

## **The Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust**

### **Its inception, structure, and operation 2006-2020**

#### **Formation of Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust**

It was Lindsay McKenzie the Chief Executive of ES who first raised the idea of forming a Trust to deal with the wilding tree issues at Mid Dome. He suggested that a Trust, representing all the stakeholders affected by the wilding tree problem at Mid Dome, would be able to seek funding from sources that were not available to central or local government. He did this after exploratory discussions with the then Chief Executive of LINZ (Brendan Boyle – who originally came from Winton). They proposed that ES and LINZ could provide a lump sum of ‘seed funding’ of \$300,000 each to get the Trust started. In addition, LINZ would provide around \$100,000 and ES \$50,000 a year as ongoing operational funding for the duration of the project. This was a highly creative and courageous initiative on the part of these leaders and provided a strong support for the concept of a Trust. The gestation of this idea probably took over a year where the key focus was on the creation of a Deed of Trust to set out the objectives of the Trust, its composition and rules. Naturally, this initiative was embraced enthusiastically by the members of the existing, informal Mid Dome Wilding Trees Management Group who saw this as the only way to break the funding impasse the issue was stuck in.

On 30 August 2006, the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust was launched. This took place at a public meeting in the Royal Mail Hotel in Lumsden which was attended by all the parties involved and included the Minister for LINZ, Hon David Parker. Fig. 1. below shows ES Council Chair Stuart Collie signing the Trust Deed as the Settlor with Lindsay McKenzie on his left and Sir Alan Mark a foundation Trustee on his right.



Fig. 1. Signing of the Mid Dome Deed of Trust

Five Trustees were appointed as shown in Fig. 2. below. These represented a range of interests including the local community and landowners as well as national stakeholders. Ali Timms, the ES Regional Councillor representing the local Eastern Dome constituency, was elected as Chair. Essentially the new Trust took over the role and function of the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Management Group but now it was a formal entity which could legally hold and disburse funds. Continuity was provided by Ali Timms who had been the Chair of the Group since taking over from Regional Councillor Ted Loose 2002. There was also the ongoing involvement of agency representatives from ES, DOC and LINZ.

The composition of the Trust was remarkably stable in its first 10 years. Ali Timms has remained as the chair over the entire period and until 2017 Sir Alan Mark remained also a founding member. During this time various people have left and been replaced and the newcomers included Woody Rouse (very short), Michael Skerrett (Iwi), Mark Sutton, Ross Ramsay and Jeff Grant. Most recently Richard Bowman was appointed a Trustee after retirement from ES and Glenys Dickson joined in 2018.

The Trust also has a patron – Sam Neill the internationally famous and Queenstown-based actor. He very kindly agreed to take on this role after being approached by Sir Alan Mark. In his letter of acceptance, he said he was happy to lend his name to the Trust but did not expect to have direct involvement with the programme and in that respect, he has been true to his word.



Fig 2. Foundation Trustees: From left to right: Graeme Miller (DOC staff), John Aspinall (Trustee), Alison Broad (Trustee) Ali Timms (Trust Chair), Sir Alan Mark (Trustee), Robert Durling (Trustee)

The governance structure created may seem quite complex but has proved over time to be robust and has served all the parties well. This structure is presented diagrammatically below in Fig.3. as it was in 2019.

The key relationships between the Trust and the three long term funding partners, i.e., DOC, LINZ and ES were endorsed in MOUs between the parties. While these were deliberately not legally binding, they still provided a strong base for continuing collaboration and the means to address any problems that may arise. Initially these MOUs were renewed annually and although this practice has slipped over the years they are nonetheless still followed as each of the partners has continued their commitment to deal with wilding trees at Mid Dome.

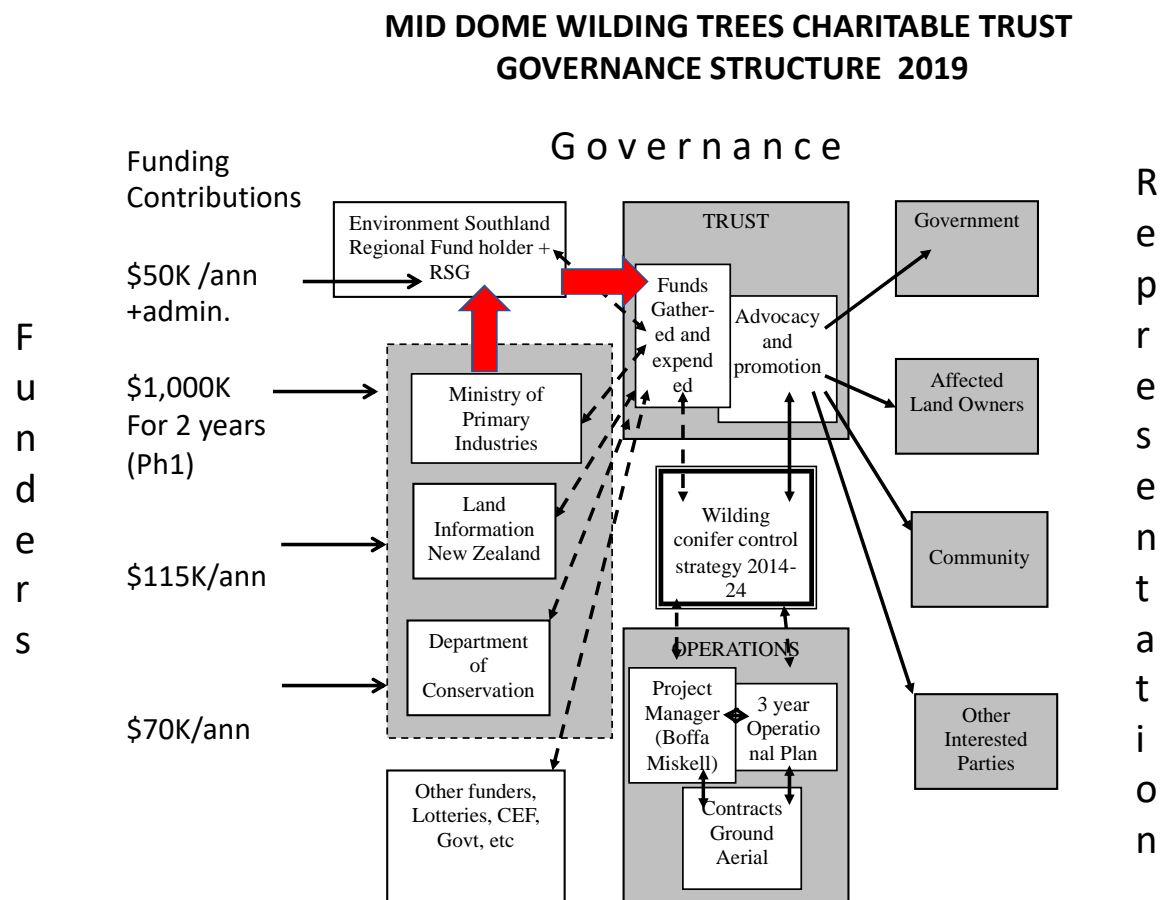


Fig.3 The Mid Dome Trust Governance structure in 2019

Under the structure the Trust takes responsibility for the overall governance of the programme and for attracting, holding and disbursing the funding required. The Trust takes a strategic, long term approach to managing wilding risk at Mid Dome. This involves focussing on the 'eradication' of wilding pines by providing control where it most effective irrespective of land tenure. This is termed by the Trust 'the ecological approach'. The work programme is based on a multi-year plan provided by a project manager which is suitably qualified to design, manage and report a major work programme. Initially DOC took on this role based on its historical involvement with wilding tree control at Mid Dome and elsewhere on its lands. This changed in 2014 when DOC opted out of the role which was then contracted out to a private

firm Boffa Miskell. The project manager subcontracts all of services required to deliver the wilding tree control which mainly entailed contracting out ground and aerial control works. The administration of the Trust's business was undertaken by Environment Southland mainly by the Biosecurity Division. This involved organising Trust meetings, taking minutes, holding the Trusts funds, making payments and financial reporting. It also assisted in technical matters and with the holding of volunteer workdays. Environment Southland's rationale for these contributions was that fostering a partnership, involving stakeholders and agencies, was not only providing a service to the regional community but it also offered the most cost effective means to meet its RPMS management responsibilities for *P contorta* and *P mugo* in the region.

The Governance structure and the long-term relationships between the partners has endured and provided the critical foundation for the Mid Dome programme which has now operated effectively for over 10 years.

## Funding

At the time of its formation in 2006 the Trust had a substantial 'fighting fund' of \$600,000 provided by LINZ and ES. It would also receive base funding of around \$380,000 from the three agency partners. Initially this involved \$50,000 from ES, \$110,000 from LINZ and up to \$213,000 from DOC much of which was 'in kind' through the provision of project management services. When DOC presented its 12-year programme to achieve eradication at Mid Dome in 2008 it estimated a total control cost of \$8.6M out to 2018/19. This indicated that an average expenditure of at least \$700,000 would be required or less than half of the annual base funding. The chronic funding deficit in Fig. 4. below which was prepared in around 2008 demonstrates the critical need for additional funding. The shortfall would need to be made up through fund raising.

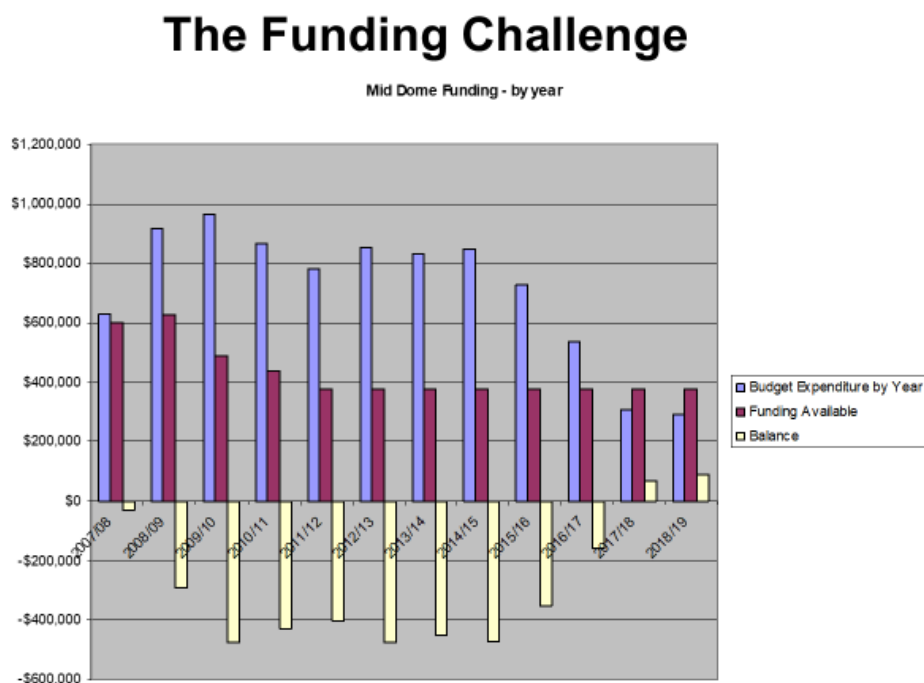


Fig. 4. The chronic funding deficit as seen in around 2008.

DOC staff led the initial bids and the first few years the Trust was successful in winning a grant of \$300,000 from the Lotteries Commission, around \$54,000 from the DOC biodiversity condition fund and another from the Ministry for the Environment – Community Environment Fund of \$300,000 over three years. These funds were useful but only provided stop gap measures. The programme was boosted significantly when after considerable lobbying from the Trust and ES Government made a one-off grant \$1.2M available to Mid Dome (as well as \$0.9M to the Wakatipu Wilding Conifer Trust) in the 2013 budget. Although this came as a very welcome surprise it had been foreshadowed by some discreet communications from Hon Bill English's office. In 2016 the Trust's Funding Coordinator – Karen Maw successfully sought a second grant of \$400,000 to be spent over two years, from the Lotteries Commission.

One of the major impediments to the early fund raising was the lack of a proven aerial boom spraying tool that could eliminate the 700 odd hectares of closed canopy wilding trees that comprised the critical high-altitude seed sources. These were the cause of distant spread down wind. This prevented the Trust from being able to state in a bid that it was able to provide a definitive, long term solution to the problem. An aerial boom spraying solution did not start to emerge until around 2013 and is still evolving.

The funding situation did not really improve until around 2016 when Government made \$16M over 4 years available nationally through the NZ Wilding Conifer Control Programme. This funding was provided by Government because of the recognition of environmental and economic costs of wilding conifers presented in the NZ Wilding Conifer Management Strategy. It was launched in 2014 and promoted the key message - "The right tree in the right place". The strategy was developed over several years by Biosecurity NZ/MPI in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and industry sectors represented through the NZ Wilding Conifers Management Group. Its main aim was to generate awareness of the wilding conifer threat nationally and to improve coordination between land holders, communities, the farming and forestry sectors and both local and central Government agencies. Given that its focus was not about funding it came as a surprise when the then National-led government decided to allocate significant funding to help achieve the strategy's goals in 2016.

Initially Mid Dome was only able to get around \$90,000 in the first year because as a mature project it did not meet the funding criteria. These were to target low-density but high-risk infestations to protect very large areas of vulnerable land. However, after heavy lobbying from the Trust and ES and others this amount was raised to \$2M to be spent over 2017/18 and 2018/19. This finally got the programme up to an acceptable level of control funding for two years at least after a long period of chronic underfunding. It is hoped that Government will extend this funding for up to another decade to solve to the wilding problem nationally.

The actual direct operational expenditure (minus project management costs) for the Mid Dome Programme from 2006 to 2018 is shown in Fig. 5. below. The most important feature is the funding boost received in 2017-18 from the national Wilding Conifer Control Programme which finally got expenditure above \$1M/annum. This would continue for one more year at that level. In the 2020/21 budget as part of a major Government package to stimulate the economy after the Covid-19 epidemic a major boost was given to national funding for wilding conifer management which should allow the Mid Dome programme to be adequately funded through till 2024/25

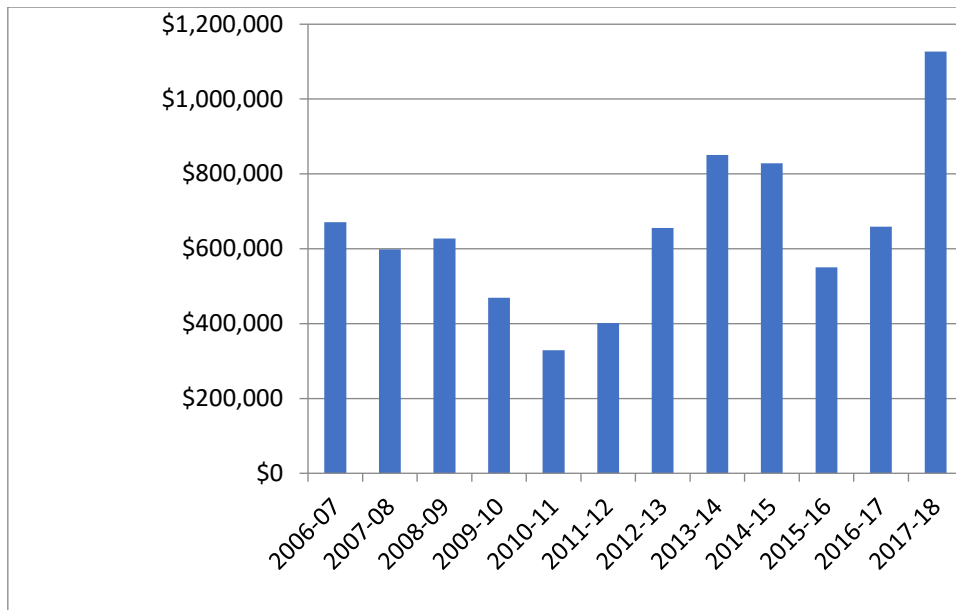


Fig.5. Actual operational expenditure for Mid Dome 2006-2018

The total expenditure at Mid Dome from the early 1990s to 2018 is \$8,795,173 of which \$7,766,173 has been spent by the Trust since the 2007.

### Concluding Thoughts

The operational achievements of the programme so far are summarised in the Fig. 6. below.

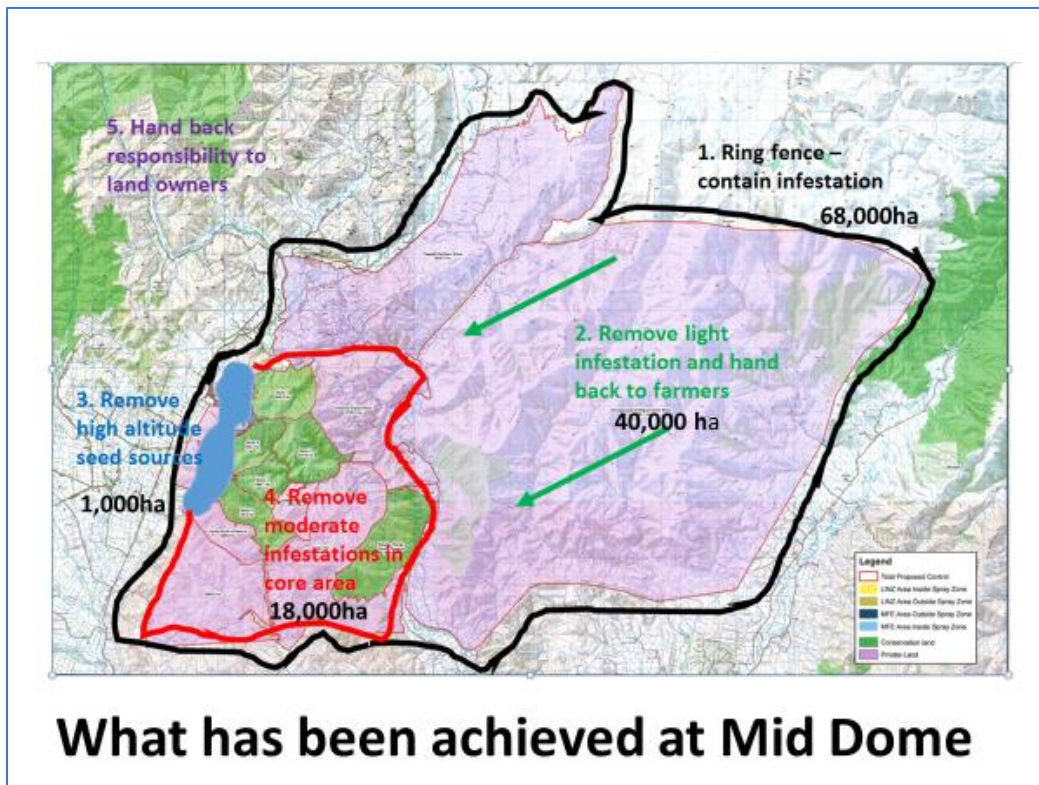


Fig. 6.

Explanation of Fig. 6.

Phase 1. The first phase began in the mid-2000s and identified the boundaries of the infestation, especially downwind to the east. This then allowed the distant spread of wilding *Pinus contorta* from Mid Dome to be contained or 'ring fenced'.

Phase 2 To remove all of the scattered trees on the land east of the Matura River. This was done over two seasons using the 'skid hopping method' where ground crews were carried by helicopter to cut down every tree found. By 2008 around 40,000 ha of cleared land was handed to the respective land holders to take responsibility for any residual issues.

Phase 3. Focuses on removing the high-altitude seed source infestations on the western faces and upper slopes of the Mid Dome – Cupola Ridge. This involves around 1000 ha where the original plantings took place. This area provides the high risk take off points for windblown seed. Work has involved intensive ground control and spraying closed canopy infestations.

Phase 4. Involves the removing infestations in the rest of the 18,000ha core area west of the Matura River particularly in the Dome Creek and the Tomogalak catchments. There has also been a long history of ground control on low density areas and more recently extensive aerial boom spraying of dense infestations. and Aerial Basal Bark Application (ABBA) is now used wherever possible to control scattered trees and light infestations over the bulk of the area. This is expected to take several years to complete as infested areas require an initial control then at least two further cycles of maintenance control 3 – 5 years apart. This is to remove any new trees that germinate before the seed bank in the soil is exhausted. It assumes there will be no new seed blown into the control area.

Phase 5. Will be complete when all land in the programme area is handed back to the respective land holders to manage any residual trees under the Regional Pest Management Plan. This will require land holders to be ready to take over when necessary and this will require considerable consultation and preparation. This, however, will depend on a number of factors.

By 2018 the programme had almost completed Phase 3 and was making good progress with Phase 4.

To achieve the Programme completion target by 2031 several critical factors must be recognised.

1. The Programme must obtain the funding it needs to take each phase of the operation through to completion. It is estimated this will cost around \$8m on top of the almost \$10M spent to date. The Mid Dome Trust must continue to raise whatever funds it can from already heavily subscribed public and private sources. However, most importantly it must seek the bulk of its funding from Government through the NZ Wilding Conifers Control Programme. If this money cannot be provided, then the programme will fail and the sunk costs to date will be lost. (See Fig. 7.)

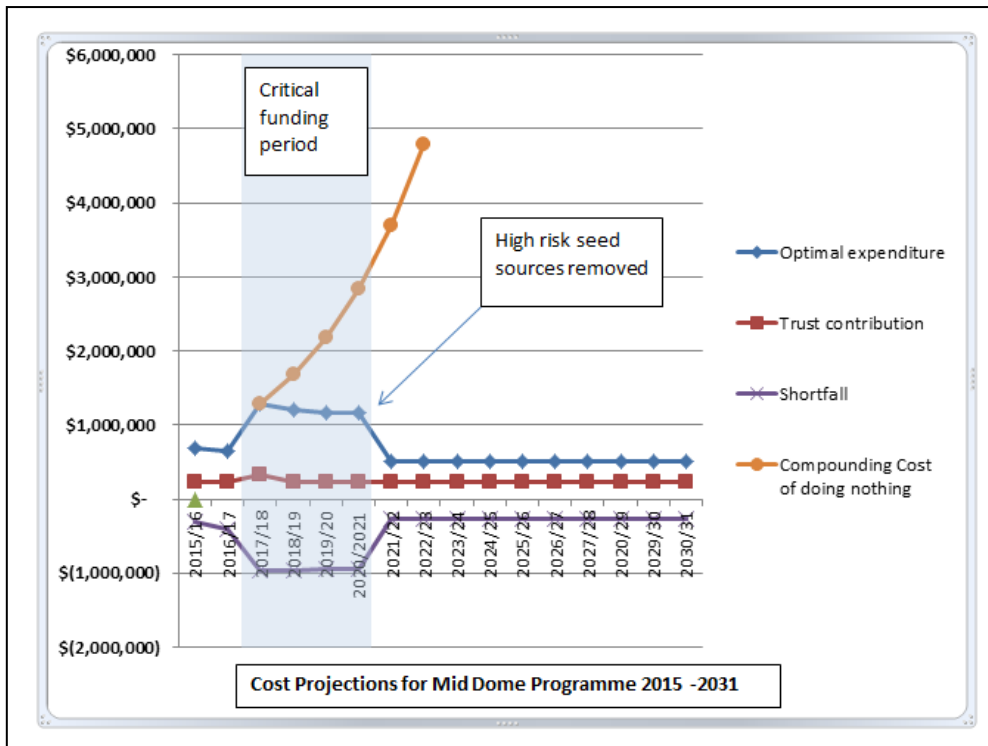


Fig. 7. This shows an estimate of the funding needed to complete the Mid Dome programme. It indicates that if there was no funding from 2017/18 onward how costs of doing nothing would escalate exponentially - based on a compounding factor of 30%/ann.

2. Aerial spraying methods are expected achieve high mortalities (90%+) from the initial treatments. However, there is evidence at Mid Dome that some sprayed areas have not achieved this target and that some form of retreatment will be needed. This could add substantial new costs to the Programme.
3. On the positive side the development and implementation of improved control methods is expected increase progress toward the completion goal. The growing use of ABBA for dealing with light infestations in place of ground control is showing excellent benefits. It is also hoped that an aerial herbicide treatment can be developed for infestations at less than 80% canopy cover. If off-target effects can be minimised this could provide a very cost-effective tool for second and third cycle maintenance.
4. Land holders must be made aware of their need to take over responsibility for long term management after the completion of the programme and plan and prepare to meet their obligations well before the handover date.
5. It is critical that the Trust maintains its strong collaborative relationships with its stakeholders and the Government agencies and continues to advocate strongly for the support and resources it needs to complete the programme.

The Mid Dome Programme has been highly successful to date. Accordingly, it is recognised nationally as a leader in community-based wilding conifer control. This resulted from its



developing and maintaining an effective partnership of diverse stakeholders and agencies to address a large scale, long term environmental problem.

The critical success factors in the Programme has not only been the leadership provided by the Trust but also the ongoing support of the government agencies, i.e., DOC, LINZ and MPI as well as Environment Southland. In particular, the political, administrative, technical and funding support provided by ES since 1999 has been fundamental to the development and performance of the Mid Dome Trust. Without this support it would have struggled in difficult times and would not have been able to focus so strongly on its strategic goals. In providing this support the Council recognised that it was contributing strongly to its own objectives to manage *Pinus contorta* and *mugo* under its Regional Pest Management Strategy.

Richard Bowman

August 2020

Please note that the views expressed here are mine alone based on my recollection of events. Any errors or omissions are entirely my responsibility.