

NOTES

Face-to-face workshop – Milford Opportunities Project next phase

DATE:	16/07/2025
TIME:	Start: 11:30 am – End: 2:00 pm
VENUE:	Clutha Room, Holiday Inn Frankton, Queenstown
ATTENDEES:	<p>The meeting was attended by around 26 representatives including: Ngāi Tahu, rūnaka, Southland District Council, Emergency Management Southland, Southland Conservation Board, MSTL, previous MOP board members, tourism operators and community.</p> <p>DOC was represented by Penny Nelson – Director General DOC; Cat Wilson - Director Heritage and Visitor; Pip Fox - Director Regulatory Authorisations; Jock Edmondson - Senior Regional Visitor Planner</p>
PURPOSE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share key decisions • Outline plans for the work ahead • Discuss how to collaborate on the next phase

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Michael Skerrett from Ngāi Tahu Papatipu Rūnanga opened the meeting and

- shared the history of the Milford Opportunities Project (MOP)
- highlighted the significance of Piopiotahi to Ngāi Tahu
- confirmed their commitment to MOP.

Penny Nelson, DOC Director General (DG), presented the agenda and thanked those who travelled from outside Queenstown, noting that Te Anau was the preferred location, but winter travel and timing made it difficult.

MOP JOURNEY

Jenn Bestwick, former MOP Board Chair, presented the MOP Journey (presentation slides 4–8). She outlined

- Treasury's Better Business Case process, which MOP followed in stage 3
- noted that the main shift from the masterplan to the business case was the need to manage natural hazards and to create a self-funding model.
- Option 4 was preferred by the Board as it offered the most ambitious changes and fastest results.

Penny Nelson acknowledged the role of the MOP Board in delivering a comprehensive business case. Penny also addressed the time it took for the Government to respond, noting Ministers took the time to get it right.

WHAT IS DOC PROGRESSING FROM THE BUSINESS CASE

Cat Wilson, DOC Director Heritage and Visitors, outlined how Milford's challenges reflect wider issues across DOC visitor sites nationally (presentation slides 9-15).

- MOP's business case has influenced the Government's legislative reform work, including planning processes, access charges, and better use of amenities areas.
- DOC is now in the delivery phase, focusing on:
 - Quick, visible improvements
 - Legislative changes to support long-term destination upgrades
- MOP highlighted the scale of change needed, including long-term investment and a strategic approach to concessions.
- DOC is continuing work on natural hazards with other agencies.
- DOC aims to take a stronger leadership role at Piopiotahi, be more visible, and act as an honourable Treaty partner.
- Opportunity to start preparing now for legislative reform.

Cat Wilson, Penny Nelson and Pip Fox, Director of Regulatory Authorisations, provided details on Legislative Reform (presentation slide 13), noting that:

- Ministers are working on key decisions to simplify statutory processes.
- The Government plans to make Milford Sound one of the first locations to implement a new approach.
- The Government chose not to create special legislation for Milford, instead opting for national solutions.
- DOC is making progress on reducing the backlog of concession applications in the system to a more sustainable number, through updates to policy, technology, and business practices.
- The Government is working towards decisions that will improve the system and support a more strategic approach to concessions in future.

THE PROPOSED TRANSITION PLAN

Cat outlined a two-year programme focused on short-term upgrades to the visitor experience, development of a new area plan, and a proposed levy ahead of the 2026 legislation (presentation slides 16-17). This included that:

- A short-term investment of \$6.4M will be used to prioritise improvements in the corridor and Deepwater Basin.
- Long-term investments will depend on how ambitious the Government chooses to be.
- A Transitional Governance structure will be in place, with the roles of advisory and project committees outlined (see slide 18), noting that the structure will evolve as the programme progresses.
- An Expression of Interest (EOI) process will be run to fill the remaining independent role on the Programme Board.
- The programme is currently being set up with the necessary resources.

Attendees requested that the next phases focus on Southland and Te Anau tourism operations and communities.

FEEDBACK SESSION

Penny Nelson opened the floor for feedback on DOC's approach and work plan.

Feedback:

- Support for the focus on Milford Sound Piopiotahi and the plan to improve the statutory environment for concessions.
- Request for stronger support to unlock private investment.
- Agreement on addressing ageing infrastructure issues.
- Request for more MOP technical reports to be made available on the DOC website [now uploaded]. [Milford Opportunities Project: Our work](#).
- Concern that community and iwi input was reduced in the legislative reform consultation documents, making it hard to see local voices.
- Emphasis on the importance of upholding Treaty obligations and addressing any gaps.
- Request for more detail to be provided, so TRONT can provide advice to the rūnaka.
- Call for IVL funding to ensure the work is done well.
- Request that the aerodrome be included in planning.
- Highlighted the importance of integrating planning across agencies.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Slide 24, Question 3: How can we best collaborate with you to deliver these initiatives?

Feedback:

- Agencies should work together and integrate efforts.
- Direct face-to-face engagement is needed with local communities.
- Request that DOC shares an engagement plan showing priorities.
- The importance of the place to mana whenua was emphasised, and there was a request for a framework with the right capability, leadership, and clarity on the role of mana whenua.

Slide 24, Question 1: Which initiatives should we prioritise to deliver the greatest immediate impact?

Feedback:

- Natural hazard management is a key issue. Work to assess and reduce the risk of a landslide-induced tsunami (Emergency Management Southland is working with DOC, MSTL, and the National Emergency Management Agency).
- Conservation must be central to planning, which would also support mana whenua expectations for the place.
- Call for guiding tikanga and first principles to be established with alignment to rūnaka long-term strategic goals.
- Masterplan pillars should be used to guide priorities and create a shared language for sustainability and investment.
- Infrastructure should be a top priority, and 10–20-year investment plans should be developed alongside area plans with activity settings.

MEETING CLOSED

Penny Nelson reviewed the meeting and covered the following actions

- DOC will share the presentation
- Expressions of Interest will be advertised for the independent governance member
- DOC will keep stakeholders informed on progress and opportunities for further collaboration

Michael Skerrett closed the meeting and described a future where the iwi footprint is returned to the place and to the experience and is embedded alongside the European heritage.

Meeting closed with Karakia from Michael Skerrett

ATTACHMENT: PRESENTATION