RECOGNISING, PLANNING FOR AND MANAGING LIMITS TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NATURAL AREAS

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Introduction

This paper discusses work in progress⁴ towards the development of an integrated approach to planning and management of natural areas for tourism and related activities. An integrated approach needs to take into account ecological, economic, social and cultural (including Maori) considerations at different spatial scales – from site specific up to the regional scale – and for different types of natural areas in land and marine environments. It is apparent that a successful management approach will also need to recognise the finite capacity for some activities at some sites, as well as the potentially competing requirements of cultural and amenity values, tourism/recreation activities and other economic activities. The approach will be designed for application in multi-stakeholder contexts and will be sufficiently generic to be applicable to a range of different environmental and activity settings.

To aid the development of an integrated approach we are developing a kete of practical management tools⁵, with information about their individual and collective usefulness (including consideration of their cultural appropriateness) and their strengths and weaknesses for particular sorts of natural areas, development contexts and management problems, and social, political and cultural contexts. The tools listed in Table 1 are drawn from several disciplines, including economics, risk assessment, landscape architecture, ecology, tourism planning, regional and resource planning, community development, public participation, leisure and recreation management, law, and impact assessment.

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⁴ The work described is part of the FRST-funded research programme: Integrated planning and managing of natural areas for tourism-related development.  
⁵ These ‘tools’ include methodologies, frameworks (for example the Resource Management Act) and responses to issues that arise in the context of integrated planning.
### Table 1: Approaches reviewed

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| Valuation/risk assessment   | Non-market valuation  
Contingent valuation  
Hedonic pricing  
Travel cost method  
Cost benefit analysis  
Regional economic analysis (including input-output tables and multipliers) |
| Landscape/visual/ ecological| Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)  
Biophysical carrying capacity  
Environmental standards, control and certification |
| Participatory approaches    | Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)  
Co-management  
Charrettes and visioning exercises  
Transactive planning |
| Leisure and recreation management | Specialisation theory  
Crowding management (social carrying capacity)  
Conflict management and resolution  
Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)  
Visitor Asset Management (VAM) system |
| Planning/statutory approaches | New Zealand Resource Management Act framework  
New Zealand Conservation Act framework  
Conservation Act concessions system  
NZ regional/district tourism strategies  
Environmental regional planning  
Management of cumulative impacts  
Resort planning  
Zoning  
Integrated monitoring of impacts and thresholds |
| Integrated approaches to impact assessment | Eco-tourism approaches  
Analysis of reverse sensitivities  
Webbing-and-chaining approaches  
Social Impact Assessment (SIA) |

As Figure 1 illustrates, these tools can be broadly described as those that:
- inform the setting of limits
- make up the legislative and planning context through resource and land-use plans
- contribute to tourism plans
- are used to assess impacts
- are used to structure public participation including Maori participation
- are used to value and allocate natural resources.

Together, they provide the basis for building community, industry and agency capacity to manage natural areas in an integrated way for tourism and related activities.
Figure 1: An integrated approach to planning and management of tourism and related activities in natural areas

Tools and their usefulness

Research findings so far have revealed the existence of a wide range of management and decision making tools that are potentially applicable in New Zealand, most of which have been already been applied in New Zealand in some context. Our assessment of specific tools or groupings of tools focused on their appropriateness and effectiveness in the range of contexts noted above. The assessment was informed by internationally and nationally documented reviews and evaluations (see the bibliography for an indication of the documented material available), in-house evaluations based on a set of indicators that reflect principles of integrated management and the experience of key users in conservation, local and regional government, tourism, recreation and related activities - as drawn from 50 interviews (2001-2) and a series of case studies (2002-3). The case studies were selected to show how applications of these tools worked in practice. Often the motivation for these applications related to a key stakeholder’s recognition that some sort of limit to tourism and related activities was needed, given: existing or potential negative social, cultural and/or physical impacts; and the need to protect ecological and/or cultural values, manage user conflicts and maintain user satisfaction. The potential value of

6 District or areas where case studies were carried out include the Catlins, Hump Ridge, Doubtful Sound, Milford Sound, Fox Glacier and Franz Josef Glaciers, Mount Cook, Kura Tawhiti, Lake Pearson, Loch Katrine, Kaitorete Spit, Pegasus, Panakaiki, Kaikoura, Pupu Springs, Farewell Spit and Puponga Farm Park, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Kapiti Island, Mount Bruce Wildlife Sanctuary, Tongariro National Park, Waitomo Caves, North Head, Orakei - Whenua Rangatira, and Hauraki Gulf.
these tools is being further tested and developed through applications in an ongoing series of case studies (2003-4) using action research methodologies.

The reviews, interviews and case studies undertaken to date point to the sorts of approaches and tools that deserve further consideration as part of an integrated approach to planning and management of natural areas. Tools identified as having particular potential for integrated tourism management in New Zealand include analytical frameworks such as Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), economic rationing tools, community visioning and participatory approaches, and impact assessment tools. These tools constitute a disparate collection. Furthermore, they appear to us to be generally poorly understood by people in decision-making roles, and with limited capacity available to implement them fully.

In this paper we discuss current and potential use of these tools under a number of integrative themes. These include: recognising and setting limits; finding ways to link planning processes and approaches; valuing and allocating resources on public conservation land through concessions; the contribution of voluntary codes and voluntary action; structuring community input into key decisions; giving land special status through zoning and other mechanisms; the value of working parties and other collaborative working arrangements between stakeholders; how relationships between key stakeholders influence resource management; monitoring as a key to effective planning and management; and the need for more innovative and informative interpretation and co-ordinated information and research.

**Recognising and setting limits**

There is a general recognition, both within the literature and by key decision-makers, that consideration of limits to tourism and related development needs to be part of management strategies. This need is highlighted by a wide perception that visitor levels in places such as the Abel Tasman National Park (including the Abel Tasman track and its coastal environs), Milford Sound (including the access road), Pu pū Springs in Golden Bay and Tongariro Crossing in the Tongariro National Park are approaching or have surpassed carrying capacity. Many of the areas affected are iconic destinations. On the other hand, some destinations including Kapiti Island and some of the South Island Great Walks are perceived as well managed, largely because limits have been directly or indirectly set (e.g., a specific cap set on the number of visitors permitted on Kapiti island per day, or the hut booking system and the visitor management through the guiding concessions on the Great Walks).

One of the problems around setting limits, usually to visitor numbers or the number or scale of activities, is uneven use of analytical frameworks such as physical and social carrying capacity or limits to acceptable change, to build the evidence base for establishing a threshold. This problem is apparent at a variety of places including the Waitomo Caves, Milford Sound, Farewell Spit, Ruapehu skiing areas, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Punakaiki, Kura Tawhiti (Castle Hill in Canterbury) and Abel Tasman National Park. Aoraki (Mt Cook) is one of the exceptions, where limitations on aircraft activity, adopted voluntarily by operators, have been informed by a
purpose-developed monitoring process that is used to assess the limits of acceptable change.

In most of the areas identified as having reached carrying capacity or at risk of doing so, social carrying capacity is the greatest concern. Signs of social carrying capacity approaching or exceeding acceptable limits include: negative effects of visitor numbers on visitor experiences; conflicts between different groups of visitors or activities; and the effects of visitors on cultural and heritage values and on the social integrity of local communities. These social impacts are generally perceived as both the major limiting factor to increasing tourism and related activities and the most difficult to manage. In contrast, biophysical carrying capacity is seen as more straightforward to manage, for instance through hardening tracks, fencing off fragile areas, and managing visitor activities through interpretation. An exception to this situation may be the Northern Crossing of Tongariro National Park, where indicators of a threshold in carrying capacity include physical effects of localised track damage and contamination from inadequate toilet facilities, as well as adverse cultural effects on tangata whenua values and social effects of high visitor numbers on visitor experiences.

Concerns about exceeding limits usually involved the accumulation of effects over a period of time - whether for social, biophysical or cultural effects. That accumulation can be in terms of numbers, scope and types of activities, numbers (and sometimes variety) of visitors, and spatial and temporal expansion (e.g., growth in the footprint and hours/days/months of visitor and recreational activities). Identification and monitoring of these cumulative effects remains challenging, both because impact assessment practitioners themselves grapple with how to identify and measure them, and because on-going monitoring tends to be narrow in focus. If monitoring becomes more prevalent and systematic, the data will build better baseline information and contribute to our understanding of cumulative effects. Then it will be possible to anticipate and recognise problems before it is too late to easily halt or reduce the scale and variety of activities.

**Linking planning processes and approaches**

Planning for the tourism sector frequently intersects with other processes and approaches for natural resource and land-use planning, but the different approaches lack cohesion and frequently lack reference to each other. In New Zealand the relevant approaches include both systems or process-based approaches (such as regional tourism planning, resort planning and regional planning), and statutory processes established through legislation, including the Resource Management, Reserves, Conservation and Local Government Acts.

Differences amongst the regional tourism plans in New Zealand provide one example of the lack of coherence at the process level. Rather than conforming to a generic model, or acknowledging links between regions, these plans tend to reflect the geographic, social and economic characteristics of particular destinations. In Australia, in an attempt to overcome similar problems, the Environmentally Based Tourism Planning Model was trialled as a way to achieve a more coherent approach to regional planning. However the model has not been widely applied.
Inconsistencies in planning outcomes can sometimes be explained by the statutory planning objectives embodied within different acts. For instance, the RMA’s objectives - sustainable management of natural and physical resources - provide a management framework for development to occur in a sustainable way, while the objectives of the Reserves Act and the Conservation Act focus on management for protection or conservation of natural values, regardless of whether development occurs or not. A more integrated approach to planning, adopting both statutory and non-statutory planning tools, should enable sustainable development in natural areas. The approach should enable an appropriate balance of commercial and non-commercial visitor and recreational activities. It should also allow the development of amenities and structures that are, together, consistent with and protect natural and other values associated with a natural area.

**Valuation and allocation by concessions on public conservation land**

There are a number of tools used to value goods and services that are not traded in competitive markets, including access to and use of nature conservation areas. However, there is little use of these techniques in New Zealand. Neither is there any impetus towards using economic mechanisms such as direct access fees to manage activity, given strong values around “free” access to the conservation estate.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) uses a concession system\(^7\) to allocate commercial activities such as guided walks and marine mammal viewing in public conservation areas. In turn, operators charge visitors a fee, including passing on the costs of the concession and providing DOC with some income related to levels of use.

The current process for concession approvals is not conducive to strategic planning. Instead, the process is more or less entirely reactive, with DOC responding to applications from tourism operators to carry out particular activities on a case-by-case basis. History shows that, if applicants persist for long enough, few applications fail although many applicants abandon their application or refine them in response to DOC requirements. The concessions allocated have different conditions, including the time scale of the concession, limits on visitor numbers, requirements for monitoring, and DOC mechanisms for setting charges. Tourism operators with concessions that cross more than one conservancy or different concessions in different conservancies have long talked about their frustrations from inconsistencies in these conditions and charges. There is no permit required for any non-commercial recreation. DOC notes the difficulties faced by staff in attempting to avoid or mitigate cumulative effects and conflicts, for instance between among tourism operators or between them and other users, in the absence of a more strategic approach to the concessions process.

A more strategic approach may involve DOC using tools like ROS to map out the types and intensity of activities that could occur across a conservancy. Such a process

\(^7\) A concession is a permit to undertake a commercial activity in a particular place and over a specified period of time.
may involve DOC tendering out a set number of concessions for particular categories of activities across particular categories of natural areas, with a total limit of commercial tourism activity to be allocated. DOC could then take a regional or local focus that enabled more strategic approaches than the current case-by-case process. Such an approach would be consistent with integrated management (natural, cultural and historic values and visitor experiences) of key places. DOC is currently seeking to move towards such an approach, as is evidenced in some national park management plans and draft general policy under the conservation legislation.

But there is still a tension between the “protectionist” basis of the Conservation Act and the management of effects-based concessions provisions, which are much more akin to RMA processes. There is philosophical tension as well as an inconsistency and practical difficulty for DOC managers who have to cope with two different systems.

**Structured participation**

Key to integrated approaches to the management of natural areas is effective public input into, or participation in, identifying cultural values, conflicts and impacts of existing and proposed activities, establishing management priorities, and making management decisions. Visioning exercises, including charrettes, and consultative approaches to the development of tourism plans and strategies are relatively common in New Zealand. In visioning exercises, groups or communities develop agreed strategies as responses to commonly agreed problems and desired outcomes, usually through a facilitated process. These processes, especially when there are multiple uses of natural areas, can lead to greater collective commitment to the final plans. However, they are non-statutory. Therefore, as the examples below illustrate, they often fall down at the implementation phase, leaving participants disappointed. The statutory requirement for public consultation in much of the legislation that intersects with tourism, including specific requirements to consult with tangata whenua, remains the most common source of public participation in tourism and conservation planning and management.

Visioning exercises have occurred in a number of nature-based visitor destinations. At Te Waikoropupu (Pupu Springs, Golden Bay), DOC, iwi, local government, residents, divers, conservation groups, tourism operators and commercial interests like salmon farmers participated in a process that generated a plan. The plan is yet to be implemented. Similarly, successful visioning processes conducted at North Head (Auckland), Waitomo, Punakaiki and Kaikoura have encountered difficulties at the implementation stage – that is, in turning visions into action.

Visioning exercises have been more successful in other places. At the Wildlife Centre at Mt Bruce (northern Wairarapa), the visioning process and implementation was assisted by a collective focus on a sub-project – the Pukaka Project. This more narrowly focused sub-project became the vehicle for the wider group of interested parties (including tangata whenua, DOC and conservation groups) to develop a shared vision and a set of objectives and protocols for working together. In the case of the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary in Wellington, the initial efforts of environmental advocates were consolidated through wider community and business support. The project was community based from the start although it has also enjoyed strong
support from both DOC and local government. Local tourism operators’ recognition of the economic potential of the Sanctuary is reflected in integrated marketing strategies with other Wellington icons.

A further community-based process is the Tuatapere community’s development of the Hump Ridge Track. The development meets the needs of a range of stakeholders including the local community, landowners, relevant central and local government agencies and users – the people walking the track. Notable are the 10-year timeframe from idea to action, a feasibility study that specifically considered social and economic impacts, on-going liaison between the community, the Southland District Council and DOC, and strong community leadership. However, interviews identified that the process of developing a successful, economically variable, project is not yet complete and will require ongoing effort by the community and other interests.

Consultation processes have also under-delivered. While the need for consultation is often part of the rhetoric around how to develop workable management plans, in reality its use is often problematic.

- At Waitomo, Pupu Springs and Punakaiki, problems have been experienced in translating diverse community views, gained through consultation, into viable solutions when hard decisions are necessary. For instance, at Pupu Springs, DOC needs to make a firm decision (around diving) that will not please all the stakeholders.
- Case studies highlight the inadequacy of consultation with tangata whenua. For instance, that the sacred values of Pupu Springs are not fully appreciated and the consequent inappropriate recreational use of the springs may be attributed to lack of consultation in the preparation of the management plan.
- As is often the case, in some case studies (North Head, Waitomo, Pupu Springs) community expectations as a result of consultation could not be fulfilled. Often these failures, especially in rural areas, appear to be linked to community expectations that better tourism management will lead to increased economic development in a district.

Voluntary action

Voluntary codes and voluntary action form an important part of the overall management strategy in some places with agencies such as DOC and local government encouraging them to achieve a variety of outcomes. These include managing conflicts between user groups, setting limits to visitor numbers and activities, and discouraging activities that are inconsistent with cultural and other values. Although agencies have encouraged their formation, these voluntary actions usually reflect a grassroots recognition of problems and the need for some level of group or community responsibility to alleviate them. For instance, at Pupu Springs two voluntary initiatives reflect local community concerns and recreational user responses to tangata whenua concerns. First, the local community indicated its wish for the establishment of care groups (involving iwi, DOC, community and landowner representatives) during a community consultation process commissioned by DOC and the Tasman District Council (TDC). Also, recreational divers have developed a voluntary Code of Conduct in response to tangata whenua concern about diving in a
place of high spiritual value. A more statutorily based mechanism may still be required, however, so that cultural values are protected to the extent required by local Maori.

A similar mechanism may be required at Kura Tawhiti, where a rock climbers’ voluntary code recognises the ecological importance of the area, resulting in some parts being out of bounds, but is less cognisant of its cultural significance. At Aoraki/Mt Cook, local operators have formed an Aircraft Users Group that works with DOC to find acceptable ways to operate in the area, with negotiations over flight paths, types of aircraft and voluntary actions regarding aircraft operation. Informal groups have also been established at Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers for similar purposes. Experience has shown that the success of these groups depends very much on the people involved, both amongst the operators and in DOC. In the Waitomo area, landowners have formed a landcare group, with the support of Environment Waikato, which takes an active role in managing properties to protect the Waitomo Glow-worm Caves catchment by reducing sedimentation into the stream that feeds the caves.

The experience at the Whenua Rangatira within Orakei illustrates the multi-layered nature of ‘care groups’ and their need for real ‘grass-roots’ links to be able to take decisive action on the part of their constituents. The Ngati Whatua o Orakei Maori Trust Board could be viewed as a tangata whenua ‘care group’ However, to be effective, the group needs to constantly check out that it has sufficiently wide hapu and whanau support to act on behalf of its people.

**Collaboration**

Collaborative working arrangements such as working parties can be an effective part of integrated management approaches, especially in multi-jurisdictional contexts. The activities of the Hurunui Lakes Working Party (HLWP), formed in the early 1990s at the initiative of the Hurunui District Council, show how groups set up to address particular issues can evolve into more widely focused groups. While the HLWP was initially established in response to the impacts of increasing 4WD use in the area, its recent focus has shifted to the 65 private baches “squatting” at Loch Katrine. An inclusive consultation process has generated a generally accepted and innovative solution.

At Lake Pearson, a stakeholder working party was set up to find ways to protect wildlife, especially the threatened southern crested grebe, and the natural and recreational qualities of the lake for fishing, camping, day visitors and, hut users from the impacts of speeding boats. The groups prompted Environment Canterbury to find a solution, as it turned out through use of marine safety regulations.

The Karori Wildlife Sanctuary Trust, including Forest and Bird, DOC, Totally Wellington, iwi, private commercial, state and community interests, has proved an effective structure for increasing community support, attracting resources, developing an increasingly commercially oriented operation and setting up a number of special management zones for achieving different outcomes.
The Hauraki Forum operates at both governance and operational levels, providing the basis for collaborative inter-agency and iwi approaches to management of the wider catchment - Hauraki Gulf, Waitamata Harbour, the Firth of Thames, the east coast of Coromandel Peninsular and the Gulf Islands. The Forum provides opportunities for both councilors and iwi to consider policy responses to catchment issues at a governance level and for officers to work together to develop practical responses at the operational level.

**Stakeholder relationships**

When relationships between stakeholder groups are strong, the extent to which natural areas are managed in an integrated way seems enhanced. Often these close relationships reflect the small town contexts where stakeholders live in reasonably close proximity, have children in the same schools and so on. For instance, in Tongariro National Park, key senior managers in both DOC and operator companies have known each other for a long time (often having had shared work experiences) and staff of the various organisations are long standing members of the local community. At Mt Bruce, DOC staff, Rangatane and the Mt Bruce Trust all value the quality of their working relationships and their importance to the smooth management of the area.

In other areas, the complexity of stakeholder relationships is not so conducive to integrated management. Stakeholder relationships in the Whenua Rangatira at Orakei, Auckland are a case in point. These relationships are dominated by two organisations - the Auckland City Council (ACC) and the Ngati Whatua o Orakei Maori Trust Board, which represents the Orakei hapu. Tourism development on the Whenua Rangatira – the last remnant of ancestral land - is shaped by interaction between government agencies\(^8\) and the Trust Board. These relationships can be adversarial or co-operative, depending on the context. For instance, the ACC, given its territorial authority status, and the Trust Board, given its tangata whenua status in the wider Auckland isthmus, may have opposing points of view on Auckland wide issues but work together within the Orakei Reserves Board. Relationships between hapu, whanau and the Trust Board may also be adversarial or co-operative, depending on the context and the issue.

DOC is especially aware of the need to build and maintain strong stakeholder relationships as part of its management approach. At most of the important tourism sites in the public conservation estate, DOC is trying to manage a complex set of stakeholder relationships including tangata whenua who either have (eg., Ngai Tahu) or are seeking formal partnership arrangements, the “general public”, a dominant well-established concession holder, other commercial operators who would like a bigger slice of the action, environmental/recreation/access advocacy groups who would like to see less commercial use, and local communities. Balancing the needs of these stakeholders with the statutory obligations to manage the area on behalf of the Crown and to put conservation requirements first, DOC can only succeed with good

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\(^8\) Including the Orakei Reserves Board, which manages the Whenua Rangatira; Auckland City Council, which co-manages the Reserves Board and interacts with the hapu at the individual, community and hapu level; and Te Puni Kokiriri, which has funded whanau tourism initiatives.
tools to develop and implement a shared vision, set limits and monitor how well it is all going.

**The value of co-ordinated information, interpretation and research**

One way to protect special values and manage visitor use is to provide information about an area’s special cultural, natural and other qualities and, given these, the permitted and/or appropriate behaviour and activities. Information provision, in the form of signage, brochures and interpretation, was noted as an especially important management tool, particularly for managing cultural significance and impacts, for instance at Pupu Springs, Kura Tawhiti, Tongariro National Park, Mt Bruce and Punakaiki.

Specific attention needs to be given to who provides the information, what it covers, and the most appropriate information dissemination and interpretation mechanisms, given the message, the intended audience, the range of uses and values and the physical environment. Consistency of message is essential.

There is a need for more coordinated information sharing between key players in the development and management of natural areas. These include DOC, local government and tourism organisations such as Tourism New Zealand, Regional Tourism Organisations and visitor centres.

Case studies highlight the potentially negative impacts (such as crowding) that can occur as a consequence of poor communication between key organisations or ill-informed development strategies. For instance, the lack of effective communication between DOC and Tourism New Zealand with reference to the Tongariro Crossing means it continues to be marketed as one of the “best one-day walks in the world” when visitor numbers have probably exceeded the social carrying capacity that ensures visitor satisfaction. Other issues such as safety, given the high altitude and changeable weather patterns in the area, have historically also not been adequately reflected in the marketing strategy. Waitomo Caves and Milford Sound may be other examples of a marketing/capacity discrepancy.

The value of Regional Tourism Organisations working with wider economic interests in their region was highlighted in a number of case studies. In Northland and Southland the amalgamation of the RTOs into the regional economic development agencies will hopefully lead to better integration of tourism into the wider economic development strategies.

**Conclusion**

The integrated use of a number of approaches and the various tools available within them provide the basis for integrated management of tourism in and around natural areas. The model in Figure 1 illustrates the way the research is linking these approaches together. The model also provides the framework for the action-research case studies currently underway. These case studies are expected to provide for more

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9 The Copland Pass crossing at Mt Cook provides a similar example.
in-depth analysis of the model, and to identify strengths and weaknesses of the various tools.

The research conducted to date indicates the need for capacity building at a number of levels to enable this integrated approach to develop. These levels include management agencies, industry and its organisations and operators, and host communities. Capacity building in this context will require a combination of improving understanding of the available tools and where they might be applied, and up-skilling of agency staff and others involved in the implementation of tourism strategies. An improved link between research and capacity building will include the practical application of an integrated approach in the case studies and development of an integrated information base that the sector can draw on.
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