

# Destination Coromandel

## Product Development and Industry Capability – Feasibility Study

Pūkoro Mirānda Shorebird Centre

Final Report - October 2021



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## Executive Summary

Developed in partnership with Destination Coromandel, the Hauraki District Council, and the Hauraki Tourism Action Group, this report provides a feasibility study regarding the potential redevelopment of the Pūkoro Mirando Shorebird Centre (PMSC) into a world class eco-tourism, conservation, and education experience. As part of an agreed two-step process, its main purpose is to investigate the potential options available to reinvigorate the visitor experience at the site and provide a recommendation concerning whether the second component of this process (a full feasibility assessment and business case) should subsequently be commissioned.

The report first 'sets the scene' by listing the main goals of the work to date, with the long-term welfare of the shorebirds and their precious habitat being the first and foremost priority of all parties involved. After outlining the main factors considered when developing the concepts contained, Section 1 ends by providing an overview of the target markets identified, which range from 'passers-by', holiday makers and the local community, to nature lovers, birdwatchers, education groups, and group tours.

Section 2 then introduces the main opportunity, that being to move the PMSC towards a regenerative tourism model by broadening the visitor experience to incorporate the wider ecological context of the shorebirds and their habitat, with climate change and the impacts of coastal inundation being key factors within this. It is recommended that this conservational approach be combined with the introduction of stories and mātauranga (traditional knowledge) of Māori culture to offer an experience that balances western science with traditional knowledge, with the interconnectedness between the natural world and human civilisation being core to both the experience, and the conservational message being delivered. The report continues by describing the 'building blocks' that would need to be worked through to turn the above opportunity into a reality, and suggests some potential conservation, cultural, educational and commercial partnerships which may help with this. The section finishes by exploring some of the potential outcomes of this regenerative model, with benefits identified across the four wellbeing pillars of environmental, cultural, social, and economic.

Section 3 explores what steps and enhancements should be considered in turning the above model into reality. The main components of this being:

- The refurbishment of the PMSC visitor centre to provide an eye-catching and compelling visitor attraction in of itself
- The development of supporting infrastructure to facilitate an enhanced appeal and visitor experience
- The introduction of both 'core' experiences and 'supporting' services to provide greater awareness of the shorebird, its habitat and the positive impacts the visitor contribution is having.

Section 4 lists the main challenges and concerns that have been identified by the work to date. Along with the long-term viability of the site due to future coastal inundation, the main concern highlighted is an uncertainty on how comfortable and committed the PMNT are themselves with the proposed regenerative tourism concept.

The report finishes by offering the view that there is indeed the potential for the PMSC experience to answer the fundamental objectives of the brief. However, it warns that if these objectives are to be one day realised, it is essential that the PMNT are 100% committed in their view of tourism and the wider visitor economy as a powerful long-term enabler that is closely aligned and symbiotic with their overarching conservation goals. The report therefore ends with the final recommendation that while the PMNT should absolutely be supported in continuing to develop a fantastic visitor experience offering within the wider Coromandel area, no further feasibility or business case work should be undertaken or facilitated for the PMSC as a hero visitor attraction for the area until this fundamental position is made clear.



## Section 1: Setting the Scene



### Introduction

Facilitated by Destination Coromandel, this project has been funded through the *Strategic Tourism Asset Protection Programme (STAPP)* as one of the key projects selected within the *Product Development and Industry Capability* category. Developed in partnership with the Hauraki District Council and the Hauraki Tourism Action Group, it seeks to help the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust (PMNT) identify the opportunities available to develop their existing Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre (PMSC) into a world class eco-tourism, conservation, and education experience.

Most importantly, this project strives to ensure the long-term welfare of the shorebirds and their precious habitat through the development of a successful regenerative tourism model.

This is first about how visitors can help the shorebirds, then how the shorebirds can help enlighten visitors to be environmental advocates.

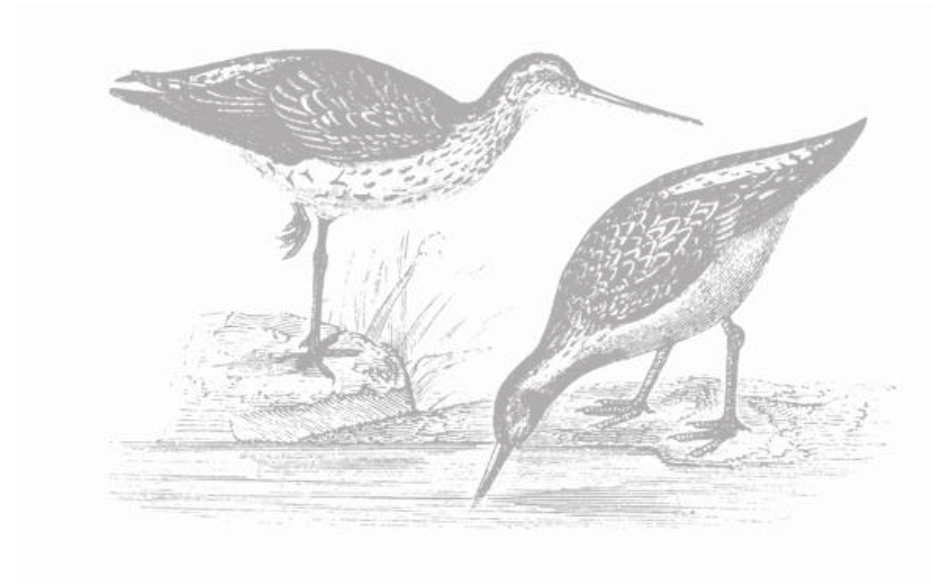
## Original Goals of Project

- Identify deliverables for a world class eco-tourism, conservation, and education experience.
- Determine how to develop a compelling attraction that appeals to a wide audience, beyond only conservationists and birders, to become a bucket list attraction in the region.
- Design a commercially successful and quality experience that delivers significant benefits to the natural environment, iwi, local communities and enhances *The Coromandel good for your soul* brand
- Identify and implement suitable income-generating experiences and offerings to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the PMSC.
- Renew the PMSC visitor experience to ensure it is fit for purpose for the PMNT, visitors and research partners.
- Ensure ongoing positive and synergistic relationships with key stakeholders including Destination Coromandel, Department of Conservation, Hauraki and Thames-Coromandel District Councils, local tourism operators and accommodation providers, neighbours, and Hauraki iwi (e.g., Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Maru and Ngāti Pāoa).

## Agreed Approach:

TRC's solutions will be practical and market oriented to ensure a visit to the Centre has broad appeal. Sustainability will be at the centre of our assessment of the opportunities. Our methodology is based on a financially prudent approach, which is to separate the project into two stages:

1. Investigate options to reinvigorate the visitor experience at the site and recommend solutions and, if feasible,
2. Invest further in developing a full feasibility assessment and business case (please note: this phase has yet to be activated).



## Considerations:

### In developing concepts for the future of the PMSC visitor experience, the following main factors have been considered:

- The ongoing wellbeing of the shorebirds and their natural habitat is the absolute priority for all those involved.
- The key requirements outlined by Destination Coromandel, the PMNT, the wider panel, and local tourism and hospitality operators:
  - Develop a compelling attraction that appeals to a wide audience, beyond only conservationists and birders, to become a bucket list attraction in the region.
  - Design of a commercially successful and quality experience that enhances the local eco-system.
  - Deliver significant benefits to the natural environment, iwi, local communities and enhance *The Coromandel good for your soul* brand.
  - A financially self-sufficient operation with no additional financial burden placed on local government or ratepayers.
- Locational impacts and limitations:
  - Sea level rise and increased inundation risk for both visitor facilities and habitat areas.
  - Planning, resource and building consent constraints.
  - Alleviating future health & safety concerns, most notably road safety with relation to vehicle and pedestrian movements.
- The visitor experience:
  - Location of the existing centre some two kilometres from bird watching areas.
  - Ability to facilitate enhanced visitor experiences.
  - Location relevant to the popular Hauraki Rail Trail.
- Wider benefits to community:
  - Impact on community wellbeing pillars (environmental, economic, social, cultural)
  - Potential partnerships and synergies with neighbours, local businesses, trusts, and aligned organisations.
- Engagement with mana whenua:
  - Throughout the development of this report both TRC Tourism and Destination Coromandel have been mindful of the importance of appropriate engagement with mana whenua. The PMNT have assured both parties throughout this process that they are comfortable with engaging representatives of Ngāti Pāoa first and foremost, which has been respected.
- Likelihood/sustainability of funding:
  - Ability to attract funding for both development and ongoing operations.



## Target Market

When developing these recommendations, the following target segments were identified as being potentially available to the PMSC:

- 1. Passers-by:** Visitors going past who are looking for a place to stop. This audience are likely to be either driving past the PMSC on a daytrip, as part of a small touring group (e.g., car clubs), have been staying in a motorhome at a nearby freedom camping spot, or have just started biking the Hauraki Rail Trail. They may have a general interest in nature but are typically just looking for a place for a quick stop (rest/bathroom break/coffee/food etc). Though the most obvious of this segment would be those travelling directly past the PMSC, this could also extend to those travelling on SH2 – a main entrance point and arterial link from Auckland to the Coromandel.
- 2. Holiday Makers:** Visitors staying somewhere on the Shorebird Coast looking for something to do for a morning or afternoon. They are likely to be either ‘silver surfers’ (retired or semi-retired in a motorhome or local accommodation provider), or parents/grandparents with young children staying at the Miranda Holiday Park. They may have a general interest in nature, but are more likely interested in doing some form of activity close to where they are staying.
- 3. Local + Wider Community:** Live in the local area and want to increase their involvement with the PMSC either through regular visits, volunteering, or participating in events. Includes both the local and wider (Hauraki/Thames) community looking for something to recommend to/take visiting friends and relatives.
- 4. Nature Lovers:** Visiting the area partly due to the shorebird watching opportunities available. They have a genuine interest in nature and birds and enjoy learning more about them and meeting other enthusiasts. This group would happily spend several hours exploring the PMSC and may in fact visit multiple times over the course of their few days spent in the area.
- 5. Birdwatchers/Twitchers:** Travelled to the area specifically to visit the PMSC and experience the shorebirds and their natural habitat. They will likely spend several days on the Shorebird Coast and be largely focused on optimising this experience. Most likely to stay at the PMSC accommodation.
- 6. Education Groups:** Intermediate, high school or tertiary education providers within an hour’s drive of the PMSC interested in a day trip teaching students about nature/conservation, history, and/or geography.
- 7. Group Tours:** Hosted groups of 10 – 50 passengers, they may be from a retirement village or other senior-focused organisation (e.g., Lions or U3A) who are visiting on a daytrip from Auckland/Hamilton, or on a coach trip passing through the area as part of a larger itinerary within the Coromandel.
- 8. Corporate Groups:** Small corporate groups looking for somewhere to host an overnight break-out team session or mini-conference.



## Section 2: Developing a world-class visitor attraction



### **Objective:**

Outline the opportunity available to create a world class eco-tourism, conservation, and education experience that appeals to a wide audience to become a bucket-list attraction in the region.

### **Key Components:**

1. The Opportunity
2. The Building Blocks
3. Collaborative Partnerships
4. Potential Outcomes



## The Opportunity

The Shorebird Coast is naturally stunning, but it's in trouble. Being extremely low-lying, it will be (and already is) one of the first places in New Zealand to directly bare the disastrous effects of climate change, and the associated coastal inundation, storm surges, and environmental imbalance/destruction that comes with it. If left unchecked, this will of course have huge repercussions for both people and nature in the future, with the shorebirds and their habitat one of the first things in the firing line.

But this weakness can become a strength. Utilising the shorebirds as a visible, likeable, and tangible centrepiece to the cause, the PMNT together with the wider Pūkorooro Miranda community, and in true partnership with mana whenua, can attract, entertain, educate, and inspire visitors to do their part in both combating climate change specifically, and conserving and restoring the natural environment in general.

To harness this opportunity, the PMNT should consider broadening the PMSC visitor experience to include:

- ***The wider ecological and conservational context:*** As one of New Zealand's lowest-lying land areas, the global climate change crisis is extremely relevant to the Pūkorooro Miranda area. Impacts such as coastal inundation (sea-level rise), increased damaging effects of weather events, and ecological impacts of warming wetland habitats are all having a direct effect on both the shorebirds, and humans as co-inhabitants. With these issues becoming more and more impactful, and an increasing trend generally for visitors to seek experiences that have a positive effect on people and place, there is an opportunity to increase appeal by including more awareness, educational, and restorative elements within the wider shorebird experience.

- ***Mana whenua stories and mātauranga:*** The PMNT are very fortunate to have been offered stories and accompanying mātauranga (traditional Māori knowledge) surrounding the shorebirds from the local Ngāti Pāoa people. A key strength of mātauranga is the interconnectedness of things - taking a holistic view of the natural world, and humans' role within it. As pointed out in one relevant publication, when combined with western science '*There is an enormous potential for the use of mātauranga Māori to more widely enhance the understanding of aquatic ecosystems, underpin culturally appropriate restoration approaches, and provide a more holistic and integrated perspective for activity in this realm*<sup>1</sup>. This same thinking can easily be extended to the shorebird visitor experience, with the inclusion of Māori culture and values deepening the experience dramatically, particularly for international visitors.

Though the shorebirds and their wellbeing should remain at its absolute heart, as self-described 'naturalists' concerned with all aspects of the natural world, this broader ecological approach is theoretically well within the PMNT's scope of focus. It would enable the PMNT to pull together both the resident and conservation community around them as they work collaboratively towards a collective goal, ensuring the visitor centre becomes pivotal to the social fabric of the Northern Hauraki region, and empowering the PMNT to share with visitors a unique and very special experience. If executed correctly, it would also ensure these same visitors represent a key economic, social, and cultural enabler for this local community as they help to protect the shorebirds and their habitat, and enhance the wider Pūkorooro Miranda environment for all in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research - Mātauranga Māori: shaping marine and freshwater futures.

## The Building Blocks

While the above opportunity is viewed as an exciting idea on paper, there is of course many requirements that would need to be discussed, designed, and realised before this can become a reality.

### **Governance:**

Before anything else, the PMNT must find agreement in themselves, and ensure they have absolute clarity and confidence in a united vision of harnessing the visitor economy as an enabler of their aspirations for the shorebirds, their habitat, and the surrounding community. To ensure this, a robust strategic plan would need to be developed - one that clearly articulates the current and future (desired) states, identifies the challenges and opportunities involved, and acknowledges the resources and actions required to overcome or achieve these.

### **Visitor Experience:**

While the shorebirds provide their own natural show, and the surrounding environment offers beauty and tranquillity, there is an opportunity to build upon these core assets to ensure visitors are left with an experience that will entertain, educate, and inspire them to help ensure positive environmental outcomes for the shorebirds and their habitat. Section 3 explores these opportunities in more detail.

### **Infrastructure & Facilities:**

As made clear in the brief, the PMSC itself needs to represent an eye-catching and compelling visitor attraction, as well as efficiently facilitate the wider activities of the PMNT and shorebird centre experience and remaining fit for purpose into the future. Section 3 also looks at the requirements and opportunities for both the PMSC and the supporting infrastructure and facilities in more detail.

### **Funding & Support:**

Securing adequate and sustainable funding channels is of course a critical element for both the redevelopment and ongoing operation of the PMSC experience. Any redevelopment of the PMSC must not be a source of additional financial burden to the local community and be as economically self-sufficient as possible. The broadening of the visitor experience to facilitate wider environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes will provide the PMNT improved access to additional funding channels and enhanced levels of support. Examples of these funding channels could include:

- Local and central government grants and funding (tourism, economic development, community development, and nature/conservation based funding)
- Philanthropic trusts
- Corporate sponsorship
- Private benefactors
- Increased membership fees
- Visitor donations/ticket sales.

If the right strategic partners and stakeholders are identified, engaged, and leveraged this wider approach could also attract further support via non-financial forms of resourcing. A more in-depth look at potential partners is explored in the section below, but some examples include:

- Expertise and insights into best-practise conservation research, techniques, and processes
- Enhancements to the visitor experience via the sharing of specialist knowledge
- Provision of staff and/or volunteers
- Promotion of PMSC experience through communication channels.

**Mechanisms of delivery:**

If the PMNT are to take the tourism opportunity seriously, they will need to equip themselves with the right people and processes to successfully grow and manage the visitor offering. Key functions such as sales, marketing, ticketing, guide training and book-keeping will need to be considered with appropriate resourcing and systems put in place.

**Sales & Marketing:**

Developing a world-class visitor experience is pointless if no-one knows about it. The PMNT will need to develop a comprehensive sales and marketing plan which clearly identifies who their potential visitors are, how they will reach them, and what message(s) they need to communicate. With collaborative partnerships also being of high importance to the broader approach recommended, the development of a stakeholder engagement plan should also be considered.



## Collaborative Partnerships

### *Conservation (Shorebirds, Wetland Protection & Climate Change)*

It has been recognised that the PMNT is by its very nature a group of 'naturalists'. Whilst the shorebirds are very much at the forefront of the group's interests and efforts, they are enthusiasts concerned with the wider natural world. The following aligned organisations and groups could provide value to the PMNT, both by enhancing the PMSC visitor experience and educational opportunities on offer, and by finding synergies in coordinated ecological research and conservation efforts.

- **Department of Conservation (DoC):** DoC is currently managing several significant environmental issues in the surrounding area, including drainage issues, pest weeds and fish, sedimentation problems, botulism and algal bloom, and biodiversity issues. These issues are either directly or indirectly related to climate change and sea-level rise and affect the shorebirds in some way.
- **Living Water Project:** An existing supporter of the PMNT, Living Water is a partnership between DoC and Fonterra, designing and trialling solutions to restore and reconnect a rural freshwater ecosystem and sensitive coastal environment using a community-led 'mountains to sea' approach.
- **International Shorebird Organisations:**
  - *The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership:* Is made up of partners from both government and non-governmental organizations from across the U.S.A. who pooled their resources and expertise to develop a conservation strategy for migratory shorebirds and the habitats upon which they depend.
  - *Shorebird Conservation Society:* A community formed to highlight the plight of shorebird populations on a global scale through community education, citizen-science, research programmes and events.
  - *Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative:* Education and public engagement tools based out of Cornell Lab (U.S.A.)
  - *East-Asian Australasian Flyway:* Aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitats, and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them. It works to enhance research, monitoring, information exchange as well as CEPA (communication, education, participation, awareness) of conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats.
- **The National Wetland Trust of New Zealand (NWT):** A non-profit organisation established to increase the appreciation of wetlands and their values. They aim to increase public knowledge and appreciation of wetlands, their functions, and processes, and ensure landowners and government agencies commit to their protection, enhancement and restoration. The NWT are in the process of setting up a Wetland Discovery Centre at Lake Rotopiko in Waipa that acts as an introduction to all wetland types in New Zealand.



- **Western Firth Catchment Group:** A group of local farmers and small-block holders working together to improve water quality and increase biodiversity in the Western Firth area. They facilitate stream monitoring, pest control, replanting and public education, and are already working with EcoQuest (below) and Living Water (above) in the Pūkoro area.
- **EcoQuest:** Describing themselves as ‘catalysts for sustainability through education and research’, Whakatiwai based EcoQuest offer a range of ecological-focused services from monitoring and research, education and courses, and community engagement. The EcoQuest Education Foundation is a charitable trust and a NZQA registered Category 1 training provider.
- **Additional partnership opportunities (Conservation):**
  - New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute (Victoria University of Wellington)
  - Ramsar Convention on Wetland’s Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation, and awareness (*CEPA*)
  - Blue Carbon Initiative
  - NIWA (in collaboration with NZ Searise)
  - Wetland Link International
  - Earth Echo Water Challenge
  - National Geographic
  - Mountains to Sea Charitable Trust
  - Wetlands International
  - eBird

## *Social*

There is also potential for the PMSC to become involved with/collaborate with initiatives that can help improve the social wellbeing of the wider community.

- **Te Whangai Trust (Dalton family):** Are a community led social organisation aiming to create a sustainable ecological, social and educational enterprise that supports, trains, and advocates for people find it challenging to enter the labour market.

## Cultural

With connections to Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Maru and Ngāti Pāoa iwi, the Pūkorokoro Miranda area holds significant cultural importance to Māori. The PMNT have indicated that they are willing to partner with mana whenua whenever appropriate.

- **Ngāti Pāoa:** Have engaged with the feasibility process at the time of writing and have indicated their willingness to partner with the PMNT Shorebird Centre to protect and enhance both the natural and culture importance of the area and the shorebirds into the future.

## Educational

With one of their principle aims to facilitate shorebird education, engagement, and awareness, the PMSC could look to partner with local schools, secondary schools within 60-90 minutes' drive, New Zealand tertiary education providers, and international education groups to facilitate an educational experience aligned with relevant curriculums. Though the PMNT has pre-existing relationships in this area, it is worth delving deeper into this opportunity, particularly since the education sector has represented a significant source of visitors in the past.

- **Local Schools:** There are several schools in the surrounding area which could be partnered with to both provide educational opportunities for young people and encourage community engagement with the PMSC.
- **Secondary Schools (60-90 minutes' drive):** Intermediate and high schools in the Thames, South Auckland and Hamilton areas could travel to the PMSC as a day trip. The PMNT has previously enjoyed positive relationships with several high schools which could be utilised by designing the future educational experience available to align with relevant course curricula (e.g., Conservation/Environment, Geography, New Zealand history).
- **Tertiary Education Providers:** Those tertiary providers offering ecological-based courses could be partnered with to facilitate both class field trips and longer-term academic research opportunities. An example of one such provider is the New Zealand Climate Change Research Institute (Victoria University of Wellington). Tertiary institutions could also be partnered with to provide international students with an opportunity to experience New Zealand natural environment with an educational component also included (see below). There may also be opportunity to develop ongoing relationships with aligned student groups or clubs.
- **International Education Groups:** Once the international borders are reopened, there is an opportunity to partner with organisations bringing in international students, either in partnership with local tertiary providers, or independently. Organisations such as EcoQuest (mentioned above) specialise in providing nature-based educational experiences for international students. Organisations such as Study Auckland could also be partnered with as part of a collective effort to help international students optimise their time in New Zealand.

## *Commercial*

The PMNT and Shorebird Centre have previously relied heavily on donations and grants in various forms in order to remain financially viable. Going forward, there is a need for the Shorebird Centre to become financially self-sufficient, so additional funding sources needing to be considered.

- **Local tourism operators/businesses:** The PMNT have made it very clear that their wish is to continue a harmonious relationship with local businesses for the good of the wider community. While they recognise the need for the Shorebird Centre to remain financially self-sufficient, there is a reluctance to establish any operation or offering that has negative impacts to other local businesses, most notably local tourism experiences, accommodation providers and hospitality establishments. This negative effect could be countered by offering commercial opportunities such as food and beverage, and accommodation or activities to local businesses to complement their existing businesses.
- **Corporate partnerships/sponsors:** In a similar vein to the Fonterra/DoC 'Living Water' project mentioned above, there is the opportunity to partner with other aligned organisations and/or brands that would gain public relations (PR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) value from supporting the Shorebird Centre and PMNT.



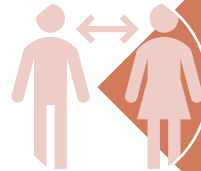
## Potential Outcomes

As mentioned above, if correctly executed the redevelopment of the PMSC visitor experience towards a regenerative tourism model (tourism that gives back to the local community and environment) will enable the PMNT to provide visitors with a unique and very special experience, while also ensuring their visit makes positive contributions to the area across all four of the wellbeing pillars.

The following outlines some potential examples of such benefits.



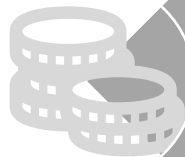
*Environmental:* The most important of all potential benefits is helping to ensure positive outcomes for the shorebirds themselves. While this may seem obvious, less obvious is finding the correct balance of focus between specific, short-term conservation projects, and ‘big-picture’, longer-term programmes. The proposed (broader) PMSC experience would ideally find this balance, ensuring the immediate care and protection of the shorebirds and their habitat through physical and/or financial visitor contributions, alongside an equally important education programme, which (in the long run) would hope to have a far greater ecological impact.



*Social:* The issue of impending coastal inundation is something that will likely have an increasing impact on the local community in the future. The PMSC redevelopment gives the PMNT the opportunity to pull together both the resident and conservation community around them as they work collaboratively towards the collective goal of mitigating this. The positive and widely admired work of the PMNT, together with a greatly enhanced visitor experience, will help the visitor centre become a source of great pride for the local community – one that is pivotal to the social fabric of the Northern Hauraki region.



*Cultural:* The PMNT are very fortunate to have been offered stories and accompanying mātauranga (traditional knowledge) surrounding the shorebirds from the local Ngāti Pāoa people. Having the opportunity to tell these stories and share traditional knowledge through the revised visitor experience will empower the Ngāti Pāoa people and ensure their culture is celebrated as these stories are shared with visitors into the future. Similarly, the redevelopment will also allow the PMNT and wider community of shorebird enthusiasts the increased opportunity to share and celebrate their own unique culture and stories.



*Economic:* The potential economic impact for the PMNT could be significant as the redevelopment brings added direct revenue through the selling of engaging visitor experiences and increased donations (see Section 3 for specific ideas). This would also be economically beneficial to the wider community, as the visitor economy is enhanced and leveraged to its full potential through increased spending on local goods and services.



## Section 3: Visitor Experience Enhancement

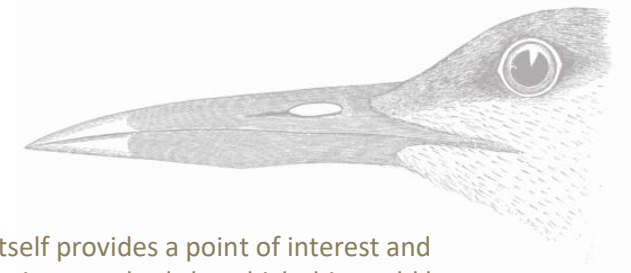


### Objectives:

- Identify opportunities to enhance the visitor experience of the Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre across the main visitor types
- Avoid/minimise/mitigate detrimental effects to the shorebirds and their habitat.
- Optimise ways in which visitors can positively contribute to both environmental and wider community wellbeing pillars (social, economic, cultural).
- Provide ideas, guidance, and recommendations with regards to the PMNT's preferred redevelopment option for the PMSC.

### Key components:

1. Visitor Centre Refurbishment
2. Supporting Infrastructure
3. Core Experiences
4. Supporting (Secondary) Services



## Key Component 1: Visitor Centre Refurbishment

As the centre-point of the Pūkoro Mirānda shorebird experience, it is imperative that the PMSC building/location itself provides a point of interest and compelling reason to visit across the various visitor types identified. As such, the refurbishment of the PMSC and the various methods by which this could be achieved was a central discussion topic throughout this project. With this having a major impact on any future redevelopment of the visitor experience, the PMNT board were presented with 3x 'scenarios' of how this future may look as part of this project and invited to provide their thoughts as part of this reports development (see 'Overview of Redevelopment Options' in Appendix). The feedback received indicated that the refurbishment of the existing PMSC as the preferred option.

With any major redevelopment or building work outside of the existing structure's footprint assumed to attract significant challenges in terms of building consents, any refurbishment work needs to focus on the optimal use of the PMSC facilities as they (largely) stand. Assumed to be structurally sound, and given the opportunity identified of capturing more of the 'passer-by' market, a major component of this refresh work should be to focus on improving the 'street appeal' to create both a more welcoming and compelling reason to stop for passing traffic, and to better service the visitors that do come in.

The PMNT is fortunate to have access to some great thought-starters in this area, with a recent project by architectural students providing a series of possible designs in which to draw inspiration from.

- **Eye-catching façade:** The refurbishment design process should ensure that the external view of the PMSC (particularly from those passing by road) is improved and assists in offering an intriguing and compelling attraction to potential visitors. Imperative to this will be to keep any visual redevelopment in harmony with the surrounding natural environment, ensuring that there is no negative impact on the habitat and wildlife, and even exploring methods in which the building can enhance or help the natural environment. For example, in keeping with the naturalist/birdwatching 'vibe' of both the PMSC experience and surrounding area, the roof of the PMSC could the front of the existing building could be adjusted to resemble a large bird hide, with large window shutters not only achieving the right 'look', but potentially also providing practical protection from destructive weather events or storm surges. A 'head-turning' installation at, or near the PMSC entrance such as a commissioned artwork/sculpture appropriate to the shorebirds, would also help to raise visibility and awareness of the PMSC.
- **Visitor arrival:** The current arrival experience is poor with visitors being unsure they are at the right location. Improved roading, parking, landscaping and signage is required to enhance the sense of welcome and presentation of the overall site, cater for increased visitor numbers, as well as for buses and larger campervans. This could be done in a style that is complimentary towards the setting and overall vibe of the PMSC experience, with low planted flax lines in lieu of painted lines etc. The earthmoving/landscaping work required for this would also provide the opportunity to improve the way in which the visitor first interacts with the site. For example, the pathway to the main entrance could be rerouted to incorporate elements of Widgery Lake (or vice versa), bringing the experience to life the instant the visitor arrives. Replacement of the entrance, courtyard and main (front) decking would also freshen the presentation of the site and improve the feel of these areas.

- **Changes to floorplan/use of space:** There are several recommended adjustments to the current use of space which would enable an improved visitor experience within the PMSC itself. The creation of a dedicated area for groups separate to the main interpretive and retail area would be the single biggest improvement to the visitor experience. This could be in the existing Board Room with the office relocated to another space. This would significantly increase the size and functionality of the main visitor space, negating the need to rearrange installations, making operations more efficient and allowing the main displays and shop area to have more permanent displays. The existing office could potentially relocate to the bunk room within the main building. Removal of the existing toilets and the installation of a dedicated external compost toilet block would also create substantial more space within the main area of the PMSC. A refurbished visitor space could then utilise this additional room now available, incorporating a refreshed entrance and information/booking desk, modern interpretive displays, lounge, and retail area.
- **Widgery Lake:** There is an opportunity to really bring the birdwatching experience to life within the PMSC itself by redeveloping 'Widgery Lake' so that wildlife is further encouraged to spend time there. Along with the ponds themselves, the design of the surrounding viewing infrastructure (entrance to and nature of viewing decks, seating, weather mitigation etc) would also need to be looked at to allow for a more natural, user-friendly, and comfortable flow between the indoor and outdoor spaces.
- **Development of raised viewing platforms:** The original PMSC design incorporated a viewing tower which was never realised. This concept, or the addition of a second story or similar raised viewing platforms should be revisited as part of the redevelopment process. These heightened observation points would allow visitors to get a much better visual overview of the chenier plain and shell-banks and improve their ability to see the shorebirds. These structures would also be a natural location for high-powered stationary optics (mentioned below) and could also incorporate mobile-based access systems and interpretive signage options (also mentioned below). While any raised structures would need to be carefully designed and constructed to avoid a negative visual impact on this very flat and low-lying area, if done correctly they would offer an appropriate eye-catching attraction and a more compelling reason to stop for passers-by.
- **Refresh of accommodation facilities:** It is recommended that the accommodation facilities currently in place are kept in their current nature/format but should be refurbished to remain fit for purpose when deemed necessary.



## Key component 2: Supporting Infrastructure



The current visitor experience is serviced by what could be described as ‘simple, but effective’ physical infrastructure, consisting mainly of the visitor centre itself, a carpark with toilet servicing the Robert Findlay Reserve main entrance, pathways, three main viewing hides, a seat, and some basic signage. While this is largely fit-for-purpose under the current value proposition offered to visitors, improvements can be made to create a more eye-catching, connected, and compelling visitor attraction, and to enhance the visitor experience itself.

- **Locational & wayfinding signage:** Signage both leading to and located at the PMSC needs to be updated to offer a clear and compelling visitor offering. There is also a significant opportunity to deepen the learning opportunities provided by installing modern interpretive signage throughout the shorebird experience. With an initial (basic) level of information provided on the sign itself, QR codes can also be incorporated and scanned with mobile devices to point towards more in-depth and interactive content hosted online. Refreshed signage could also incorporate the appeal for donations via mobile payment platforms. Companies specialising in visual story telling can create highly engaging visitor experiences via both static and digital content.
- **Stationary high-powered optics (*‘tower viewers’*):** Though security would need to be considered, the permanent placement of high-powered optics in strategic locations would greatly improve the ability for those visitors without their own to enjoy up-close viewing of the shorebirds. These could potentially be self-funding via a pay-to-use/access system, though research to date has identified only free, or coin-operated options currently available.
- **Improved pathways:** Pathways that are wider, consistent underfoot and more clearly defined will help visitors feel more confident in exploring this unfamiliar landscape. Improved pathways will have the added benefit of catering for those visitors with mobility issues, allowing access for wheelchairs or even electric golf carts, as well as improving the overall health and safety performance of the experience.
- **Redevelopment of hides:** Whilst serving a basic purpose for birdwatching enthusiasts, the current hides have the potential to offer greater and more comfortable shorebird viewing to a wider scope of visitor. Though any enhancements would need to consider the real possibility of significant damage due to storm surges, improvements to the access points, and the installation of comfortable seating, clearer viewing portals, high-powered optics, and the interpretive signage mentioned above would greatly improve the visitor offering.
- **Shelters and seating:** The installation of a series of shelters located in strategic positions along pathways would provide the opportunity for visitors to rest or seek shelter from the elements (sun/rain). These would also be natural locations for the interpretive signage mentioned above and help to spread visitors out (taking pressure off the hides themselves).
- **Rest Shelters (Hauraki Rail Trail):** There is currently an opportunity to partner with the Hauraki Rail Trail in the design and placement of a bespoke shelter servicing cyclists, to be located along the trail, just south of the existing PMSC site. This could potentially act as an additional entrance point to the shorebird experience, with the shorebirds and surrounding habitat heavily influencing the content and design of the structure. As bikes are not currently allowed on the walking paths, the provision of bike racks and a bike locking mechanism could also be investigated.





### Key Component 3: Core Experiences

Apart from the accommodation offering and some retail products offered within the gift-shop, the existing shorebird visitor experience is heavily weighted towards free-to-use locations and infrastructure, with a high reliance on voluntary donations, and very little 'paid for' experiences available. Introducing additional products and experiences that require payment would not only create additional funding sources for the PMNT, but also incentivise travel-trade to promote the centre to their customers via the selling of commissionable tourism products.

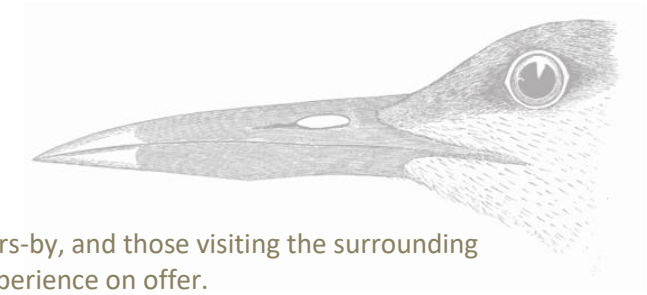
The following experiences have been designed with the intention of matching and optimising the needs of the visitor types likely to visit the PMSC/Robert Findlay Reserve:

- **'Infotainment' options:** Educational content related to the shorebirds and their natural habitat can be presented in an interactive and entertaining manner, utilising modern interpretive displays and digital technology to deepen the experience with dynamic content such as high-res imagery, video, and mobile-enabled AR/VR experiences. A high-tech extension of the existing offering would add to the educational elements of the experience, broaden the appeal of shorebirds to younger visitors, and mitigate weather limitations associated with the Robert Findlay Reserve. An AV offering in the main visitor centre could be complemented by additional content activated by QR codes found on interpretive signage throughout the reserve. Associated audio-visual facilities would have the added benefit of being utilised by corporate and private groups as part of the event hire offering. This area of the PMSC could be included as a value-add for all visitors, or accessed via a ticketing system.
- **Wildlife viewing:** Any opportunity to view wildlife either nearby, or from the PMSC building itself should be optimised to bring the shorebird/conservation experience to life and provide a 'hook'/'taster' of the wider experience available. It is acknowledged that the essential shorebird experience (i.e., the massed flocks gathered ahead of the tide, aerial displays, witnessing migration departures etc) will always be physically distanced from the PMSC itself. However, the development of both Widgery Lake through landscaping modifications/possible extension, and nearby habitat restoration closer to the building will help bring other birds (bittern, cranes, ducks, herons, rails etc) closer. This will increase viewing opportunities and provide further entertainment for PMSC visitors.
- **Guided experiences:** Perhaps the best opportunity to improve both available funding and the visitor experience (in the short to mid-term), is to introduce more consistently available guided tour options. With a passionate group of volunteers available to the PMNT, a model like the guided experiences available at [Tiri Tiri Matangi](#) could be employed, where volunteers host paying visitors and provide interesting and informative commentary on both the shorebirds, their habitat, and the restorative efforts underway to help them.

Alongside these volunteer-led products, a specific Māori cultural guided experience could also be developed by partnering with Ngāti Pāoa. With a focus on the telling of traditional stories and the sharing of mātauranga (traditional knowledge) and whakataukī (proverbs), this has the potential to offer a unique visitor experience as the shorebirds, their habitat and protection are explained through the lens of te ao Māori (Māori world view), with focus placed on the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all living and non-living things. Hosting these tours at dawn or dusk could add something extra special to the experience and be packaged up with a night's accommodation at the PMSC or another local accommodation provider.

An alternative or additional option to the above is the use of geofencing technology to deliver an audio or audio/visual assisted self-guided experience. Put simply, pre-recorded audio and/or visual content specific to a location is triggered and delivered via the visitor's mobile device. Along with English, content could also be delivered in additional languages to better service international visitors (e.g., Mandarin).

- **Conservation experience:** There may be an opportunity to develop a 'shorebird conservation experience', that provides the opportunity for individual visitors, small groups, or corporate teams to participate in some of the conservation initiatives conducted by the PMSC team. Positioned similarly to the popular 'corporate beach clean-ups', these 'conservation experiences' could include accommodation at the PMSC, a guided tour, and the opportunity to help with a specific conservation project such as monitor tagging, restorative planting or pest control.
- **Transport around trails:** Broadening and enhancing the appeal of these guided tours further would be the incorporation of some form of transport option along the trails to facilitate a quicker/easier interaction with the shorebird habitat. Electric tuk tuks for example, would provide no noise or carbon emissions, with the ability to accommodate 4-6 paying guests plus a driver/guide providing informative commentary along the way. Use of these vehicles would also allow mobility impaired guests to enjoy the shorebirds and provide all passengers shelter from unfavourable weather conditions.
- **Integration of Hauraki Rail Trail:** While acknowledging that this is an idea that has already been explored and dismissed due to concerns over the potential negative impact on the shorebirds, the integration of the shorebird experience with the Hauraki Rail Trail via a 'Shorebird Cycle-path' through the DoC/Robert Findlay Reserves would provide a truly unique on-trail experience. Of course, this would rely heavily on the ability to design a cycle-path/route that avoids any disturbance to the birds, and that has the ability to be closely managed in terms of its use.
- **Pay-to-access infrastructure:** Whilst general entry to the Robert Findlay Reserve and surrounding areas should of course remain free, as mentioned above, there may be opportunities to charge a modest amount for the use of additional infrastructure that further enhance the viewing experience, such as viewing platforms and stationary high-powered optics.
- **Virtual experiences:** There are several digital platforms the PMSC could utilise to deliver a virtual shorebird experience to viewers anywhere in the world. This is particularly aligned with the PMSC offering given the global migration patterns of the shorebirds, and associated alliances such as the East Asian-Australasian FlyWay Partnership (EAAFP). Delivered either free (as an awareness/promotional tool) or behind a paywall, virtual experiences could include a fully guided tour via platforms such as [AirBnB experiences](#), or live-video feeds of particularly 'active' locations.
- **Donation requests:** Though not an 'experience' in itself, there is an opportunity to gain additional funding by improving the manner in which voluntary donations are requested. With mobile technology and digital payment platforms as they now are, these requests could be incorporated into the interpretive signage mentioned above, with a clear and easy payment channel made available.



## Key Component 4: Supporting (Secondary) Services

There is an opportunity to enhance the appeal of the PMSC by adding additional 'reasons to stop/visit' for both passers-by, and those visiting the surrounding area. While not core to the shorebird experience itself, these supporting services would enhance the wider visitor experience on offer.

- **Food & beverage offer:** While not practical to introduce any significant food or drink offering as part of the PMSC itself, there is an opportunity to outsource the provision of these services via a relocatable food and/or coffee truck. Parked in the PMSC carpark, a food truck(s) would provide a compelling 'reason to stop' for passers-by, as well as adding to the overall experience proposition for visitors to the area. The relocatable, outsourced nature of a food truck would reduce the investment/risk to the PMNT associated with committing to this internally and allow for the supplier to move elsewhere during off-peak days/times/seasons.
- **EV charging station:** Though setting up the required infrastructure may prove challenging, an EV charging station would likely be another compelling reason to stop for passing motorists, with limited charging options available in the area (outside of the main highways). Encouraging and facilitating the reduction of fossil fuel use would also align with the PMSC's overall conservation focus.
- **Children's playground:** Those parents travelling with young children are often looking for opportunities to experience something that interests them, while also allowing their children to be entertained/occupied. Perhaps themed in an ode to the shorebird and their habitat, and visible from the road, a playground would not only add a compelling reason to visit for those passing, but potentially provide an interactive learning opportunity for young people. It would also enhance the visitor experience for their parents as they are provided more time/freedom to explore the centre while their kids are entertained.
- **Bike-friendly facilities:** With the increasingly popular Hauraki Rail Trail passing right by the front entrance, there is a fantastic opportunity to attract passing cyclists into the PMSC as a welcome chance to get off their bike and enhance their overall riding experience. Making the PMSC as 'bike-friendly' as possible via bike racks and locks, secure storage lockers, bike wash/repair stations, water bottle refill stations etc would help ensure it is a 'must stop' point of interest along the trail.
- **Information & booking services:** With no other well-established information or DoC visitor centres in the surrounding area, there is an opportunity for the PMSC to further establish/formalise and promote its visitor offering in this space. This is a service that has (informally) been provided by PMSC for some time, but if formalised through proper partnership with DoC and/or local businesses, would provide another reason for visitors to stop. This would also benefit the PMSC financially by providing another source of revenue via booking commissions and strengthen relationships with other tourism/hospitality providers in the area.



## Section 4: Challenges & Concerns





**There are several red flags that can be foreseen when looking at the potential redevelopment of the existing PMSC site.**

- **Embracing the regenerative tourism model:** It remains unclear how comfortable or committed the PMNT are themselves with this regenerative tourism concept, and of the consequential need for them to welcome and host a changing visitor set if this is achieved.
- **Long-term viability of site:** Coastal inundation prediction tools provided by the Waikato Regional Council show Miranda Pūkoro to be one of the first areas in New Zealand to be inundated should sea-level rise patterns continue. The redevelopment of the current building would likely not provide robust futureproofing in response to the increased risks associated with coastal inundation, with the need to relocate the facility likely in the mid to long-term.
- **Building & environmental consents:** The area sits within the Seabird Coast Management Area of the District Plan and while further detailed advice will be required to fully understand the development constraints, it is likely extension of the existing, or construction of new buildings will be limited by the local planning instruments.
- **Distance from shorebirds/Robert Findlay Reserve:** Retention of the facility at the existing site does not address the issue of its distance from the main shorebird viewing area. This means that in situations where a 30minute walk is not feasible (e.g., mobility issues, short of time, or adverse weather) visitors will need to get back in their cars after the visitor centre to drive down to Robert Findlay Reserve to access the bird hides. For most casual visitors the marginal attractiveness of the experience is unlikely to compel them to make a second stop at this destination. It may also be that with better information available online about the Robert Findlay Reserve, visitors will stop there and bypass the visitor centre, particularly as this location now has a toilet facility.
- **Size of site:** The existing site of the PMSC is restricted in terms of the usable space, making the opportunity for any significant expansion of facilities in the future limited. This is likely to have an impact on parking and vehicle management, with the area's popularity with motorhome travellers requiring particular attention in this regard.
- **Traffic control & road safety:** The existing PMSC site is located on the outside of a corner on East Coast Road. This is a fast section of road with limited visibility when it comes to oncoming traffic. This could become a concern as visitation rates increase, with the safety of visitors arriving on bike via the Hauraki Rail Trail of particular concern.
- **Commercial mindset:** The PMNT have made it very clear that their wish is to continue a harmonious relationship with local businesses for the good of the wider community. While they recognise the need for the PMSC to remain financially self-sufficient, there is a reluctance to establish any operation or offering that has negative impacts to other local businesses. While admirable, a more commercial mindset will at times need to be embraced to ensure the financial sustainability of the centre.
- **Tides:** Optimal viewing of the shorebirds is restricted to two hours either side of the high tide, making set times for guided experiences impossible. Though this does complicate things somewhat, it is not seen as being a deal-breaker in terms of developing the ideas contained in this report.

## Section 5: Findings & Recommendations



At the conclusion of this project, it is the view of TRC Tourism that there is indeed the potential for the PMSC experience to answer the fundamental objectives of the brief in one day representing a world-class, 'bucket list' attraction for the area that appeals to a wider audience beyond birders and conservationists, while also contributing to the natural environment, iwi, and local communities, and enhancing the '*Coromandel - good for your soul*' brand.

Crucially however, it remains unclear how comfortable or committed the PMNT are themselves with this regenerative tourism concept, and of the consequential need for them to welcome and host a changing visitor set if this is achieved. If the above objectives are to be one day realised, it is essential that the PMNT are 100% committed in their view of tourism and the wider visitor economy not as some form of 'necessary evil', but as a powerful long-term enabler that is closely aligned and symbiotic with their overarching conservation goals. The development of a strategic plan would allow the PMNT to identify the long-term vision, aspirations, and operating guidelines for the PMSC, and confirm to what extent attracting and hosting visitors play in this future.

It is therefore the recommendation of TRC Tourism that while the PMNT should absolutely be supported in continuing to develop a fantastic visitor experience offering within the wider Coromandel area, no further feasibility or business case work should be undertaken or facilitated for the shorebird experience as a hero visitor attraction for the area until this fundamental strategic work has been completed.

**Further recommendations TRC would like to make as part of this required strategic plan development include:**

- **Developing a stepped approach to growth:** Ensuring that the PMSC is well equipped to sustainably manage the impact of increasing growth in visitor numbers.
- **Access to board:** Ensure that future consultation or engagement with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties includes the wider PMNT board whenever possible/appropriate.
- **Futureproofing:** Succession planning/reducing key person reliance within the organisation to ensure the ongoing, sustainable operation of the PMSC.
- **Wider engagement with mana whenua:** At the direction of the PMNT, the engagement with local iwi for the development of this report was solely with a representative of Ngāti Pāoa. While Ngāti Pāoa hold the treaty settlement rights over the immediate area, there are several other iwi (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Maru) who may also have tribal affiliations with the area. This should be carefully considered when developing any new use or visitor experience concerning the land and/or sea or use of any Māori cultural elements.
- **Engagement with surrounding landowners:** It is recommended that the PMNT engage with all surrounding landowners when considering the implementation of any of the above. Most notably the Dalton family who own a block of land very much surrounded by the shorebird experience.

## Appendix





# 1. Consultation

Name	Organisation Representing	Position
Leanne Irvine	Department of Conservation	Senior Ranger/Supervisor Community
Alice Anderson	Department of Conservation	Pou Tairangahau – Hauraki-Waikato-Taranaki
Hadley Dryden	Destination Coromandel	General Manager
Rebecca Jenks	Hauraki District Council	Community Development Advisor (Economic)
Ross Harris	Hauraki District Council	Councillor (Plains Ward)
Phillip Buckthought	Hauraki District Council	Councillor (Plains Ward)
Diane Drummond	Hauraki Rail Trail	Chief Executive Officer
Ali	Miranda Homestead	
Frank Rawiri	Ngāti Pāoa	
Keith Woodley	Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre (PMNT)	Centre Manager
Trudy Lane	Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust	Board Member, Council sub-committee member
Annie	Stray Dog Cafe	
Paul	Sea Urchin cottage	



## 2. Methodology & Timeline of Events

Planned Approach	Actual Events	Reason for Adjustment
<b>Phase 1: Inception</b> Confirm project scope and deliverables.	As planned	n/a
<b>Phase 2: Site Evaluation</b> Visit site to meet with relevant stakeholders, assess the current experience, identify special locations, and make preliminary assessments re how to improve experience.	As planned	n/a
<b>Phase 3: Assessment of Visitor Use/Market Demand</b> Use the information gathered to assess the existing visitor use and potential new market demand opportunities.	As planned	n/a
<b>(Mid-phase)</b>	A report was produced outlining the high-level redevelopment options available to the PMNT. This report included potential impacts (positive and negative) of each option on the potential future visitor experience, along with a recommendation on what option would be most likely to answer the brief (Option 3: A new 'Floating' Visitor Centre on the Grazing Block).	With a meeting of the PMNT board eminent, and distinct scenarios having already been formed regarding the (limited) options available in answering the key objectives of the brief, it was agreed that it was better to gain a deeper understanding on the PMNT's preferences before further developing each of the possible scenarios.
<b>Phase 4: Visitor Experience Development Workshop</b> Run a workshop in-region with local stakeholders to build on the material reviewed and share initial thoughts on visitor centre.	Remote engagement sessions with key stakeholders were held to further develop potential enhancements to the visitor experience possible under the redevelopment option (2) preferred by PMNT.	With the PMNT signalling their strong preference as Option 2 (enhancements of visitor experience offering + redevelopment of the existing site), arrangements were made for the VE development workshop to be conducted in-region as planned. Unfortunately, this was cancelled due to the Covid-19 outbreak within the Northern Hauraki making travel to the area impossible.
<b>Phase 5: Concept Development</b> Analyse the information collected and evaluate thinking. Develop initial thinking and proposed strategic directions for the overall site and its component parts.	A draft report comprising the following sections was developed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visitor Experience enhancement</li> <li>2. PMSC Refurbishment</li> <li>3. Answering the brief: Developing a world-class experience</li> <li>4. Findings &amp; Recommendations</li> </ol>	With much of the basic concepts already discussed in reasonable detail, it was viewed as better use of resource if these concepts and ideas were collated and finalised as part of the draft report.
<b>Phase 6: Draft Report</b> Draw together the results of the site visit, consultation, the workshop, analysis, and feedback from the steering committee on concept paper into one document.		
<b>Phase 7: Final Report</b> Finalise report based on feedback from client and key stakeholders.	The design of the final report was adjusted to better present the overall (larger) opportunity to answer the objectives of the brief. It is also designed to allow the main ideas, insights, and potential enhancements to be pulled out and utilised by the PMNT regardless of the recommendations made regarding the larger feasibility project.	n/a

### 3. Visitor Insights

With no international visitors to speak of due to the closing of New Zealand's borders, latest spend figures available from MBIE *Tourism Electronic Card Transactions* (TECTs) show domestic tourism faring well, with visitor spend up 25.6% for YE August 2021 for the wider Coromandel region, which also performs well compared with YTD 2019 figures (+20%), which are not impacted by Covid related lockdowns. This shows through at the territorial authority level also, with \$290m (+30%) being spent in the Thames-Coromandel district, and \$82m (+13%) to the Hauraki district, respectively<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted that these figures do not capture the latest Auckland lockdown, which will have a major impact on figures across September/October 2021.

Of this spend in the Coromandel area however, the majority is heading to non-tourism sectors such as retail and F&B, with only \$24m (accommodation services), \$14m (other tourism products) and \$10m (cultural, recreation) spent on what may be deemed as primary tourism products.

Regarding visitor source markets, the Coromandel area is predominantly domestic tourism focused. Auckland represents the largest provider of visitors with over 40% of all visitor spend coming courtesy of Aucklanders, followed by Waikato (28%), and Bay of Plenty (15%).

The majority (72%) of these visitors are adults travelling without children and are visiting by road. The key experiences they seek are largely the same as most New Zealand domestic travellers, with some of the more popular activities being a short walk in a wilderness area, a meal at a local restaurant, to bath in hot pools and visit a farmer's market<sup>3</sup>.

Anecdotally, a trip around the 'Shorebird Coast' is very popular with motorhome users and as a daytrip from Auckland for touring groups such as car and motorcycle clubs. The nearby 'Ray's Rest' freedom camping spot is well frequented by freedom campers, and the Miranda Holiday Park is proving to be extremely popular, with approximately 54,000 visitors each year made up of older, retired/semi-retired 'silver surfers' visiting mid-week, and younger families coming in the weekends and school holidays. The recently developed Hauraki Rail Trail is also a key attraction to the area, and though not yet fully opened, the Miranda section of the trail is already attracting close to 12,000 visitors to YE April 2021<sup>4</sup>.

The PMSC itself has also gained in popularity as a visitor attraction, with an annual increase of 15% leading to over 9,000 people visiting in 2019 (does not include those visitors to the hides only). Though visitor figures over the 2020 and 2021 (current) calendar years are of course impacted by the nationwide lock-downs due to Covid-19, this past summer had seen encouraging visitation levels almost equal to those pre-covid. While there has been an impact from Covid with the loss of international visitors, anecdotal evidence is that these have been largely replaced by locals. This is impressive given that approximately 40% of visitors pre-covid were from offshore (majority UK, followed by Australia, USA and China).

Seasonality has a major impact with the majority of visits occurring over the warmer months (Oct – April)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> MBIE Tourism Electronic Card Transactions (TERTs) – YE August 2021

<sup>3</sup> DGIT

<sup>4</sup> HRT Eco-counter (Miranda)

<sup>5</sup> PMNT Visitor Numbers

## 4. Existing Products

In terms of product offering, the experience available to most visitors includes visiting the Robert Findlay Reserve to view shorebirds in their natural habitat, and some educational opportunities courtesy of informative displays located within the PMSC itself. Other than asking for a voluntary donation, most of this existing experience is offered free of charge to the general public.

*Shorebird Centre:* Located just off East Coast Road, the PMSC offers visitors static displays focused on the shorebirds seen in the area and their global migratory routes, along with detailed information about New Zealand's shorebirds, their ecology, habitat and conservation. There is also a lounge available for visitor use, with basic tea and coffee making facilities accessible for a small donation, along with some toilets (available free of charge, but with a voluntary donation suggested). The gift shop located within the PMSC offers a selection of shorebird-related gifts, books, and assorted paraphernalia.

*Accommodation:* The PMSC also offers basic accommodation on-site, with the choice of either self-contained units or bunk dormitories. There are two self-contained rooms which offer an en-suite and fully equipped kitchen, and three bunkrooms of varying capacity with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. In total there is accommodation for approximately 22x guests at any one time, though there are also fold-down settees available in the self-contained units if required. Nightly rates range from \$90 (member) to \$135 (non-member) for two people staying in the self-contained units, and \$20 (member) to \$35 (non-member) for the bunkrooms.

*Robert Findlay Reserve:* Located approximately 2km (30 mins walk) south of the PMSC, the Robert Findlay Reserve is the main shorebird viewing area available in the area. Infrastructure facilitating this experience begins with a public carpark located just off the road at the southern end of the reserve, with a public toilet also available on site. Alternatively, there is a walking track accessible from the PMSC which allows entry from the north through (DoC) conservation reserve. From either end, a combination of limestone/grass walking tracks and boardwalks provide access to three wooden viewing hides available for public use, spread within approximately 15 minutes' gentle walk of each other. The optimal times to view the shorebirds are two hours either side of high tide.

*Additional Services:* The PMSC provides some basic related services such as binocular/scope hire and has previously offered ad-hoc guided experiences of various forms. They also facilitate a selection of bird-related courses throughout the year covering a variety of areas including shorebird management, geology, botany, entomology, and printmaking. The PMSC lounge is also available for venue hire with basic facilities (tables, chairs, projector screen, tea/coffee) provided.



## 5.SWOT Analysis (Visitor Use/Market Demand)

### Strengths

- The PMSC is surrounded by stunning natural (wetland) scenery unlike most other NZ offerings.
- Availability of passionate shorebird experts and volunteers to help facilitate positive experiences.
- Proximity to Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua and Tauranga markets.
- Proximity to Auckland Airport (1hr).
- On route to Coromandel – a popular destination for the Auckland market.
- Lack of direct competitors in area.
- The existing visitor centre has a relaxing, understated, and comfortable ‘vibe’.
- PMNT has strong international ties via the East-Asian Australasian ‘Flyway’ (Godwits).

### Weaknesses

- The visitor centre is located away from the main bird watching area at the Robert Findlay Reserve, requiring a 4 km return walk or visitors getting back in the car.
- The whole Miranda area is extremely low-lying and susceptible to sea-level inundation. This will be a predominant limitation with regards to future development (resource and building consents).
- The visitor centre and information displays contained within are somewhat dated. While still mostly fit for current purposes and expectation levels, a refurbishment does need to be considered.
- PMSC is over-reliant on the knowledge and know-how of Keith Woodley with regards to operations.
- There is also a high reliance on the shorebirds themselves, with no guarantee that they will remain in the area should dramatic changes in the surrounding ecosystem occur.
- Lack of infrastructure in the surrounding area (toilets, parking, roading).
- The current PMSC visitor centre site is located on a corner, as such traffic intensification and safety will need to be considered.
- Optimal viewing of the shorebirds is restricted to two hours either side of the high tide, making set times for guided experiences impossible.
- The outdoor nature of shorebird watching means the experience itself is predominantly weather-dependent, though the existing hides do mitigate this slightly.

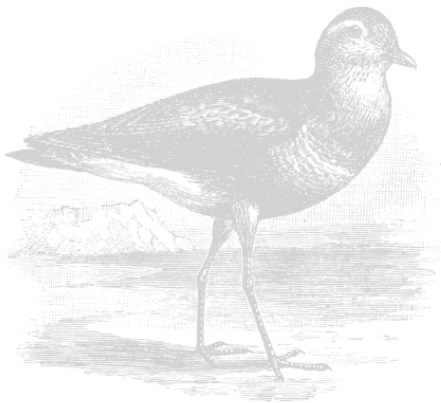
## Opportunities

- Lack of other experiences in the area.
- High volume of 'passerby' visitors available.
- Increasing focus and support for environmentally conscious experiences.
- Ability to introduce paid (guided experience) offerings as part of the PMSC experience.
- Educational groups have previously been highly engaged.
- The Hauraki Rail Trail is set to become a major attraction to the area, with cyclists riding right past the existing PMSC site. There is currently a lack of supporting services (café or restaurant, bike hire, shuttles, storage facility, information centre + booking facility) for this.
- PMNT are proposing habitat enhancement works involving the creation on new ponds on previously disturbed lands (known internally as the 'Grazing block')
- The Miranda Holiday Park (located 5 minutes' drive away) is extremely popular, with ~54,000 annual visitors. The owners (Kerry & Josh) are happy to recommend PMSC to guests once the experience is enhanced.
- The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association (NZMCA) is actively seeking land in the area for members to use.
- There are several like-minded organisations operating conservation-focused initiatives in the area who may offer synergistic partnership opportunities.
- The PMSC enjoys a positive relationship with Ngāti Pāoa, who are developing their own tourism initiatives nearby.

## Threats/Barriers/Challenges

- Any development must treat the safety and protection of the shorebirds and their wetland environment as priority.
- Strained relationship between PMNT and nearby landowners the Dalton Family due to a difference in opinion with regards to a previous visitor centre development proposal, and different styles of operation in general. The PMNT are open to extending an olive branch as part of the feasibility process.
- The natural environment surrounding PMSC is under threat from a number of factors including drainage issues, pest weeds/fish, sedimentation and loss of biodiversity.
- While Ngāti Pāoa hold the treaty settlement rights over the immediate area, there are several other iwi (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Maru) who may also have tribal affiliations with the area. This should be carefully considered when developing any new use or visitor experience concerning the land and/or sea or use of any Māori cultural elements.

# 6.Land Boundaries



# 7. Case Studies

## Bird-watching Visitor Centres

- *The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (U.S.A.):* Dedicated to advancing the understanding and protection of the natural world, the Cornell Lab joins with people from all walks of life to make new scientific discoveries, share insights, and galvanize conservation action. Offerings include a visitor centre with guided and self-guided tours, indoor bird-watching, online/virtual experiences, citizen science, and educational programmes. <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/visit/>
- *Tåkern Visitor Centre (Sweden):* Is a visitor centre within a nature reserve in Sweden offering guided tours, bird watching, theme days and educational opportunities. In the reserve there are hiking trails, bird towers, barbecue areas, a ‘fairy-tale trail’ and nature playground. <https://www.lansstyrelsen.se/ostergotland/besoksmal/naturum-takern.html>
- *Liminka Bay Visitor Centre (Finland):* This visitor centre provides guiding services, a restaurant, a shop, a small ‘nature hotel’, an auditorium for 80 persons and other conference facilities. The roughly 200 species of birds in the area can be seen using binoculars from the two-story birdwatching tower about 600 metres from the visitor centre. <https://visitliminka.fi/en/tuote/liminka-bay-visitor-centre/>
- *Edithvale Seaford Wetland Education Centre (Melbourne):* This centre built by Melbourne Water at a RAMSAR listed wetland includes an elevated enclosed viewing area with angled, double-glazed windows that allow plenty of light to enter, prevent the centre from overheating, and discourage birds from flying into them by reflecting the ground instead of the sky. There are also ESD features such as a recycled waste system, solar panels, and an integrated ventilation system. <https://www.melbournewater.com.au/water-data-and-education/learning-resources/water-and-sewage-treatment-plants/edithvale-seaford>
- *Brockholes Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (Lancashire, UK):* This floating “visitor village” includes a café, shop, conference and function spaces and interpretive areas directly linked to hides, paths and viewing points. <https://www.brockholes.org>

## Comparable Experiences

- *Tiritiri Matangi:* Tiritiri Matangi Island sanctuary is a partnership between the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the local community, through the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (Inc), a non-profit community conservation organisation. Visitors can book a guided tour hosted by a volunteer, and there is a small visitor centre with gift shop available. <http://www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/>
- *Auckland Whale & Dolphin Safari:* Provide a marine-research focused marine-mammal tour out of Auckland city. In addition to wildlife viewing, passengers have the opportunity to interact with marine scientists and get involved with citizen-science research while on board, as well as contribute financially to aligned conservation efforts. <https://whalewatchingauckland.com/>



## 8. Financial Performance

INCOME	2020	2019
Shop Margin	\$ 35,526	\$ 42,705
Accommodation	\$ 23,963	\$ 19,630
Courses	\$ 13,843	\$ 18,515
<b>Total Product Income</b>	<b>\$ 73,332</b>	<b>\$ 80,850</b>
Donations	\$ 19,807	\$ 23,352
Grants	\$ 85,750	\$ 69,652
Bequests	\$ 37,682	\$ 2,000
Subscriptions	\$ 28,097	\$ 24,999
Interest	\$ 6,101	\$ 5,198
Land Lease	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,400
Other Income	\$ 4,286	\$ 6,531
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>\$ 186,523</b>	<b>\$ 136,132</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 259,855</b>	<b>\$ 216,982</b>

<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Employment	\$ 104,306	\$ 120,363
Restoration Project	\$ 36,347	\$ 3,691
Magazine	\$ 15,441	\$ 18,868
Depreciation	\$ 12,179	\$ 15,847
Other	\$ 9,708	\$ 10,415
Courses	\$ 8,001	\$ 14,153
Maintenance	\$ 7,206	\$ 27,619
Audit	\$ 5,225	\$ 5,225
Insurance	\$ 4,986	\$ 4,810
Credit Cards/Paypal	\$ 4,524	\$ 2,721
Cleaning	\$ 4,325	\$ 6,479
Electricity	\$ 3,297	\$ 3,708
Education	\$ 1,433	\$ 7,009
PGP	\$ 25	\$ 23,318
Flyway	\$ 0	\$ 29,359
Signage	\$ 0	\$ 5,121
Life Member Reserve	\$ 0	\$ 2,550
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 217,003</b>	<b>\$ 301,256</b>

<b>NET RESULT</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Net Income/Deficit</b>	<b>\$ 42,852</b>	<b>(\$ 84,274)</b>

## 9. Overview of Redevelopment Options Presentation

# Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre

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Overview of Redevelopment Options

PMNT Board Meeting – Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021



This report was prepared by TRC Tourism for Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

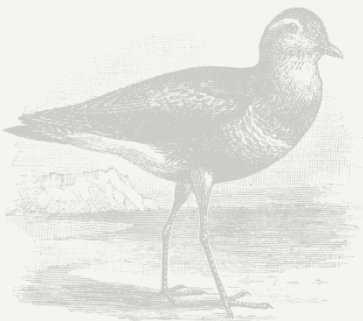
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# Introduction & Objectives

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This document identifies and evaluates the main options currently available in the potential redevelopment of the Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre (PMSC) as a world class eco-tourism, conservation, and education experience.

The objective of this document is to present the likely benefits, challenges, and outcomes of each available option in a straightforward manner, and to identify a recommended approach to which both the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust (PMNT) and Destination Coromandel can provide their initial feedback on. It is hoped that this process will identify an approach that (at first glance) ticks the right boxes for all major stakeholders, which can then be further explored.

A final report with recommended actions will then be produced, which will inform a decision on whether a business case with full financial analysis of the proposed development should be commissioned.





## Considerations

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In developing concepts for the future of the PMSC visitor experience the following main factors have been considered:

- The ongoing wellbeing of the shorebirds and their natural habitat.
- The key requirements outlined by Destination Coromandel, the PMNT, and the wider steering group:
  - Develop a compelling attraction that appeals to a wide audience, beyond only conservationists and birders, to become a bucket list attraction.
  - Design of a commercially successful and quality experience that enhances the local eco-system.
  - Delivers significant benefits to the natural environment, iwi, local communities and enhances *The Coromandel good for your soul* brand.
  - Is financially self-sufficient from an operational sense, with no additional financial burden placed on local government or ratepayers.
- Locational impacts and limitations:
  - Sea level rise and increased inundation risk for both visitor facilities and habitat areas.
  - Planning, resource and building consent constraints.
  - Alleviating future health & safety concerns, most notably road safety with relation to vehicle and pedestrian movements.
- The visitor experience:
  - Location of the existing centre some 2kms from bird watching areas.
  - Ability to facilitate enhanced visitor experiences.
  - Location relevant to the increasingly popular Hauraki Rail Trail.
- Wider benefits to community:
  - Potential partnerships and synergies with neighbours, local businesses, trusts, and aligned organisations.





## Overview of Options

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Broadly there are three potential development futures for the facility at Pūkorokoro Miranda:

1

Extension of the visitor offering only.

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2

A refurbishment of the existing visitor centre and experience offer.

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3

Establishment of a new 'tidal'/floating visitor centre integrated within the development of silt-ponds on the PMNT-owned 'Grazing Block', with the existing facility repurposed as a 'back of house' research facility and associated accommodation.



# 1

## Extension of Visitor Offering

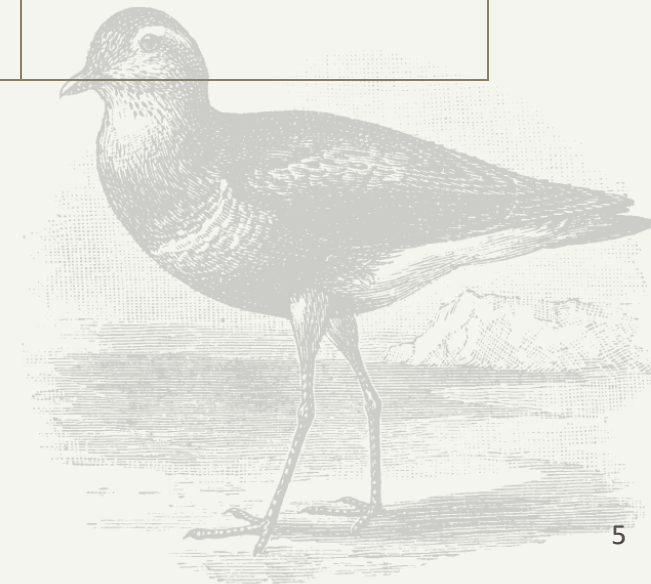
Impact on Visitor Experience	Benefits	Challenges	Likely Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tangible improvements to visitor experience (regular, scheduled, guided experiences + Interpretive signage) improve appeal.</li> <li>• Increased focus on global climate change and coastal inundation broadens appeal.</li> <li>• Inclusion of Māori culture deepens experience and offers unique content/perspective.</li> <li>• Improved F+B offering via outsourced supplier or foodtruck.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick, easy, and affordable (compared to other options).</li> <li>• Slightly broadens appeal to non-birders.</li> <li>• Assists PMNT financially.</li> <li>• Encourages partnership with conservation groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would not offer a 'must do' visitor attraction.</li> <li>• PMSC still separate from the shorebirds/hides.</li> <li>• PMSC would still need to be refurbished to remain fit for purpose.</li> <li>• No futureproofing for increased storm surges/sea level rise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gradual increase in visitor numbers.</li> <li>• Enhanced visitor feedback.</li> <li>• Better relationship with aligned conservation groups and iwi.</li> <li>• PMNT remains reliant on grants and donations.</li> <li>• PMSC requires relocation in mid-long term.</li> </ul>



# 2

## Refurbishment of existing site.

Impact on Visitor Experience	Benefits	Challenges	Likely Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refreshed signage, parking and landscaping improves sense of arrival.</li> <li>Meeting/presentation space is moved to office/boardroom.</li> <li>Dedicated toilet block creates additional visitor space.</li> <li>Modern interpretive displays utilise the additional space available.</li> <li>Shuttles/alternative transport provide better link to Robert Findlay Reserve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of financial investment (compared to Option 3).</li> <li>Space is better utilised to improve or extend the visitor offering.</li> <li>Utilises existing resources.</li> <li>Avoids complicated consent processes/development covenants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would not offer a 'must do' visitor attraction.</li> <li>PMSC still separate from the shorebirds/hides.</li> <li>No futureproofing for increased storm surges/sea level rise.</li> <li>Many visitors unlikely to stop at both RFR and PMSC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate increase in visitor numbers.</li> <li>Enhanced visitor feedback.</li> <li>Better relationship with aligned conservation groups and iwi.</li> <li>PMNT remains reliant on grants and donations.</li> <li>PMSC requires relocation in mid-long term.</li> </ul>

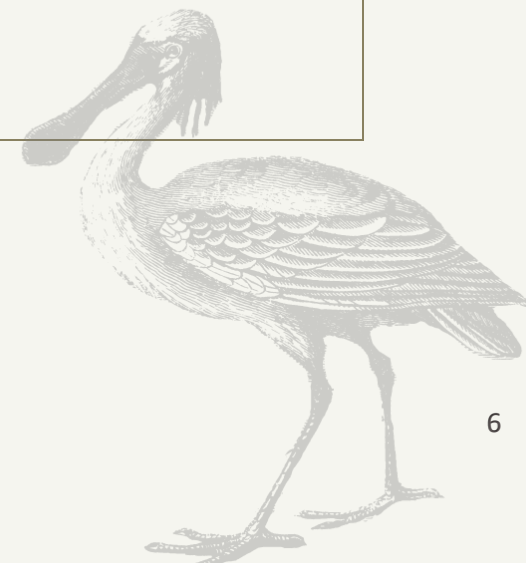




# 3

## New 'tidal'/floating visitor centre on 'Grazing Block'.

Impact on Visitor Experience	Benefits	Challenges	Likely Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stunning attraction offering wetland bird watching, interpretive displays, F&amp;B offering and lounge area.</li> <li>• Guided experiences incorporate PMSC, Robert Findlay Reserve + 'behind the scenes' research facility.</li> <li>• Interpretive displays with info on shorebirds + habitat protection/climate change.</li> <li>• Unique event venue for small conferences, meetings, and events.</li> <li>• Ability to host large groups (e.g., schools).</li> <li>• Short trail linking to Robert Findlay Reserve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iconic and unusual facility creates a 'must visit' point of focus.</li> <li>• Mitigates reliance on favourable weather.</li> <li>• Provides a more accessible shorebird watching experience.</li> <li>• Closer to the Robert Findlay Reserve = more cohesive visitor experience.</li> <li>• Future-proofed approach being immune from storm surges and coastal inundation.</li> <li>• Allows repurposing of original PMSC as research facility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires significant funding.</li> <li>• Requires "shore based" facilities such as access, parking, water supply, sewerage, and power supply.</li> <li>• Requires extensive impact reporting and consents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iconic and unusual facility creates a 'must visit' point of focus, resulting in a significant increase in visitor numbers.</li> <li>• Additional demand for accommodation, F&amp;B, and other services provides significant economic benefits to the area.</li> <li>• Is widely celebrated and supported as a leading case study of regenerative tourism practices.</li> </ul>



## Option 1: Extension of visitor offering

### Overview

Opportunities to improve the visitor experience and financial performance of the PMSC without excessive physical adjustments or financial commitment:

#### Impact on Visitor Experience

- Modern interpretive signage throughout the Robert Findlay Reserve would provide interactive educational content and the ability to gather donations.
- Paid-for guided tours of the Robert Findlay Reserve provided by PMNT volunteers for free and independent travellers (FIT), group travel, educational and corporate groups.
- Both the guided and non-guided experiences could partner with aligned conservation groups and incorporate wider ecological and conservation content, specifically in relation to global climate change and coastal inundation (sea-level rise).
- Māori stories and whakataukī developed and incorporated in partnership with mana whenua.
- A range of support services and facilities (e.g., booking services, bike racks/storage and shuttle services) could be introduced to create a central point of activity and facilitate visitor's enjoyment of the surrounding area.
- Guided experiences, accommodation and catering can be packaged together.
- An improved (but unstaffed) tea/coffee offering is introduced inside or via a food truck in the parking area.

## Benefits

- Provides tangible improvements to the visitor experience.
- Does not require significant financial investment by PMNT.
- Quick and easy to develop and implement when compared with other options.
- Opportunity to provide some financial assistance to PMSC/PMNT.
- Creates an opportunity for PMNT to partner with and support aligned organisations, including conservation groups and mana whenua.
- Key-person reliance would diminish as a pool of knowledgeable volunteer guides is developed.
- Commissionable products would open trade channels within the tourism sector, with commission payments also encouraging the local tourism industry to drive increased visitation.
- Incorporating wider conservation and climate change education within the experience helps decrease the sole reliance placed on the shorebirds themselves.

- Would not provide a unique or world-class visitor experience.
- Limited space to host groups at the same time as general visitors.
- Does not address the physical separation of the visitor centre with the shorebirds and habitat.
- The PMSC would retain its current issue of not presenting a 'must do' visitor attraction in of itself.
- Does not address the need for the PMSC to be refreshed/refurbished to remain fit for purpose.
- Does not provide robust futureproofing in response to coastal inundation, with the need to move the facility likely in the mid-long term.

- Visitor numbers continue to gradually increase (5-10% YOY).
- The improved experience leads to enhanced visitor feedback and word-of-mouth referrals.
- Additional travel-trade relationships lead to a slight increase in both FIT and group visits.
- Relationships with aligned local groups are improved.
- The PMNT remains largely dependent on grants and donations to be financially sustainable.
- The PMSC eventually requires renovation or relocation, with future building development complications likely due to the impacts of coastal inundation.



Likely Outcomes

## Challenges



# 2

## Option 2: Refurbishment of existing site

### Overview

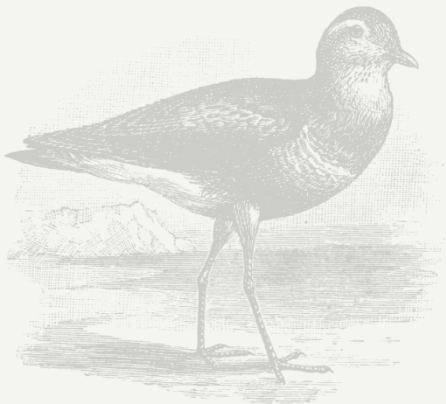
The existing visitor centre is refurbished within its current footprint, with an enhanced sense of arrival, reallocation of existing spaces and updating of the interpretive experience all improving both the visitor experience and functionality of the available space.

### Impact on Visitor Experience

- Improved signage, parking, and landscaping creates a clear sense of welcoming and arrival.
- External building and landscaping improvements enhance parking and pedestrian movements and improve the arrival experience and site presentation.
- A dedicated presentation/meeting area located within the existing office/boardroom increases the size and functionality of the main visitor space. Office to potentially relocate to bunk room within the main building.
- Removal of the existing toilets and the installation of a dedicated public toilet block improves the experience for visitors and creates additional space.
- A refurbished visitor space utilises the additional space now available and incorporates a refreshed entrance and information/booking desk, modern interpretive displays, lounge, and retail area.
- Accommodation facilities are refreshed to remain fit for purpose.
- Replacement of the entrance, courtyard and main (front) decking freshens the presentation of the site and improves the feel of these areas.
- The removal of the existing toilets allows for increased flow between the main visitor space and the external courtyard, with comfortable seating and tables creating a pleasant space to spend time in.
- A transport experience such as a shuttle or 'bird train' is developed to better link the PMSC with the shorebird viewing locations.

## Benefits

- Provides tangible improvements to the visitor experience.
- Increased functional space can be better utilised to improve or extend the visitor offering.
- Does not require a high level of financial investment (when compared to Option 3).
- Would likely avoid complications arising from building consents or development covenants.
- Utilises existing resources.
- Maintains proximity between the PMSC and manager's cottage.



## Challenges

- Would not provide a unique or world-class visitor experience.
- Does not address the physical separation of the visitor centre with the shorebirds and habitat.
- The PMSC would retain its current issue of not presenting a 'must-do' visitor attraction in of itself.
- Does not provide robust futureproofing in response to coastal inundation, with the need to relocate the facility likely in the mid-long term.
- With improved information available online visitors may stop at the Robert Findlay Reserve and not at the visitor centre, particularly as this location now has a toilet facility. The marginal attractiveness of the experience is unlikely to compel many visitors to make a second stop.

## Likely Outcomes

- Moderate increase (~10% YOY) in levels of visitation as 'Passers-by' are drawn in by the enhanced sense of welcome.
- See Option 1 (above).





# 3

## Option 3: New ‘tidal’/floating visitor centre on ‘Grazing Block’

### Overview

A new ‘tidal’/floating visitor centre is developed in coordination with the creation of additional silt ponds on the ‘Grazing Block’ parcel of PMNT-owned land, south of the current site. A stunning and popular visitor attraction, the PMSC is designed in a manner that allows its facilities and visitors to respectfully interact with the natural surroundings while maximising the shorebird watching experience and highlighting key ecological issues of habitat protection and climate change. The existing site is repurposed as a ‘back of house’ research facility, with associated accommodation facilities available on-site.

### Impact on Visitor Experience

- The iconic structure creates a ‘must visit’ point of focus for those visiting the region.
- The ability to view wetland/shorebirds from the comfort of the PMSC itself provides a more accessible and comfortable visitor offering and mitigates the reliance on favourable weather.
- Moving the PMSC closer to the Robert Findlay Reserve allows for a more streamlined and cohesive visitor experience, with visitors having the additional option of an (approx) 30 – 45 minute walking loop to enjoy the coastal environment and shorebirds.
- Guided experiences are offered, incorporating a tour of the PMSC, the surrounding silt ponds, and extending into the Robert Findlay Reserve. A ‘Behind the Scenes’ visit to the research centre (located in the original PMSC building) can also be offered.
- Purpose-built interpretive displays provide information on the shorebirds seen in the area, with content also including related ecological subjects such as habitat protection and climate change.
- An improved food and beverage offering (either outsourced or provided via food/drink trucks parked outside) creates an additional reason to visit.
- The facilities also double as a unique event venue for small conferences, meetings, and events.
- The PMSC space has the ability to host large groups (e.g., schools) without disrupting FIT visitors.
- An information/booking desk and retail shop are also incorporated.



## Benefits

- The 'tidal'/floating visitor centre is likely to become an attraction in of itself, gaining media attention and increased levels of interest from outside the region.
- A floating facility would present a future-proofed approach being immune from storm surges and coastal inundation and may better meet the intent of local planning instrument rules and regulations than a non-floating facility.
- The ability to view wetland/shorebirds from the comfort of the PMSC itself provides a more accessible and comfortable visitor offering and mitigates the reliance on favourable weather.
- Bringing the PMSC closer to the Robert Findlay Reserve allows for a more streamlined and cohesive experience, and largely mitigates the risk of people visiting the reserve but not the visitor centre.
- Extending the experience to include aligned ecological issues broadens the appeal, decreases the reliance placed on the shorebirds themselves, and creates an opportunity for PMNT to partner with and support aligned organisations.
- Allows the original PMSC to be repurposed as a 'back of house' research facility.
- Provides an opportunity to move the PMNT further towards becoming financially self-sufficient operationally.
- Supporting infrastructure (parking and toilets) will alleviate issues concerning the Hauraki Rail Trail.

## Challenges

- Would require significant funding sources for both development, operation, and maintenance.
- A floating centre would also require "shore based" facilities such as access and parking, water supply, sewerage management and power supply.
- Would require environmental impact assessment and associated reports to gain consents and meet other legal requirements.

## Likely Outcomes

- The creation of a new iconic visitor facility would attract great interest and attract new visitors as 'passers-by' are compelled to stop in for a visit, and those holidaying in the area purposely seek out the PMSC as a 'must do'.
- A combination of a floating centre (a first in the southern hemisphere) and a striking architectural design would create a paradigm shift in thinking about the site.
- Combining these with improved food and beverage services and guided tours at appropriate times (surrounding high tides) would meet the expectations of this larger visitor cohort.
- Such a centre would drive demand for other services such as accommodation, food and beverage and other services in the local area and provide significant economic benefits.
- The PMSC is widely celebrated as a leading case study of regenerative tourism practices, with local and central government, other key stakeholders, and aligned ecological/conservation groups all providing high levels of support.
- The improved experience leads to enhanced visitor feedback and word-of-mouth referrals.
- Increased awareness combined with commissionable products results in increasing levels of business from travel trade channels.





## Recommendation

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### Recommended Option

TRC Tourism recommends that Option 3 (the development of a new 'tidal'/floating visitor centre on the 'Grazing Block') best meets the objectives outlined by Destination Coromandel, the PMNT, the winder panel and local tourism and hospitality operators to create a regionally significant destination that enhances ecological, environmental, community and financial well beings.







#### Further information and rationale

The 'Grazing block' is a disturbed area of pastoral land in the coastal zone owned by the PMNT and located south of the existing PMSC location. Through consultation with the PMNT, it was discovered that the PMNT have considered interventions on these lands to improve shorebird breeding habitat and address the impacts of sea level rise. These considerations are understood to include the excavation of shallow ponds suitable for wading shorebirds, and presumably would need to include infrastructure to allow adjustment of the water levels to manage water flows. This would involve significant civil works to excavate the artificial wetlands and reshape areas to dispose of the excavated material.

This presents an opportunity to design the habitat enhancement works so that a new visitor experience centre could be integrated within the site. This would include allowing for site access, parking and wastewater treatment facilities in the civil works while allowing for additional pondage to accommodate a floating visitor facility designed to respond to predicted sea level rise and increasing

inundation events. There is a precedent for this with the visitor facility at Brockholes Nature Reserve in Lancashire in the United Kingdom. While this facility is much larger than would be proposed for Miranda Pūkorokoro, it is a great example of a floating visitor facility ideally suited to a wetland wildlife sanctuary.

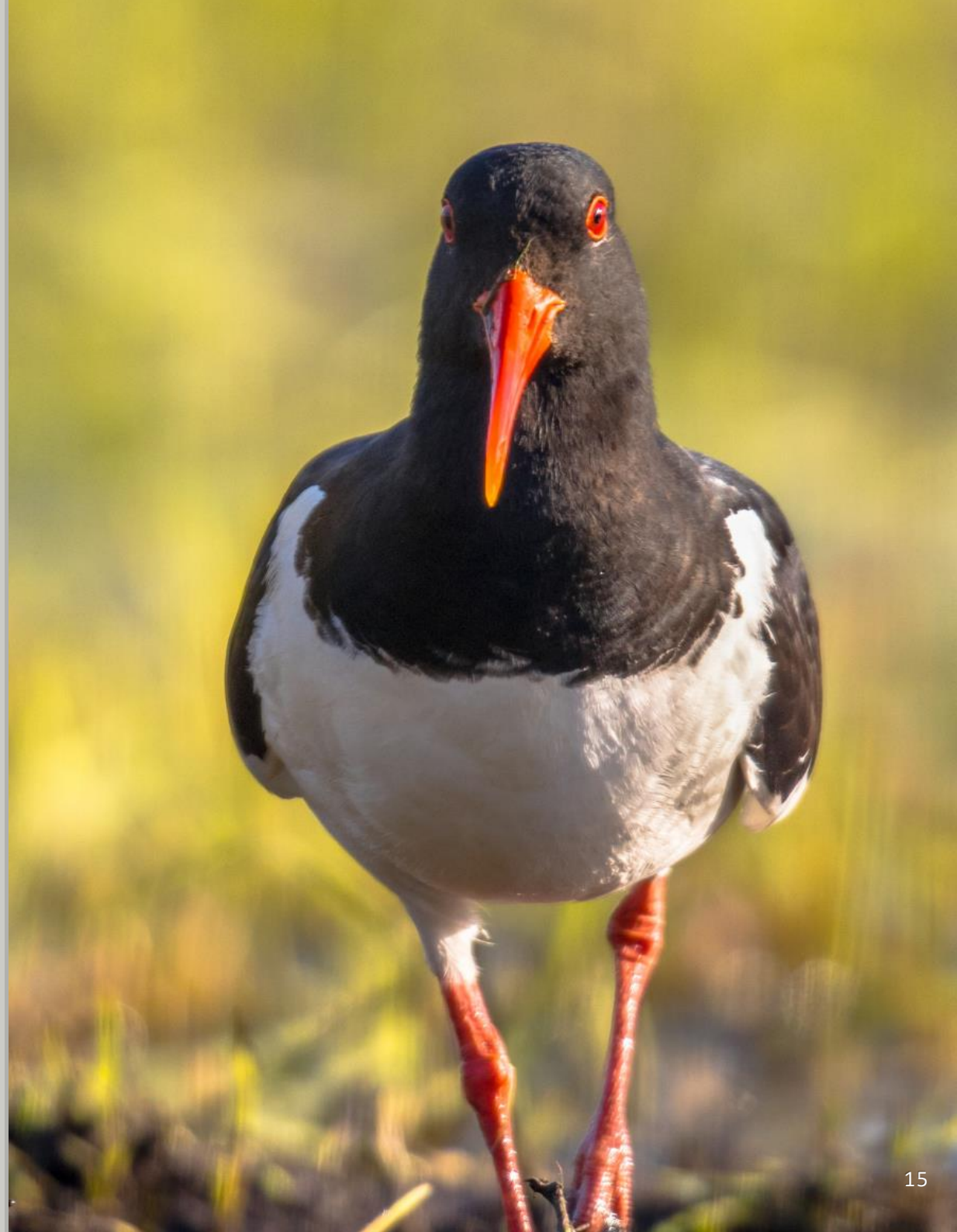
Though the most ambitious and challenging of the options, if done correctly, the PMSC would respectfully place the visitor in the centre of the action and bring the protection of the shorebirds and their low-lying, wetland habitat to life - maximising the shorebird watching experience while highlighting key ecological issues of habitat protection and climate change. Established as a 'must do' for the Pūkorokoro Miranda area, this iconic attraction would deliver the momentum required to further enhance nature, community benefits and the visitor experience as identified in the brief.

This option would have the added benefit of retaining the existing PMSC site for repurposing as a 'back of house' research facility with associated accommodation.



#### Additional Rationale:

- The area sits within the Seabird Coast Management Area of the Franklin section of the operative Hauraki District Plan and while further detailed advice will be required to fully understand the development constraints, it is likely extension of the existing, or construction of new buildings in the locality will be limited by the local planning instruments. A floating facility, while not being contemplated by these instruments, may better meet the intent of those plans because it would be associated with habitat enhancement and climate adaptation efforts at the reserve, be immune from inundation, and assist in communicating messages about our changing climate.
- As mentioned, a floating centre would also need “shore based” facilities such as access and parking, water supply and sewerage management and power supply, however given the likely level of civil works required to create the habitat ponds these could be readily planned for in those works.
- The existing facility is showing its age and despite the good efforts of the Trust, the visitor experience is compromised and will further deteriorate over time.
- If no improvements are made the Trust can expect a decline in the attractiveness of the centre and a reduced ability to cater for visitors.



# Case Studies

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/visit/>

Brockholes Nature Reserve Visitor Centre  
(Lancashire, UK)

This floating “visitor village” includes a café, shop, conference and function spaces and interpretive areas directly linked to hides, paths and viewing points.



<https://www.brockholes.org>

Edithvale Seaford Wetland Education Centre  
(Melbourne)

This centre built by Melbourne Water at a RAMSAR listed wetland includes an elevated enclosed viewing area with angled, double-glazed windows that allow plenty of light to enter, prevent the centre from overheating, and discourage birds from flying into them by reflecting the ground instead of the sky. There are also ESD features such as a recycled waste system, solar panels, and an integrated ventilation system.



<https://www.melbournewater.com.au/water-data-and-education/learning-resources/water-and-sewage-treatment-plants/edithvale-seaford>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (U.S.A.)

Dedicated to advancing the understanding and protection of the natural world, the Cornell Lab joins with people from all walks of life to make new scientific discoveries, share insights, and galvanize conservation action. Offerings include a visitor centre with guided and self-guided tours, indoor birdwatching, online/virtual experiences, citizen science, and educational programmes.







## Next Steps

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TRC Tourism welcomes feedback from both the PMNT board, Destination Coromandel, and the wider panel.

It is hoped that this process has identified a top-line approach that (at first glance) ticks the right boxes for all major stakeholders, which can now be subjected to further concept development and produced into a full feasibility report.







TRC