



Milford Sound Piopiotahi Programme Board meeting summary

Dates:	11 December 2025
Venue:	Online
Chair:	Penny Nelson (DOC)
Board members:	Jenn Bestwick (Independent), Dale Elvy (MBIE), Rob Phillips (Environment Southland), Jana Davis (Ngāi Tahu), Nadia Wesley-Smith (Ngāi Tahu), Barry Bragg (Ngāi Tahu), Dave Beeche (Independent), Phil O'Reilly (Independent)
Other attendees:	Kate Norris (Milford/Te Anau community representative) DOC Milford Sound Piopiotahi programme team

Summary

- The Milford Sound Piopiotahi Programme Board held its second hui online on 11 December 2025.
- The Board welcomed community representative Kate Norris and new member Phil O'Reilly. From February, a permanent community representative will join the Board. DOC will issue an EOI for this shortly.
- The Milford journey's risk environment was considered, including earthquake-induced tsunamis. Piopiotahi and the Milford road are remote, high-hazard environments, coupled with a mainly low-skilled or vulnerable visitor demographic.
- The Board is taking a hard look at the hazard environment and implications for visitors and infrastructure both existing and new in the basin. This is a key consideration and priority when planning the work ahead. DOC will support Emergency Management Southland, who continues as the lead agency, by convening partners in the next few months to strengthen emergency planning. The goal is to improve coordination and readiness during an emergency.
- Piopiotahi Milford Sound's incredible natural and cultural heritage and manaakitanga/local hospitality attract visitors from around the world. The Board considered agreed criteria for a 'world-class' visitor experience at Milford, to inform future decision-making. DOC will socialise the proposed criteria with tourism industry and agencies.
- Board members shared insights on the challenges of operating this year with high visitor numbers and observations that more visitors are choosing to self-drive. The Board heard that DOC has invested to improve visitor parking at Deepwater Basin and is working with MSTL and Milford Road Alliance to provide overflow parking options to assist during the peak period this summer. Visitor experience upgrades are being designed across the corridor, prioritising improvements at Deepwater Basin (including value for money assessments of temporary toilet improvements), and the upgrade of the Divide car park.
- The Board is keen to consider further 'quick wins' in future to address immediate challenges while longer term planning is underway, linking into community and wider agency expertise.
- DOC shared plans for upgrades to facilities on Marian Falls track, Key Summit and The Chasm walk, with more work planned in the new year.
- The Board agreed to establish a new community advisory group, which DOC will establish soon. Other specialist groups and advisors will be needed in future as work progresses

Next meeting

The next Programme Board meeting will be held on 18 and 19 February 2026 and will include time in Piopiotahi Milford Sound and Te Anau.