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**Conservation versus Visitor Use: a Case Study
within New Zealand's Conservation Estate**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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For the Tomtens and other wise friends at Puhikereru

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Abstract

World tourism has boomed in recent years and as a result there is increasing pressure being placed on destinations in the natural environment. This pressure has implications for the long-term sustainability of 'natural' destinations. It is with regard to these issues that this thesis investigates whether recreation and conservation goals can be reconciled in New Zealand's conservation estate using sustainable approaches to tourism development.

This research question is analysed through a review of relevant policy and literature, and semi-structured interviews with people involved in tourism in a variety of contexts. In order to gain an appreciation of tourism impacts at a site-specific level, the Queen Charlotte Walkway in the Marlborough Sounds is investigated, using quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The walkway was recently developed in order to reduce pressure on the Abel Tasman Coastal Track in the Nelson region. However, in the years since its development, visitor numbers have grown considerably on both tracks.

The Queen Charlotte Walkway situation encapsulates the issues relating to the ongoing conflict between recreation and conservation in natural areas, and enables a better understanding of the consequences of New Zealand's institutional arrangements for tourism management. Moreover, the case study complements the findings of the policy and literature research as it illustrates a number of weaknesses in these institutional arrangements.

As a result of these weaknesses, tourism management agencies have limited options available to deal with tourism growth, particularly considering the lack of provision for regulatory management of visitors to the conservation estate. The study also illustrates that these agencies are currently unable to adopt a holistic approach to tourism planning due in part to an absence of strategic links in the institutional arrangements for tourism. This has serious implications for the achievement of sustainable tourism development in this country.

While the case study was specific to the Queen Charlotte Walkway, the findings of this thesis are relevant to any situation where rising tourist numbers are potentially threatening the intrinsic values of New Zealand's conservation estate.

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