dangerous; excessive parking area at The Divide, Lake Marian Track and Deepwater Basin
- No airport facilities, including no terminal, bathroom, bus pickup space, bus turnaround, insufficient aircraft parking – no integration from DOC and uncertainty about airport future and unfair landing allocations
- Overcrowding – noise pollution from helicopters and aircraft, and from buses idling at popular stops, ad hoc infrastructure, deplorable condition of buildings particularly in Freshwater Basin, vehicle crowding, and noise and visual pollution from commercial activities; overcrowding at Mirror Lakes, The Chasm, Lake Howden
- No 'wow' moment of arrival at Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* itself, just a distracting visual confusion of infrastructure competing for attention with nature, Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* is tired
- Communication – internet speeds, band width, cellphone coverage on road
- Foul sewerage odours present at Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* Visitor Centre dockside, Knobs Flat and Freshwater Basin
- Lack of a hub for the community, no pub, no place for people to hang out and relax
- Lack of facilities and boat ramp not fit for purpose in Freshwater Basin
- Visitor terminal has the atmosphere of a suburban shopping mall - noisy, crowded, and heavy with commercial presence, nil acoustic control materials in terminal leads to painful human noise levels and it leaks
- Other criticisms included: Te Anau Downs Station land use has adverse environmental effects to Te Anau basin and surrounding conservation, illegal camping, attitude of cruise ship pilots, costs of services, lack of consideration of use of Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* for NZers, waste management, road safety around the sound, no full time medic; lack of toilets at The Chasm and smelly toilets at The Divide car park; New Zealand Police rarely patrol SH94 within Fiordland National Park - slow moving drivers in the afternoons create an indirect hazard, a real time communication system to NZ Police traffic patrol officers within SH94 would enhance road safety; no publicly visible master plan guiding future use of Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* dust nuisance at Deepwater Basin; pot holes at Deepwater Basin; space utilisation, boat schedules not adhered to, 1080 drops in local areas and a lack of accommodation, visual pollution from regulatory signage e.g. No Drones signage at Eglinton Valley, Monkey Creek and Milford Sound *Piopiotahi*; visual degradation of Christie Falls and Hollyford River with mixed materials and forms when the same safety outcome could have been achieved with a higher standard of design, such as a natural rock wall; visual degradation of Homer Tunnel by application of unnecessary white paint on walls; visual degradation of Eglinton Valley by unnecessary steel roadside barriers between Walker Creek and Mackay Creek degradation of Cascade Creek meadow, Eglinton Valley by camping infrastructure - island toilet blocks, gravel parking areas, island shelters- no longer a natural amenity, now a parking, toileting and accommodation site

What changes would you make in Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* if you could do anything?

- One unified body in charge of the purse strings, disestablish Milford Sound Tourism, compensate existing investors as required, replace with a governing body independent of commercial interest, limit concessions and make them contestable at defined intervals, establish visitors and locals user groups providing input to decision making, not just a commercial and regulatory stakeholder group; less red tape, royalties returned to area. Remove DOC management, have a master plan and look at what is done overseas!
- Start again with a clean slate for parking, bus turnaround, and overall modernisation of tired facilities; transform the Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* foreshore at Freshwater Basin to return it to a peaceful, natural place to visit - that is what visitors are coming to experience. Consider moving visitor terminal to Deepwater Basin so that Freshwater Basin is reserved for natural values only; demolish existing terminal, make replacement subject to a national design competition to attract NZ best architects, and direct brief to make the building an experience of the natural features of the location, restore Freshwater Basin to a place for people and nature, while allowing fishing, kayaking, cruise boat and private boat launching operations to operate from a redesigned Deepwater Basin. Make foreshore arrival wow moment.
- Relocate means of travel from Te Anau (cars, buses) away from the Milford Sound *Piopiotahi* foreshore – maybe new arrival hub between the Tutoko River bridge and Milford Sound Lodge; provide high frequency public bus operations along SH94 between desired access points (park and ride system); allow private vehicles for locals, levy punitive penalty rates for international tourists who insist on bringing a car in to the National Park; park and ride for all people – or exclude NZ drivers or permits for Milford operations, staff etc; move to professional drivers only; explore electrification of buses and boats with incentives for conversion; consider traffic capacity caps based on tunnel loads, have an intermediate mass transport system between the valley arrival hub, disincentive bus travel from Queenstown in one day
- Better accommodation – demolish the old hotel and other buildings around there and rebuild a new world class one
- More activities for tourists than just cruising or kayaking – Milford History Museum, abseiling, more nature walks, reopen Bowen Falls walkway and build a shelter at the top, waterfront restaurant/gastro pub with local cuisine
- Create airport facilities – a terminal with bathrooms, bus area with turnaround and scrap landing allocations as weather does that naturally
- New staff and crew accommodation – communal, not based around the businesses, with a community centre and pub
- Get rid of paying for parking – charge visitors a fee to enter the park
- Cap daily visitor numbers – like a lottery system, with more people in the shoulder and winter season
- Grounds maintenance – general tidy up of public areas, litter, make the place look nicer, keep natural but nice
- Signage – foreign language for directional and instructions eg parking, maps- Deepwater Basin carparking, foreshore walkway, clear and concise instructions for parking/ overnight camping etc, warnings before entering Milford Road – no petrol station, check fuel, no Wi-Fi, no service, drive with care – let cars pass
- Ensure there is an info centre that has after hours help for tourists
- Public facilities at Deep Water Basin and Airport– boat ramp and toilets and changing areas

Other ideas included: move primary ticket sales function to Te Anau, levy punitive penalty rates if sold at Milford Sound with 100% margin transferred to conservation project budgets in Fiordland National Park. Relocate helicopter operations up valley to arrival hub to reduce noise pollution at foreshore; transition fixed wing aircraft operations to quiet aircraft types only; remove white paint from Homer Tunnel and tidy up electrical services on tunnel walls; commission a heritage conservation plan for Mitre Peak Lodge and enforce it; reduce staffing at Milford Sound by moving sales to Te Anau, demolish redundant housing at Freshwater Basin; implement a multilingual must-read telephone app for all visitors prior to entering FNP as a substitute for visually polluting regulatory signage, have a building standards master plan and stick to it. Accelerate return of tussock grassland to Eglinton Valley with reintroduction of Takahē to follow, banning plastic bottles; relevant informative signs that work – ie Mossburn – road closed; reinstate Bowen Falls walk; improve Wi-Fi and cell coverage; new hydro scheme and remove large cruise ships, a casino, create a fuelling service wharf in Deepwater Basin to relieve pressure from Freshwater, better road condition communication with Milford companies as in when road will open/close and not opening for only 2 hours in a day, developing Little Tahiti site for freedom campers, develop true right bank of Tutoko River Milford side of Tutoko bridge, use the food waste to have a biogas plant, become more eco-friendly, on call/equipment for tourists if they have car issues.