

REC SUMMIT COMMENTS

Geoff Spearpoint

Kia ora,

1 In the field of conservation, DOC works closely with conservation organisations. It seeks their volunteer support. It accepts linking with them at all levels and is comfortable to drive conservation agendas in NZ with them. There are only a few per cent of NZers actually connected with those organisations. Is DOC seeking wider views and input from the other unrepresented 98%? Keen to change its policy to suit newer attitudes amongst the general public towards conservation management of DoC administered lands? I think not too much. Unless they take on DoCs perspective, their views would probably seriously water down DoCs conservation focus.

2 In contrast, for some time in the 1990s, DOC seemed to become quite disconnected from outdoor recreational organisations. DOC saw itself as the arbiters of providing what it thought was necessary for recreation, rather than what active outdoor organisations thought, and I think there was a genuine belief that traditional use of our backcountry was almost dead. The cost was significant flack from the supposedly weak and collapsing organisations that were written off as sunset industries. The extent of the reaction and genuine surprise in the dept was an indication of that disconnection. Hopefully we are past that now.

3 During that time, when Chicago economics dominated thinking nationally, DOC became a very good advocate for tourism. Consequently it is now expected to provide infrastructure for tourists and approve a burgeoning concession lobby, which for the businesses involved is as good as money in the bank in increased value and assets. DOC I think became such a strong advocate because there is plenty of professional credibility and money in tourism. It felt important to do and it could link a conservation message to it. Maybe it has turned out more tricky than expected. Maybe a lot of the tourist stuff could be provided through the Tourist Board, or some other directly related govt organisation. But I think its a bit disingenuous to portray it as essentially Kiwi recreation though. Because it isnt. Language use betrayed thinking at the time. Everyone became 'visitors' to their own land, called the 'DoC Estate'.

4 The Conservation Act says 'foster' recreation and 'allow' for tourism. The dept interprets them the same. My Collins NZ dictionary defines 'foster' as "to nourish; to rear; to promote; to cherish". It defines 'allow' as "to acknowledge; to permit; to give; to set apart; to provide". The same? You decide, but I dont see one recognised as a synonym for the other in either case. The original choice of words was very deliberate and came from the National Parks Act in 1953 specifically to differentiate priorities. I still see that heirarchy as not just relevant, but essential.

5 The original recognition of difference between recreation and tourism was one of amateur and professional interests. A current discussion holds that there is no difference. If that is the case, then the results are the same. If that is the case, then access to a site by a company with paying customers is no different to haphazard amateur use. However, that is not the case, because the longer term outcomes are different, even though the immediate effect may be the same with the same number of people. An amateur group visits and leaves and there is no driver to keep returning. Intermittently they may, or may not. On the other hand, the concessionaire has different priorities that involve increasing the value of the concession asset. Increasing amounts of money will be tied up in advertising the 'product' and for a successful business, there will be increased pressure on the resource. That is the nature of business, and as an example, that is exactly what is happening in Milford.

6 Fishing, hunting, climbing, tramping and walking clubs, over 40s clubs, youth groups

are much more healthy than many in the recreational planning field seem to give them credit for. That should have been recognised through the backcountry hut debate. I wonder if any have ever really investigated them or done in depth analysis of what they continue to offer. I belong to an average sized club in ChCh called the Peninsula Tramping Club. Their figures for person/days on official club trips last year went up another 100 to nearly 1000. Other clubs in ChCh exceed that. Added together with all their private trips, it becomes quite a lot of people. Equally there is significant formal educational use of our backcountry, and many organisations such as project K are also introducing people to our wildlands. They need to be a significant part of that consultation too. It doesn't hurt to remember people's roots though. Very many of the people now immersed in outdoor tourism or youth and educational work got their introduction and had their outdoor passion ignited through a club. That is not about to stop.

7 So I think part of the way forward is to stop calling locals visitors and include them in local and regional planning, as this conference is doing. It is, after all, their place. Recognise that they do have a different stake in our backcountry to overseas visitors. Where do locals go? What do they want? Support that. Help them to facilitate getting more kiwis out there. Don't get too hung up that locals using DOC land may be a bit older. Many people are coming to the hills later in life and it is a big growth area for many clubs. Middle aged people need to be reconnected too, and facilities and support. Last weekend one of the people on the club trip I was on was an immigrant of Asian descent. She has been in NZ 20 yrs, consciously sought out and joined a tramping club and had a fantastic weekend in relatively remote country. So she comes into tramping at midlife. Statistics sometimes don't tell the real story.

8 We need to be careful not to become disenfranchised from our own wildlands. Let me illustrate with an example. I recently went to Mueller Hut (a bit dishonest really- it's a lodge in anyone's language, not a hut) in Mt Cook NP. It was recently rebuilt, and cost over half a million dollars. Consequently, the hut fees are very high for NZers, at \$35/person/night. But it is very appropriate for NZ tourism. Annual hut passes, which active outdoor kiwis might have, can't be used. Now I never heard any kiwis pushing for the extremely high hut standard that has happened up there, quite the reverse. There were 3 or 4 separate sets of survey forms at the hut. They will, going by comments in the hut, absolutely reinforce what a wonderful experience the hut offers.

The problem for me is that all of the hut users that night, wardens excepted, and about 90% of those in the hut logbook, were overseas visitors. Who fill in the forms. That drive survey results that show what is wanted by "visitors". DoC takes that hard data seriously and tries to provide facilities that satisfy those almost entirely overseas visitor's preferences. Many of our best backcountry areas are driving down the same track, and many outdoor kiwis now simply stay away from them.

Don't get me wrong. I enjoyed my stay and the company. In no way do I want to stop overseas visitors enjoying our backcountry. I just don't think that they should become the drivers of what standards and facilities DoC provides in the NZ backcountry, even in the toured areas. That should remain primarily the prerogative of kiwis. Just as I don't expect to go to Germany and tell them where and what to provide as recreational facilities in their country. Or for that matter, survey them on how we should manage the conservation aspect of our DoC lands, and then base policy on it. For instance, what to do about our possums and 1080 and whether we should be managing our biodiversity differently. That's not appropriate, either.

9 Simplify and lower costs on outdoor recreational facilities, particularly in the backcountry. Last weekend I visited several older style 4 and 6 bunk huts done up recently by DOC. They are wonderful. Quintessentially Kiwi backcountry. We had a lot of rain. None

leaked. A new design 6 bunk hut put in the same area had pools of water inside. The extra cost is to make them last? I think not in this case. Simplify and weatherproof. That's all backcountry people want, and what they said in the standards review. The higher standard is simply corporate junk. Don't blame backcountry users for those extra costs. In Stewart Island, huts being built by deerstalkers are about \$15,000 i think. They are presumably legal. A DoC equivalent is about \$80,000+. The one that lasts will be the one that stays dry.

10 I think DoC could learn a lot and get a little less bound up in its own policy stuff by taking some lessons from what local and regional park people are doing around the fringes of cities, if they want to engage more of the community. Think way outside the square DOC has put itself into. I dont have a dog, and dont particularly want to see them or their sign everywhere in the hills, but where can people with dogs go in the hills? Where is that advertised? What opportunities do DoC provide? Friendly roadend carparks where granny doesnt have to park down the road and walk to the recreation area, but can drive to many sheltered sites, such up at Kaitoke waterworks for instance. And in some places at least some of the overbearing conservation message boards could be dropped. People can feel alienated by the uncompromising nature of some of that stuff from the religious greens. It is not needed everywhere. Let people interpret their own land how they want.

11 To recap, i see the way forward being DoC working in closer partnership with those interested in outdoor recreation in local communities, professional and amateur. NZ is small enough that there should be personal links and regular meetings to talk through local issues. At the same time, it should not become a closed shop, but be actively seeking to include anyone or group that wants to contribute, or have a say. Decisions should follow a general overview policy but include a healthy dose of local pragmatism too.

12 We dont need any more grand visions or to suddenly swing off at a new tangent, as what we have provides a sound basis to continue from. A lot of effort and thought has gone into what we currently have. People sometimes say we are very lucky to have what we have. There is an element of luck in it. But mostly it has nothing to do with luck. We inherited a fantastic National Park System because passionate Kiwis had a vision, and fought and fought for it.

We have a wonderful set of Forest Parks because people gave endless time and effort to make them so. They didnt just happen. The backcountry facilities we have are more than just an historical hunting accident, though some sometimes portray it that way. Those who put them in knew by the early 70s that they were also providing substantially for recreation.

And it needs to sometimes be remembered that even DoC didnt set up DoC. Neither did luck. We did, less than 20 years ago. Just as we have fought for protection of, and access to, in countless campaigns, our backcountry for the best part of a century before that. We need to build on from where we are, and to welcome newer ways to use our wildlands, but let's not forget where we have come from, what we have already done, and find ways to support our unique outdoor culture. It is our heritage, and i am committed to maintaining it.