

PIOPĪOTAHĪ MILFORD SOUND

Report of the Milford Sound
Ministerial Advisory Group
30 June 2024



**MILFORD
OPPORTUNITIES**



A UNIQUE TREASURE TO SHARE AND SAFEGUARD FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



FOREWORD

Photography: David Tip via Unsplash.



Tā Tipene O'Regan

ONZ, CRSNZ

*E te tī, e te tā, e raurakatira mā,
tēnei te mihi atu ki a koutou.*

*Rere atu aku kupu mō te taoka
o Piopiotahi.*

Raki, the sky father, had three children by his first marriage to Pokoharua o Te Pō: Aoraki, Rakamaomao and Tāwhiri a mātea. Deciding to explore the great ocean, Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, Aoraki set out in his waka, Te Waka o Aoraki, with some of his other brothers. Tired of voyaging, Aoraki was attempting to lift his waka back into the realm of his father when it stranded on a reef. Aoraki and his crew climbed out onto the reef and were there for so long that they turned to stone,

becoming the highest peaks of Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, the Southern Alps.

After a time, Tū Te Rakiwhanoa, a descendant of Aoraki, discovered the wreck of Te Waka o Aoraki and gazed upon the frozen faces of his whānau. After completing the takiauē (funeral process), Tū set about the great task of preparing the wreck to become a home for the people who would come after him. He created tuawhenua (peninsulas) to act as breakwaters against the raging seas of the Southern Ocean while his assistant atua invested the land with trees and forests and the coastlines with fish and other resources.

Moving on to Te Tai Poutini, the West Coast, Tū looked down on the wreck of the waka. Seeing the water and rain that had gathered in the wreck, he decided to create rivers. He made a hole and with his strong thighs he thrust against the land

and released the waters. This first river was called Kā Māwheranui o Kā Kūwhā o Tū Te Rakiwhanoa.

Tū then travelled south on the western coast towards his biggest challenge. Beginning at Tāwhito-tārere (Puysegur Point), he started chopping into the land with his adze, beginning the formation of what we now call Te Rua o Te Moko (or Te Atawhenua), Fiordland. With the assistance of Hine Titama, the land was covered with forest.

After several successful attempts at shaping the land, Tū and Hine Titama (who later became Hine-nui o Te-Pō - the mother who gathers us in at death) embarked upon their greatest and final work, carving the land to create Piopiotahi Milford Sound.

While the grandeur of Piopiotahi is undeniable, there is much more to

discover throughout this entire region, following the ancient pathways of our tipuna. Informed by mana whenua, the Milford Opportunities Project has presented a holistic vision of how our cultural understanding of the landscape can inspire the protection needed to sustain Piopiotahi for the future. Weaving the stories of the past into the future vision for this region through the concept of a journey provides an opportunity to enrich the experience for visitors through Ngāi Tahu values.

Sitting within this internationally recognised UNESCO World Heritage site, Te Rua o Te Moko Fiordland is both a refuge for our taonga species and a place of spectacular natural beauty. Given its international status and depth of cultural significance for Ngāi Tahu as the culminating work of Tū Te Rakiwhanoa, it is difficult to think of a place more

deserving of a bold commitment to achieving aspirational goals than Piopiotahi.

Many years ago, the founding Director-General of the Department of Conservation, the late Ken Piddington, invited me to work for a period as a consultant to the Department during its establishment. We formed a close friendship and he often spoke of Piopiotahi to me. I remember to this day his great words:

*“We must be very careful of
this taoka, this treasure, lest we
love it to death.”*

With purposeful coordination and well-planned sustainable development, we have a chance to enhance the wairua or spirit of this special place for future generations and their guests.



INTRODUCTION



Jenn Bestwick

Milford Opportunities
Project Board Chair

I still vividly recall the day my parents and I first travelled to Piopiotahi Milford Sound in April 1990. We'd spent the previous evening in Te Anau, woke to a blue-sky day and set off in our rental car. From the moment we crested the hill and saw the Eglinton valley, we were struck by the majesty and beauty of Piopiotahi Milford Sound. Gasps of wonder interspersed the silence as we took it all in.

I have no doubt that our experience of this New Zealand icon will be like that of visitors from around the world, and the journey to Piopiotahi Milford Sound continue to spark similar reactions in the future. Ngāi Tahu, mana whenua of this special place, have long known its majesty and significance. As Tā Tipene O'Regan so eloquently articulates, the creation of Piopiotahi is integral to Ngāi Tahu history and their connection to the wider Fiordland area.

More recently, Piopiotahi Milford Sound's significance was recognised globally with it being declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986.

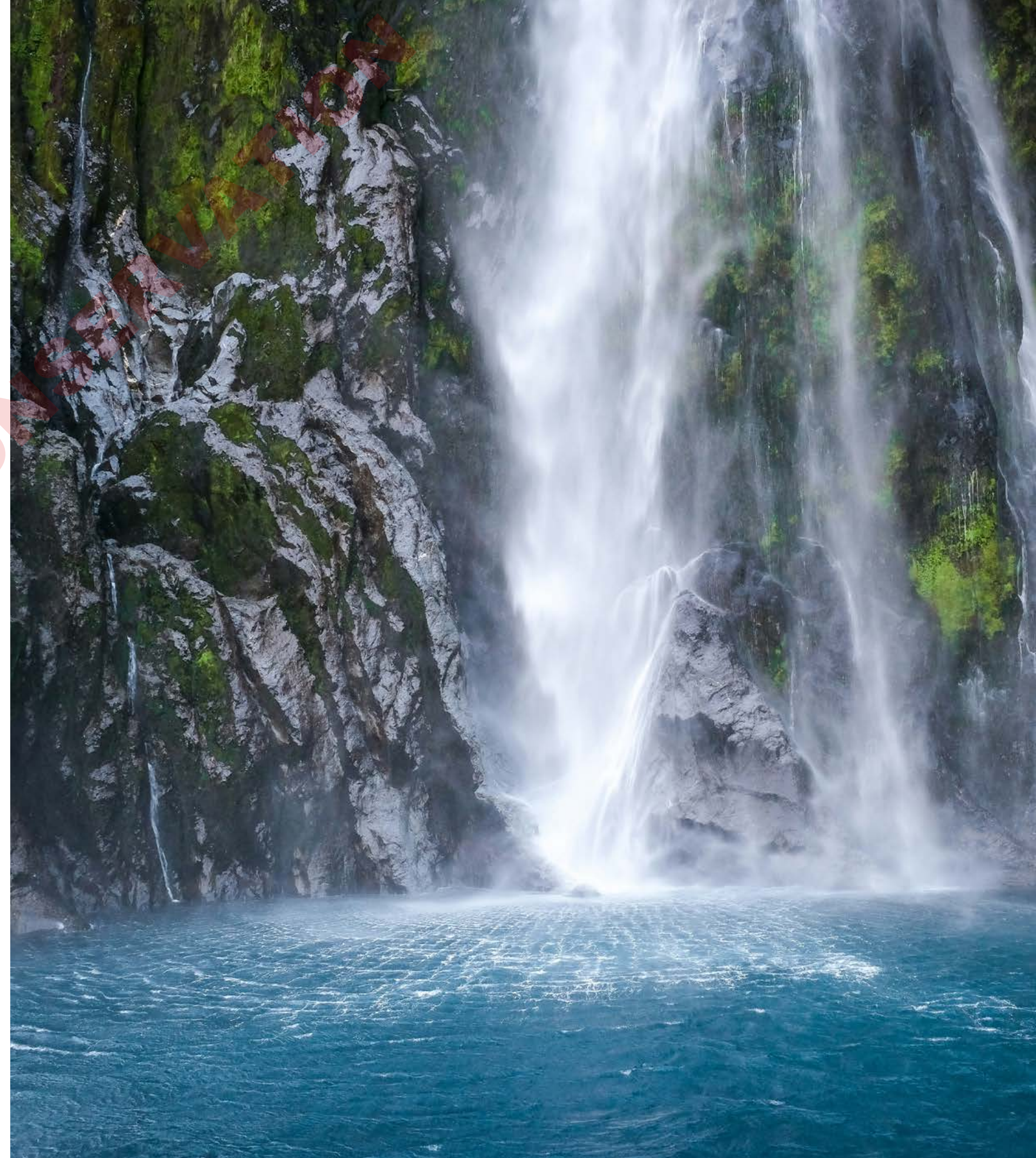
With the growth of New Zealand as a premier international visitor destination, and with many visitors attracted by the iconic imagery of Piopiotahi Milford Sound, visitor numbers continue to increase. Despite the best efforts of mana whenua, tourism operators, central and local government, and conservation groups, visitor numbers are having a negative effect on the visitor experience, conservation, and environmental values. As a result, we have seen this New Zealand icon deteriorate.

The Milford Opportunities Project was established to turn this around. The project produced a Masterplan that aimed to preserve and enhance Piopiotahi Milford Sound and its surrounding environments for future generations, by preserving the environment and improving the visitor experience.

This Business Case is the cumulation of six years of work to develop and test the feasibility of the Masterplan. It contains options and recommendations for Ministers to consider. It has been informed by robust research and feasibility testing and is based on the best information currently available, here, and overseas.

The Business Case reflects the thoughts, aspirations, and experiences of a wide number of stakeholders. Many people have generously contributed their time, energy, and wisdom to its development. The sheer number of interested parties speaks to the uniqueness of Piopiotahi Milford Sound, the complexity of the issues, and the connection it inspires in those who visit, live, play and work in the area. I'd like to thank all who have been involved in getting the project to this point and to emphasise the importance of your ongoing role in realising the future state envisaged by this Business Case.

In closing, I'd like to acknowledge the previous Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Board, Dr Keith Turner for his contribution to the project, and Ministerial Advisory Board members, past and present. I'd also like to acknowledge the central and local government agencies who have supported the work of the board, particularly the Department of Conservation for hosting the Unit working on this project. Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge Ngāi Tahu for their unwavering support and commitment to the project.



Photography above: Milford Sound Waterfall by Zac Porter, and below: Fern by Daniel Mirlea, both via Unsplash.



**“WE MUST BE VERY
CAREFUL OF THIS TAOKA,
THIS TREASURE, LEST WE
LOVE IT TO DEATH”**



WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

Piopiotahi Milford Sound is New Zealand's premier visitor attraction and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, due to its magnificent natural beauty and internationally recognised conservation values.

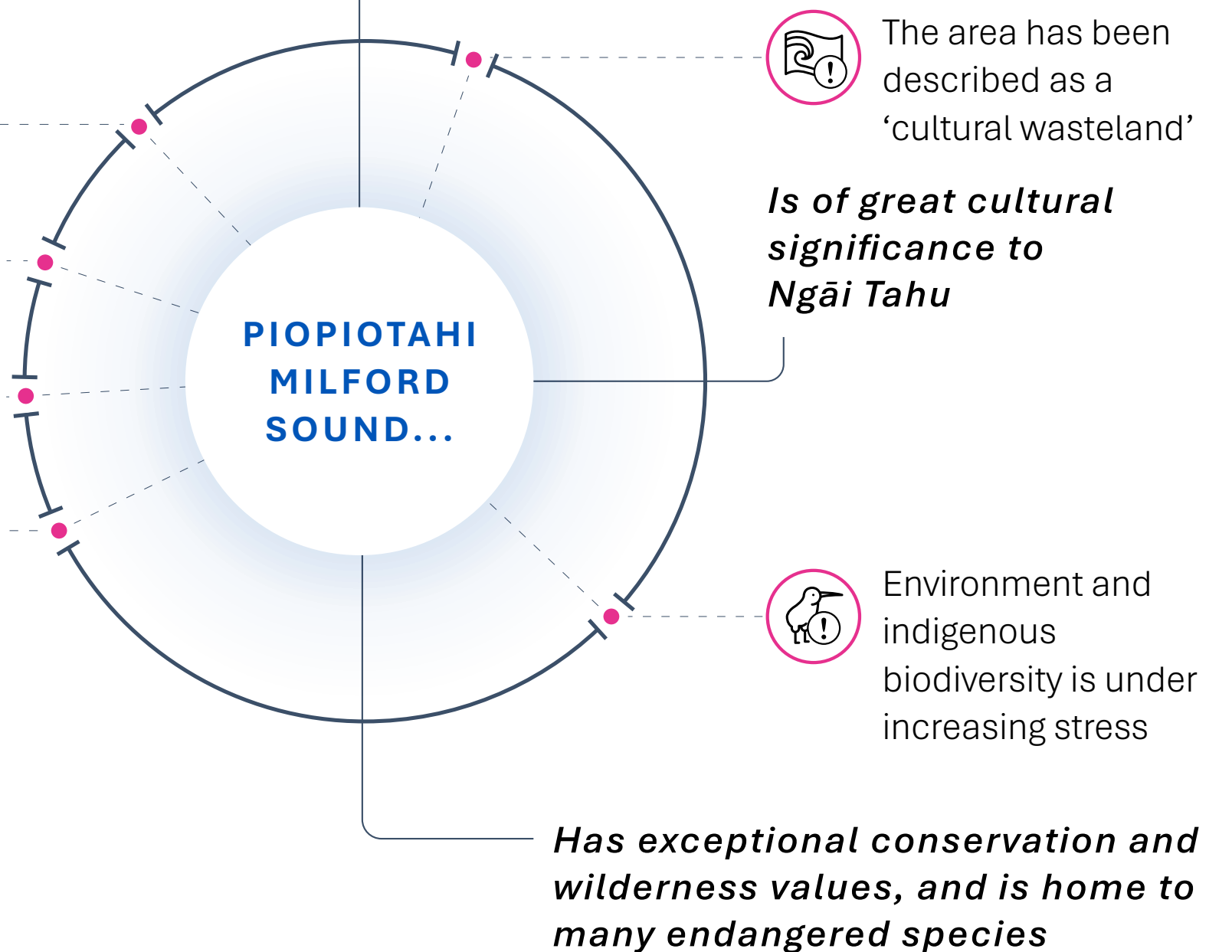
But it is under enormous pressure. Our work has shown almost universal support for taking action to safeguard this unique treasure for current and future generations.

* Peak visitor numbers prior to COVID were regularly exceeding recommended maximum noise and congestion levels. Allowing current visitor patterns to continue will eventually erode the visitor experience by reducing the sense of mana and untouched wilderness and reducing conservation values. This has the potential to damage Aotearoa New Zealand's tourism brand and image.

** There is little evidence of Ngāi Tahu cultural heritage in buildings or visitor experience.

SITS WITHIN A WORLD HERITAGE AREA WITH AN ICONIC REPUTATION, VISITORS EXPECT A UNIQUE AND MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

- Ineffective and ageing infrastructure
- Reactive and limited regulatory system and governance
- Insufficient funding and poor funding tools for investment
- Growing congestion from unmanaged tourism *





THIS IS A ONCE- IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

If we take this opportunity, there will be multiple benefits for visitors, operators, community, mana whenua, and importantly, the environment.

Increased economic
and social benefits
for the Southland and
Otago regions

Improved visitor
experiences and
more sustainable
tourism in Piopiotahi
Milford Sound

IF TAKE THIS
OPPORTUNITY,
THERE WILL
BE MULTIPLE
BENEFITS

Increased support for
conservation within
Piopiotahi Milford
Sound and Fiordland
National Park

Greater opportunities
for mana whenua
to exercise their
rangatiratanga



A LEGACY WITH CASCADING BENEFITS

Our preferred option creates a virtuous cycle for tourism, community, conservation and Ngāi Tahu aspirations through a self-funding, regenerative model.

We want to make tourism in Piopiotahi more sustainable and higher value. At the same time, we want to protect and enhance the significant environmental and cultural values of Piopiotahi.

We propose major improvements to facilities for visitors and the community, combined with a way to give back to the environment over the long-term through a dedicated **“Piopiotahi Protection and Restoration Fund”**. This will be used to reinvest in the whole Milford journey and wider Fiordland.

Our preferred option includes:

- a step change in the visitor experience, with the creation of new immersive cultural experiences, new commercial accommodation options, walking and cycling trails, to provide more options throughout the corridor and help slow down the journey

- significant upgrades to visitor facilities and new opportunities for tourism operators throughout
- upgrades and spatial enhancements to the Village, recognising the increased seismic risk, with new opportunities in the corridor, and to create a greater sense of arrival
- introduction of an international visitor access charge to fund the necessary changes and give back to conservation and the environment
- an opportunity for a reset of the strategic vision and management of the place which can embolden mana whenua, operators, conservation groups and other parties to act in a co-ordinated way to manage the tourism and conservation pressures the place is facing.



MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

1. MANAGING ACCESS

Managing access through a combination of:

Investment in visitor experiences and accommodation along the corridor to spread the flow of visitors during the day—any development would be sympathetic to the natural environment.

The introduction of an International Visitor Access Charge, in the range of \$75-\$100 per person.

Limiting the number of carparks in the village, and requiring that they be pre-booked.

1.1 CRITICAL NODES

We tested the feasibility of the developments anticipated by the Masterplan at each node along the journey into Piopiotahi Milford Sound. Our work confirms several critical nodes along the corridor where investment will provide significant improvement to visitor experience, management of environmental effects, and recognition of areas of great importance to mana whenua, Ngāi Tahu.

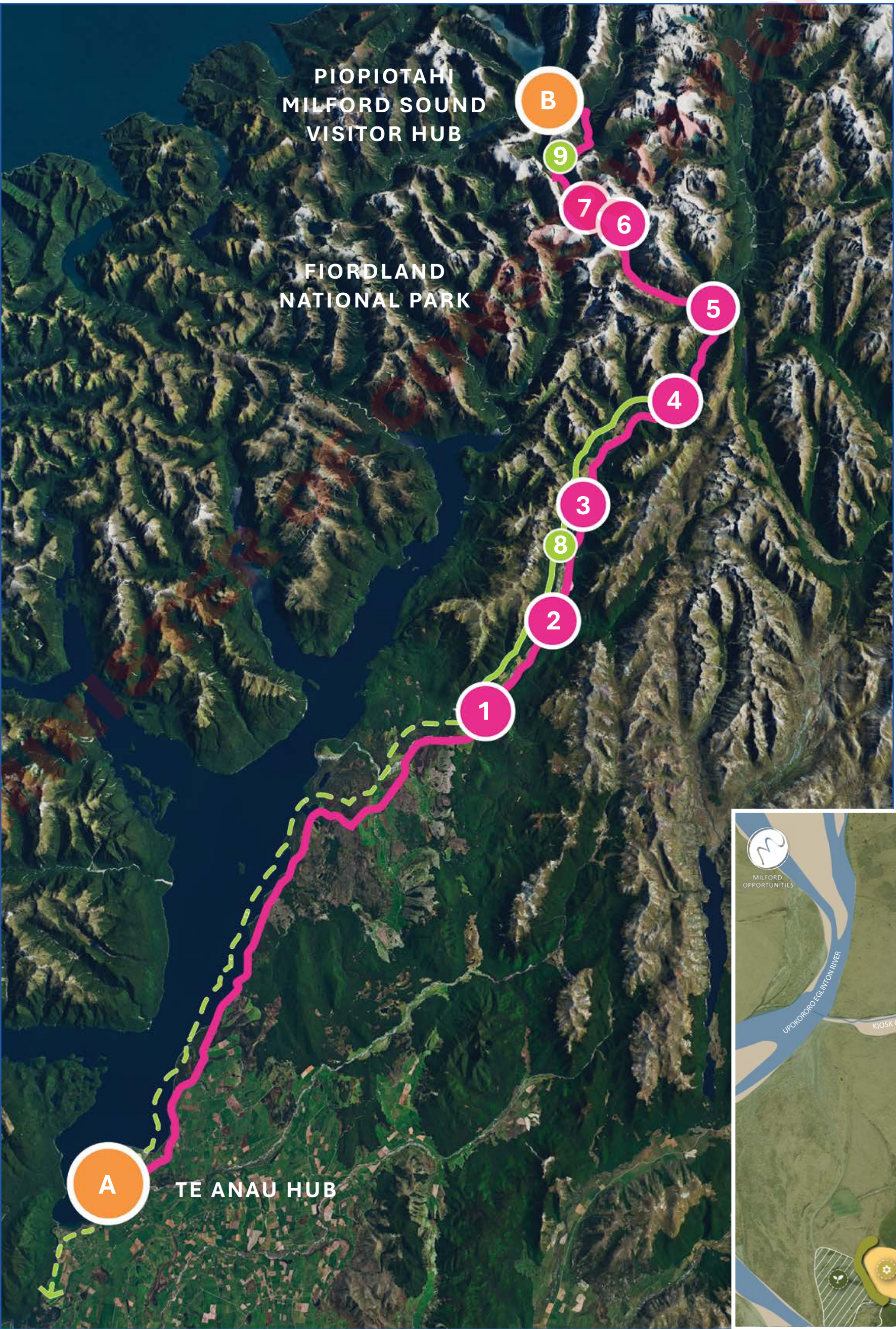
These investments will help to disperse visitors on their journey into Piopiotahi Milford Sound, enabling better management of congestion at Piopiotahi itself and to sustainably grow the capacity of the National Park to host visitors without further adverse effects on its conservation values.

1.2 TE HUAKAUE KNOBS FLAT

Te Huakaue Knobs Flat is a central node in the visitor journey. It offers the most potential to slow visitors and deliver immersive natural and cultural experiences, with a range of new accommodation options that appeal to different types of travellers and act as a base for accessing a wide range of experiences.

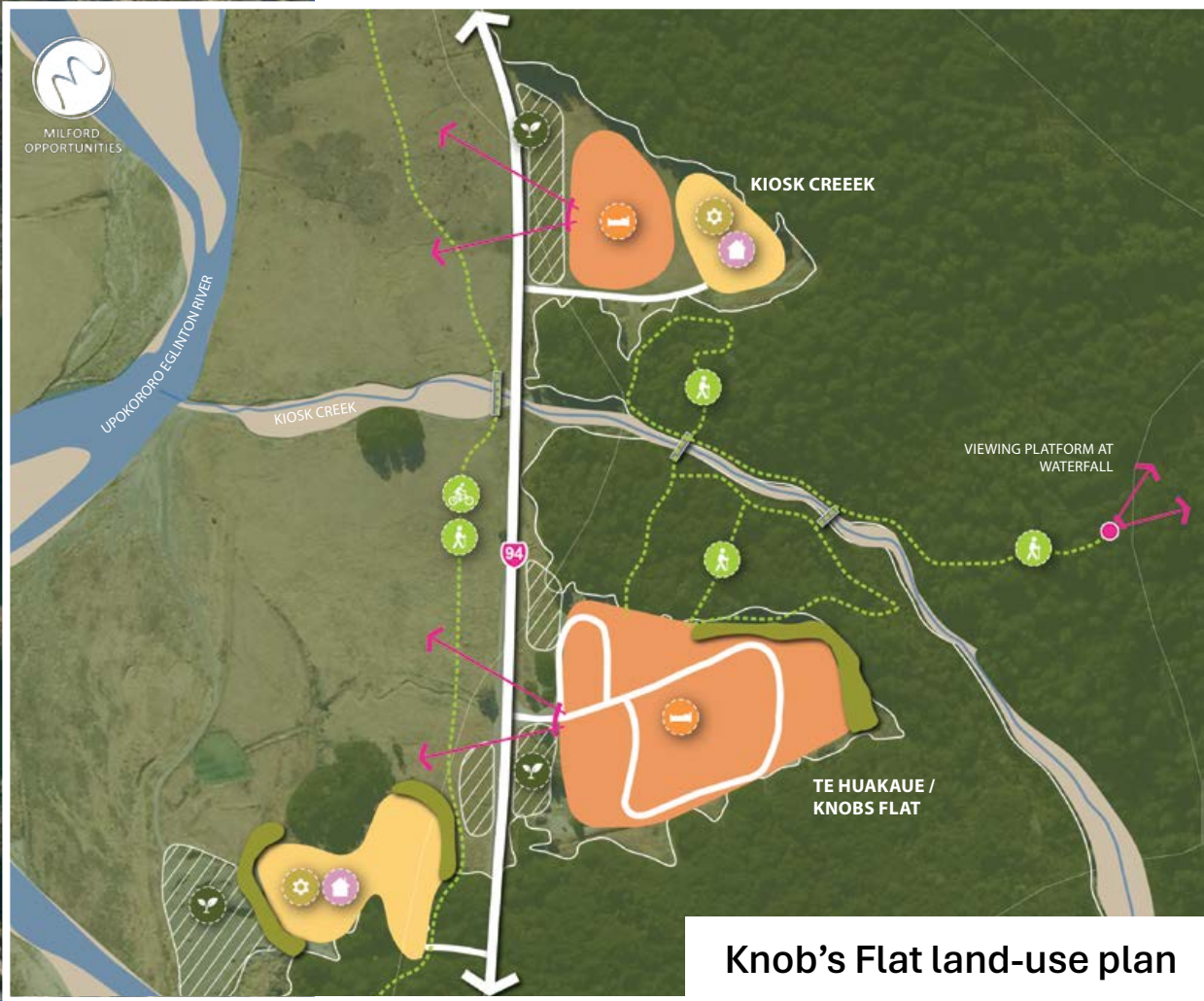
Due to its location and current footprint, it provides the best opportunity to develop as a tourism service hub and future staff accommodation. The nearby Mirror Lakes will be improved with toilets, rain shelters, bus stops, and new interpretation.

Image credit: Milford Corridor map and Knobs Flat Land-use Plan by Boffa



MAP KEY:

- State Highway 94 / Milford Road
- Eglinton Valley shared trails (northern section)
- Eglinton Valley shared trails (southern section, community-initiated)
- A** Te Anau Visitor Hub
- B** Piopiotahi Milford Sound Visitor Hub, Freshwater Basin, Deepwater Basin and Cleddau Delta Nodes
- 1** Node 1: Te Rua-o-Te-Moko Fiordland National Park Gateway
- 2** Node 2: Eglinton Reveal
- 3** Node 3: Te Huakaue Knobs Flat
- 4** Node 4: Ō Tāpara Cascade Creek / Mistake Creek Overnight Walk
- 5** Node 5: The Divide / Whakatipu Trails Head
- 6** Node 6: Gertrude Valley
- 7** Node 7: Cleddau Cirque
- 8** Short stop: Mirror Lakes Waiwhakaata
- 9** Short stop: The Chasm



Knob's Flat land-use plan



Image credit: Option 4 Spatial Plan by Boffa

MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

2. SIGNIFICANT PIOPIOTAHIVILLAGE UPGRADES

Significant upgrades to visitor, staffing and recreational accommodation at the Piopiotahi village to enable a greater sense of arrival.

Our proposed spatial plan for the Village was informed by stakeholder feedback on the visitor experience and analysis of natural hazards. Our proposal minimises environmental effects and provides greater protection against seismic risk.

This includes:

- enhancing the layout for Piopiotahi Milford Sound village to create a compelling sense of arrival for visitors, to protect and enhance the pristine natural environment and reduce visitor exposure to seismic risk, and to give a compelling sense of arrival with view shafts through to Rahotu Mitre Peak from the main arrival along the road.
- returning the foreshore to its natural state, while protecting valuable views to Rahotu Mitre Peak by rerouting the highway away from the foreshore and enabling native riparian replanting.
- recognition of the Ngāi Tahu Tauranga Waka (traditional arrival place for waka).
- new nature walks, activities, lookouts, and refreshment options, enabling a wider range of experiences in the village and revegetation of remaining areas.
- relocation of staff and visitor accommodation to areas with greater resilience and reduced exposure to natural hazards, in particular landfall induced tsunami.

- CAR PARKING
- UTILITY
- TRANSITIONAL COASTAL REVEGETATION (SELECTIVE)
- TRAILS
- BOARDWALK
- PONTOON
- VIEWS
- VIEWING AREA
- *HATCHED LINE INDICATES NEW INFRASTRUCTURE
- *DASHED LINE INDICATES NEW INFRASTRUCTURE



MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

3. TWO NEW WORLD-CLASS VISITOR CENTRES

Two new world-class visitor centres, one as a gateway at Te Anau, the other at Piopiotahi Milford Sound.

The centres will showcase all that the area has to offer, sympathetically designed to reflect the landscape and strong enough to be resilient to seismic risk for years to come; they will create connections and give a richer cultural heritage and conservation narrative.



Top left: Te Anau Hub Plan by Boffa.
Bottom left: Takahe by Timo Volz via Unsplash. Right: Artist impression of new Te Anau Visitor Centre by Boffa.



MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

4. RECOGNITION THAT VISITORS ARRIVE BY DIFFERENT MODES

We recognise that visitors arrive by different modes. We propose retaining the aerodrome but with improvements to better match the world-class experience the area warrants. Cruise ships are also retained with increased focus on minimising environmental effects.



Top: Piopiotahi Milford Sound village, and bottom left: South Island Robin Kakaruai, photography supplied by Milford Opportunities Project team.
Bottom right: Milford Sound Cruise by Tonia Kraakman via Unsplash.



MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

5. MANAGING CONCESSIONS DIFFERENTLY

Concessions are an important tool to help manage the area. We recommend a different approach, including through setting higher standards and expectations for operators and the use of proactive approaches to statutory planning for

and allocating of concessions; this will be complemented with more deliberate monitoring, oversight and performance management of commercial activities against agreed expectations.



Image: Artist impression of Te Rua-o-te-Moko Fiordland National Park entrance by Boffa.



MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

6. ACCESS CHARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

We propose the introduction of an access charge for every international visitor, to be collected through online bookings and concession holders. This brings the area into line with the management of world heritage areas internationally.





MORE ABOUT OUR PREFERRED OPTION:

7. NEW GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

New governance and management arrangements aim to reduce complexity and red tape, and support tourism and conservation enabled by a new legislative approach. These arrangements better utilise existing protections but recognise decision making needs to be more strategic and better resourced.

Left: Mitre Peak by Colin Sickler, top right: Kea by Sebastien Goldberg, and bottom right: Fern by Daniel Mirlea, all via Unsplash.



OUR PREFERRED OPTION HAS BEEN WELL TESTED

We followed Treasury's 'better business case' approach to feasibility test the Milford Opportunities Masterplan and arrive at our preferred option.

Our preferred option was informed by:

1. feedback from a wide range of subject matter experts and groups representing residents and the community, the tourism sector, operators in Piopiotahi, conservation and recreation groups, government officials, and Ministers, and

2. feasibility testing including extensive, engineering, geotechnical, environmental, and natural heritage technical analysis.

Our preferred option is closely aligned with the vision and original intent of the Masterplan. Some changes were made after our feasibility testing, including seismic risk analysis.



KEY DIFFERENCES: OUR PREFERRED
OPTION VS. THE MASTERPLAN

KEY REASONS WHY

01 WE PROPOSE **MORE** INVESTMENT
IN VISITOR EXPERIENCES ALONG
THE MILFORD CORRIDOR

Visitor research told us visitors want a wider range of experiences and that the visitor profile has broadened, post-COVID.

02 WE PROPOSE **FEWER** ELEVATED
STRUCTURES WITHIN PIOPIOTAHU
DUE TO GROUND CONDITION
AND GEOTECHNICAL RISKS.
WE PROPOSE **STRENGTHENED**
/ MORE SAFETY REFUGES AND
AVOIDANCE OF RISK

Analysis of seismic and natural hazard risk did not support the feasibility of the original gondola proposal or significant upgrading of visitor accommodation. Stakeholder feedback confirmed this approach.

03 WE PROPOSE MANAGING
ACCESS TO PIOPIOTAHU MILFORD
SOUND THROUGH A RANGE OF
TRANSPORT OPERATORS

Engagement with operators and visitors showed a preference for a range of bus operators and options delivered by the market rather than a single hop on-hop-off service.

04 WE PROPOSE **GREATER**
INVESTMENT IN A TE ANAU
GATEWAY EXPERIENCE

Engagement with operators, residents and a range of different visitors revealed the value of an impressive and enticing gateway experience at Te Anau. This will also provide an alternative weather option for visitors drawn to the region and connection to cultural and natural heritage.

05 WE PROPOSE **RETAINING** THE
AERODROME AND CRUISE SHIP
ACCESS

Engagement with stakeholders was mixed. Our judgement on whether to retain the aerodrome and access to the area by cruise ships had to be carefully balanced. Access by these means is very important for operators, however there are clear environmental effects. Our preferred option balances these tensions and provides for significant investment to mitigate negative effects (including over time if more environmentally friendly technologies are not adopted).



A WORLD-CLASS EXPERIENCE

Together, with the community, conservation groups, operators and with mana whenua, we aim to protect and enhance the cultural heritage values of Piopiotahi Milford Sound and deliver a world class experience for those who want to share it.

Mana whenua wants both Ngāi Tahu Whānui and manuhiri to be in awe of the majesty that Tū te Rakiwhanoa crafted and for subsequent generations to experience the wairua of Piopiotahi Milford Sound.

