

**CONSERVATION OF COASTAL AREAS
- FIORDLAND AND MILFORD SOUND**

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The western coastline of Fiordland stretches for over 1,000km and includes 14 fiords from Milford Sound to Preservation Inlet some extend inland for up to 40km. It is a remote, rugged environment unique in its geological makeup and exceptional natural beauty.

The fiords in particular are universally outstanding and range from overwhelming narrowness at Milford Sound to the wide island studded expanse at Dusky Sound and Chalky/Preservation Inlet.

Of the fauna particularly in the marine environment, one-third or more of the total population of the southern fur seal breed around the Fiordland Coastline. The Fiordland Crested Penguin is almost confined to its shores, while underwater red and black Corals, Brachiopods and other interesting forms of marine life occur.

The early Maori used the area on regular basis, making forays for hunting, fishing and collecting the prized greenstone variety takiwai.

European navigators including Cook, Vancouver and Malaspina visited area in 18th century. Sealers hunted the fur seals, nearly to extinction, in the early 19th century. Goldmining, exploring and surveying followed.

The areas modified by these and similar 19th century activities and, more recently, such development as the Manapouri power scheme are small and their overall impacts minimal.

The coastal landscape of Fiordland remains essentially in a natural unmodified state except in very small areas, for example, at the head of Milford Sound, where there has been confined development. This development, for the most part, has facilitated the public use and enjoyment of the Park.

Milford Sound is undisputably one of the most important of all the amenities areas in New Zealand National Parks. It is the only road access point to a world famous area of spectacular scenery, and it is a long established link in the country's tourist circuit. In recent years there has been a marked increase in visitors to the area - annually estimated at 250,000 maximum.

Following the Maori Milford Sound was rediscovered in 1820 by Captain Grono and visited periodically by sealing ships during

the 19th century. The first resident, Donald Sutherland, became involved with early steamer visits and thus helped to establish it as a tourist area. The Milford Track was opened in 1889.

In 1903 the Sutherlands opened an accommodation house. The Sound was included in the Sounds National Park in 1905, but there was little control until 1956. It was during in this period that most of the present facilities were developed. The Tourist and Health Department took over the guest house which later become the Tourist Hotel Corporation hotel.

With the Milford Road opening in 1954, Milford became directly linked with the outside world. The Milford Hotel was completed in 1954 and an airport established in the period 1951/54.

A further development of the 1950's and 60's was that of the crayfishing industry. This industry has boomed and Milford is a major focus port, on the Coast, for these activities.

The area became Fiordland National Park under the National Park Act in 1952, but not until the late 1960's was any appreciable degree of control exercised. Today this small area of Fiordland suffers from a number of character threatening uses, the most notable being the pressures from increasing numbers of visitors.

It is the only Fiord that has direct access by public road. As a consequence it is the only place in the Park which has a high concentration of tourist pressure and development.

The deficiencies in existing facilities have been evident for at least 20 years. The facilities are not adequate in capacity, or on environmental grounds to cope with expected visitor numbers.

A rationalisation of the tourist and fishing fleet moorings, and improvements to commercial rubbish collection has relieved some of the pressures, - BUT traffic congestion, dangerous access, restricted parking facilities, lack of amenities such as toilets, interpretation, ticketing and an airport terminal, as well as effective sewage disposal and a power supply - all remain pressing and urgent issues to be resolved.

Constraints to Development

There are only 55 hectares of reasonably flat land with the remainder being extremely precipitous, solid rock. It has the wettest recorded climate in New Zealand with an average 6,500mm of rain per annum. .

The prevalence of the biting sandfly, 'Te Namu', is a distinct consideration because it limits the range of enjoyable outdoor activities.

The distance of Milford from service centres, such as Te

Anau, and the constraints imposed by SH94 and the Homer Tunnel are other factors.

On the administrative side, numerous government agencies are involved, which does not always permit the easiest and most efficient administration.

Finally - the need for development must make the minimum possible impact on the natural environment, if the very reason why visitors come to Milford is not to be destroyed.

Planning To Date

Various sequences of events, in the 1970's, led to the preparation of the 1980 Development Concept Plan. From the recommendations made, the 1986 Development Plan and Environmental Impact Assessment was conceived. A social carrying capacity of about 4,000 per day is predicted, whereas the present maximum is about 2,000 per day.

These factors, plus the 1986 Development Plan must be considered.

Along with three other development concepts to the recent time:

- Gondola proposal
- Combined Fiordland Travel/Tourist Hotel Corporation option (Based on the 1986 Plan)
- Deep Water Basin option (for shipping)

The critical factor in all of these is cost, the dollars and cents, and who pays ? - All options should be considered openly.

Whatever is decided - must take into account the increased use at Milford, coupled with the deterioration and inadequacy of existing facilities, which will adversely effect the natural environment that the visitor comes to see, as has happened in other places throughout the world.

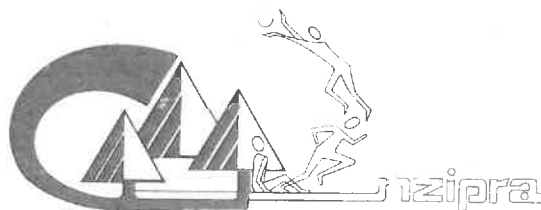
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