

Abel Tasman National Park

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Abel Tasman National Park is New Zealand's smallest national park at 23,000 hectares, but it is one of the countries most popular park destinations. In 2004 an estimated 184,000 people visited Abel Tasman. In order to deal with the environmental, social, and physical pressure put on the Abel Tasman National Park, it is vital that a clear and comprehensive management plan exists. This paper will examine the background as well as the historical significance of the park, and several case studies pertaining to the management of the park. Including interactions between sea-kayakers and motorized boaters, management of concession, visitor attitude towards current management, and finally a comparison of these activities to the management plan published by the department of conservation in 2008. Conclusions will be drawn as to whether or not the management plan published in 2008 reflects the needs and suggestions as outlined in previous evaluations of the national park.

Abel Tasman National Park is 23,000 hectare in size and is located on the coast of the northwest top of the south island. The park was created in 1942 on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first contact between Maoris and Dutch explorer Abel Tasman on December 18, 1642 (Chadwick, 2008). Early European settlers cleared and burned the land, destroying coastal forests and shrub lands. Abel Tasman National Park is an example of landscape recovery as it was cleared by humans and is now in a re-growth process (Dorfman & Gesperini, 2005). Within the park many different ecosystems exist including sub-alpine bogs, tussock land, lowland coastal forests, and dunes. The contrast between fertile soil and infertile granite soil contribute greatly to the biodiversity of the park. There are over seventy species of birds recorded within the parks boundaries.

Native birds dominate the forest, estuary and seashore habitats. Abel Tasman National Park is not only significant of its beauty and conservation of flora and fauna, it holds a substantial level of historical and cultural value. Within the park there are six small, former fortified sites known on the coast. There are also seven recorded historical significant villages at Taupo point. Records show that Waitaha and Rapauai people, followed by Ngati Wairangi occupied the coast before 1600 AD. From 1600 AD this area was controlled by the Ngati Tumatakokiri until they were defeated by the Ngati Apa 1800 AD (Pascoe, 1974). The earliest recorded contact between Europeans and Maoris was in 1642 when Dutch explorer Abel Tasman anchored his ships off of Golden Bay. Early Europeans settlers logged the lowland forest for timber and cleared land for farming in several of the park bays. From as early as the 1890s people considered protecting the area. The first firm proposal wasn't made until the 1930's; Perrine Moncrieff set aside her property as private scenic reserve. In 1942 Abel Tasman National Park was established as conservation site and a permanent memorial to the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman.

As visitor number annually increase by 5%, the Department of Conservation has been accused as issuing too many concession permits. As of December 2000, thirty-one concessions operate in and outside the park bringing in 8,500 visitors. This accounts for 5% of all visitors in any given year. The increase in visitor is placing a strain on park facilities and carrying capacity. Nelsons mayor, Paul Matheson, offered his opinion on the difficulty in controlling visitor numbers "controlling the number of people who use the Abel Tasman National Park's beaches is a more important issue that the question of

who manages the foreshore” (Dennis, 2006). The apparent mismanagement of people has caused capacity problems with the facilities in the park. Also increased commercial boat transport, where no concessions are required by the park, have increased the conflicts between sea-kayakers and motorboats. Proposed solutions to these carrying capacity problems include modifying visitor timing, visitor expectations, attracting visitors to different park sites, and increasing facility capacity (Hawke & Booth, 2001).

The matter of proper park management transcends past the sheer capacity of the facilities but also must deal with arising conflicts of visiting groups. For many people Abel Tasman National Park is considered the Mecca of water bound recreations (Cressford, 1998). Many Changes over the years have increased the level of boat traffic in and around the park, including a rise in commercial kayak companies operating on the coastal areas just outside the park. The two groups that frequent the area are sea-kayakers and motorboat enthusiast; increased flow between the two groups has increased the interactions between the groups causing a number of conflicts and concerns. A recent study suggests that 53% of sea-kayakers are disturbed while on water by motorboats. Worthy of note is that the disturbance relationship does not work both ways. Motorboat users describe their interaction with sea-kayakers as minimal and not problematic (Hawke & Booth, 2001). These two groups differ extensively from each other in their demographics and socio-economic characteristics. Sea-kayakers who visit Abel Tasman National Park are made up of a mixture of overseas visitors as well as people from New Zealand. Where as the majority of motorboats users are exclusively from New Zealand. Sea-Kayakers are younger, have a higher education, and are employed in more

professional occupations than their counterparts. The conflicts that exist between sea-kayakers is an inter group organization, where as and intra group dynamic exists between motorboats interactive negatively with each other (Parr, 2000). The main points raised by the sea-kayakers are attributed concern about the level of enjoyment, disturbances, and safety concerns. Given that the greater part of sea-kayaking businesses operates outside the park boundaries, the Department of Conservation is unable to manage the number watercraft on the coast through the reduction of concessions issued. In order to reduce the conflicts between sea-kayakers and powerboats there are a number of proposed management strategies. This includes a re-evaluation of proposed powerboats lanes, as this may only exacerbate the situation. Also the education of kayakers and motorboats is important, particularly each groups needs and limitations. Another strategy is the enforcement of boating regulations along the coast of Abel Tasman National Park (Department of Conservation, 2008).

This next sections deal with the visitor satisfaction, perceptions, and attitudes towards management options on Abel Tasman National Park. In 1994 a visitor survey suggested little dissatisfaction or any need for management action within the park (Hewson, 1996). Other results indicated the need for further improvements achieved through reducing campsite littering, improved water supplies, and visitor perception of water hygiene. Other issues described as problematic from the survey include congestions on the coastal track and the disturbance from motorboats. Visitors favored information based management rather than more regulatory controls, although many favored regulatory controls of motorboats. Of the 657 walkers that were surveyed on the Coastal

Track 70% said primarily other visitors bothered them where as 25% said they were disturbed by motorboats (Hewson, 1996). The recommendations that were including after the survey were as follows. Reducing physical hotspots, improving water hygiene at campsites, improving track markings, and improving booking information.

This final section will evaluate the management plan released by the New Zealand Department of Conservation and determine if it addresses the problems outline in the case studies above. Since the 1990s the perception that the park is overcrowded has existed. The Department of Conservation's is outlined as a framework for preserving the park in its natural state for future generations and to maintain what is distinctive about park recreation, as well as facilitating visitor benefits while respecting the rights of other visitors (Department of Conservation, 2008). The Department monitors visitor experience in all recreations zone in the park. The case studies discussed in this paper have a reoccurring theme of problematic management of the coastal track. The management plan released by the Department of Conservation identifies the Coastal track as the busiest park of the park being used by all demographics. The plan discusses the campsites, toilets, shelters, and signs being developed to a minimal level. They are described as being designed to provide a quiet close to nature experience. The capacity increase and upgrade of water facilities is not addressed. Another recurring theme that exists in the case studies mention previously, is dealing with the concern of motorized watercraft. The general policy for national parks sates the jet-skis and motorboats cannot be used within the park. As mentioned before, the majority of commercial boating operation our outside the boundaries were congestions, and conflicts occur.

After a critical evaluation of case studies, management issues, and recent management plans released by New Zealand Conservation Department, a conclusion can be drawn the newly released management plane addresses major concerns. Focusing on watercraft use and Coastal track management and concentrating less on the development of water supplies and facilities. The Department of Conservations suggest making the rivers on the coastal border of Abel Tasman park of the park, by doing this the Department of Conservation will have greater control of water craft use in and around the park. The development of facilities in the park was mentioned in less detail do to the way the view the use level of the facilities. They were originally designed for, simple, quiet use, and not for the facilitation of mass tourism. A failure to develop a management solution to rising number of visitors and increased pressure of the parks facilities will only cause greater problems down the road.

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