

# Community – Kea Project Plan

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## Lower West Coast: Haast - Okarito

**Funded by:** Department of Conservation Community Fund (DOC-CF)

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### Aim

The aim of the Community – Kea Project Plan is to i) facilitate long-term community kea conservation initiatives and ii) to change the way we think, act and live with kea in our communities. This will be actioned through development of collaborative Community – Kea Project Plans across the South Island. The Lower West Coast plan (which extends from Haast in the south to Okarito in the north), will address concerns specific to the local community and threats to the resident kea population.

### Project Background

This initial project plan outline has been developed as a result of discussions with communities during the Kea Conservation Trust's (KCT) Winter Advocacy Tour - 20 July – 3 August 2015. The tour was funded by Dulux and supported by Department of Conservation (DOC). The tour theme, "Building a future with kea", aimed to promote a new MOU between communities and kea. This initiative is in line with the new Strategic Plan for Kea Conservation (refer attached document), objective 3: to i) increase positive perceptions of kea and reduce conflict and ii) facilitate formation of community led kea conservation initiatives.

Local Community – Kea Project Plans will be activated by two Community Engagement Coordinator's (CEC's) based in the following areas:

1) Upper half of the South Island: Northern region (Nelson/ Motueka/ Kahurangi), Central North (Nelson Lakes/ Murchison/Arthur's Pass/Christchurch/Mt Hutt) and upper West Coast (Greymouth and Hokitika). There is also the potential to include Kaikoura at a later date (the eastern most population of kea).

2) Lower half of the South Island: Lower West Coast (Franz/Fox Glaciers and Haast), Central South (Mt Cook, Wanaka/Mt Aspiring and the Routeburn/Dart/ Queenstown areas) and Fiordland (Te Anau/ Milford/Murchison mountains).

Each project plan, will be developed in detail over the next two years and will involve creation of an active volunteer network and facilitation of funding streams (external and internal). The plans will take into account eight threats, actual and potential, to the wild kea population which have been identified by kea researchers.

- 1) Predation by introduced mammals
- 2) Lead in kea habitat (e.g. flashings and lead-head nails, tyre weights, lead shot)
- 3) Poorly-deployed pest control devices (e.g. poison baits and traps laid for pest control and aerial 1080 operations)
- 4) Avian diseases

- 5) Climate change (e.g. changes in predator abundance, food availability and habitat quality)
- 6) Accidents with human objects (e.g. motor vehicles, snow groomers, rubbish bins, electricity sub-stations)
- 7) Destruction/removal of nuisance individuals (permitted or illegal)
- 8) Illicit trade in wildlife

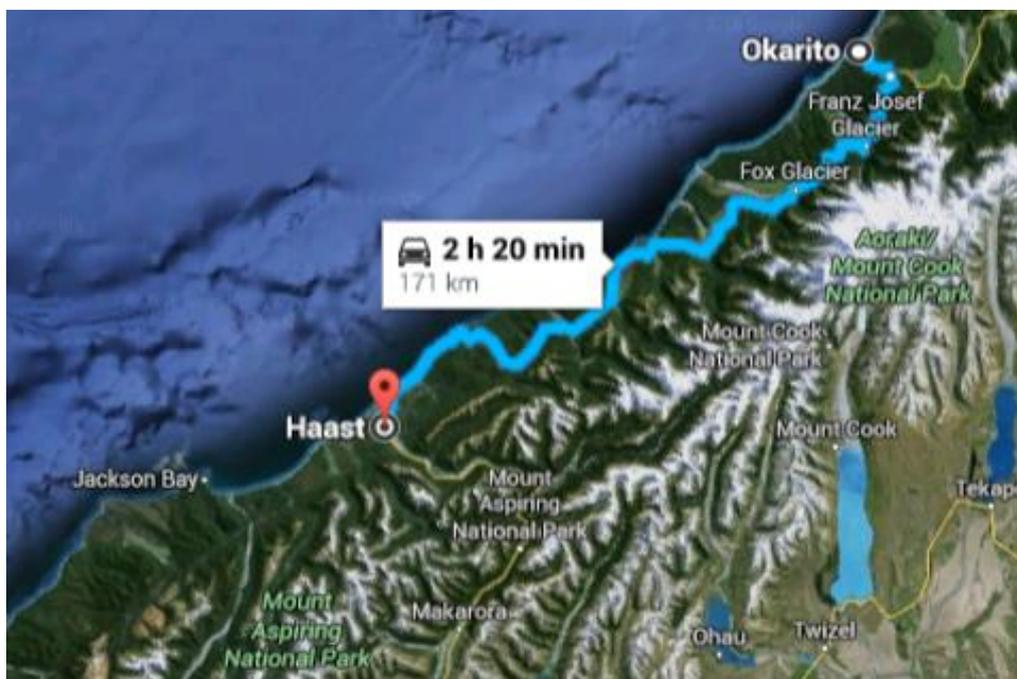
Threat focus and mitigation will be area and resource dependant and take into account community interests, expertise and support.

### **Lower West Coast: Haast – Okarito**

The west coast between Haast and Okarito spans over 171 km and includes the townships of Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers. The two glaciers lie within Te Wai Poutini Westland National Park (NP), while Haast lies just northwest of the boundary of Mt Aspiring NP. Both NP's are part of the Te Wahipounamu World heritage area (wiki, 2016).

The total area of Westland covers 11,000 square kilometres (Birding West Coast, 2016). The area was settled in the 1870's and due to its continued remoteness, has a very low population of around 1000 permanent residents (Haast - 300, Fox -375 and Franz Josef- 300 (Statistics, 2006), Okarito – 30 (DOC)). Primary sources of income include tourism (glacier guiding, scenic flights, sky diving, wildlife tours), fishing (including whitebait) and farming. People also come to the area for hunting and tramping.

Franz and Fox Glacier townships are the gateways to two of the most accessible glaciers in the world. Fox is visited by up to 1000 visitors per day during summer and Franz 2,700 visitors per day (or 250,000 per year (Te Ara, 2015)).



**Fig 1.** The lower west coast stretch of highway between Haast and Okarito showing proximity to the Southern Alps, National Park areas and Aoraki/Mt Cook.

The coast is cut off geographically from the rest of the South Island by the towering Southern Alps which extend almost to the sea. Access to the coast is via two alpine passes; Haast Pass to the south (which connects Haast township to Wanaka (1.5hrs) and Queenstown (2.5hrs)) and Arthur's Pass to the north which provides direct access to the east coast (Christchurch). State Hwy 6 continues to run north through Hokitika and Greymouth (the largest of the west coast towns at over 13,500 inhabitants), then runs through deep gorges towards Motueka and Nelson at the top of the South Island. All towns on the coast are located at sea level on a narrow strip with the Southern Alps rising sharply behind to a height of 2,000 - 3,700mtrs (Aoraki/Mt Cook).

### Local Conservation Efforts

Due to its remoteness, the West Coast still has extensive wilderness areas with several endangered species being targeted for protection. These include two of NZ's rarest kiwi, the Rowi and Haast Tokoeka and the Tawaki/Fiordland crested penguin. The West Coast Wildlife Centre, located in Franz Josef is involved in the hatching and rearing of the two kiwi species and provides behind the scenes tours of its facilities. The Haast Range (sole habitat of the Tokoeka kiwi), is also one of DOC's Battle for our Birds campaign target areas in addition to Abby Rocks and the Landsborough located approx. 50 kms further up the coast (both of which were treated in 2015).

Nest monitoring of the endangered Fiordland crested penguin (tawaki) at Jackson Head, Haast is being spearheaded by The West Coast Penguin Trust. This project aims to determine predator impact on the species nesting success over a three year period.

The Kea Conservation Trust in association with Department of Conservation is also monitoring kea nests in Paringa (2015) to ascertain predation risk to kea. DOC has been monitoring kaka and kea survivorship and nest productivity at Okarito since 2008, as well as at Paringa/Abbey Rocks and the Lower Copland to ascertain costs and benefits of utilising 1080 on kea populations.

**Table 1. Conservation work carried out by groups on the South West Coast.**

Group	Location	Activity	Trap #s	Focal species
DOC	Okarito, Franz Josef, Abbey Rocks and the Lower Copland	Kaka and kea productivity and survivorship. Battle for our birds predator control campaign		kea
West Coast Wildlife Centre	Franz Josef	Raising and hatching kiwi	n/a	Rowi and Tokoeka kiwi
West Coast Penguin Trust	Jackson Head, Haast	Nest monitoring to determine predator interaction with Tawaki / Fiordland Crested Penguin	n/a	Tawaki / Fiordland Crested Penguin
KCT	Paringa	Kea nest monitoring	n/a	Kea

**Figure 1. Location of individual organisations carrying out predator control work**

## **West Coast Kea**

Department of Conservation led research projects have been active on the coast since 2008. These have focused on the impacts of predation and 1080 use on kea populations. Of the 199 kea monitored during 14, 1080 operations South Island wide, 24 died from ingesting 1080 pellets at 6 sites. Over half of these deaths occurred at 3 sites on the west coast; 7 kea at Franz Josef Glacier (2008), 8 at Okarito (2011) and 1 at Abbey Rocks (2014) DOC 2016. Why west coast kea appear to be disproportionately represented and more at risk than other kea populations is currently unknown. New SOP's for use of 1080 and timing of drops in kea habitat have been developed as a result to minimise risk to kea from 1080 as well as risk of nest predation. Although there is a strong anti-1080 sentiment on the coast, no practical alternative method of broad scale pest control has been put forward for trialling whilst bird repellents trialled in the field have been unsuccessful to date.

Human – kea conflict issues arising from kea interacting with and damaging human property, have also seriously impacted on local kea populations. In the early 1990's a local Fox Glacier resident shot and killed 33 kea and was prosecuted and fined (\$1,500). Other anecdotal reports of illegal killing of kea have not been substantiated. Kea issues in the townships of Fox and Franz as well as the glaciers are reported sporadically to the KCT or DOC.

Other causes of kea injury and death are vehicle strike (most recently on the main highway in Haast, December 2015), capture in traps used for control of possums and stoats and lead poisoning. Although lead is a known issue for kea throughout kea habitat and west coast kea have tested positive for the heavy metal, there has been no survey of local buildings to ascertain location of lead nail heads or flashings. Anecdotal reports have been received by the KCT of lead in old white bait huts while 12 of the 18 DOC huts maintained on conservation land in the Franz Josef and South Westland area were built prior to the 1990's, so may pose a risk to local kea.

## **Project Plan Focal Areas**

Discussions with the community and researchers over the years as well as recent meetings with the local community during the 2015 Winter Advocacy tour, highlighted the following areas locals wished to get involved with in regards kea conservation: i) Identification of local kea population status, ii) identification and reduction of local threats (predation, pest control, lead and conflict), iii) care of injured kea (through support of local community volunteer efforts), iv) identify status of local perceptions of kea and v) education of local residents and visitors to reduce conflict and exposure of kea to dangerous situations. These focal areas may be added to in the future.

- i) Identification of local kea population status

Aim: monitoring of Kea and kea nests on the West Coast to ascertain population status and predation threat over years

Method: identify kea with active radio transmitters and follow through subsequent breeding seasons. Active kea nests will then be identified and progress followed through the breeding season to ascertain productivity and predator impact. All progeny will be banded prior to fledging to enable visual ID, and data entered into the main kea database.

Funding: Funding to be secured for this project. Project management time will be supported via the DOC CF.

ii) Identification and reduction of local threats

Pest Control –

Aim: This project will look to a) Identify level of nest predation at monitored nests, b) support and expand local pest control efforts to benefit nesting kea, c) minimise unintentional injury and deaths to kea (both trapping and poison methods).

Method: Develop a plan to maximise the benefits of pest control to nesting kea and minimise any negative impacts on the species.

Funding: DOC CF funding to develop an initial plan to action the above project.

Lead Poisoning – Although lead poisoning has been known to effect kea across the South Island and more locally on the west coast (ie kea which have died have returned high blood lead levels when tested), there has been no survey of lead building materials to ascertain amount and location in the local environment.

Aim: Identify lead presence in west coast buildings and remove.

Method: Log location of west coast huts and buildings built prior to the 1990's and a) survey for lead content, b) develop a plan for lead removal and c) apply for funding and community support to action this (materials and volunteer input).

Funding: Plan development funded through the DOC CF (CEC position). Funding for lead removal to be secured as required.

Conflict – Due to the relatively recent and high level conflict issues with local residents and kea, it is important to ascertain the current perceptions of kea and establish whether there are any current issues which need to be resolved

Aim: Investigate current perceptions of kea in the area.

Method: Talk to local residents about local views on kea and any unreported issues. If conflict is seen to be an issue, extend the Conflict Resolution programme into the area.

Funding: Initial discussions and report funded through the DOC CF. Additional funding to be secured as required.

iii) **Care of Injured Kea**

Aim: In the first instance a fund is to be set up to take donations to support volunteer efforts to access medical care for injured kea. This will be driven by the KCT and be used for the following purposes:

- Reimbursement of travel costs (petrol) on production of receipt/s;

- Purchase of any equipment (carry cages etc), expendables (food and hydration) to support holding and transport of kea (any proposed purchases must be cleared first to ensure there are sufficient funds available);
- Development of veterinary register (list of vets able to provide initial and long-term medical support for kea)
- Process for transporting kea to specialist veterinary facilities (Massey University (Palmerston Nth), the Nest (Wellington Zoo)), Vet Ent (Queenstown) or the South Island Wildlife Hospital (ChCh));
- Develop local SOP with community stakeholders for dealing with injured kea

Funding: a crowd sourced funding page to be set up to collect funds to support volunteers transporting kea to receive medical treatment. This fund will be promoted on a regular basis throughout the year.

Development of Injured kea SOP will be supported through the DOC CCPF Strategic plan funds and DOC CF Community - Kea Project Plan.

**iv) identify status of local resident perceptions of kea**

Aim: to understand local resident perceptions to kea to enable better targeting of resources.

Method: develop confidential online/hardcopy survey and promote during annual Winter Tour.

Results to be utilised to direct local conflict resolution and education/advocacy programme.

Funding: this project will be funded through the DOC CF – Community – Kea Project Plan.

**v) Education of local residents and visitors to reduce conflict and exposure of kea to dangerous situations.**

Aim: to increase public awareness of the endangered status and threats to kea and to reduce the incidence of inappropriate behaviour and conflict. Main education points to cover a) kea are endangered and fully protected, b) no feeding of kea, c) conflict resolution and d) call to action.

Method: The project aims will be achieved through the following methods:

- Supply of kea education resources to outdoor focused companies
- Development of appropriate resources for local towns where necessary
- Promotion of kea sightings reporting (via website or phone app)
- Promotion of kea proofing database and conflicts programme

Funding: this project will be funded through the DOC CF – Community – Kea Project Plan.