

Hon Damien O'Connor
Minister of Tourism



12 October 2007

Speech Notes

Twenty years of the Yellow Eyed Penguin Trust

Tena koutou katoa.

It is my pleasure to be here with you today to open this conference and join you all in celebrating twenty years of dedicated work by the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust.

Since 1987, the Trust has been a tireless advocate for one of New Zealand's most iconic native species, and has done an amazing amount of work both protecting the Yellow-Eyed Penguins and the biodiversity of this region.

It has also helped create an identity for Dunedin as a world-class eco-tourism and wildlife destination, something that is of great value to the New Zealand tourism industry and to the Dunedin economy, as I'm sure Mayor Chin will agree.

The work of your trustees and staff and the support provided by your sponsors is appreciated greatly by many people and I hope that amongst all the serious discussions that will be undertaken this weekend, you will take the time to reflect on all you have achieved. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Lady Reeves. As Patron of the Trust for 18 years, her presence looms large over this

organisation, and the sort of commitment she showed is something that should be applauded.

Anton Oliver has also been a supportive patron and must be acknowledged today. I know his commitment to the trust is valued hugely.

I am here today because the work that the Trust, and other similar organisations up and down New Zealand, does is vital for both the New Zealand environment, and the New Zealand tourism industry.

Dunedin is getting a good share of the tourism market. The presence of both penguin habitat and the Royal Albatross colony in Dunedin provides a unique selling point for the region.

There were nearly 1.6 million visits by international and domestic travellers in 2006, and between them, these visitors contributed \$326 million dollars to the local economy.

However, more than anything, people come to New Zealand to enjoy our natural environment. Indeed, while in some countries nature based tourism might be a sector of the tourism industry, in New Zealand, it is at the very heart of the tourism industry.

This industry is both aware of the importance of environmental sustainability and prepared to take the steps needed to address the many issues this encapsulates.

The industry cannot do this alone, however. The natural environment complex and delicate, and the expertise required to understand, and thus protect it is becoming increasingly advanced.

This is where organisations such as the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust, and events like this conference are invaluable. You raise awareness of the wonders New Zealand has to offer, and help protect and nurture them.

You are helping to create the products that make New Zealand such a great destination, and you also provide the knowledge to help operators and the public understand how they can enjoy New Zealand's rich biodiversity to its fullest while minimising their impact upon it.

I recently read in the Dominion Post of research undertaken by Phil Seddon from Otago University, which addressed the potentially negative impact of human presence in the Penguin's environment.

This sort of research highlights the importance of treading lightly while enjoying the wonders of nature.

While it is sobering information, I was pleased to read that researchers have a good relationship with operators in the region, and that the issues his research raises are ones that can be managed. It is only with a full understanding of these impacts, and how to minimise them, that the industry can truly deliver on its desire to be sustainable.

I also believe that the relationship is one that can provide mutual benefits. Sustainable nature tourism has the ability to raise the profile of the plight of endangered species and the importance of maintaining our biodiversity.

Successful tourism operations are also in a position to really give back, funding research and monitoring changes daily in the environments they know so well.

More specifically the Government's commitment to biodiversity is evident in its position, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on biological diversity.

This is part of a government commitment to maintaining and preserving the natural heritage of both our lands and waters, which is exercised through the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

However, this very uniqueness also presents unique challenges that can be difficult to address solely via national policy.

As such, I believe there is a vital role for local authorities to play in maintaining the biodiversity of the areas they know best.

I note that the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust has been the recipient of a range of community based awards, and this gives me great confidence that communities around New Zealand are also getting involved in protecting the biodiversity of their regions, and acknowledging the good work of groups such as the Trust.

Events such as this give me further confidence that central and local government, industry, and organisations such as the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust can all work together to protect and share the benefits of New Zealand's biodiversity.

By doing so, I am certain the future of our tourism industry will be assured, and I'm sure that 20 years from now another Minister of Tourism will be congratulating the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust on 40 years of protecting this region's biodiversity.

Thank you for inviting me here today.