

Conservation House
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Te Aro
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doc.govt.nz

Ref: OIAD-5737

12 November 2025

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 09 October 2025, in which you asked for *“all information DOC has to date regarding the \$4m Milford Road upgrade announced in Budget 2025.”*

On 15 October you refined your request to:

“an update of the visitor experience projects proposed for the \$4 million MBIE International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL) allocation, how they were selected, and the benefits being targeted”

including

“an overview with a list of projects and how they relate to the Milford Opportunities Project, the current estimate of costs, the multi-criteria assessment documentation used to assess the projects, and correspondence with MBIE confirming the projects”.

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Background context

Piopiotahi Milford Sound holds high significance for Ngāi Tahu and sits within Fiordland National Park – an area of exceptionally high conservation values recognised through World Heritage Status. Tourism to Piopiotahi has grown to over a million visitors a year, presenting environmental, safety and management challenges. Change is needed to safeguard the incredible natural and cultural values that people come to enjoy and deliver a more sustainable visitor system.

In 2021, the Milford Opportunities Project (MOP) provided the government with a masterplan including recommendations for a regenerative tourism system for the Milford Road and Milford Sound Piopiotahi. This was followed by a feasibility business case in June 2024. The MOP business case has informed government decisions and work on broader legislative change.

You can find information about the [Milford Opportunities Project \(2017 to 2024\)](#) and [Sustainable Destinations Milford Sound Piopiotahi](#) on DOC's website, including the masterplan, feasibility business case, reports and Cabinet papers.

Project selection, allocation and criteria

MOP highlighted a compelling case for change recommending both immediate and longer term investment and planning to enhance the experience, improve safety and safeguard the area's significant natural and cultural heritage.

In February 2025, the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality was seeking ways to increase/invest in tourism infrastructure. The Minister of Conservation proposed the

Milford corridor upgrades as a high tourism priority ready for government investment. Ministers agreed to invest \$4M of MBIE International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL) funding into projects along the Milford road corridor.¹ Note that this funding is not for upgrades to Milford Road itself, but relates to tourism and visitor experiences and facilities on conservation land along the corridor.

In June 2025, the Government announced \$8.2M IVL investment to progress improvements in Piopiotahi and along the Milford Road.²

The IVL funding comprises:

- \$6.4M targeted to improve visitor experiences and the cultural narrative, including a new gateway pou whenua.
 - This figure includes the \$4M MBIE IVL funding for the Milford Road upgrade announced in Budget 2025, combined with \$2.4 million from DOC IVL funds.
- A further \$1.8M to deliver longer-term change, including new infrastructure plans, safety improvements, a revenue strategy, and traffic flows.

For the improvements to the visitor experience the following work was proposed at the time of the announcement:

Breakdown: Milford Piopiotahi visitor experience investment*	\$ 6.4M	Description
New short-stop visitor experiences	\$2.8M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gertrude Valley – new valley loop track and viewing area • Sinks Bridge – new short walk and viewing area
Improvements to short-stop visitor sites	\$1.55M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Marian Hinepitiwai – amenity improvements • Gertrude Valley – improvements to the carpark and access from SH94
Cultural footprint and storytelling (includes a new gateway pou whenua)	\$1M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites to be confirmed with Iwi
Deepwater Basin amenities upgrade	\$750K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepwater Basin – amenity / facilities upgrade
Visitor behaviour change programme	\$300K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be designed with concessionaires
<i>*Indicative costs include capital and future operating costs (depreciation & maintenance)</i>		

The \$4M that you identified, which was transferred from Vote Business, Science and Innovation to Vote Conservation, has been allocated to the programme of work above. Currently, we are in the detailed design phase, and project delivery will be rolled out over the next two years.

Criteria for investments

¹ In accordance with section 16(1)(e), I have decided to provide a summary of correspondence between DOC and MBIE confirming the projects as it would otherwise impair efficient administration.

² [Government to protect and enhance Milford Sound Piopiotahi: Media release 4 June 2025.](#)

Originally, these investments were drawn from the MOP masterplan and business case as they had been through a robust feasibility assessment and extensive stakeholder engagement. A multi-criteria assessment was used to refine the investment options down to an achievable package that could be progressed right away. The criteria focused on:

- Managing safety issues and visitor impacts
- Improving the cultural footprint across the visitor journey
- Resolving issues of ageing infrastructure
- Improving visitor flow along the corridor

See Attachment 1 for detail. These criteria relate to the challenges outlined in both the MOP masterplan and the business case, particularly the objective to deliver a world-class experience and to embed Ngāi Tahu and te ao Māori values.

As we engage with stakeholders and complete detailed designs, we are refining the scope of work and costs.

Longer-term planning

Alongside this work, long-term planning is needed to progress the majority of MOP's recommendations for a more sustainable tourism system. These include tourism covering its costs and funding conservation via an access charge for international visitors, better managed access, addressing challenges for business operators and more coordinated governance.

Resolving tourism pressures requires coordinated action with other agencies, iwi, industry and community and the redesign of the visitor system based on MOP's extensive advice and research. This work is underway using the \$1.8M IVL mentioned above.

In August 2025, the Minister of Conservation announced decisions to modernise and streamline conservation land management and introduce an access charge for foreign visitors to high volume sites.³ The Conservation Acts (Land Management) Amendment Bill is now being drafted to give effect to these decisions. This Bill will streamline and simplify management planning in Fiordland National Park by revising national policies and creating a single layer of area plans.

DOC capital works programme

In addition to the IVL-funded work, DOC is part way through a \$7M capital works programme to improve infrastructure in Milford Sound Piopiotahi and along the Milford Road. Work includes upgrading visitor facilities at Key Summit Track, The Chasm and Marian Falls Track and replacing the boat ramp in Deepwater Basin. Included in the \$7M is work recently completed with the remediation/removal of Little Tahiti landfill and improvements to Cleddau River flood protection.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the OIA.

³ [Unleashing growth on conservation land: Media release 2 August 2025](#)

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and attached document may be published on DOC's website.

If you would like to discuss this response or find out more about the project, please contact the Sustainable Destinations Milford Sound Piopiotahi team by email to milfordproject@doc.govt.nz.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Wilson', written in a cursive style.

Catherine Wilson
Director Heritage and Visitors
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Document Schedule

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
1	Feb 2025	Multi-criteria assessment documentation used to assess the projects	Released in full