

## Visitor strategy a positive step for DOC and the tourism industry

It's been a long time coming, but Tourism Industry Aotearoa is pleased that the Department of Conservation finally has a Heritage and Visitor Strategy.

The **new strategy**, released today, provides important guidance for DOC's efforts to sustainably manage visitors to the public conservation estate.

DOC manages many of New Zealand's greatest tourism assets that attract our international visitors. It also controls hundreds of commercial tourism operations that operate on conservation lands and waters via concession processes.

In combination with the anticipated report from the Tourism Futures Taskforce and tomorrow's release of the latest report from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, the new DOC strategy contributes to shaping the future of tourism and ensuring it benefits Aotearoa and New Zealanders.

"DOC is arguably the single most important player in the visitor system but it has been 25 years since their last Visitor Strategy was developed in 1996 and much has changed. DOC consulted with TIA on the first drafts of this Strategy back in 2016. The new document has since been through dozens of drafts, five years and three Ministers," TIA Chief Executive Chris Roberts says.

"We are pleased the finalised document notes the importance of the relationship with TIA and the wider tourism industry. TIA is committed to working with DOC to achieve positive outcomes for both conservation and tourism," Mr Roberts says. "In 2015, TIA and DOC developed a tourism/conservation partnership via the Groundswell project and it is pleasing to see DOC recognise the ongoing relevance of this initiative in the strategy."

TIA and the tourism industry are committed to a strongly positive relationship between nature and visitors. We want the tourism industry to be actively working to make nature better. This is where the objectives of DOC and TIA are locked together, and the new strategy provides a platform we can use to make important advances for the long-term benefit of nature, visitors and communities.

While the Heritage and Visitor Strategy sets out clear goals for DOC, TIA is disappointed that the crucial role of tourism operators in helping to reach those goals lacks visibility in the document.

"Tourism operators host domestic and international visitors across the conservation estate. They share New Zealand's stories and educate visitors on the importance of our biodiversity, culture and heritage. They manage visitor flows and support conservation activities. Private sector operators can also support DOC in identifying new opportunities for visitor experiences," Mr Roberts says. "These operators assist DOC to meet its

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objectives and they should be considered essential partners, not just a source of revenue through concession fees.”

TIA has continually highlighted improvements needed to planning and concessions systems, to reduce unnecessary barriers to sustainable private sector activities.

“We want to see the overhaul of outdated legislation, including the Conservation Act 1987 and National Parks Act 1980. This legislation does not respond to 21<sup>st</sup> Century pressures and opportunities.”

TIA is to meet with Conservation Minister Kiritapu Allan next month and looks forward to discussing these matters with her. The association will also continue to work closely with DOC senior management on the many complexities of the department’s relationship with the tourism industry.

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## KEY FACTS

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Tourism in New Zealand was a \$114.8 million per day industry. Tourism delivered more than \$48 million in foreign exchange to the New Zealand economy each day of the year. Domestic tourism contributed another \$66.7 million in economic activity every day.
- Tourism was New Zealand’s biggest export earner, contributing \$17.5 billion or 20.1% of New Zealand’s foreign exchange earnings (year ended March 2020).
- 13.6% of the total number of people employed in New Zealand worked directly or indirectly in tourism. That means 384,186 people were working in the visitor economy.
- The **Tourism 2025 & Beyond** sustainable growth framework/Kaupapa Whakapakari Tāpoi has a vision of growing a sustainable tourism industry that benefits New Zealanders.

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