

**Speech: FMC Conference
Te Papa
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President Richard Davies, Vice President Quentin Duthie, executive members.

Thank you for the invitation to talk to you this morning, especially at this your 80th anniversary conference, what a fantastic track record you have.

Your theme this year, 'forever wild' is interesting. I know one thing for sure. The shaky isles of New Zealand will remain forever wild - wild in the sense that we sit astride a series of active faults. These active faults created our mountains and rivers and continue to form and reform our environment with unpredictable regularity. This has been graphically illustrated in the past year in my home patch of Canterbury. Twice. The September earthquake shook us badly and in February we learned what it's like to be truly struck by disaster. Some land has risen by a metre; some has dropped by a metre; and some has stretched by about three metres.

I know that Federated Mountain Clubs contributed many trained personnel into Canterbury through LANDSAR to help with the rescue and recovery effort and I want to personally thank you for that. It has been a time of strong community connection as we strive to provide the basics of life for all the affected people of Christchurch. So as a Cantabrian – one eyed at times, parochial and proud – thank you!

I have nothing but admiration for the people who went in and worked tirelessly during the rescue effort. The skill shown and the effort put in were tremendous.

I also want to say thank you to the many FMC Club members who routinely help with hut and track maintenance. I am aware the balance has shifted over the years with certain liabilities affecting just how people can contribute to hut maintenance because of building codes and specific expertise requirements.

The hut standards have risen and so too have the regulations that govern their maintenance. But, invariably, much of the work done in painting and clearing of tracks and around huts would never be able to be done without the help of the member clubs, so thank you again.

The idea of wilderness is very personal. It means something different to everyone. I know for many of you in FMC that wilderness is the epitome of what it means to challenge ones self in remote locations. It's part of your culture. It's about self reliance and meeting nature purely on her terms.

For FMC, advocating for the retention and establishment of further wilderness areas is a key part of what you should continue to do. I know one of your long-standing advocates of wilderness, Arnold Heine, would agree.

I know you are proud of the role that FMC has played over the years in promoting and influencing the establishment of conservation parks. I still remember vividly my first job as the then Associate Minister of Conservation opening Ka Whata Tu o Rakihouia Conservation Park, Kaikoura Ranges – amidst such stunning scenery.

I also understand that of the ten wilderness areas proposed by FMC at its 1981 conference, six have now been established – not a bad record!!

I was interested in reading in *The State of Wilderness in New Zealand* that we were a world leader in legislating for wilderness. They are now a well-established component of our protected network.

My Department is reviewing Conservation Management Strategies, which I'll talk more about a little later, but it's worth mentioning now that we will be looking at other policy documents that will affect wilderness areas. Buffer areas around wilderness areas are important too and your input is invaluable. So I would encourage you to be involved.

The wild lands of the world are rapidly shrinking and will become rare in the near future. You only have to look at Brazil and the intended developments in the Amazon basin for hydro-electricity. The opportunities New Zealand can offer for wilderness recreation are of international significance.

Increasing access to our conservation estate is one aspect of DOC's role that I believe is incredibly important. I'm not necessarily talking about vehicle access – though in some cases that can be improved. I'm largely talking about recreational opportunities that involve getting out and enjoying our fresh air.

One of the small announcements made in the Budget was the securing of \$1.5 million from Tourism to help complete the Te Araroa Long Pathway from Cape Reinga to Bluff. I'm reliably informed that the idea of developing a national walkway originally emerged when the Alpine Sports Club brought such a proposal to the FMC AGM way back in 1967. A more detailed proposal for a North Cape to Bluff walkway was then produced in December 1970.

I don't know what exactly happened in the meantime, but that specific project didn't eventuate – though the idea never died. And now, some 40 years later, a national walkway is on the verge of being roughly completed. These sorts of projects are never without debate about the best routes, how extensive the track should be and how much should realistically be invested in it.

When you're doing something this big there will always be differing opinions and I think the Te Araroa Trust has done extremely well to get to this point. I know you have been very supportive of this trail too and no doubt someone here will one day soon be able to lay claim to having walked the whole trail.

As a Government we've also invested in building the national cycle trail. These projects are about opening up new recreation opportunities for both

trampers and cyclists. We are an outdoors country. We love our land. We love being out enjoying it. This is particularly true of our rural communities.

It's probably not good manners to make such a comparison while speaking in Wellington, one of our major cities, but it's true that urban New Zealanders don't get out into our conservation estate as often as their provincial cousins. Whether it's time constraints – notably work – or having grown up in cities and not developing the same backcountry hobbies.

So the more opportunities there are available for all New Zealanders to get out and see their own backyard the better. I've often said, and probably said as much to you last year, that I believe the best way to protect our forests, rivers, fiords and valleys is for New Zealanders to see for themselves why they deserve protecting. We are so incredibly fortunate to live here, but most of us have barely scratched the surface.

I can tell you that the biggest perk of being Conservation Minister is getting to go everywhere and see everything myself. I've experienced more of our country in the past two years than I have in probably the previous 30. I've been everywhere from the Chathams and Subantarctic islands in the south to the Kermadec's in the north - and so much of the mainland in between. It is amazing. But then I don't need to tell you that.

Of course it's not only New Zealanders I want to see out experiencing the country, it is the international tourists we need to keep our economy going. It's only fair we share with them, after all.

We have one of the most envied international reputations in the world. Tourists don't come here for our shopping, they come to experience nature and the adventure activities we've built around it. We're an outdoors destination. They want to see the beauty of the wild.

I'm always interested in exploring ways to improve this experience. Whether it's evaluating new areas for protection, such as pushing forward on creating

the new Kauri National Park in Waipoua, or improving our tracks, huts and camping facilities.

Camping is a big deal in New Zealand. Over the past summer the use of DOC campgrounds increased by eight percent. There are many reasons for this, one being that families are looking for more affordable holiday options. Another is that DOC is doing a great job at upgrading its facilities to make them more accessible.

There will always be differing standards of campsites based on how remote the location is. But we're constantly looking at how we can improve this service and make it more accessible for the average family. Sometimes we get criticised for improving a campsite and sometimes we get criticised for not improving a campsite – it is all about finding the right balance.

We've established eight new campsites and identified others for upgrades. A focus of these upgrades is energy efficiency. Last year we introduced solar panels to the Dumpling Hut in Milford and it's this sort of technology we are now progressively installing in our serviced campgrounds.

Most recently, DOC completed the first outfit at the Peel Forest site in Canterbury, which included solar panels, gas hot water systems and five minute shower timers. I'm not interested in attempting to trump or compete with the private sector when it comes to camping services and in some cases DOC will look to collaborate where it can. But as I said earlier, we have a beautiful country and if I can get more people enjoying and appreciating it then I'll do it.

On the flip side of the camping issue is freedom camping. You might have seen just this week we introduced a new Bill in Parliament aimed at addressing the downside of this pastime.

Inappropriate camping and toileting does this country a disservice and we don't want this behaviour to be lodged in anyone's memories when they get

home from holidaying. Freedom camping is an important part of our tourism industry and great Kiwi lifestyle but we cannot tolerate irresponsible campers spoiling our most iconic areas with human waste and litter.

This is particularly important as we gear up for the Rugby World Cup. Roughly 85,000 visitors are expected to arrive on our shores and for many of those this is the holiday of a life time. So we are acting rapidly to ensure that this legislation is in place by then.

The number of freedom campers has doubled over the past decade to 110,000 international visitors and more than 40,000 New Zealanders. The existing system where each of our 67 districts has its own bylaws is not working for the responsible freedom camper wanting to do the right thing or for councils wanting to protect their local environment.

I know there has been a bit of apprehension in some parts about how far the new infringement system will reach. I can assure you this is about targeting specific areas. This is not about restricting camping. It is about restricting and disincentivising unacceptable behaviour such as fouling, polluting and damaging our fantastic countryside and potentially compromising and jeopardising our international reputation.

Restrictions on camping on public conservation lands will only apply in a very few sites, such as rest areas along highways, places with sensitive wildlife, and areas where there are already designated campsites with toilets nearby. And the infringement regime will only apply near formed roads and the coast – where vehicle access is easy – and along Great Walks.

Specifically it only applies to areas within 1km of a formed road or the sea or 500m of a great walk track. Most importantly it only applies where camping has been explicitly restricted. Regular backcountry recreation activities are unaffected.

If you do have any concerns or have ideas that might improve this legislation, the select committee will be calling for public submissions shortly.

Another area you may be interesting in offering your thoughts is the review of DOC's Conservation Management Strategies. The first six reviews started in February this year for Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Canterbury, Otago and Southland. First drafts are expected to be available early next year and signed off within 12 months.

This process will use information from the Natural Heritage Management System and Destination Management Framework tools to help develop conservation and recreation priorities across the country.

As part of the information gathering process DOC is asking New Zealanders what native species and special places help define our identity. The survey is called "*Quintessentially Kiwi—what defines us as New Zealanders?*"

It's about getting a picture of what matters to us as a nation and whether that's properly reflected in DOC's priorities.

The challenge, as you well know, is how we go about ensuring "the wild" stays "the wild". Ultimately, it's about acknowledging that we depend on our natural environment as the backbone of our economic existence.

There will always be the need to strike the right balance between economic growth and environmental responsibilities – particularly when it comes to our natural resources.

New Zealand's two biggest earners are cows and tourists. Both rely on quality environmental management, so wild places are important to the economy in providing the natural heritage protection and downstream value at the farm gate. We must all work to maintain wild places so they add value to the welfare of all New Zealanders.

Conservation does not mean locking up land. Likewise it doesn't mean we avoid development or extraction of value. But, it does mean managing our resources in the sure knowledge that we are dependent on nature's services and that our prosperity and posterity hinges on how well we maintain harmony with nature.

There will always be debate about what is best for us as a nation. That is healthy and should be welcomed. Unfortunately in this day and age we don't get to have too many robust intellectual debates as they're so heavily influenced by emotion and the media that people get shy about expressing their views.

So when it comes to issues you're passionate about, I would encourage you to raise them. There is always room for discussion and even in the event we don't agree, I'm always willing to listen. I welcome the regular meetings I have with Richard and Quentin, so we can discuss the issues that matter to you.

Thank you again for inviting me to open your 80th conference. Unfortunately I have other commitments in Canterbury today so I can't stay for the political panel, but my colleague Louise Upston will be on hand.

Thank you also for the important part you play in appreciating and ensuring that New Zealand is really the best country in the world.

And I want to finish with the very quote from FMC's first president, Fred Vosseler (it is as relevant today as it was 80 years ago) – "We must guard closely the welfare of our national parks and reserves...We should not regard our national parks and reserves as the property of our ministers and our government departments, but that they belong to the people of today and tomorrow.....We must fight for their protection if necessary."