



Date: 17 January 2025 **File Ref:** DOCCM 7839058

To: Aaron Fleming, Director Operations, Southern South Island

CC: Hilary Aikman, Director Terrestrial Biodiversity
s 9(2)(g)(ii) erations Manager Te Anau
Operations Manager Takahē Kākāpō

From: s 9(2)(g)(ii) Regional Issues Manager Southern South Island

Subject: **Te Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu review recommendations – Stage two, part 1.**

Purpose:

This report is delivering on task assignment [DOC-7817634](#); to recommend whether DOC should continue its current commitment to the management of Te Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Sanctuary (Te Punanga Manu).

Recommendations:

1. That DOC does not continue its current commitment to the management of the Te Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Sanctuary.
2. That by February 28th 2025 a Task Assignment is in place to drive the work for part 2 of this review; DOC's transition from its management of Te Punanga Manu.
3. That the task assignment has a decision timeline that manages risk related to infrastructure degradation (work will need to be done to understand these risks).
4. That the task assignment considers:
 - a. The aspirations of Iwi
 - b. The needs of the birds currently in Te Punanga Manu
 - c. The best use of FTE resourcing currently allocated to Te Punanga Manu, including how best to support aspirations of existing staff.
 - d. The aspirations of community, existing partners, commercial interests and Fish and Game
 - e. How to navigate the high sense of ownership of the local community – including supporting the DOC staff who are the 'face' of this work.
 - f. If others are not taking on the management, how to work with Fish and Game to transition out.
5. That work be done to understand and respond to the operational challenges referred to in the Biodiversity Report.

Decision:

Approve/ Decline this report's recommendations.


Aaron Fleming
Director Operations, Southern South Island
Dated: 24 January 2025

Decision Maker Comments (if any):

I approve the recommendation. In making this decision I have discussed this report with the DDG Regional Operations.

I would like to view and approve the communications plan to communicate this decision before any internal and external communications are issued.

Contents

Basis for recommendations	4
1. Clarity on the future of Te Punanga Manu is urgently needed.....	4
2. Te Punanga Manu's work is not a priority for the Department – Biodiversity or Visitor network.....	4
3. Revenue does not reflect the number of visitors and only covers every-day operating costs.5	
4. Te Punanga Manu requires significant investment.....	6
5. Visitor demand is high.....	6
6. Existing Partners	7
7. The local community has a strong sense of ownership of Te Punanga Manu.....	7
8. There is appetite for change from all key stakeholders.....	7
9. Changing DOC's current level of commitment.....	8
10. Addressing operational challenges raised in the Biodiversity Report.....	8
Appendix 1: Previous internal reviews and commercial interest.....	10
Appendix 2: Review process	12
Appendix 3 : Legal advice on asset ownership and responsibilities (2017)	14

Basis for recommendations

1. Clarity on the future of Te Punanga Manu is urgently needed

Clarity on the future of Te Punanga Manu is urgently needed. Despite having a mission statement, it has had a lack of strategic direction and been in an ambiguous management and investment position for decades. This introduces risk to birds, staff wellbeing and DOC's reputation:

- Bird welfare has been managed, supported primarily through dedication and commitment from Te Punanga Manu staff.
- Staff wellbeing has been and continues to be affected.
- Infrastructure requires substantial investment to meet good practice standards into the future.
- DOC's reputation related to Te Punanga Manu is compromised.

The last substantive review of Te Punanga Manu, the 2017 Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu; Issues and Options Paper (Appendix 1) identified many issues that remain today. It noted that:

"For many years it seems two approaches to the future of the park have occurred simultaneously. One has been to view the park as an asset DOC should try to make better use of. The other considers displaying birds as the role of a zoo and not DOC's business. Many, many development ideas/strategic directions documents have been written about Te Punanga Manu since its being vested to Fish & Game, testifying to the considerable uncertainty around its role and purpose. This has led to inconsistent positioning, management and great confusion among staff and community alike."

Other contributing factors to the ambiguity around the Sanctuary include:

- Lack of clarity between Fish & Game and DOC regarding Te Punanga Manu and responsibilities for assets and maintenance. (Appendix 3)
- Uncertainty around proposals for commercial development of conservation in the Te Anau Basin; Te Punanga Manu remained in limbo while these initiatives were proposed then discarded. (Appendix 1)
- DOC's decision out of the 2017 Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu; Issues and Options Paper (Appendix 1) to proceed with the option for 'maintenance and minor upgrade work'. As a result, many of the issues identified in that paper remain relevant today.

2. Te Punanga Manu's work is not a priority for the Department – Biodiversity or Visitor network.

Biodiversity

An internal review of Te Punanga Manu's alignment with biodiversity priorities (the Biodiversity Report) was undertaken in October 2024. It found that while Te Punanga Manu does make a valuable contribution to biodiversity conservation, its work is not a priority for the Department (meaning Te Punanga Manu is not needed to achieve the goals of the programmes for the species it supports). It recommended that consideration be given to re-directing DOC biodiversity funding from Te Punanga Manu.

Of note is the report's commentary that (page 13) *"Te Punanga Manu is the only DOC-facility supporting these captive breeding programmes (with the exception of*

Takahe), which are otherwise run through zoos, conservation trusts and private holders under the directive of a captive coordinator. This model works very well... as it utilises the facilities, staff and expertise of passionate partners and reduces resource requirements for DOC.”

In addition to the Biodiversity Report:

- Bird recovery programmes not currently serviced by Te Punanga Manu have said it is not a priority for the future of their programmes.
- The Takahe programme have said that while Te Punanga Manu is not essential to their work, it is helpful, and they could continue to use it to home Takahe as long as it meets required standards.

Visitor network

Te Punanga Manu is part of DOC's visitor network. It received approximately 50,000 visitors this year. It provides an advocacy and education function for the species it supports, for DOC's work and for conservation more broadly. It does this passively via visitors viewing the birds and reading the information boards, and actively via guided tours.

DOC is looking to evolve its visitor network to be fit-for-purpose, financially sustainable and better meets visitors' needs. The Future Visitor Network (FVN) work programme states that our current visitor network is not affordable and that redesigning the network offers opportunities including options such as third-party management, iwi partnership, revenue generation or divestment.

A desktop exercise by the national team rated Te Punanga Manu as not being a FVN Tier 1 experience. It had reasonable visitation due its location on the Te Anau waterfront but for DOC to be offering captive wildlife experiences for visitors these would also need to have significant conservation benefits.

The draft Visitor Network Strategy provides the following guidance for this experience set. “Wildlife viewing experiences will continue to be assessed on a case-by - case basis, ensuring the protection of wildlife is at the core of those considerations.” As context DOC has few wildlife viewing experiences with this experience set having around twenty Tier 1 experiences across the country. Almost all of these involve experiencing wildlife in the wild.

The closest analogue to Te Punanga Manu is Pūkaha National Wildlife Centre at Mt Bruce which is run as a partnership with local iwi and also has greater biodiversity value with a captive breeding programme and 942-hectare forest that is home to wild birds. Given Te Punanga Manu's lack of alignment with core biodiversity and visitor priorities the site is an opportunity for realignment.

3. Revenue does not reflect the number of visitors and only covers everyday operating costs.

Revenue and visitation

2024 saw a gross revenue of \$68K:

- \$41K in donations - \$30K cash at site, \$8.5K QR code at site, \$2.5K at VC.
- \$15K local sponsorships
- \$10K tours

Visitor numbers in 2024 were circa 50K.

Gross return from donations per visitor was 82 cents.

Anecdotally there is considerable opportunity to increase revenue – via increased tours or other user pay mechanisms. A QR code scanning option is the latest innovation for revenue gathering, it returned \$8.5K of this year's revenue.

Costs

Ascertaining the exact expenditure/revenue costs for Te Punanga Manu is not easy. Expenditure costs are amalgamated from a variety of budgets.

Te Anau office staff state that Te Punanga Manu revenue covers operational costs (excluding staff), but that there is no buffer for operational investment or capital expenditure.

Staff costs come from DOC's baseline budget. The Biodiversity Report notes that Te Punanga Manu uses approximately 2.5 FTE per year; 1.2 dedicated Te Punanga Manu rangers at B band, 1.2 across various support functions e.g. technical advice, staff management, site maintenance, and toilet servicing. This review has found that improved levels of technical oversite support and trained local office staff dedicated to cover bird sanctuary rangers are also recommended.

It is important to note that work in Te Anau District consistently outstrips staff capacity and must be prioritised to fit. 2.5 FTE is a significant staffing resource currently delivering non-priority work.

4. Te Punanga Manu requires significant investment

Te Punanga Manu has been underinvested for some time. Whilst still meeting minimum standards, the Biodiversity Report notes that investment is required.

This work has not been scoped. It will be important to understand what work is needed to inform timeframes for the next stage of this review.

Importantly, if upgrades are made, budget would still be required for ongoing operational investment.

5. Visitor demand is high

Te Punanga Manu provides a valued and popular experience for locals, school groups from across the region and visitors to Te Anau. Approximately 50K people visited the Te Punanga Manu in the last year. Anecdotally the Takahe are the primary draw card.

Te Anau is a busy Tourist town at the gateway to Fiordland National Park but has limited options for visitor activities in the town itself. Likely this contributes to the Te Punanga Manu's popularity.

Te Punanga Manu is free to enter and is not gated. It has limited car parking space which is often at capacity in peak summer months.

People can book for a paid tour (koha). Demand for these tours is higher than can be serviced under the current model - DOC is turning away both school groups and Tourists. Commercial operators have also expressed interest in personalised tours.

6. Existing Partners

Three organisations currently partner with DOC on Te Punanga Manu:

- New Zealand Nature Fund - [Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu | New Zealand Nature Fund](#)
- Lakeview Holiday Park – \$15K per year for Whio. Partnership agreement is in its final year
- Radfords on the Lake – up to \$1000 per year for Parakeets.

These organizations have not yet been approached as part of this review.

7. The local community has a strong sense of ownership of Te Punanga Manu

The Te Anau community have a very strong sense of ownership of Te Punanga Manu. It is an integral part of the Te Anau township; visits are part of the local school programmes, the Takahe is the unofficial town 'mascot' and local businesses offer sponsorship.

There is however a general sentiment of wasted potential and frustration with the current state.

Any change in DOC's commitment to Te Punanga Manu will need to be carefully navigated with the Community.

8. There is appetite for change from all key stakeholders

Iwi interest in Te Punanga Manu are high

Ōraka Aparima have expressed interest in the Te Punanga Manu and are currently working with Great South to understand how that might be realised.

Local community want more for Te Punanga Manu

The Te Anau community have long wanted more for the Te Punanga Manu. DOC's enduring lack of investment and aspiration are a source of frustration.

Some members of the community have expressed an interest via a proposal for the future of Te Punanga Manu.

Certainly, any change will need to include the local community – a focus on listening and managing expectations will be important.

Te Punanga Manu staff are frustrated with current state

Te Punanga Manu staff see it as an underutilised front country opportunity for access to our threatened species.

They have noted many opportunities that are not being realised under the current model; examples include proactive injured wildlife support, increased community and commercial involvement, increased native flora and fauna to maximise opportunities of the site.

Staff have also noted many challenges with maintaining the current state. The root cause is almost certainly Te Punanga Manu's ambiguous management and investment position. Despite this difficult context, staff have worked with dedication to support the welfare of the birds.

Fish and Game are open to new ideas

DOC manage Te Punanga Manu while Fish and Game own the land and infrastructure, there are complexities with this arrangement (Appendix 3).

Fish and Game would like to see Te Punanga Manu progress from its current ambiguous position into one with purpose and support.

Commercial business has an interest

Tourism businesses have also signalled interest, both historically and now, although there is no proposal currently in place.

9. Changing DOC's current level of commitment

Given points 1-8 above, this report recommends that DOC does not retain its current level of commitment to managing Te Punanga Manu.

This transition will ideally create space for others to realise the potential of Te Punanga Manu (particularly the aspirations of Ōraka Aparima), however if others do not want to take over the facility, then DOC will need to work with Fish and Game to transition out.

As DOC transitions from its current level of commitment it will be important to:

- manage the risk of aging infrastructure
- navigate the high sense of ownership from the local community – including supporting key staff who are the 'face' of DOC for this work.

10. Addressing operational challenges raised in the Biodiversity Report.

The Biodiversity Report stated (page 15) that:

"there are also several Te Punanga Manu-wide challenges, which will create risks to birds, staff, programme objectives and/or DOC" reputation if not resolved promptly."

The report did not specifically identify these challenges. It is important that work is done to understand and respond to any priority concerns.

This topic is separate to the task of looking into whether DOC should maintain current commitment to Te Punanga Manu, but they remain important and should not be lost in the context of this work.

Appendix 1: Previous internal reviews and commercial interest

Previous internal reviews

These reviews all hold rich context and should be used as key inputs into determining the future of the Te Punanga Manu.

2024: A review of the Te Punanga Manu's alignment with biodiversity priorities [DOC-7776457](#)

- In October 2024 a report was produced from an internal review to assess the biodiversity -related purpose and value of Te Punanga Manu, and its alignment with DOC's strategy. The review was undertaken to inform future options for Te Punanga Manu. It was undertaken by the Terrestrial Unit in the Biodiversity, Heritage and Visitor Group.
- The review considered the biodiversity conservation activities conducted at the Te Punanga Manu, including captive breeding and advocacy.
- The review recommended that consideration should be given to re-directing DOC biodiversity funding from Te Punanga Manu. It found that while Te Punanga Manu does make a valuable contribution to biodiversity conservation, it is not the highest priority work for the Department and greater benefits for conservation can be achieved through funding higher priority work.

2017: Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu issues-options paper [DOC-3149990.docx](#)

This review identified the following critical issues:

- 1: There is considerable lack of clarity around Conservation HQ
- 2: There is a perception of an uncertain future for takahē at Punanga Mana o Te Anau / Te Anau Bird Sanctuary
- 3: There is lack of clarity about DOC's relationship with Fish & Game regarding the Sanctuary, and shared responsibilities.
- 4: Considerable maintenance/upgrades are needed to maintain the Sanctuary in a reasonable state
- 5: The Sanctuary is a popular attraction but donations do not reflect the number of visitors to the site
- 6: The concerns of the community and impact of DOC's decisions must be understood, considered and addressed appropriately
- 7: There is low morale among staff at the Bird Sanctuary resulting from perceived lack of direction and resourcing.

It suggested a range of solutions, however the decision was made to proceed with 'maintenance and minor upgrade work'. As a result, many of the issues identified in that paper remain relevant today.

2015: Te Anau Captive management facility – species scoping report

10/16

Final report stage two, part 1: Te Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu Review

[DOC-2332075](#)

Report was written on the back of a proposal from Real Journeys (a major tourism partner, now named Real NZ) to develop the Te Punanga Manu via a public-private partnership with DOC and other parties into a wildlife captive management facility with a visitor experience element. In 2015 the scope of the project was broadened to include conservation-related research and technology and in-situ wildlife management.

In order to scope the need and opportunity for a captive wildlife facility in Te Anau, species experts were contacted. This showed that while a facility could be helpful for DOC, it would incur significant costs and require a high level of technical support.

Previous commercial interest

In 2019 Ngai Tahu Real Journeys (now RealNZ), Fish and Game, and DOC developed a proposal for MBIE Tourism [DOC-7838580](#).

The proposal did not progress; this review has not invested why. That information could however be relevant for the next stage of this review process, particularly if DOC is looking to enable a partnership approach.

Appendix 2: Review process

This review began with the review of Te Punanga Manu's alignment with biodiversity priorities [DOC-7776457](#).

The outcome of that review was that Te Punanga Manu's work does not align with DOCs biodiversity priorities, and it recommended that consideration be given to redirecting DOC biodiversity funding.

This recommendation led to this second stage of the review, outlined in this task assignment [DOC-7817634](#); to recommend whether DOC should continue its current commitment to the management of Te Punanga Manu o Te Anau/Te Anau Bird Sanctuary (Te Punanga Manu).

People involvement

Steering group: s 9(2)(g)(ii) Operations Manager Te Anau, and s 9(2)(g)(ii) Principal Ranger Biodiversity Te Anau. (s 9(2)(g)(ii) Operations Manager Takahe Kākāpō involved in the background).

- Development of Task Assignment and review process
- Content of report and recommendations

PSA representation: s 9(2)(a)

- Review of Task Assignment and review process.
- s 9(2)(a)
- Feedback on draft report and recommendations

District office staff: s 9(2)(g)(ii)

- Review of task assignment
- Information on Te Punanga Manu – including costs, revenue, visitor numbers, critical issues
- Site visit and critical issues/opportunities

BHV unit and Species recovery leads; s 9(2)(g)(ii)

- Input on future need for Te Punanga Manu for the programmes they lead.
- Kaki, Kākariki Karaka, Tūturu, Kākāpō, Tōeka.

Heritage and Visitor Unit s 9(2)(g)(ii)

- Future Visitor network Context

Ōraka Aparima: s 9(2)(a)

- Rūnanga context
- Awareness of the review

Kaitiaki Roopu

- Awareness of the review

Commercial operators; RealNZ – s 9(2)(a), Cruise Milford – s 9(2)(a)

- Commercial context on future interest in Te Punanga.

Literature review:

- 2024: Review of Te Punanga Manu's alignment with biodiversity priorities [DOC-7776457](#).
- 2019 Ngai Tahu Real Journeys (now RealNZ), Fish and Game, and DOC developed a proposal for MBIE Tourism. [DOC-7838580](#).
- 2017: Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu issues-options paper [DOC-3149990.docx](#)
- 2015: Te Anau Captive management facility – species scoping report [DOC-2332075](#)

Appendix 3 : Legal advice on asset ownership and responsibilities (2017)

The latest legal advice is captured in the 2017: Te Anau Bird Te Punanga Manu issues-options paper, Appendix 2 DOC-3149990.docx:

APPENDIX 2: Legal advice relating to the assets on Te Anau Wildlife Park as per "Agreement in Principle in the matter of the transfer/vesting of the former wildlife service assets known as the Te Anau Fish Hatchery/Wildlife Park" dated 16 November 2005.

23/08/2017

Hi Kate,

Thanks again for sending through this Assyst request relating to the assets on Te Anau Wildlife Park ("Park"), and for speaking with me over the phone.

s 9(2)(h)

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

s 9(2)(h)



RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT