

# Evaluating public input in National Park Management Plan reviews

Facilitators and barriers to meaningful  
participation in statutory processes

SCIENCE FOR CONSERVATION 308



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*Te Papa Atawhai*

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## Facilitators and barriers to meaningful participation in statutory processes

Mariska Wouters, Ned Hardie-Boys and Carla Wilson

SCIENCE FOR CONSERVATION 308

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# Evaluating public input in National Park Management Plan reviews

## Facilitators and barriers to meaningful participation in statutory processes

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### ABSTRACT

This study set out to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation in the New Zealand Department of Conservation's (DOC's) statutory planning processes, and to identify any constraints to effective participation and areas that could be improved. The evaluation focused on six recent statutory review processes—five National Park Management Plans and one Conservation Management Plan. The study used a mixed methods approach and this report presents the findings from a review of DOC's statutory requirements and its practices, a survey of submitters to recent management plan reviews, and stakeholder and staff interviews. The Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation was used as the underlying framework for public input. Nine evaluation criteria were developed and applied—representativeness, influence, purpose and decision-making, timeliness, early involvement, feedback, information, effective forums, and enabling process. The study found that participants were generally satisfied with the consultation opportunities provided, and the ability to provide written submissions was strongly supported. Current participants represent a core constituency of experienced people who participate well in the planning processes and, on the whole, the methods used suit these people. Those who are currently engaged are not representative of New Zealand society. Main constraints to public participation were the lengthiness of the review processes, lack of feedback provided to participants, under-representation of certain interest groups and the general public, and unclear definition of objectives for involving the public in each review. Recommendations are that DOC actively plans for public input, broadens public and interest group representation, involves the public as early as possible in these processes, provides regular feedback, and reduces the timeframe for the plan review process.

**Key words:** best practice, constraints, effectiveness, engagement, evaluation, facilitators, national park management plan, public participation, stakeholder consultation, statutory planning, New Zealand

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# 1. Outline of study and objectives

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Conservation (DOC) engages in public consultation as part of its statutory planning processes under the Conservation Act 1987, National Parks Act 1980, and the Reserves Act 1977. It has recently undertaken a number of National Park management plan reviews, and at present, is embarking on an intensive period of consultation on Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) reviews. These strategies will set the conservation management direction for DOC's 12 conservancies for the next 10 years, and will have a different structure than previous CMSs; in particular, there will be a large emphasis on understanding people's values for places. Ensuring these reviews reflect public needs and expectations will require effective consultation processes.

There has been growing pressure from key stakeholders for DOC to engage in consultation on its management plans and conservation management strategies, and to improve its consultation practices. Questions have been raised by these stakeholders as to whether DOC's existing public processes are too restrictive in terms of encouraging effective public input. At the same time, there is concern that while there may be increased awareness by some of the public for the need to be involved in these processes and for their views to be appropriately heard and considered, few people actually make the effort to become involved. It is unclear whether DOC's current processes are enabling sufficient public input or are likely to be able to meet future management planning needs.

The last objective evaluation of DOC's public consultation as part of its statutory planning reviews was carried out in 1990 (James 1990). It is therefore timely to undertake an evaluation of current practice.

The Conservation Act 1987 and the National Parks Act 1980 describe mandatory processes which include public notification of the intent to prepare, amend or review plans, and which enable public submissions and hearings on draft plans. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of public input in these processes, to identify any constraints to effective participation, and any areas where things could be improved.

As this study looks specifically at public input to DOC's statutory management planning processes, it applies DOC's definition of consultation as prescribed in its General Policies (further described below) which implement the conservation legislation (DOC 2005: 54; NZCA 2005: 62). Therefore, the underlying definition for consultation / public input in this study is:

*... an invitation to give advice, and the consideration of that advice. To achieve consultation, sufficient information must be supplied and sufficient time allowed by the consulting party to those consulted to enable them to tender helpful advice. It involves ongoing dialogue. It does not necessarily mean acceptance of those views, but it enables informed decision-making by having regard to those views.*



## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

The two main objectives of this research were:

- To identify facilitators and constraints that affect public input to DOC's statutory management planning processes
- To provide guidance to improve the practice of public consultation in DOC's statutory planning processes

This research used a mixed methods approach comprising a survey of submitters to six management plan reviews, and interviews with submitters, staff, and members from Conservation Boards and the New Zealand Conservation Authority. This report does not provide a complete evaluation of each management plan review. Rather, it gives insight into the facilitators of, and constraints to, public input, and uses the collective information from the six reviews to inform improvement and the recommendation of 'best practices'. Issues identified from these reviews are likely to be pertinent to other statutory management plan reviews. For that reason, it is anticipated that the report will help DOC staff, the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA) and Conservation Boards better understand the barriers and opportunities to effective public input to DOC's statutory planning processes, and will contribute to improving processes to provide effective public participation.

It was beyond the scope of this study to include those people who did not engage with the review processes. This study formed part of a three-pronged approach to improving DOC's consultation practices associated with its statutory management planning processes. In addition to this evaluation, a separate study was undertaken to improve the way DOC plans for and seeks public input into the review of statutory management plans<sup>1</sup>, and public participation training, through the International Association of Public Participation, was made available by DOC to a number of its staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Pattillo, A.; Wouters, M. 2010: Engagement story report. Department of Conservation. Wellington.

## 2. Review of existing information

This section is divided into three main parts. The first considers the statutory requirements for public input in DOC's planning processes and current practice guidance available to staff. This is followed by a summary of findings from previous studies which examined the effectiveness of public input in DOC's statutory planning processes. In the third part, internationally-recognised principles for public participation are then briefly described to help place DOC's approach to public input in its statutory management plan processes. Based on the information described in the three parts of this section, a series of evaluation criteria are developed to guide the study.

### 2.1 THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S OBLIGATIONS

#### 2.1.1 Statutory basis for consultation

The Conservation Act 1987, the National Parks Act 1980 and the Reserves Act 1977 prescribe statutory processes which require public consultation<sup>2</sup>. While this legislation does not include a definition of public consultation or participation, it prescribes the process to be followed to enable the public to formally have input. The processes that are specifically considered in this study are those set out for Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) and National Park Management Plans (NPMPs), but the issues are equally relevant to Conservation Management Strategies (CMSs)<sup>3</sup>.

CMSs, CMPs and NPMPs are all 10-year planning mechanisms. Under the Conservation Act (s17D), DOC is required to prepare CMSs for all areas it administers, and all natural and historic resources covered by its responsibilities—there are 17 CMSs covering the whole of New Zealand. The Conservation Act (s17E) also provides for CMPs, which are detailed plans for particular sites. They are designed to achieve the goals set out in CMSs and are required only if specifically mentioned in a CMS. Under the National Parks Act 1980 (s45), each of New Zealand's fourteen national parks has to have a management plan (i.e. a NPMP). Since 2003, six NPMPs and one CMP have been reviewed and approved, while three further NPMPs were under review at the time of this study.

In 2005, two general policies were introduced to help implement the conservation legislation. The Conservation General Policy provides policy for the implementation of a number of Acts<sup>4</sup>, and also provides guidance for consistent management planning, including the preparation of CMSs and CMPs. The purpose of the General Policy for National Parks is to implement the National Parks Act

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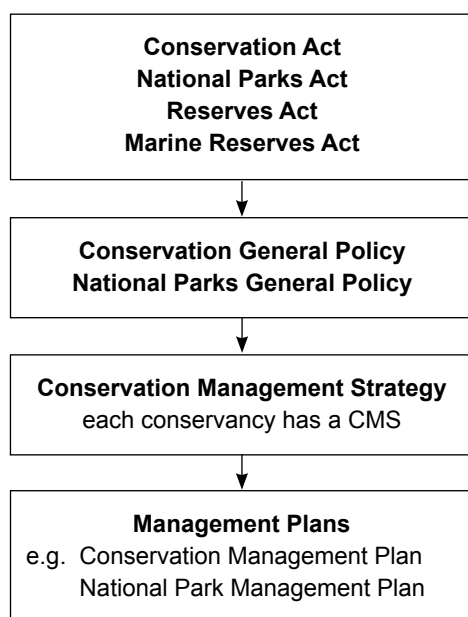
<sup>2</sup> There are also legal requirements to consult when preparing CMSs and CMPs under the Marine Reserves Act 1971 and the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, but these processes do not form part of this study.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this study, there were no recent CMS reviews available for assessment.

<sup>4</sup> Conservation Act 1987, Wildlife Act 1953, Marine Reserves Act 1971, Reserves Act 1977, Wild Animal Control Act 1977, Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978.

and to provide consistent national direction for the administration of national parks through CMSs and NPMPs. The hierarchy of these three types of planning documents is shown in Fig. 1. It is in a CMS that the two general policies are addressed together and establish objectives for the integrated management of natural and historic resources managed by DOC.

Figure 1. Statutory framework for management of public conservation land. Based on figure in DOC & NZCA (2006: 6).



The key consideration here is that the statutory planning documents are required to implement, and cannot derogate from, these general policies. The general policies require public input into the statutory planning processes to provide an opportunity to canvass a wide range of public opinion and strengthen cooperative relationships, and that the public **will** be consulted. The General Policy for National Parks states that DOC 'will consult the relevant Conservation Board and tangata whenua and seek written comments from, and have regard to the views of, interested people and organisations' (NZCA 2005: 57). For CMSs and CMPs, the Conservation

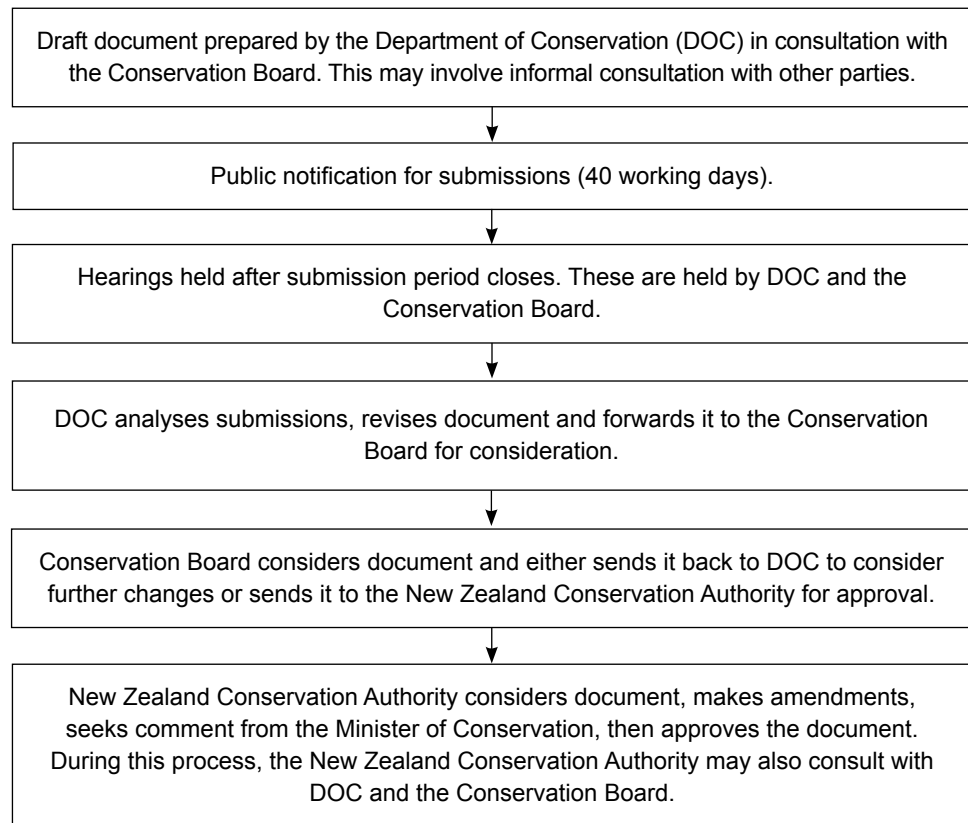
General Policy states: 'Conservation Boards, people or organisations interested in public conservation lands and waters, including fish and game councils and tangata whenua, will be consulted when developing or reviewing conservation management strategies and plans' (DOC 2005: 49). The general policies also provide a definition for consultation, as referred to in Section 1.1.

In relation to Māori, section 4 of the Conservation Act requires that all persons exercising functions and powers under this Act give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. A duty to consult is one of these key principles. Where there is inconsistency between the provisions of the conservation legislation and the principles of the Treaty, the provision of the Conservation Act will apply (DOC 2005). In terms of DOC statutory planning processes, both general policies require that Māori will be consulted when statutory planning documents are being developed (DOC 2005; NZCA 2005).

The statutory obligations describe a mandatory process which includes public notification of the intent to prepare, amend or review plans, and seeking public submissions on draft plans. The processes for CMS, CMP, and NPMP reviews are very similar in terms of when public input into the statutory planning cycles is sought. The CMS and CMP review process has two and the NPMP process has three formal opportunities for public views, solutions and ideas to be put forward to help shape a strategy or plan. Figure 2 shows a summary of the planning process while Appendix 1 contains a description of the full process for the preparation and review of NPMPs and CMPs.

Under the NPMP process, DOC has to publicly notify its **intention** to review in local and national newspapers, and thereby invite interested parties to send in their views. This is not a statutory requirement for the CMS or CMP process but is

Figure 2. Summarised planning process.



generally considered best practice (DOC & NZCA 2004b). This requirement gives the public the opportunity to provide input prior to the drafting of the plan. All three planning processes require public notification inviting people to put forward a written submission on the draft plan or strategy, as well as reasonable opportunities for people to speak to their written submission.

The Conservation Act has prescribed timeframes for the CMS and CMP processes—from the date of notification to when the plan is forwarded to the Conservation Board is set at 14 months. The Conservation Board has 6 months to forward it on to the NZCA. The Minister of Conservation can grant extensions to these timeframes if requested. It does not prescribe a timeframe for the NZCA part of the process. The National Parks Act does not provide any statutory timeframes, except for a minimum period of 2 months required for seeking written submissions on the draft NPMP.

The main decision-making bodies involved in the statutory planning process are DOC, the relevant Conservation Board, and the NZCA. The planning documents are prepared by DOC, and then forwarded to the conservation boards after public consultation and revision. The conservation boards have multiple roles; they are actively involved in the preparation, review, and amendment of CMSs and NPMPs; and often approve CMPs. The NZCA is the final decision-maker for CMSs and NPMPs, and it may approve CMPs, although this is usually done by conservation boards (DOC & NZCA 2006; DOC 2008).

The statutory process does not have a requirement to provide feedback to submitters and other members of the public on how submissions or public opinion was addressed. There is, however, a legal requirement for DOC to do the following:

- For CMSs and CMPs, DOC must prepare a summary of submissions and/or public opinion known and provide this to the Conservation Board (Conservation Act s17F(h)). The Conservation Board is required to send this to the NZCA (Conservation Act s17F(k)(ii)).
- For NPMPs, the Conservation Board must send a summary of submissions received to the NZCA and a statement of the extent to which submissions were accepted (National Parks Act s47(6)).

There is no obligation to provide this information to the public (unless requested).

The legislation does not provide for a review or appeal process for the decision. If a submitter does not agree with the outcome of the process, he or she can seek judicial review on process<sup>5</sup>, or complain to the Ombudsman.

### 2.1.2 Management planning practice guidance

Over time, DOC has produced a number of tools for use by management planners to guide the practice of involving the public in the statutory planning process. These include:

- Consultation Policy and Consultation Guidelines (DOC 1999a, b)
- CMS Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) (DOC & NZCA 2004a)
- CMS Best Practice Manual (DOC & NZCA 2004b)
- CMS Structure and Content Guidance (DOC 2006a)
- Te Kete Taonga Whakakotahi (2006)

Management planners can refer to DOC's Consultation Policy and Consultation Guidelines (DOC 1999a, b). These complementary documents explain that DOC consults to get more information to help make better decisions, and to meet DOC's legal obligations under legislation (including section 4 requirements of the Conservation Act). It uses the following definition for consultation:

*Consultation is a stage in the decision-making process where the Department seeks community and tangata whenua views on issues and proposals. The Department of Conservation keeps an open mind about the final decision it might make, and makes its final decision after consultation has been completed. It may end up keeping its preferred option, but will be able to justify clearly why. The Department will have informed the community and tangata whenua of the problem, issues and options, and will keep the flow of information open throughout the consultation process. (DOC and NZCA 2004a: 14)*

Where legislation specifies the way consultation shall be undertaken, such as for CMSs and NPMPs, the statutory process takes precedence over this Consultation Policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Meredith Connell (2006) defines judicial review as follows: 'Judicial review may be brought against any person or entity (usually a government or quasi-government body) that has exercised a statutory power. The typical case involves a plaintiff who has been affected by a government decision and wishes to challenge the way in which the decision was made'.

In 2004, DOC introduced a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for CMSs<sup>6</sup>. The purpose of CMS consultation is 'to meet statutory requirements for consultation with stakeholders in the CMS preparation process' (DOC & NZCA 2004a: 14). The SOP identifies the various steps in the CMS process that require consultation. When embarking on a statutory review process, each conservancy is expected to identify the specific goals for public involvement for that particular process.

An accompanying Best Practice Manual (DOC & NZCA 2004b) was produced to be used in conjunction with the CMS SOP, and provides a template for a consultation plan. It identifies two stages of public consultation—when the CMS is at the pre-draft stage before the draft is ready for official public release (non-statutory), and then once the draft has been released for the formal submission-making stage (statutory). This is not the same for the NPMP process. Feedback is expected to be provided to all participants in the consultation process, which should acknowledge where their views were considered and accepted or, if declined, an explanation for the decline. Department of Conservation staff are expected to be open to new ideas, run an efficient process, get the best information from the community, consult well with tangata whenua, and complete the consultation process through feedback and evaluation. The consultation process is also expected to provide sufficient time for effective and meaningful exchange of information between parties. The SOP also includes a module to evaluate the process used.

While the general policies (Section 2.1.1) require that **the public** will be consulted, the key groups for consultation identified in the Best Practice Manual are (DOC & NZCA 2004b):

- Tangata whenua
- Communities
- Regional and District Councils
- Non-government organisations
- Historic Places Trust
- NZ Fish and Game Council
- Farming/rural sector interests
- Commercial/marine interests
- Tourism industry
- Research institutes

These groups represent stakeholder interests rather than the wider public.

While aimed at the public, a booklet released in 2006 by the NZCA (DOC & NZCA 2006: 9) about DOC's statutory consultation processes is also a useful guide for staff. The purpose of this guide is to assist the public to become involved in DOC's planning processes, and clearly sets out the legislative requirements, and how the public can effectively engage in the process.

Conservation Management Strategy guidelines were approved in 2006 to guide the drafting of future CMSs (DOC 2006a) and a CMS framework (template) was developed in early 2008. These documents aim to provide consistency across DOC in terms of structure and content of CMSs and may benefit public input.

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, there are no SOPs or practice guidelines for national park management planning, although DOC staff are encouraged to refer to the CMS support information.

## 2.2 FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Even allowing for the fact that management plans have a long life (10 years), it has been a significant number of years since previous studies were conducted. James (1990), Airey (1996), and CRESA (1998) each examined aspects of the effectiveness of public input in DOC's statutory consultation processes. This section summarises the findings of these studies in relation to the purpose for seeking public input, their key findings, and their recommendations to DOC on how to improve public input.

James (1990) investigated participants' views and experiences in the Tararua Forest Park and the Tongariro National Park management plan review processes in 1989. This study arose from a major review of DOC's management responsibilities in 1989 during which the Task Group on Management Planning (1989, cited in James 1990: 3) identified a number of public participation issues for DOC, particularly that there was a need to take account of public opinion and incorporate it into plans, and that there should be development of public consultation and participation procedures. The purpose of James' research was therefore to provide information that DOC could use to develop more effective public participation procedures. The research examined what the public wanted from participating, and how effective the public thought the exercise was. James (1990) surveyed all individuals and organisations that had made submissions to the two reviews, asking about their experience of the process.

Airey (1996) examined the effectiveness of public consultation in eight CMSs developed during the period 1992-1996. The study categorised respondents (by sector group, gender, locality, method of response), summarised the main issues expressed by them, and summarised the consultation processes used in the CMSs.

CRESA (1998) undertook an independent review of DOC's community consultation following the restructuring of DOC in 1997. The purpose of the study was to assess DOC's community conservation approaches and processes, particularly in relation to the development of CMSs and concession allocations. The study identified strengths and weaknesses of past consultation processes, as a basis for making recommendations for improving DOC's consultation procedures, processes, and structures.

### 2.2.1 Purpose of public input

James' (1990) study used a broad definition for public participation: *public participation is any action taken by an interested public (individual or group) to influence a decision, plan or policy beyond that of voting in elections* (James 1990: 2). Airey (1996) did not identify the purpose of public consultation in DOC's statutory processes or any criteria for measuring effectiveness. CRESA (1998) described when consultation is required in DOC, and identified approaches to consultation, but did not provide a definition of consultation.

Both CRESA (1998) and James (1990) found that DOC consults because it is a legal requirement and also to gain support for conservation. The Department has a mandate to advocate for the conservation of all natural and historic resources—it must therefore promote community awareness and understanding of conservation, including public participation in management processes.

James (1990) also stated that, as DOC is responsible for such a large portion of New Zealand's natural and historic resources, its management will affect the well-being of the public. CRESA (1998) found that DOC consults to achieve conservation outcomes, but that there appeared to be confusion between consultation and public relations.

### 2.2.2 Barriers and facilitators found

James (1990) identified general support for public participation procedures and that the existing process had a number of strengths<sup>7</sup>. In general, participants considered they had been given adequate opportunity for involvement in management planning. Organisations were more satisfied than individual participants with the scope of opportunities provided. There was strong support for submission-making as the primary method of participation; however, many respondents did not want to be limited to submission-making only, especially if there was only one opportunity to make a submission on the draft plan. Māori were least likely to feel that their views were expressed in management planning. There was strong support for DOC providing a discussion paper early in the process, and there was further support for participation at the early stage of forming a plan. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the way their views had been received by DOC. People particularly supported the opportunity to meet staff in informal settings, to enable a direct exchange of views and information. Public meetings were valued as a way of obtaining information from DOC and other parties, but they were considered less successful as a means of influencing staff. The main satisfaction people gained from being involved in the process was the opportunity to express their views and concerns directly to DOC. Some participants also identified increased awareness and understanding of conservation issues as benefits from the consultation process. Public participation also provided opportunities for DOC to advocate conservation and develop stronger links with the community.

Airey's (1996) study showed that individuals were the largest group of submitters (by number), and that submitters were mainly men and from urban areas (except in Southland and Waikato, where submitters were mainly from rural areas). Most submitters were local, except those for the Tongariro/Taupo and East Coast CMSs. The largest sector represented amongst submitters was recreation groups, followed by iwi/hapu, environmental groups, business and State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), who all provided a similar number of submissions. There were low levels of submissions from concessionaires, women's groups, and scientific groups. Some sectors (particularly recreational hunters, concessionaires, and iwi) felt they were not involved enough in the process of developing CMSs, and found the consultation process to be inadequate or inappropriate. Airey (1996) concluded that the CMS submission process was an effective consultation mechanism for some sectors and organisations, but that iwi, women, and some other sectors were under-represented. Barriers to participation included timing, lack of information, lack of resources, lack of faith in the process, and inaccessibility of the planning document.

CRESA (1998) found a number of good examples of current practices, but also that the public wanted a wider range of consultation techniques (in addition to written submission and oral presentation). In terms of encouraging public input,

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<sup>7</sup> It needs to be remembered that these are the views of those who participated in the process.



the study raised the question of who is responsible for ensuring all parties have an opportunity to comment, and how. Participants reported that submissions by individuals and organisations were treated differently. CRESA (1998) identified more than ten factors that were seen to be barriers to participation. These included time and resources, staff skill levels, the complexities of resource management, and alleged staff sympathy (or lack of) with particular groups or individuals. Prerequisites for effective consultation that were identified included: communication skills amongst staff, administrative support within DOC, flexible interpretation of management plans, and sufficient resources. Consultation issues for Māori were particularly highlighted.

### 2.2.3 What was recommended

All three studies identified a number of areas for improvement which can be grouped as follows:

1. **Representation**—more effort is needed to ensure all groups and sections of the community with interests in the area under review are involved, particularly to ensure that the views of iwi are taken into account and that iwi are involved in designing the consultation process.
2. **Information dissemination**—information to help people participate is needed (e.g. summaries of the draft plan, the submissions process, who to contact etc.), as well as feedback from DOC to ensure that participants are kept informed during the review process and, once the formal participation opportunities are over, of how their views influenced the final outcome of the process.
3. **Consultation techniques**—techniques appropriate to the audience should be used, e.g. visual presentations, display caravans, slide shows to stakeholder groups, workshops, discussion forums (with comments incorporated as oral submissions), and less-formal meetings prior to consultation.
4. **Skilled staff**—a range of staff need to be involved, with appropriate consultation and information analysis skills.
5. **Influence**—participants wanted to be certain that their input made an appreciable difference to the content and direction of the plan and that ideas were competently assessed and reasons for decisions made explained. It is important for DOC to ensure that input from people outside the traditional stakeholder groups is valued and incorporated into decision-making.
6. **Non-participation**—there are sections of the population that do not participate in DOC's management planning processes, and DOC needs to identify the disincentives and barriers that limit public participation.

James (1990) and CRESA (1998) also highlighted some overarching strategic issues. Both recommended that DOC needs to resolve the appropriate extent of public influence in its management planning, and that there is a need for carefully planned consultation frameworks to underpin each consultation process. As there are many 'publics', a variety of participation opportunities appropriate to the situation and to the planning objectives must be offered. In addition, both studies emphasised the need for DOC to better understand the benefits of consultation in achieving conservation outcomes: as the primary goal of management planning is care and protection of the natural and historic environment, a plan's success must be judged on how the public participation procedures help to achieve conservation objectives.

## 2.3 PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The context for this study is the statutory requirement for public consultation in DOC's planning processes, and the effectiveness of such input. As noted above, this statutory requirement is not the only reason for involving the public. The areas of land protected and managed by DOC are public assets, and public participation is seen as essential to ensuring that they are properly managed and strongly supported by the public (CNPPAM 2002). It is therefore important to understand public input and participation beyond the definition of consultation provided in DOC's general policies.

### 2.3.1 Spectrum of public participation

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2 2006:5) describes public participation as *any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions*, with public defined as *any individual or group of individuals, organisation or political entity with an interest in the outcome of a decision* (IAP2 2006: 5). The public may actually be (or perceive that it may be) affected by the outcome of a decision, directly or indirectly.

There are different levels of public participation in decision-making. A number of spectrums have been designed to assist in selecting the right level of participation and establishing the public participation goal, to ensure that the benefits of involving the public are maximised (e.g. IAP2 2006; OCVS 2008).

This study uses the spectrum and principles put forward by the IAP2. Figure 3 shows that at the left of the spectrum, the public is simply provided with information. The next two levels of 'consulting' and 'involvement' include formal consultation on specific issues, in which views are considered but the final decision is made by those consulting. At the most devolved end of the spectrum, 'collaborate' and 'empower' require a higher level of co-operation, shared goals, and joint decision-making.

Public participation in DOC's statutory planning processes will typically be in the 'inform' and 'consult' areas of the spectrum and, from time to time, the 'involve' region, depending on a conservancy's planning issues. The statutory requirements firmly place decision-making in such planning processes with DOC. It is important to note here that applying the IAP2 spectrum does not derogate from the general policies' definition of consultation nor DOC's statutory management planning processes but, rather, that it enables a clearer understanding of the purpose of seeking public input.

Effective public participation is driven by properly understanding the goals and objectives of the role of the public and the level and purpose of its input. Involving the public does not mean that the agency making final decisions abdicates responsibility (IAP2 2006). It should mean that the agency develops a plan for effective engagement that clearly identifies proper responsibilities, that supports the agency's and the project's or policy's purpose, and creates a way for productive participation by the public.