

15<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Dear Dr Kay Booth,

I have given a lot of thought to how best to compose this letter to you, and I find such a serious matter difficult to articulate. I hope that you find this a logical letter to follow and apologise if I speak from the heart a lot, however I feel that this is unavoidable given the context. However I will try and give reference to relevant policy or issues/concerns raised in both the ecology report and summation of correspondence thus far.

I would like to start by introducing myself. I know I that we had a brief introduction and discussion on your site visit to the concession area however time was short so I will give you an outline of who I am and why I am writing this letter.

I was born and raised at Glentanner Station near Mount Cook, I attended Mount Cook Primary School, a small school where we were privileged to spend a large amount of our time out in the National Park. I attended boarding school at Waihi and St Andrews College. From there I studied a Bachelor of Commerce and Agriculture majoring in Farm Management at Lincoln University. This is where I met my wife Catherine who was studying a Bachelor of Commerce majoring in Tourism and Property. Catherine and I spent time in Canada before returning to live in Haast to work for John Cowan, obviously Catherine's father and my father in law. We were full time in Haast for six and a half years and have recently shifted to Glentanner Station to pursue further opportunities there. We are still heavily involved in the running of the property in Haast and regularly travel between the two places. John is now 72, and although he is still actively involved day to day on the farm, Catherine and I now handle most of the business matters relating to the farm.

At the public hearing relating to this concession I introduced myself and amongst other things I stated that I considered myself to be a conservationist, this was scoffed at by some and highlighted by the media. It concerns me that because we are farmers, some look at us like environmental anarchists. In my experience, in some of the most beautiful parts of New Zealand, Farmers are tremendous caretakers of the land and most would consider themselves conservationists. We have recently hosted with my parents Ross and Helen Ivey, a dinner evening for the Te Manahuna Aoraki project, an enjoyable evening and a demonstration of this fact in my opinion.

We were greatly disappointed that we could not have accompanied you on your site visit, however we could take on board that you were trying to form an unbiased opinion of the concession area for yourself. You may be able to understand my surprise then, that while reading the ecology report prepared by the department and to be considered "the definitive report", reference was made to a submission made by Theo Stevens and Susan Walker. At the time I assumed that the ecologists had obtained the submission privately or had been supplied it by Stevens and Walker. Therefore I was further astounded to read in the

summary notes that this letter accompanies, that the submission had been supplied to the ecologists by department staff. How is it possible then that these ecologists can make an unbiased report, which is to be considered “the definitive report,” when they have been lead by a submission written by two people that vehemently oppose us, a submission upon which the vast majority of opposing submitters based there opinion on, and a submission which we completely discredited at the public hearing. Although unfortunately not one opposing submitter took the time out of their day to listen to our Reply. Stevens and Walker presented a submission that grossly overstated the affects of cattle. I cannot see how it is at all appropriate that opinion be used as reference material for an ecology report. We were certainly not given the opportunity to influence the report, as I would not have expected.

We were however given the opportunity to employ an ecologist to prepare a report on our behalf. We sought advice on this through Federated Farmers. We were informed that there had been clear direction given by the Minister of Conservation Hon. Eugene Sage, to give more weight to ecology reports prepared by the department. Therefore there advice was that we would be wasting money on a report that would be largely discredited. Hence we chose not to employ our own ecologists. I can certainly understand this stance by the department, and do not have any real issue with it so long as the reports are undertaken in a professional unbiased manner, which I would suggest as the evidence shows probably wasn't the case here, and I am sure you can make judgement on that issue. The ecology report was produced post hearing yet still references birds which, as established at the hearing, have never even been sighted in the concession area. There is no relevance here and shows the danger of referencing material which has been largely stretched and over exaggerated to try and best portray personal opinion.

I think it is important to point out again that cattle have been grazing this valley for over 150 years. It is unfortunate that there is no consistency in reporting of ecology and therefore all vegetation impacts are based on assumption. It is assumed that cattle are having an increasingly negative impact on vegetation and rather than regeneration there is continual decline in species. I will continue to argue that this is indeed not the case, I realise we will be ignored, but it is simply not what we are seeing, there are numerous areas of regeneration happening throughout the Haast valley. If destruction were occurring at the rate suggested by the ecology report then I do not believe that after 150 years of continual grazing, with a plague of deer numbers thrown in the mix in the early years, the Haast would not look like it does now. All of the previous reports undertaken by the department had no significant issues with grazing and its effects on the ecosystem, were these ecologists all incompetent, or has there been a sudden change in cattle habit's around grazing and trampling which hasn't occurred in the past 150 years? I find it strange that there is not mention made of the massive flood event, which occurred before the ecology report was undertaken. As I stated at the public hearing the amount of silting this event caused was huge, in particular the large slip which moved thousands of tonnes of debris only 100 metres away from the Sunny Flat yard doesn't even get a mention. This event deposited huge amounts of silt across flats and into waterways and wetlands.

Stevens and Walker tried to pin this silting onto cattle but they also failed to note the slip. Photo 5 in the ecology report shows damage attributed to cattle according to the authors, yet it clearly shows a huge amount of silt deposited across the small stream flat by recent flooding which cattle have walked through. It is tracking in silt not the destruction of a pristine flat. The Haast as noted is a dynamic and changing environment and there are many forces, which shape what we see in the valley and what species thrive and survive. For instance in the most recent flood the entire holding paddock at Sunny flat was under water. Whilst on the topic of the holding paddock I will point out that the trees in Photo 7 are in the holding paddock and as I have stated previously it was a huge mistake to have not fenced them out, it was simply an oversight but these trees should not be taken as example of conditions throughout the lease they are an isolated example.

There has been much talk around the splendour of the Haast valley and whether or not the cattle enhance or detract from this splendour. It was also disturbing to read in the summary notes that there is direction to remove all human presence from the Haast valley. I am not going to continue to argue about cattle adding too or detracting from the view, it's simply a matter of opinion. What I will point out is sometimes these directions and ideas sound fantastic but in theory are simply unworkable. There are three blocks of freehold in the Haast valley that will always be the home of cattle; therefore removing cattle from the Haast entirely will never be achieved. Further more the splendour of the view which everyone speaks of, from the road, is fast becoming hidden, there are actually very few glimpses of the Haast Valley from the road. I am unsure if you are familiar with the road but it is certainly not a great open highway travelling upward through a bare valley. Trees continue to grow and hide more and more of the valley from sight. There are really very few opportunities to actually see these cattle in the landscape. The clearest areas are just past Grassy creek heading up valley, overlooking freehold, Thomas bluff looking upstream, again overlooking areas of freehold, and Clark bluff which looks largely into the Landsborough. The places where cattle are most likely to be observed are freehold. It is a romantic notion to be travelling through this place devoid of human interference but its not going to happen. For a start you're on a highway winding through it. Why not instead tell the story of a partnership between the conservation estate and one of the most sustainable farming systems in New Zealand, which has run largely unchanged in harmony with the native ecosystem for 150 years. These river runs are a part of South Westland's heritage, the oldest part in fact. They are the reason that Haast came to exist in the first place. They are the cultural heritage of Haast, a heritage which the Department of conservation is charged with preserving, not dissolving.

Access seemed to be of great concern at the hearing but in all honesty I believe we showed that it was a non-issue and it would seem that the local office has little issue with it either. Once again if there is some issue then we can work to rectify any problems.

I disagree with the view that our cattle are further spreading weeds. As I explained to you at your site visit, our cows more or less spend their entire lives

on certain areas of the Haast. This means they get to know the flats, and where to get to safety in flood events. What it also means is that they are only ingesting and then defecating weed species and seed which is already present. There are weeds in the Haast valley, as there are weeds in many valleys and places, no doubt early on some were helped to spread by cattle however I don't believe that there is any real further spread by cattle now, cattle are not pushing into new areas, simply grazing areas which they have done for the last 150 years. As farmers we spend a lot of time, money and effort on preventing the spread of, and controlling weeds in the Haast valley. As is pointed out in the summary notes, under a negative result this responsibility would fall to the Department of Conservation. I believe there are many examples of areas, which have come out of farmers care and into the departments, which are struggling to maintain their scenic values. This is not a criticism of the department; DoC does some fantastic work, I simply believe they are underfunded for the scale of land they are charged to care for. I believe we are doing a pretty good job of looking after the land and would like the opportunity to continue doing so.

Please be under no illusion that a negative decision made in regard to this lease will not set precedent. It will and will have very serious consequence for many farmers and businesses in South Westland and wider New Zealand. The effect on property values could make some businesses un-bankable. There is real fear amongst farmers, not just in South Westland.

There would also be huge effects on the community. Of the three people we employ, one is the fire chief and one is an ambulance first responder. Two have two children each, which will both attend the local school and their wives are both hugely involved in fundraising to keep this going. These are core community members, which keep Haast functioning. It is very common for us to have staff away attending emergencies or training. There is no better example of how these communities function than the recent flood events. When the local power station was shut down, clogged with gravel, it was farmers, fishermen and local business owners that banded together, volunteered, to spend hour after hour, for days, removing gravel from an inlet tunnel to restore power to the community. If you start removing employment and people's way of life, these small communities simply cease to function, schools close, vital services are understaffed. We would love to keep employing these people, we would love to employ more people, however, like any business employment must be justified expenditure, without scale we would struggle to justify keeping some of these staff. As you may know there are very limited job opportunities in South Westland, two of our staff have stayed in Haast because we could offer them employment, and the third came to live in Haast permanently through our employment. Three families may not sound like a lot but please remember Haast has a population of around 220 people.

Please take the time to read Blair Farmers letter which we have attached along side our own. I realise this is not the time to be making new submissions, but this letter is intended to give some insight into community effects from someone who is heavily involved in local services.

It is unfortunate that boundary lines drawn on a map with limited understanding of cattle behaviour have come to be such hard and fast boundaries. I believe it was an oversight by the department at the time and most definitely an oversight by us to have not corrected them. We believe there are opportunities to exclude cattle from certain wetlands and patches of bush, particularly on the True Left of the concession area. I am sure with common sense and some practical thought and experience we could overcome and find some compromise on this issue. I would certainly be open to discussion around this. I also feel there are opportunities to improve fencing around areas of high stock traffic, such as holding paddocks to limit impacts from the effects of large stocking rates in small areas at a couple of key times of the year.

World Heritage status is a real honour for South Westland. I believe most locals are proud of the wild beauty of the place they live in. However these titles are not designed to destroy local business and livelihoods, simply ensure that the natural landscapes are maintained and enhanced where possible. This does not mean, trying to recreate prehistoric New Zealand by removing any trace of human presence. We have millions of hectares of land like that. A valley with a highway running through the middle of it and parcels of freehold throughout will always have a human presence. Extensive cattle farming, was an expected practice when we were granted World Heritage Status, I do not see how that has changed now.

The Haast Valley is a special place. There is little to compare to the feeling, of saddling a horse on a misty South Westland day, and getting readying to ride out and bring the cattle in. It is a feeling which any stockmen that works these valleys gets, and talking with people like John Nolan, that have been working these valleys their entire lives, one which never fades with familiarity. Knowing that you are part of a tradition, which hasn't changed for a century and a half, is a special feeling. It's a moment that I hope to be able to share with my children, like those that have gone before have had the privilege of sharing with their children. It's difficult to understate the emotional attachment that those that work these valleys form for the land. The Haast isn't viewed by us as a lease block, It's home. Ask any succession planner why it is so difficult to sort succession on family farms and they will tell you that for the most part it is the attachment that families form for the land, that makes it so hard for people to let go. These concessions are so much more than a piece of land to us, they are a tradition and way of life that stretches back to the first settlers of South Westland. The stories that can be told by the old stockmen of battles had and mobs moved are a tremendous part of our heritage and history. They should be able to be told into the future with fresh tales adding to the story. The Haast Visitor centre has some tremendous photos of mustering scenes in the valleys and most nights at the local bars, tourists can be seen looking at the many photos of the early pioneers and stockmen, which line the walls of both bars. The West Coast has given up much of its industry for conservation efforts and jobs are hard to come by. I believe that it is important to consider the effects that a negative decision may have on local communities, of which many throughout the coast are at tipping point.

This is not a new concession and should never be considered as such. To do so is to insult the 150 years of heritage, hard work and tradition, which has gone before.

I believe that we had a favourable public hearing at which we were able to provide answers for the issues raised.

It is telling that the West Coast conservation board, of which some members publicly submitted against us, came to neutral decision on their submission. They could see that the effects on community were too great to ignore given the low impacts these farming systems have.

We can improve in areas, this we know. No one is perfect and there is always space to improve. We are neither too proud nor stubborn to accept that fact. I am sure we can work to protect species such as Ribbonwood to ensure they can be enjoyed by all who wish to see them.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further clarification on any issues I am always available for discussion.

I am sure you will give this issue the serious consideration it deserves.

I write this letter On behalf of my father in law John Cowan, my wife Catherine and daughter Charlotte, and our three permanent staff, Adam Cowan, Vern Harvey and Aaron Gray.

Kind Regards  
George Ivey

Email- [george@glentanner.co.nz](mailto:george@glentanner.co.nz)

Work- 0272111654

Home- 03 4351859