

## The Myth of Progress

### Otago Daily Times April 2013

The word “Progress” has been bandied about in the press by the directors of Milford Dart Limited who have proposed a tunnel through two of New Zealand's National Parks and the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Site. By branding those who object to the tunnel as “anti-progress” the developers are missing much deeper issues at stake, and are using the wrong language to describe a debate which is not simply a polarised pair of opposite views but something far more complex.

So what is Progress? Any definition of Progress is dependent upon where one stands, for it measures both how far one has come, and the vision one had at the outset of the journey.

The measure of Progress contains a couple of key elements worth examining. The first is that one has vision, a vision of what is to come, and a vision of how to get there. The second is that there is a method – that time and resources must be invested to reach that vision, and that the vision results in something more than or better than what was there before.

Milford Dart Ltd think that they are engaged in the work of Progress as they hope to invest time and resources to see a tunnel built, but the problem is that in their definition of Progress, they miss the first steps. Their vision is too small, and their view of New Zealand’s future is so narrow that they are sabotaging New Zealand’s image and values for the short term, rather than advancing the country into a truly sustainable future. Bums on seats, not hearts and minds, is their territory.

What is Progress? Progress is when we humans look to own flaws, and create systems to protect ourselves and the world around us from our recurring failure to accept that the world is bigger than ourselves, will last longer than our lifetimes our the short term goals of how much money we can personally acquire. Progress is not getting rich. Progress is creating worthwhile things that last.

Progress was in the vision held by individuals in 1887 to create Tongariro National Park. Progress was the creation of UNESCO in 1945 and the recognition of the concept of World Heritage in 1972, which set aside the jewels of the world to be preserved in perpetuity for the benefit of all. Progress was the vision of those individuals who, in 1990, worked to apply for UNESCO World Heritage Status to encompass 2.6 million hectares of Westland including Mt. Aspiring, Fiordland, and Aoraki National Parks.

What Milford Dart Ltd. proposes is the antithesis of Progress. It is humanity stepping backwards once again into rapaciousness for the short-term financial gains of a few individuals at the expense of posterity and future generations.

Progress is not the building of a tunnel through two National Parks – that is an erosion of our nation’s values, and in the end will expose the flawed vision of a few which could cost all of us our “100% Pure” image, and the right to be able to say we are anything like we claim.

For once, instead let Progress be defined by what we chose **not** to do, and show our willingness to

respect the truly progressive vision of those who came before us who knew that once violated, our wilderness areas could never be recreated again.

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