

Visitor Centre Strategy

2020-2025



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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1 Purpose of Document

The Department of Conservation has a network of 19 visitor centres across the country. This is a significant investment for the Department and a valuable service for visitors.

Currently there is a lack of clarity around the direction and purpose of the role visitor centres play. There is also a need to invest in these facilities and ensure more cohesion across functions. There is no clear visitor centre system or SPA which is creating confusion.

This strategy looks to address these issues and provides a set of recommendations that will assist the organisation to better plan for the future of visitor centres and make investment decisions, while also ensuring a good visitor experience.

The strategy focuses on the delivery of face-to-face visitor information but recognises that this is one channel that needs to be integrated with other visitor information channels.

This document has been informed by discussions and feedback with visitor centre rangers, operations managers, operations directors, KKA, national visitor centres team, operations leadership team, Heritage and Visitor unit, property and i-SITE New Zealand. It includes an overview of the current situation and context and provides three sets of recommendations aligned with the following outcomes:

- Support visitors to have a safe and enjoyable experience on public conservation land;
- Develop an effective visitor information system;
- Provide a quality experience through visitor centres.

A consultation process with operations directors, Heritage and Visitor Unit, DD-Gs and Property was carried out and informs this version of the strategy.

The document has been updated to reflect changes due to COVID-19.

2 Context

The following section sets out the current environment visitor centres are operating in and background that is relevant context to this strategy.

2.1 Face-to-face Information provision

Visitor Centres perform a key role to provide information and to engage with visitors through storytelling. While technology continues to be a key driver in changing consumer habits, the provision of face-to-face information is still an important part of DOC's visitor experience. It is a channel that provides vital safety information and recreation options as well as providing people with the confidence to experience nature.

DOC visitor centres have a reputation for being knowledgeable and trusted through rangers who have first-hand, in-depth knowledge about local conservation places and outdoor experiences¹. This is supported by research that shows that people's perception of DOC is

¹ Through the eyes of our visitors research 2018 – Big Picture

much stronger when they have an interaction with the Department, especially when that interaction is in person².

This has been further demonstrated by the success of the interpretation rangers, showing the value of personal interaction and storytelling at place – a very similar role to that of the visitor centre ranger. Bringing the experience to life through the stories of the area, its history and the connection to nature.

2.2 Current Situation

The Department of Conservation has 19 visitor centres, 13 in the South Island and six in the North Island. This has reduced from a total of 24 Visitor Centres and 13 DOC-staffed Information Centres in 1996.

Out of the current 19 visitor centres, 15 are located at or close to National Parks or conservation places, and four are based in main urban centres. Currently four visitor centres are co-located with an i-SITE (Auckland, Tongariro, Christchurch and Dunedin), with another two located in the same site as an i-SITE but operated independently (Nelson and Westland). In addition, there are two i-SITES where DOC has a part-time staff presence (Rotorua and Ohakune), these are not included in the network of 19 visitor centres. Appendix I and II provide more detail.

Post Covid-19 this changed slightly. The Ohakune staff presence was ceased; Nelson, Auckland and Christchurch i-SITES have gone into hibernation and the Westland i-SITE has closed permanently; meaning the end to the collaboration between DOC and i-SITE at these locations.

There have been some short-term i-SITE pop-ups in DOC visitor centres trialled. Queenstown and Wanaka trialled this over the summer and Wellington hosted an i-SITE pop-up while their building was being renovated.

In the financial year 2018/19 1.55 million people visited a DOC visitor centre. Many others were assisted through phone and email communications with visitor centre rangers. Ten visitor centres account for 81% of total visitation.

Visitor centre rangers estimate half of the people who visit a visitor centre have done little or no prior research of the place they are enquiring about (c.800,000 people), and estimate 65% of enquires have a safety and wellbeing component³.

According to *Survey of New Zealanders* (2016), approximately 80% of New Zealanders visit public conservation land at least once each year. In addition, approximately 50% of international tourists visit public conservation land (PCL), this translates to roughly 35% of people who visit PCL also visit a visitor centre.

Increasing visitor numbers are putting pressure on PCL and infrastructure. International arrivals are forecast to grow to over 5 million⁴ by 2024. This forecast indicates an increase in visitor centre visitation and people looking for information and advice regarding PCL in the coming years which we need to be prepared for.

Northland has no visitor centres and until recently limited relationships with i-SITES in the region, leaving a void in the market for DOC visitor information. It puts additional pressure

² Brand Capital Research 2018

³ Visitor Centre Staff Survey 2019

⁴ New Zealand Tourism Forecasts 2018-2024, MBIE

on regional offices when people visit looking for information, it also does not provide a good visitor experience.

Covid-19 Update: All visitor centres re-opened in Alert Level 3. Although visitor centre rangers were responding to calls and emails during ALs 1 & 2. It is estimated that across the network, international visitors made up approximately 70% of visitors to visitor centres.

Understandably, since re-opening visitor numbers have been down. Feedback from visitor centres, especially in the South Island, is they are still seeing a number of international people, either those who were here over lockdown, or people who have lost their jobs and are now travelling/exploring. Because they have more time they are going where they would not usually go, so need more assistance in planning and preparation. Indications are that domestic visitation is also increasing.

2.3 Connection to organisational and other strategies

Visitor centres align with DOC's strategic role to *Enhance well-being by encouraging and enabling people to connect and contribute to New Zealand's nature and heritage.*

Specifically, visitor centres play a role in achieving the stretch goals of:

- *90% of New Zealanders' lives are enriched through connection to nature and heritage*
- *90% of visitors rate their experiences on public conservation lands and waters as exceptional*

Visitor Centres also play a role in supporting the Aotearoa New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy through both the Environment and International and Domestic Visitors sections, specifically in relation to the following work streams:

- Encourage visitors to respect our places
- Deliver high-quality, authentic visitor experiences
- Encourage safe experiences

Tourism can also be a champion for the restoration of the natural environment and show other industries and sectors how it can be done successfully. Tourism can also encourage international visitors and New Zealanders to better connect to, and value, Aotearoa New Zealand's land, people, heritage and stories particularly in relation to Maori tourism and cultural⁵.

Visitor Centres will also support the delivery of DOC's Visitor and Heritage Strategy, in particular the goal of *Visitors are enriched and better connected to New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage.*

Face-to-face information provision is vital to support these strategies and goals. This includes providing information about where to go, what to expect, what to take, understanding if it is appropriate, how long will it take – to allow visitors to make the right decision for their skill level; telling the story of the area with local iwi to provide more context and meaning to the experience. The story told through the ranger coupled with good interpretation adds a depth to the experience of the visitor that can inspire and strengthen their connection to nature. Visitor centres also provide visitors with a warm welcome to the area, exercising manaakitanga, again enhancing the visitor's experience

⁵ Aotearoa New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy, pg. 8 March 2019

2.4 Function of Visitor Centres

Visitor centre's point of difference is the provision of information in-person, with the ability to have a conversation with a DOC ranger and gain further insight, information and reassurance. The functions provided through visitor centres include:

- Information on local recreational activities including walks and tracks, and mountain biking options
- trip planning and information about bookable huts, campsites, and Great Walks
- Accessing visitors' abilities, suggesting appropriate activities and providing reassurance
- visitor safety information - to help visitors plan and prepare for their outdoors experience, including updates about track conditions, avalanche alerts and weather forecasts.
- telling the story of the area including that of iwi and conservation values
- selling retail products including safety products
- phone and email queries from visitors
- channel for behaviour management and national marketing messages
- visitor centres also provide a variety of additional services for their regions depending on location and needs, including selling hunting permits, radio schedules, campsite servicing/compliance, and liaising with concessionaires, booking system support and liaising with rangers.

Information at visitor centres is offered in ways that integrates technology and digital channels with the in-person visitor experience, through kiosks and screens.

DOC's Great Walk external call centre service was disestablished in 2018 and now visitor centres handle all these enquires directly.

2.5 Safety Messaging

Communicating messages about outdoor safety to allow visitors to make informed choices is a critical role of visitor centres, especially those located at National Parks. Approximately 65%⁶ of enquires in visitor centres have a safety information or advice element. Feedback from visitors⁷ indicates they value the safety information they receive through visitor centres, rangers are seen to have good local knowledge with the ability to interpret weather information; and they tailor and adapt information so that it is appropriate for each visitor. There are visitors that prefer to talk to a ranger even though most of this information can be accessed on-line. However, there needs to be more cohesion around how this information is delivered.

Covid-19 Update: Safety support will be increasingly important as New Zealanders are encouraged to explore New Zealand and try something new. There will be people who are not experienced in nature heading out onto PCL as the weather heads into winter which brings with it increased safety risks.

⁶ Visitor Centre Staff Survey 2019

⁷ Through the eyes of our visitors research 2018 – Big Picture

2.6 Visitor information Research

Research was conducted to provide a better understanding of visitors' information needs and how they currently engage with DOC's channels. This research involved in-depth interviews with both domestic and international visitors. It highlighted there is already excess visitor information in the market from both DOC and other sources. The challenge for DOC is to clearly define its role in the provision of visitor information.

The research confirmed there is still a need for face-to-face visitor information provision, through this channel visitors are looking for this for:

- safety and weather checks before they set out into nature;
- personal recommendations about what the best activities are for them and who they are with;
- validating their own online research with someone who knows more provides them with more confidence.

However, there is also a proportion of people who would prefer to do all research on-line.

Visitor centres work as an information channel alongside other DOC channels that visitors have at their disposal. These include DOC's website, social media, brochures, signage and interpretation rangers. This is along with all the sources outside of DOC including websites, information centres, travel guides, word of mouth, social media, apps, blogs and vlogs.

The main information sources used by visitors were identified as google, information centres (i-SITES and Visitor Centres), guidebooks, review websites and blogs and vlogs.

The planning process for a person visiting public conservation land can be divided into four categories:

- Discover (inspiration that sparks a desire to experience nature)
- Plan (information that ensures a good experience in nature)
- Book (the ability to easily book and confirm their activity)
- Do (assurance they are doing the right thing in nature)

This information journey is not always linear or universal. We need to be able to accommodate the different entry and exit points of visitors.

DOC's channels play a role in mainly the plan, book and do phases, and visitors are primarily using visitor centres when they are in the **Do** phase, and secondly the **Plan** phase.

Understanding this allows for a better focus on what the role of the visitor centre should be, and the ability to meet visitors' needs. Visitor centres need to respond to the changing habits of information consumption to remain relevant.

This research also highlights the need for all DOC channels to be working effectively together to ensure we are delivering the information visitors want at the right time and through the right channel.

2.7 Working with Tangata Whenua

Engagement with local iwi at place is an important component of visitor centres. Their story is an integral part of the story being told at visitor centres. They are also the partner DOC should be looking to in the first instance when looking to collaborate or upgrade facilities

ensuring the story-telling aspect is a much deeper experience. This is an area that could be done better, as the treaty partner story does not come through strongly in all visitor centres.

Projects in the pipeline such as Dolomite Point and the Pounamu Pathway which are joint initiatives with iwi, are good examples of this and will create a wider visitor experience that includes the provision of face-to-face visitor information, in a way that welcomes visitors in a cultural context and provides a deeper experience and story.

2.8 Under-investment in Visitor Centres

The set-up and facilities within visitor centres vary throughout the country. The interpretation, while likely state-of-the-art when installed, in many sites is now tired and outdated. Best practice in communicating, and how people consume information has also changed with technology now playing a stronger role, especially in providing interactive experiences.

Feedback from visitors is that they are often overwhelmed when entering our visitor centres⁸. There is a lot of information they are confronted with and the way-finding can be difficult to navigate. Other issues include dated interpretation and messages that don't always align with current direction; inadequate representation of our Treaty Partner and their story; lack of signage; and bad entrance ways that don't provide a welcoming first encounter.

The condition of some buildings is also a concern with leaky buildings and mould issues making conditions less than ideal for both staff and visitors.

This is not the way the Department should be represented; it reflects badly on the brand which overtime will erode the trust people place in us.

There is work already happening or being planned to update some sites and interpretation. But this is happening in an un-co-ordinated way that does not link to any overarching strategy or direction. It risks developing sites that are not consistent with the desired DOC visitor experience or risk more disparity across the network creating confusion for the visitor.

Visitor centres have had limited promotion. Research conducted in 2018⁹ shows that 'not knowing about VCs' is one of the main reasons visitors don't visit them. This is reinforced with research from 2011¹⁰ with 'seeing signage' and 'referrals from friends and families' being the most common way for visitors to find out about visitor centres.

Investment is also variable across operating functions. Visitor centres are a front-facing channel, and as such should have a level of consistency that visitors can rely on both in terms of customer service and facilities delivered. Currently there is a lack of consistency across opening hours (some are closed for lunch breaks) the provision and quality of Wi-Fi and kiosk facilities and training. There is also the need to ensure under investment does not put staff health, safety and wellbeing at risk through inadequate training or staffing levels.

⁸ Through the eyes of our visitors research 2018 - Big Picture

⁹ Through the eyes of our visitors research 2018 - Big Picture

¹⁰ Visitor Centre Research 2011 - Angus & Associates

2.9 Operating System

The current visitor centre network operating system sees visitor centres managed at a regional level through Operations. Support, advice and strategic guidance is delivered nationally through the national visitor centres team within the Customer Engagement Unit which is accountable for the national visitor centre strategy and provision of support to achieve DOC's goals and provide high-level, consistent visitor experiences through visitor centres. There are also a number of other functions involved including property, and heritage and visitor unit. There is no co-ordination across the functions involved which is creating a 'muddle'.

Feedback from the consultation process also identified that a lack of a clear SPA is an issue.

Key support that is provided through the national visitor centres team is focused on co-ordinating strategic initiatives across visitor centres to deliver a consistent standard of customer service, sales, and visitor experience. The national visitor centres team consists of three FTEs based in Wellington. Their functions include:

- co-ordinating customer service and safety training
- co-ordinating consistent weather reporting through MetService for all visitor centres
- developing seasonal safety campaigns with Mountain Safety Council
- product sourcing, retail support and product development
- management of point of sale system
- reporting
- management of customer satisfaction tool
- co-ordination of network communication
- signage and branding support
- co-ordination of Wi-Fi and kiosks services
- managing the national i-SITE relationship; and providing guidance and support for local arrangements

The national visitor centres team has been within the Customer Engagement Unit (CEU) since 2017, prior to that they sat within the Partnership group. During the time within CEU a strong alignment has been established with other visitor information channels within the unit, which has allowed a more co-ordinated approach with these channels and message alignment. However, from 31 August 2020, the team will sit in the Heritage and Visitor Unit.

The concept of a visitor centre network is an important one for DOC, our staff and visitors. Over the past five years considerable work has been done to strengthen the connection of the 19 individual visitor centres to add value to the visitor experience and gain efficiencies in how visitor centres are operated.

Visitor centres do not absorb the cost of the support service provided nationally, with CEU also covering some operational costs such as Wi-Fi, customer satisfaction tool, point of sale system and some digital resources.

2.10 Cost of Visitor Centres

The direct costs of providing information through visitor centres for FY 2018/19 was \$3,417,292. Revenue earned through retail sales was \$2,571,870; and revenue through hut and

campsite passes, and other permits - \$549,340. Figures for each visitor centre are outlined in Appendix I. Currently there is not a lot of transparency or consistency around the financial model, and this is something that needs to be improved.

2.11 Retail

The sale of retail items in visitor centres is a secondary, but complementary role that has been part of the customer service offering at visitor centres for many years.

In particular, retail products provide additional support in the area of safety with visitor centres selling a range of items that visitors may need to have a safe trip; this is especially important for visitor centres in isolated areas where visitors do not have a lot of other options to get the essential supplies when they have turned up unprepared. Retail products are also a way to reinforce conservation messages and provide visitors with a memento from their time on public conservation land.

In FY 2018/19 retail sales totalled \$2,507,224, with a gross profit¹¹ of \$1,266,792 or 50%. A sharper focus and streamlined approach to purchasing over the last four years has seen an increase in sales by 36%.

New opportunities are currently being investigated such as a wider range of DOC and national park branded products along with an online retail store. Wholesaling our bespoke product to other conservation focused organisations is something also being considered.

Work has been done with suppliers to give back to conservation. For example, a percentage of sales from Antics soft toy sales goes towards the Fairy Tern Trust.

Revenue generated from retail sales is managed by each operations area. This generally goes back into the area directly towards conservation work and is seen as a valuable source of income for regions. However, ensuring revenue is managed to allow sales to be maximised is important, ie: where appropriate, reinvesting revenue into purchasing additional products to make sure visitor centres are well stocked during peak times.

COVID-19 update: Revenue from retail sales will significantly decrease. It will also be necessary to review the current product range considering the change of audience make-up and the need to be conscious of other retailers in an environment of reduced market size. DOC's focus will be on those products that keep people safe, and products that are directly related to DOC's work and messaging.

2.12 i-SITE

Since 2015 DOC has had a MOU with i-SITE New Zealand. i-SITE New Zealand has 77 centres within their network throughout New Zealand providing visitor information and booking services, with an annual visitation of over 7.5 million. Although the national strategy is set by the i-SITE Board (Visitor Information Network), each i-SITE is owned and run at a local level either by councils, RTOs, independent trusts or privately.

¹¹ Gross profit is based on cost of goods and does not include staff time. Additional staff are not employed in visitor centres to manage retail, but staff time is allocated towards buying, merchandising and selling product.

The MOU with i-SITE New Zealand sets out the desire to work collectively on planned initiatives including developing an annual work plan which is driven from a national level. DOC has a representative on the i-SITE board.

At a local level there are a variety of relationships between DOC and i-SITEs. These have developed organically over time and lack consistency of a nationwide approach with variance in the requirements of each party. There has also been little strategic oversight of what i-SITEs we should be forming relationships with. Some of these relationships have a financial component, others consist of training, support and/or contributions to interpretation. Those i-SITEs who have sales of over \$7000/pa on DOC products (eg: huts, Great Walks) receive commission while those who fall short of that target do not receive any. This is an area of frustration for the i-SITE network.

There are currently 4 VCs/i-SITES which are co-located, with the level of integration at each of these sites varying. There are another two locations where DOC and i-SITEs share a location but are run as two independent information centres.

The i-SITE Board is currently considering their future strategic direction as the digital age disrupts their traditional model. They are seeing stable visitor numbers looking for in-person advice, however, a decline in sales as more people book directly with providers rather than through i-SITEs.

The future i-SITE network could look quite different, but DOC's involvement is an important element of the future direction with a desire from the i-SITE board for stronger collaboration.

The relationship with i-SITE provides more opportunity. They have a network of centres in areas where DOC does not have a visitor-facing presence. They also have a strong brand presence in the visitor information space.

COVID-19 update: As a result of COVID events, a number of i-SITEs have been impacted. Several have closed permanently, and a number will be going into hibernation for an extended period. This impacts on the flow of visitor information, and will likely have a flow-on effect to DOC.

The i-SITE board have continued with their work on the revised future strategy, which has become increasingly important in this environment. They are proposing a smaller, centrally managed and funded network, and are looking to seek central funding for this. There is appetite for this to include some DOC Visitor Centres, but this will need to be considered carefully as it would have significant impacts for DOC. This is also dependant on funding being made available to undertake this option.

3 Strategy

The strategy consists of three sections with each section having a set of recommendations identified to achieve the strategic goal. It looks to address issues covered in the context and build a network of visitor centres that provide an inspirational experience for visitors. The three sections are:

- Support visitors to have a safe and enjoyable experience on public conservation land
- Develop an effective visitor information system
- Provide quality experience through visitor centres

3.1 Support Visitors to have a safe and enjoyable experience on public conservation land

3.1.1 Visitor Centre Purpose

The revised purpose provides direction for functions and decisions relating to visitor centres and their role in supporting the visitor:

To provide an inspirational experience through expert, in-person visitor focused advice at place so visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience on public conservation land.

Delivered through advice about local recreational and heritage opportunities, safety and preparedness information and telling the story of the local area through rangers and interpretation. With a strong connection with Tangata Whenua and their story.

3.1.2 Focusing on 'at place' visitor centres

DOC adds real value in the provision of face-to-face visitor information at locations at, or close to, National Parks. DOC rangers are seen as expert and knowledgeable on local recreational and safety information, when visitors are about to undertake activities on public conservation land. It is recommended visitor centres are categorised in a way that recognises where they can add the most value.

Classification of visitor centres will provide clear direction on the purpose and priority of individual centres. It is recommended visitor centres are classified in the following way.

- Group 1 – Priority sites: Visitor centres located at or close to a national park or conservation area with a high safety component, high opportunity to promote a conservation message and high visitation (+70k). Group one visitor centres currently contribute 81% of the current visitation numbers and provide 87% of retail sales. Visitor centres in this group would be priority for upgrades and investment and a focus for increasing visitation.
- Group 2 – Community sites: Group two visitor centres are located at national parks or conservation areas but lack the visitation of group one, and they may play an important role in the community. They have differing opportunities for the future, which are outlined.
- Group 3 - Urban: Located in urban areas. The majority are currently co-located or working with an i-SITE. The recommendation is to review the future role of this group through the relationship with i-SITE New Zealand, looking at both the opportunities and risks associated with a stronger alignment with i-SITE. However, this approach is dependent on the future direction of i-SITE New Zealand.

Based on the outlined criteria, Visitor Centres would be grouped in the following way.

Group 1: Priority sites – retain and refocus

- Paparoa National Park Visitor Centre – Plans to include VC in Dolomite Point development
- Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park Visitor Centre
- Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre
- Arthur’s Pass National Park Visitor Centre – Plans developed for new site, funding still to be confirmed
- Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre
- Egmont National Park Visitor Centre – planning for new VC being discussed with iwi
- Haast Visitor Centre – Part of Pounamu Pathway development
- Queenstown Visitor Centre – opportunity actively being investigated to co-locate with i-SITE
- Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre
- Westland Tai Poutini National Park Visitor Centre

Group 2: Community sites – review role

- Mount Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre – Review opportunities with i-SITE, look to increase visitation
- Dawson Falls Visitor Centre – Review based on future opportunities and ownership options ie: with iwi
- Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre – maintain, important community role
- Kauaeranga Visitor Centre – maintain, important community role
- Nelson Visitor Centre – review functions and delivery; discussions around creating a conservation hub currently underway. *Future opportunities with i-SITE uncertain at this stage.*

Group 3: Urban – Review role and relationship with i-SITE

- Dunedin Visitor Centre (Currently co-located with i-SITE)
- Wellington Visitor Centre
- Auckland Visitor Centre (Currently co-located with iSITE)
- Christchurch Visitor Centre (Currently co-located with iSITE)

3.1.3 Enhancing the visitor experience

It is recommended to work towards creating environments that deliver a visitor experience that resonates with, inspires, and educates our visitors and strengthens their connection to nature. Doing this with a level of consistency across the network that reinforces the DOC brand to give visitors a level of confidence and consistency. However, the system needs to be flexible enough to allow us to collaborate effectively with others, especially with our Treaty Partner, to deliver a deeper story and experience at place. The outcome is to give visitors a compelling reason to visit a DOC Visitor Centre. To do this, it is recommended to clearly articulate the desired visitor experience we want our visitors to have and how that translates at each location.

3.1.4 Working with Tangata Whenua

Engagement with local iwi at place is an important component of visitor centres. Their story is an integral part of the story being told at visitor centres. It is recommended DOC looks to collaborate with local iwi for any upgrades to visitor centres to ensure the story-telling aspect is a much deeper experience. The opportunity of co-management should also be explored in these situations.

Projects in the pipeline such as Dolomite Point and the Pounamu Pathway which are joint initiatives with iwi, are good examples of this and will create a wider visitor experience that includes the provision of face-to-face visitor information, in a way that welcomes visitors in a cultural context and provides a deeper experience and story.

3.1.5 Operating System

A clear SPA is required going forward for visitor centres. It is recommended that this is DD-G - Biodiversity as visitor centres are an engagement and information channel. Team members would be DD-G - Operations, DD-G - Policy and Visitors and DD-G - Corporate Services.

A key priority to improve the effectiveness of the visitor centre network is to articulate a system that allows functions involved to operate in a more co-ordinated way, with roles and responsible clearly set out ensuring support is provided from the right places.

3.1.6 Promotion

Raising the awareness of visitor centres among our target market is essential. Currently no investment is made in promoting the sites to visitors and providing them with reasons to visit. Allocating core costs of visitor centres back to operations will allow the national visitor centres team to allocate funds to a promotional campaign. Included in this is managing social media visibility, review sites (such as trip advisor), and promotion through other's channels.

3.1.7 Retail

The retail provision helps provide a good experience for visitors by providing items that can assist them to have an enjoyable and safe trip; and provides another avenue to communicate the value of nature and conservation messages and provides a significant income stream for the Department.

It is recommended to streamline the retail offering to align with the goals of the Department, which would include more safety product and bespoke DOC developed products that tells the conservation story and promotes our brand and the national parks and Great Walks.

A future recommended phase would be to develop a plan to implement an on-line retail store that is aligned with the booking system. This would allow people to purchase merchandise at the same time as booking Great Walks, huts and campsites.

COVID-19 update: There is an immediate need to review and revise DOC's product offering to align to the mainly domestic market and to ensure we are not seen to be competing with SME's in this environment.

3.1.8 Recommendations and key actions

Strategic Goal	Tactical Action	SPA
Create clear purpose	Purpose translated into clear action plans	Products, Standards and Policies Manager

Raise the awareness of visitor centres and services offered	Annual promotional plan for visitor centres	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Focusing on at place visitor centres	Review options for urban VCs in relation to i-SITEs <i>(this will be put on hold until a clear future direction of i-SITE is understood)</i> Review future of those identified in Group 2	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Working with Tangata Whenua	Explore collaboration and co-management options	Relevant Operations Director
Enhancing the visitor experience	Develop desired visitor experience	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Retail provision supports purpose	Evolve the retail offering to support DOC's messages Develop on-line retail offering Audit and revision of retail range given current environment	Team Lead – National Visitor Centres
Develop effective system	SPA for Visitor Centres – DD-G Policy and Visitors Develop visitor centre system that provides clear guidance of roles and responsible of each function involved and how they interact with each other	DD-G Policy and Visitors Products, Standards and Policies Manager Establishment of taskforce to oversee work

3.2 Develop an effective visitor information system

3.2.1 Consistent and co-ordinated information

Visitor centres are one part of the visitor information journey. They should not be viewed in isolation but rather viewed as a part of a larger whole, with an understanding of what is DOC's role in the provision of information and what information is most appropriate for which channel.

It is recommended a visitor information strategy is developed that covers the co-ordination of relevant information across our channels and looks at how we can influence, where possible, outside channels that are important to visitors. It should also identify any channels that we don't currently have that would be desirable from a visitor perspective, including investigating concepts such as virtual visitor centres.

3.2.2 Information provision through others

Utilising others to communicate our messages to visitors is a key tactic for delivering on this strategy. Our main collaborator currently in this space is i-SITE. However, there are others who DOC could partner with such as concessionaires and other stakeholders. The ultimate outcome in providing information to visitors is to satisfy visitors needs by allowing them to have a good and safe experience, providing them with the information when they want it that also meets the needs of the Department.

Our work with i-SITE is variable across the organisation. It is recommended to take a more strategic approach to strengthen this relationship as the i-SITE network also look at their future. DOC needs to work alongside i-SITE during this period of evolution.

This will include identifying key i-SITES that DOC should have a relationship, developing resources and a tool kit including consistent arrangements to support this relationship which will provide support for areas such as Northland.

However, this approach is dependent on the future direction of the i-SITE network and will not be progressed until the future of the i-SITE network is clear. Understanding and evaluating the opportunities around involvement with i-SITES in the current and future environment will be the first priority.

3.2.3 Recommendations and key actions

Strategic Goal	Tactical Action	SPA
Consistency of visitor information through all DOC channels	Customer Engagement Unit and Heritage and Visitor Unit work together to create a Visitor Information Strategy	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Information provision through others	1. Review i-SITE relationship based on network's future direction 2. Identify others who DOC could work with to provide face-to-face visitor information	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Scope and Trial Virtual VC	Scope and trial a virtual VC to provide an alternative personalised visitor information service when bricks and mortar option not available	Digital Manager

3.1 Provide a quality visitor experience through visitor centres

3.1.1 Upgrade of visitor centres

The presentation of a visitor centre impacts on the visitor's experience, how a visitor can get the information they need, and their impression of DOC. A number of visitor centres need upgrading; specifically, layout and interpretation.

An investment plan for the next five years will be developed that will be informed by building assessments at each site, opportunities in the community to partner and the desired visitor experience with a focus on those visitor centres in Group 1 (as outlined in 3.1.2). The plan will also include direction on how a visitor centre should look to ensure there is experience consistency across the network, but which does allow for local messages and flavour.

3.1.2 Service delivery

The services provided at each visitor centre need to have a level of consistency. This consistency is to ensure both a good visitor experience, and to ensure a safe operating environment for DOC staff. This includes implementing standards around staff training (including staff safety and customer service), IT services, operating hours, staffing levels, retail systems and services provided at a visitor centre. A structured plan to provide direction to both Operations and support staff will be developed and implemented.

3.1.3 Recommendations and key actions

Strategic Goal	Tactical Action	SPA
Develop Upgrade plan for VCs	Develop investment plan Assessment of Visitor Centres	Products, Standards and Policies Manager Property Manager
	Develop consistent criteria for upgrades which provides consistency for visitor experience, but allows for local messages to be communicated	Products, Standards and Policies Manager
Consistent service delivery	Develop standard operating procedures across the network	Products, Standards and Policies Manager

4 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of DOC Visitor Centres

Appendix 2 – Map of DOC Visitor Centres

Appendix 3 – Visitation and Retail Sales Report FY 13/14 to FY 18/19

Appendix 1 – Summary of DOC Visitor Centres

	DOC Visitor Centre Short Name	VC Operating Model	Annual Visitation FY1819	Annual Visitation FY1718	Annual Retail Revenue excl gst FY1819	Annual Retail Revenue excl gst FY1718	Net operating profit/loss FY 18/19	Comments	Current Plans
G r o u p 1	Paparoa NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	211,952	235,983	\$ 402,183	\$ 434,976	-\$28,989	Highly visited location. New GW to open 2019. Significant bldg infrastructure issues within the VC i.e. layout, lighting. Bldg redevelopment required. Interp change-out required.	The Dolomite Point project will include a visitor centre which will supersede the current VC
	Aoraki / Mt Cook NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	193,304	191,126	\$ 448,104	\$ 431,392	\$32,249	High number of visitors to the area included large number of tourist buses visiting for day trips stopping at VC. Alpine environment. VC bldg infrastructure requires upgrade. Interp change-out required.	Some Intrep upgrade needed, but no plans in place
	Tongariro NP Visitor Centre	Joint location, co-location	195,339	175,463	\$ 400,805	\$ 383,886	\$57,031	Bldg issues. Interp upgrade required. Increased retail floorspace and fixture upgrade required. An Ohakune i-SITE satellite established within Tongariro VC bldg from 1 July 2017. Currently included in settlement processes	
	Arthur's Pass NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	115,669	138,248	\$ 177,940	\$ 215,396	-\$108,834	Current VC closed due to NBS rating. Redevelopment project in progress. Design concept provides a conservation experience for visitors to learn and discover ways to connect with conservation either at Arthur's Pass NP or when back at home.	Project to upgrade VC underway
	Fiordland NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	128,428	129,162	\$ 210,622	\$ 197,842	-\$236,036	High number of tourists visiting for 3 GWs (Milford, Kepler, Routeburn). Alpine environment. VC bldg infrastructure requires redevelopment incl AV theatre. Extensive Interp change-out required.	
	Egmont NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	102,940	105,023	\$ 150,829	\$ 136,372	-\$199,526	Iwi settlement process. Bldg not in good condition. Interp change-out required. Taranaki Crossing Experience - Provincial Growth Fund NEVC, carpark upgrade and public bathroom facilities \$2.6m capex and \$1.7m opex regional tourism fund allocated for VC redevelopment. Café managed and operated by DOC.	Any upgrade should be incorporated with Tarankai upgrade work
	Haast Visitor Centre	Standalone	88,371	99,055	\$ 153,705	\$ 155,928	-\$68,893	Parts of bldg infrastructure require redevelopment. High numbers of tourist buses on transit to/from Franz Josef. High proportion of hunting visitor during roar. Extensive interp (i.e. museum space) requires upgrade.	Scoping of visitor experience centre which would incorporate visitor centre.
	Queenstown Visitor Centre	Standalone	70,070	81,029	\$ 79,188	\$ 78,760	-\$252,954	VC opened in current location in 2015. Previously, VC operated from upstairs site that needed improvements to VC experience. Trial over past summer of having a pop-up iSITE in the VC. Opportunity to co-locate with i-SITE as their lease expires in a couple of years and they are looking at new site	
	Westland Tai Poutini NP Visitor Centre	Joint location, shared premises	98,542	95,150	\$ 82,822	\$ 79,253	-\$137,449	Moved from standalone DOC VC bldg due to bldg earthquake standards improvements required. Reopened alongside Franz Josef i-SITE during December 2015 at joint i-SITE/DOC location constructed by Ngai Tahu.	
	Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre	Standalone	64,745	71,157	\$ 53,326	\$ 54,631	-\$87,179	Interp change-out required. Increased retail floorspace and fixture upgrade required.	working with i-SITE to look at better use of space
G r o u p 2	Mount Aspiring NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	45,082	49,648	\$ 54,987	\$ 47,776	-\$128,972	VC located at road intersection 5mins from Wanaka town centre, location not ideal. Population growth and increasing tourist numbers to the region. Potential for airport in future. Four restricted hunting blocks currently for this area and run a roar block system. i-SITE interested in pop-up in VC.	
	Dawson Falls Visitor Centre	Standalone	48,400	46,912	\$ -	\$ -	Included in Egmont	Open only Thurs-Sunday. Improvements planned for Dawson Falls car parking and associated infrastructure as part of Provincial Growth Fund. Iwi settlement process.	
	Rakiura NP Visitor Centre	Standalone	40,075	41,305	\$ 90,633	\$ 83,213	-\$71,442	Bldg infrastructure in good condition with some minor works (i.e. lighting, painting) required. VC well positioned in town. Interp upgrade required. Retail fixtures require replacement. Community museum proposed for land adjacent to VC.	
	Kauaeranga Visitor Centre	Standalone	44,476	26,930	\$ 43,764	\$ 23,509	-\$139,950	Remote location. Provision of local recreation activities; including camp site. Has been impacted by weather conditions.	Interpretation update planned
U r b a n	Dunedin Visitor Centre	Joint location, co-location	5015*	5099*	\$ 28,003	\$ 30,386	-\$20,285	Opened October 2015 at Octagon location. Prior customer service provided at DOC office. Total location visitation FY1718: 101,975. FY1819: 96,218. Visitation assumption 5% total visitation is DOC related.	
	Nelson Visitor Centre	Joint location, shared premises	41166*	51150*	\$ 14,092	\$ 16,907	-\$260,965	Premises is a shared space with i-SITE, but operated independently. Requires interp change-out. Total location visitation to location FY1718: 190,000. FY1819: 186,139.	
	Wellington Visitor Centre	Standalone	50,926	47,671	\$ 104,427	\$ 103,811	\$17,246	Permanent premises located at Conservation House provide shop-window for Department.	
	Auckland Visitor Centre	Joint location, co-location	4843*	4367*	\$ 6,604	\$ 7,882	-\$33,101	Closed temporarily 5 Dec 2017 due to end of lease term. Reopened 1 Sept 2017 at new Princes Wharf site. Total location visitation FY1718: 87,347. FY1819: 100,298. Visitation assumption 5% of total visitation based on other co-locations. Numbers dropping at location, sub-leasing from Auckland i-SITE who are currently reviewing their future plans and may pull out	
	Christchurch Visitor Centre	Joint location, co-location	6700*	7084*	\$ 5,190	\$ 5,195	\$97,026	Number of changes of location since earthquakes. Total location visitation FY1718: 170,537. FY1819: 158,738 for both i-Site and VC. Difficult site, not a lot of foot traffic and in heritage building so signage opportunities are limited.	
			1,556,043	1,601,562	\$ 2,507,224	\$ 2,487,115	-\$1,571,023		
Co-location Visitation									
* Visitor numbers estimated for DOC enquires at co-location sites.									

Appendix 2 – Map of DOC Visitor Centres

1. Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland Visitor Centre
2. Kauaeranga Visitor Centre
3. Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre
4. Taranaki / Egmont National Park Visitor Centre
5. Dawson Falls Visitor Centre
6. Pōneke / Wellington Visitor Centre
7. Whakatū / Nelson Visitor Centre
8. Rotoiti / Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre
9. Paparoa National Park Visitor Centre
10. Arthur's Pass National Park Visitor Centre
11. Ōtautahi / Christchurch Visitor Centre
12. Westland Tai Poutini National Park Visitor Centre
13. Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park Visitor Centre
14. Awarua / Haast Visitor Centre
15. Tititea / Mount Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre
16. Whakatipu-wai-Māori / Queenstown Visitor Centre
17. Te Rua-o-te-moko / Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre
18. Ōtepoti / Dunedin Visitor Centre
19. Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Appendix 3 – Visitation and Retail Sales Report FY 13/14 to FY 18/19

Visitor Centres:

Visitation and retail sales report

