

Public Access New Zealand

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Tenure Review: Greenstone, Elfin Bay and Routeburn Crown Lands

Amended Proposals

and

Analysis of Public Submissions

17 September 1996

In July 1996 Public Access New Zealand submitted to Government that the three properties be subdivided and managed as follows—

Proposal 1

Approximately 30,000 hectares be allocated to the Department of Conservation as public conservation areas and reserves. The area concerned being the floors and walls of the Greenstone, Caples and Mararoa valleys, all alpine lands, and Lake Wakatipu faces above approximately 820-850 meters asl.

Proposal 2

Grazing of the new public lands above be confined to a grazing licence over 100 hectares on the floor of the lower Caples Valley. Grazing to be confined to sheep grazing, subject to stocking limitations, based on monitored condition of vegetation, water quality and riparian areas, and impact on adjoining conservation lands. Public use to be over the area at all times.

Proposal 3

“Approximately 2,250 hectares be reclassified as “farm land” and freeholded, being confined to Lake Wakatipu lower faces, terraces and the floor of the Dart Valley. Marginal strips to be reserved along streams.

The original proposals are attached.

Public Submissions

244 submissions were received.

There is overwhelming public support for the three proposals, however with reservations about proposals 2 and 3. PANZ has looked closely at the concerns of submitters and believes there is merit in amending our original proposals.

Grazing

There is a body of concern that any grazing in the valley floor of the Caples would continue to degrade environmental values and the quality of visitors' recreational experience.

Environmental concerns focus on the need to protect riparian areas and forest margins, and the effect of driving stock through conservation forests for access to the proposed grazing area. These problems appear insurmountable due to the impracticality of fencing out such areas and maintaining fences as stock barriers. If fencing were possible, it would not be achievable without ruining the natural character of the valley.

Concern was also expressed over a history of insufficient policing of grazing licences elsewhere, which has led to overgrazing and severe depletion of supposedly 'protected' beech forests.

PANZ is aware of a lengthy history of problems arising from grazing of valley floors within the adjoining Mount Aspiring National Park. Despite decades of official policy aimed at 'phasing out' of grazing, this has proved to be extremely difficult, even when there are blatant breaches of the terms of licences. The problem is political. There is never the will to revoke licences or penalise errant licensees, even when evidence of abuse and environmental degradation is compelling. It was a 'political' decision to allow continuation of grazing on establishment of the National Park. It has been almost impossible to the 'phase-out' policy.

Basically, grazing by stock is incompatible with the maintenance of conservation and recreation values in the valleys. In any event grazing of 100 ha is not of much real value for farming. We therefore favour the removal of all grazing from the Mararoa, Greenstone and Caples.

Freeholding of lake faces and Dart valley floor

The predominate concern is that before any freeholding occurs marginal strips are laid off along the Lake Wakatipu shore and the banks of all streams and rivers, and that sufficient, convenient access ways are laid off across the proposed freehold to enable public access to marginal strips and other conservation areas.

PANZ fully concurs with such concerns.

The following provisions should be made within the boundaries of the area we propose for freeholding—

Marginal strips

Routeburn Station:

An existing strip along the true right bank of the Dart River needs to be assessed to see if provides practicable access. It should be preferably replaced with a new marginal strip, free of any exclusive leases or licences. A new strip would be movable with any changes to the river bank. It should be a minimum of 20 metres wide.

Marginal strips are required along both banks of Scott, Stockyard and Kowhai Creeks, between the Dart River and the proposed conservation area on the Humboldt Mountains. If any part of these waterways do not legally qualify for the laying off of marginal strips, public reservations of some other designation should occur so as to ensure public passage between the road and river, and the road and mountains.

Elfin Bay Station: there is currently no marginal strip along the shores of Lake Wakatipu. One must be established, free of any exclusive leases or licences. The new strip would be movable with any changes to the shore line. It should be a minimum of 20 metres wide. A strip would allow landing and picnicking etc by boaters.

Public foot access easements

Routeburn Station

Secure public foot access easements are required from the Routeburn Road to the head basins of Scott, Stockyard and Kowhai Creeks (proposed Humboldt conservation area).

Elfin Bay Station

Foot access easements are required between the lower Greenstone bridge to Elfin Bay; along any parts of the Elfin Bay-Lake Rere-Greenstone track that deviates from the recreation reserve; from Lake Wakatipu to the tributary draining Tooth Peak, and up the Black Gorge.

The easements should be registered against the titles and held as an interest in the land under section 7(2) Conservation Act. This would prevent alteration of their terms or disposal without public notification and objection procedures.

The easements must provide rights of public foot passage at all times, with no ability to close or restrict access. Hunters must have the right to carry (but not use) firearms while in transit.

With the above amendments Public Access New Zealand recommends to Government that ‘Tenure review: Greenstone, Elfin Bay and Routeburn Crown Lands’, dated June 1996, be adopted and implemented.