

## 5.5.2 Milford Airstrip

### Rationale

Milford airstrip is associated with regular high numbers of scenic flights into and around Milford Sound / Piopiotahi. It is dominated by fixed wing aircraft that generally follow regular flight paths and schedules from Queenstown and to a lesser extent, Te Anau and Wanaka. The annual number of aircraft movements (landings and take-offs) between 1996-2005 averaged about 17,000 (rounded to nearest 500). However due to unsuitable weather conditions these movements are generally limited to flying on approximately 200-250 days a year. Peaks of more than 200 movements per day have been recorded.

Milford Sound / Piopiotahi is in a frontcountry visitor setting with a variety of different users visiting this place. They range from the majority of visitors who come as part of large package tours to those who are seeking a more intimate eco-friendly encounter within Fiordland National Park. It is generally accepted that there is a high level of aircraft access at Milford airstrip in comparison with other areas of Fiordland National Park and so ground-based visitors to Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and the surrounding areas should expect to encounter aircraft. It is also important to recognise that this airstrip is located in a national park and the national park values require protection from adverse effects such as noise.

All landings and take offs from Milford Airstrip will require a concession. For the purposes of managing this process, there are three categories of aircraft landings and take offs including:

- Regular operators - defined as those commercial operators that seek a concession for more than 10 landings / take offs per year.
- Irregular operators - are defined as those that land / take off no more than 10 times per year.
- One-off operators - those applying for a one-off permit to land / take off, whose concession would expire once that landing / take off has occurred.

Research to date on the extent of adverse effects of aircraft use at Milford airstrip is limited. Until such time as detailed research is carried out to determine what appropriate levels are, it is intended to maintain the status quo. In consequence, it is considered appropriate to limit the level of regular aircraft use at Milford airstrip to the existing levels of use as at 1 April 2005 (based on the number of landings/take offs in the previous year).

Any concession granted following the allocatory process for landings at Milford airstrip would be for a ten-year term that would provide security to concessionaires for the investment they may be required to make - for example, in quiet aircraft technology. Monitoring the levels of aircraft

landings at and take offs from Milford airstrip will continue throughout the period this plan is in force and will assist in determining the appropriateness of levels of use of the airstrip.

### **Objectives**

1. To manage aircraft access in a way that facilitates public use and enjoyment of Fiordland National Park but does not have unacceptable adverse effects on natural values or visitors to Fiordland National Park.
2. To allow aircraft access for concessionaire infrastructure, event servicing or other authorised activity where the effects of that access have been considered as part of the overall activity and are acceptable.
3. To allow aircraft access for management, emergency and search and rescue purposes.
4. To monitor both the level of aircraft access to Milford Airstrip and its effects on other Fiordland National Park visitors.

### **Implementation**

Note: Implementations for section 5.5.1 Aircraft Access for Fiordland also apply to Milford airstrip where relevant.

1. To protect national park values and visitor experience at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi a concession will be required for all landings / take-offs at Milford airstrip:
  - (a) All regular and irregular landings and take-offs should be restricted to the Milford Airstrip Activity Area except:
    - (i) For management activities carried out by the Department of Conservation; and
    - (ii) For activities associated with heavy lifts from Deep Water Basin associated with the fishing industry, which are those fishing-related activities that are unable to be undertaken at Milford airstrip and for which a concession has been granted.
  - (b) Milford airstrip will be managed in accordance with the following conditions:
    - (i) The length of the runway will not exceed its existing footprint except as otherwise provided by legislation; and

- (ii) The hours of operation for all landings and take-offs will be restricted to 8.30am – 6.00pm except that consideration may be given to extending the hours of operation in the following circumstances:
  - (A) By way of concessions for filming permits where the proposed filming is advocating protection of and / or is otherwise in keeping with Section 4 of the National Parks Act 1980 and it is essential to operate outside of the stated operational hours to achieve the above. This shall be in accordance with section 5.13;
  - (B) By way of concessions for one-off aircraft landings/take-offs if considered necessary and able to be justified (in accordance with Implementations 6 to 13 below);
  - (C) The servicing of aircraft authorised by way of a concession in the event it is required for flight safety reasons only;
  - (D) For pilot training purposes authorised by way of concession;
  - (E) For management activities of Fiordland National Park carried out by the Department of Conservation; and
  - (F) For one existing operation based at Milford airstrip where it is necessary to carry out activities outside of the normal operating hours authorised by way of concession. This opportunity should be limited to one concession;
- (iii) Any activities and facilities provided for at the airstrip will be those that are essential for operating the airstrip only, though may include passenger toilet facilities.

### **Regular Landings at Milford Airstrip**

2. The Minister will call for expressions of interest for concessions to land at and take-off from Milford airstrip. Following this, all aircraft operators who expressed their interest should be invited to apply for concessions to land at and take-off from Milford airstrip at existing use levels for the year prior to 1 April 2005. As part of this process, applications should be assessed in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) The experience (measured in flight hours) the applicant has flying in the Fiordland environment;
  - b) The history of the applicant's operation including compliance with relevant statutes and regulations;
  - c) The visitor experience the applicant will offer its clients including interpretation of national park values and world heritage values; and
  - d) The preparation of a five-year plan in accordance with Implementation 3 a);
3. Any concession granted to aircraft operators for regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip should be on the following conditions:
- a) Applications should contain a five-year plan that outlines how the applicant proposes to minimise the adverse effects of regular aircraft landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip on other park users and national park values over a five-year period including, but not limited to:
    - (i) How the applicant proposes to address the adverse effects of noise of fixed-wing aircraft and/or helicopters;
    - (ii) How the applicant proposes to address the visual, social and cumulative effects of fixed-wing aircraft and/or helicopters; and
    - (iii) What new technology or technology upgrades the applicant proposes to introduce and the timeframes within which the applicant proposes to introduce them;
  - b) That the five-year plan referred to in Implementation 3 a) is part of the concession;
  - c) That the concessionaire be required to submit an annual report that details how the concessionaire has achieved/is achieving the matters set out in the five-year plan to minimise the adverse effects on other national park users and national park values;
  - d) Concessions should be granted for 10 years being made up of two five-year terms with the second five-year term being a conditional renewal subject to Implementation 4 below. Concessions should expire on a common date;
  - e) The number of landings / take-offs that may be granted should be based on Ministry of Transport data for the year 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005, being the landings / take-offs for no more than 53 fixed wing aircraft and 37 helicopters;

- f) Subject to Implementation 5, the number of regular landings / take-offs carried out by concessionaires in each year may be increased by a maximum of 4.5% per annum per concessionaire (based on the average yearly increase in the sale of tickets for cruises over the period 1995/1996 to 2004/2005 as supplied by the Milford Sound Development Authority) to reflect estimated growth trends in tourism at Milford airstrip; and
  - g) Concessions may be varied at any time in accordance with Implementation 5 to take account of significant adverse effects of landings and take-offs.
4. That concessions be renewed on the expiry of the initial five-year term subject to the following:
- a) Compliance with the concessionaire's five-year plan;
  - b) Whether the concession should be varied or suspended/terminated as a result of the findings of ongoing research into and/or monitoring of regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip; and
  - c) That it complies with any code of practice developed between the Department of Conservation, aviation controlling authorities and aircraft operators at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi in accordance with Implementations 24 and 25.
5. Where research and / or monitoring, carried out in accordance with Implementations 14 - 17 indicates that the regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip are having significant adverse effects on national park values and visitor experience at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi in any year, the annual increase in the number of landings and take-offs specified in Implementation 3(f) should not apply for the year or years covered by the research and/or monitoring findings.

#### **Irregular Landings at Milford Airstrip**

- 6. Irregular landings / take-offs (including one-off landings/take-offs) at Milford airstrip should be limited to a total of 308 landings per annum, which total reflects the level of use in the one year period prior to 30 June 2004 as determined by Ministry of Transport records.
- 7. Aircraft operators who intend to use Milford airstrip for any irregular landings / take-offs (including one-off landings/take-offs) will need to apply for concessions to land and take-off in advance of carrying out the activity.

8. Any concession granted to an aircraft operator for any irregular landings / take-offs at Milford airstrip should be subject to the following conditions:
  - a) Landings / take-offs should be limited to no more than 10 landings per operator (commercial and recreational) per annum;
  - b) Aircraft should be limited to a maximum of 4 landings / take-offs per month; and
  - c) Concessions may be varied to take account of:
    - (i) Significant adverse effects of irregular landings / take-offs; or
    - (ii) Any reduction of adverse effects of irregular landings / take-offs, including evidence of low noise emissions;
9. Any concession granted for one-off landing permits at Milford airstrip, should be subject to specific monitoring to determine the extent of adverse effects caused by the particular aircraft.
10. Information collated from monitoring carried out under Implementation 9 may be used to determine the appropriateness of granting further one-off landing permits to applicants who use the same or similar aircraft to those that are the subject of monitoring under Implementation 9.
11. Where research and/or monitoring into the effects of irregular aircraft landings / take-offs at Milford airstrip indicate that a greater number of irregular landings / take-offs in any one year than that specified in Implementation 6 is appropriate, the annual total number of irregular landings may be increased.
12. Where the total number of irregular landings has been increased above the level specified in Implementation 6, any aircraft operator may apply for a concession to take advantage of such increases in which event Implementation 8 will continue to apply.
13. Where, at any time, research and/or monitoring into the effects of irregular aircraft landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip (carried out in accordance with Implementations 14-17) indicates that a reduction in the annual number of irregular landings and take-offs is necessary, the annual total number of irregular landings/take-offs (excluding one-off landings/take-offs) should be proportionately reduced for each operator by a percentage guided by the research and/or monitoring.

### **Research related to Milford airstrip**

- 14 Research and/or monitoring will be undertaken from 2006 to 2011 and then as necessary or required in consultation with affected parties to determine the effects of regular and irregular aircraft landings / take-offs at Milford airstrip on:
  - a) Visitors to Fiordland National Park; and
  - b) National Park values (including areas of the National Park within the flight path of aircraft using Milford airstrip to land and take-off).
15. Research will be consistent with section 5.3.9.1 and section 5.16 and will be externally peer-reviewed by expert/s in visitor research prior to the commencement of the research.
16. The Department of Conservation will use the results of research and/or monitoring carried out under Implementation 14 to provide guidance on the number of regular and irregular aircraft landings and take-offs that should be permitted at Milford airstrip in accordance with Implementations 18-21.
17. All concessions authorising regular and irregular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip should include a condition requiring concessionaires to pay a monitoring fee to fund the Department of Conservation's research and/or monitoring of adverse effects of regular and irregular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip.

### **Revision of opportunities at Milford airstrip as identified by the research**

18. That unless further research indicates otherwise, the following thresholds should apply:
  - a) Where research and/or monitoring (see Implementations 14 to 17) has established that adverse effects are between 0% and 9% (inclusive) of reported annoyance, monitoring may be carried out every two years or more frequently. Consideration may be given to increasing the number of aircraft landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip;
  - b) Where research and/or monitoring has established that adverse effects are between 10% and 19% (inclusive) of reported annoyance, monitoring should occur annually. The number of aircraft landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip may be maintained at their current level, increased or decreased as appropriate;
  - c) Where research and/or monitoring has established that adverse effects are between 20% and 24% (inclusive) of

reported annoyance, monitoring should occur no less than every three to six months. The number of aircraft landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip may be maintained at their current level, increased or decreased as appropriate; and

- d) Where research and/or monitoring has established that adverse effects are 25% or greater of reported annoyance, monitoring should occur no less than every two to three months. Consideration should be given to decreasing the number of aircraft landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip.
19. That concessions may be varied either as a result of the review provided for in the concession document in accordance with Implementations 4 and 5 or at any time in accordance with Implementation 20 to take into account of significant adverse effects;

Where at any stage in the research and/or monitoring into the effects of regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip (carried out in accordance with Implementations 14 - 17) indicates that a reduction in the annual number of regular landings/take-offs is necessary, the results of the research should be provided to the Queenstown Milford User Group in the first instance (or other such group that represents the aircraft and helicopter concessionaires at Milford airstrip) and this group will have an agreed timeframe of one or two years to minimise the adverse affects of aircraft on park users and national park values on a voluntary basis. If, after this timeframe, the research identifies that a decrease in aircraft activity is still required, Implementation 21 should apply.

20. Where at any time research and/or monitoring into the effects of regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip (carried out in accordance with Implementations 14 - 17) indicates that a reduction in the annual number of regular landings/take-offs is necessary and the need for the reduction is directly attributable to a specific concessionaire or concessionaires, either:
- a) The annual total number of regular landings should be reduced for that concessionaire(s) proportionately by a percentage guided by the research and/or monitoring; or
  - b) Consideration should be given to suspending or terminating the concession in conformity with the provisions contained in the concession documents.
21. Where at any time research and/or monitoring into the effects of regular landings and take-offs at Milford airstrip (carried out in accordance with Implementations 14 - 17) indicates that an increase in the annual number of regular landings/take-offs is a possibility, these may be allocated either:



- a) The annual total number of regular landings may be increased for concessionaire(s) by a percentage guided by the research and/or monitoring; or
  - b) Consideration may be given to an open allocation process where applications are assessed in accordance with the following criteria:
    - (i) The experience (measured in flight hours) the applicant has flying in the Fiordland environment;
    - (ii) The history of the applicant's operation including compliance with relevant statutes and regulations;
    - (iii) The visitor experience the applicant will offer its client, including interpretation of national park values and world heritage values; and
    - (iv) The preparation of a five-year plan in accordance with Implementation 3 a).
22. Prior to the expiry of concessions, consideration may be given to how concessions may be allocated beyond this term. Options that may be considered (but not limited to these options) are:
- a) The allocation of concessions to concessionaires that have applied and who have fully complied with all the terms and conditions of their concessions and have made significant efforts to minimise the adverse effects of their activity through their five-year plans; or
  - b) The use of an appropriate allocation process to reallocate landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip so as to improve the mitigation of adverse effects of aircraft activity at Milford airstrip;

### **Code of Practice**

23. The Department of Conservation will work with aviation control authorities, aircraft operators and other stakeholders to develop a code of practice for minimising the adverse effects of regular and irregular landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip and adjoining conservation lands.
24. Where the Department of Conservation receives complaints about the adverse effects of regular and irregular landings/take-offs at Milford airstrip on park users, the Department of Conservation will refer them to the Queenstown Milford user group (or such other group that may represent the aircraft and helicopter concessionaires at Milford airstrip) to consider in

accordance with the code of practice and to make recommendations to the Department of Conservation.