

Speech: Julian Grimmond, chair of Film New Zealand to the Department of Conservation, to be delivered at Cromwell on September 17, 2009

Conservation is one of New Zealand's defining features – we pride ourselves on being 'green and clean', even if it's just a slogan, as the reality does not *always* measure up to the reputation. One advantage of our location, at the edge of the world, is that we haven't had the population pressures experienced by most other countries; our stunning landscapes remain relatively pristine.

We're all here tonight to celebrate conservation; one of our young country's success stories. Not just the retention of our wide, open spaces – mountains, rivers, glaciers, thermal activity, lakes; and our physical heritage that would be so easy to take for granted – but the philosophy of conservation about respecting and caring for our environment. I'm sure many of you will remember the 'Be A Tidy Kiwi' campaign of the 1970s.

It's hardly a new fangled idea. Maori certainly understood the responsibility of looking after their environment, appointing tribal kaitiaki – guardians – responsible for ensuring these assets were preserved for future generations. Valuing and protecting wild natural resources has been evolving for a long time in New Zealand, once we got through the initial colonizing mentality of slash 'n burn – and the extinction of a number of our country's unique birds.

We've come a long way. The 'evolving protection ethic' of sustainable use has been recognized in international agreements and policies; allowing for a balance between use and conservation, through careful management and monitoring. That's an important development for New Zealand, with one third of our land area part of the conservation estate. It covers sites of great cultural, historical, ecological significance and outstanding natural beauty; but the conservation estate also encompasses less blessed areas...

Is the film industry selfish, in its desire to use 'Studio New Zealand' as its backlot; offering our country's glorious landscape to the global film industry? Or is it the conservation movement that is selfish, with its desire to keep – or return – New Zealand to *Jurassic Park*, just as the Prince of Wales is accused of wanting to preserve Britain's architecture, 'a nation-wide theme park' according to his critics.

Do we want New Zealand to become a holiday camp, with up-market lodges for the international super-rich with New Zealanders cleaning the bathrooms, or do we want a country that is more accessible, albeit in carefully controlled environments – like watching in the cinema? Or are we all inherently selfish, like all species, because that's part of our hard wiring, to ensure we all survive?

I believe the winds of change are blowing. As a recent editorial in *The Listener* stated: “much of the (conservation) estate is inaccessible and never seen by anyone except deer hunters and lost trampers”. It’s interesting to note that *The Listener*, known for its liberal stance, uses its editorial to remind us that “it is in everyone’s interest to use all our resources to increase our wealth”, stating that “the wealth in them thar hills does not belong exclusively to the tourism industry” and that “there is no shame in a country harvesting its resources to make a living”.

And what is the thrust of *The Listener* article? It’s supporting the Government’s plan to take a fresh look at mining on New Zealand’s conservation estate. Now, that’s not part of my brief today. But it’s a worthwhile reminder that it’s time to take stock of our resources and use them as wisely as possible.

New Zealand’s conservation lands contain some of the most sought-after and iconic landscapes in the world. The New Zealand landscape – coupled with the pool of exceptional technical expertise used to such great effect in movies like *Lord of the Rings*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Vertical Limit* – has been a boon for the film industry, providing backdrops and settings that make foreign filmmakers drool, with hugely beneficial knock-on effects for our tourism industry.

It’s been called the *Lord of the Rings* effect, with tourists trekking to New Zealand to see and experience the locations used. And it’s not just feature films; the screen industry covers a wide range of productions, including reality and adventure television programmes, documentaries, television commercials and, even, stills photography.

Film is a powerful tool, it communicates to a mass audience, sending powerful messages that work on many levels: the subtle and suggestive use of backdrops is far more useful to New Zealand’s vital tourism industry than the overt use of advertisements; rather like the difference between a showing a hint of skin, than complete nudity. Less is truly often more!

The Government’s overarching priority is economic growth. Creativity, imagination, and innovation have been identified as three major driving forces in boosting sustainable economic growth to improve New Zealanders’ standard of living.

The Prime Minister, John Key, has been clear he’s not interested in simply reallocating slices of the pie – he wants a bigger pie. He’s committed to ensuring all New Zealanders can enjoy the benefits of economic growth and

greater wealth, with its associated benefits of improved health care, education, and standards of living. And that includes conservation, never a priority in Third World countries in Africa and Southern Asia, or even Second World ones like the former Eastern Bloc. There are plenty of advantages in living in a wealthier country; I'm struggling to think of any benefits of living in a poor country.

The film industry is important to New Zealand because of its high growth potential and its ability to drive growth in other industries such as tourism. New Zealanders are rightly proud of our young wine industry (although little is said about the environmental impact of irrigation) yet our film industry generates the same amount of revenue.

Despite the film industry's perfect fit with the Government's strategy, it faces increasing difficulties in gaining access to public land and an increasing lack of 'film friendliness'. Recent National Park management plans and other DoC strategies have often ignored the economic benefits of the screen production industry, and the demonstrably transient and manageable nature of filming activity in key areas of the conservation estate.

We've noticed a common theme suggesting filming activities must be consistent with conservation values, leading to the risk that many television commercials, and thriller / fantasy movies could be seen as being inconsistent with conservation values...with little clarity about the decision criteria or – indeed - the ultimate decision maker.

Industry efforts to promote the cause of the screen production industry to DoC have had disappointing results – frankly, it's becoming increasingly fraught to film on conservation land; under current restrictions, some parts of the *Lord of the Rings* **could not be filmed as they were should the films be shot** in New Zealand today.

So you won't be surprised that Film New Zealand is now seeking the Minister of Conservation's support before this trend gathers such a momentum that the iconic landscapes for which New Zealand has become world-renowned are no longer accessible. Which would, ultimately, mean the Government's targets for the screen production industry – a key economic growth sector – are no longer achievable.

Recently the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FORST) announced a \$5.8 million investment in Weta Digital that will undoubtedly lead to spinoffs and new business, and anchor the role of Wellywood in the global film industry. Weta Digital has led the world with its technology, which lies at the heart of the industry's future and plays a significant part in James Cameron's upcoming *Avatar* – one of the most expensive films in the history of cinema.

Globalism is a recurring theme these days, and it's a pivotal factor in our industry, where there's increasing international competition for the film dollar. New Zealand has to work harder to demonstrate we offer more than just some of the world's most beautiful locations. We must ensure New Zealand is a country that is easy to work in, with a 'film friendly' regulatory environment.

We work tirelessly with other organisations to promote areas of common interest. Last year Film New Zealand re-launched its Greening The Screen website, to address the long-term sustainability of our screen production industry. Another example is the work done by Film Queenstown and Film Otago Southland with the local district council to produce 'Zero Waste', to assist film companies to reduce and recycle waste as a way of ensuring the area's breathtaking and pristine landscapes stayed that way.

Zero Waste isn't just another policy document, doomed to grow dusty on the shelf. Instead it's a practical guide, and it's already been successful. During the filming of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* in Queenstown in the year 2007/8, an estimated 670 tonnes of waste was produced and recycled at a cost of \$NZ27,000; if dumped into a landfill, it would have cost an **additional** \$60,000 – and been around for a very long time, with drink cans taking up to 500 years to decompose, milk cartons five years and Styrofoam? *Well, that's immortal.*

How was this 94% of waste diversion achieved? Strict use of recycling, food waste sent to local farmers, printer cartridges recycled (they take 1000 years to decompose), water dispensers for refilling water bottles, reusable cutlery and all construction materials recycled; coupled with motivation and incentives for the film crew – once people understand the ramifications of waste, they're motivated to protect and preserve the wilderness in which we're privileged to operate.

After all, let's face it. Conservationists and the film industry have many interests in common; retaining our pristine natural environment is a vital part of New Zealand's appeal as a location of choice for international filmmakers. **Filming is not like opencast mining or building an oilrig.** The activity is infrequent, diverse, and with a low impact on its surroundings – and all impacts can be mitigated, as Greening The Screen and Zero Waste have demonstrated.

The film industry can contribute to scientific knowledge and understanding; it is arguably the single largest promoter of the conservation estate and its values to both New Zealanders and international audiences alike. We want to work in a positive environment where New Zealand remains a viable production destination, where the film industry and DoC collaborate to ensure the best possible outcome... which includes economic growth, so that the New Zealand

screen industry attracts foreign investment and retains (and grows) the local talent pool.

The key lies in striking a balance so our land, flora and fauna are respected – but so is man’s use of it, in an environmentally sustainable manner. We believe that filming activity is more closely aligned with DoC’s objectives than most other commercial activities undertaken on conservation lands.

The industry of story telling and industry of conservation could be perfect partners; the combination of selflessness to selfishness would result in compelling stories, and compelling values. We would make a call that all owners of the conversation estate start collaborating together effectively with the sole focus of maximizing New Zealand’s wealth creation.

I believe that would be a ‘win, win’ solution. It’s regrettable, but realistic, that poorer countries consider conservation a luxury they can ill afford. A vibrant film industry will help New Zealand become richer, with the ability to fund robust conservation projects that will ensure our beautiful countryside remains that way for future generations.

We – the film industry and New Zealand’s robust conservation movement – both have similar goals. As New Zealanders, we all cherish our country’s iconic landscapes. Isn’t it time we worked together?