

THE CROWN JEWELS VS UNKNOWN RICHES

By Tim Cossar, CEO, Tourism Industry Association

New Zealand's national parks are the crown jewels in driving international perception of this country's green and clean image. Considering mining these parks potentially damages our reputation, affecting not only tourism but many other industries.

Like the general public, Tourism Industry Association (TIA) members are divided on the issue of mining. Some consider it an opportunity for New Zealand to grow its economic wealth, some consider it will impact negatively on the tourism industry and therefore the income our industry generates.

We are not against mining, but we do oppose mining in national parks. Mining on Schedule 4 land outside those parks needs to be carefully considered on a case by case basis.

The real opportunity created by the Government's mining proposal is that we can have a structured debate about the values that will underpin New Zealand's future and how this country wants to be positioned 50 or even 100 years from now.

In many ways New Zealand's identity has been forged through tough decisions on contentious issues, such as our 'no nukes' policy which has had a long term impact on building our reputation as a country with environmental integrity and one with the image of having pristine open spaces. Over the last 10 years, the 100% Pure New Zealand brand campaign along with images from movies such as Lord of the Rings has added to this perception of our clean, green world image.

Other businesses and brands have not been slow in picking up on this unique market position. Steinlager, Icebreaker, Anchor butter, ZESPRI, Trilogy, Comvita are all examples of fantastic New Zealand companies and products that have openly capitalised on this strong national brand positioning and have been successful in the international market.

The dent in perception of the brand could have significant financial implications for the tourism industry, and for these other industries which market off our green clean brand.

According to the Ministry of Tourism research, 70 percent of international visitors come here to take part in nature based activities. These 'nature based' visitors also spend more than other visitors.

The tourism industry itself contributes more than 9.1% of gross domestic product (GDP), reaching \$21.7 billion in visitor expenditure for the year ending March 2009. At \$59 million per day in expenditure, with the visitor experience largely relying on maximising the green, clean brand, the financial risk of impacting on this industry is very real, with long term consequences.

In TIA's submission on the Government's mining proposals, we ask that the Government weigh up the known financial contributions to the New Zealand economy, with the national parks at the very

forefront of New Zealand's tourism brand offer, against the unknown value of the minerals beneath them. We are going to ensure our voice is heard into government on this issue.