

Media Release

## **2010 NEW ZEALAND TOURISM AWARDS WINNERS**

Wilson's Abel Tasman National Park are winners with distinction in the Visitor Attraction and Experience category for small and medium business at the 2010 NZ Tourism Industry Awards. With the theme of Innovation for Success, the Wilson's winning entry featured their transformation of the visitor experience in the country's finest coastal National Park at the top of the South Island.

Chief Executive Officer for Wilson's Abel Tasman, Mr Darryl Wilson says, "After 35 years as tourism operators, we are delighted to still be recognised as innovators in the industry. It takes courage to move from the comfort of business as usual to a leadership position. These awards are timely as the industry reinvents itself to offer more environmentally and socially connected world-class experiences."

The Wilsons started their tourism operation with a single passenger launch service into Abel Tasman National Park in 1977. They now offer experiences from 2 hours to 5 days in the Park with cruise, water taxi, walking and guided walking and/or sea kayaking options. Overnight trips are hosted at Beachfront Lodges, built by the family on their historic freehold land in the Abel Tasman.

The Wilson family's ancestors have been welcoming visitors to the region since 1841. Through eight successive generations, they have witnessed the change in attitude from the settlers' desire to "break in the land" to modern conservation imperatives. Through development of their tourism business, the family undertakes the responsibility of caring for the environment as an essential part of their visitors' experience, illustrating Tourism New Zealand's values of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and manaakitanga (hospitality).

Wilson's Abel Tasman's development of the commercial transport infrastructure to the Park, and associated marketing initiatives, led the world to discover the many attractions of the region. As other tourism operators saw the opportunities offered by ease of access to the Park and proximity to the city of Nelson, commercial activity developed without formal processes to plan or manage visitor numbers.

As the increasing number of visitors started to cause disruptions to isolated communities at Marahau and Torrent Bay, the Wilson family recognised the need to introduce new itineraries to transform visitor interaction with the Park. This required development of a new type of passenger ferry, designed to overcome problems associated with boat transfers in the shallow, sandy estuaries of the coast with one of the largest tidal ranges in the country: up to 4.8 metres.

Research and trials showed that one large vessel was preferable to a fleet of smaller boats to provide levels of comfort, safety and efficient use of resources crucial to provide the range of itineraries required to attract visitors to the region. The Wilsons searched the world and found the hull ideally suited to their needs, right here in New Zealand. The semi-displacement catamaran hull was designed and built in Whangarei and Auckland, first commissioned by America's Cup challenger, Origin, for their support vessels.

Transforming the visitor experience with their state-of-the-art Vista Cruise catamaran illustrates the Wilson family's legacy of innovative thinking that has made them key players in raising the profile of the Nelson region from a local holiday location into an international destination. As long-term residents of the region, they are dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of tourism for future generations.

In 2008, John Wilson was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for his contribution to tourism.