Executive Summary – Preparing the Tourism Sector for Climate Change

Climate change has the potential to both increase New Zealand’s attractiveness to tourists and undermine some of its core attractions. Tourism in New Zealand is a highly weather and climate dependent industry with most of the popular attractions/activities enjoyed by international tourists based outdoors. Currently little is known about how sensitive the industry is to climatic events and the level of risk projected future changes pose; what the tourism industry's adaptive capacity is and which adaptation measures could reduce the potential costs of climate change. This research will help protect and grow international tourism in New Zealand by identifying both the tourist activities most vulnerable to climatic change and potential opportunities for new products. It will also identify where investment is needed to limit the negative effects of climate change and identify adaptation strategies to increase the ability of tourism decision makers’ to cope with resulting future changes. This new knowledge will increase the international competitiveness of the New Zealand tourism industry.

This research will contribute to the Target Outcome of “Increasing the benefit from international visitors” to New Zealand (SER). The programme directly addresses the needs identified in the New Zealand Tourism and Climate Change Plan (2008), and aligns with the NZ Tourism Strategy and the Government’s Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change: Plan of Action. The research will also assist the sector to further engage in future thinking by strengthening risk management capabilities and increasing resilience, thereby synergising well with research to be undertaken in parallel on tourism future scenarios.

To date, no detailed sector-specific assessment has been undertaken of the potential impacts of climate change on the industry and the tourism activities most vulnerable to these changes, despite potentially significant threats to the industry’s long term viability. This project will significantly advance the New Zealand tourism industry’s knowledge, allowing for well judged responses to climate change and the selection of effective adaptation options. The research approach will start with an assessment of the sector’s vulnerability to current climate variability, and will then integrate climate-related pressures (through NIWA’s 2040 scenarios) with other economic, social and environmental pressures. This highly interdisciplinary research will for the first time integrate climate modelling with quantitative and qualitative impact assessments (Objective 1). Evaluation of adaptation options and implementation of most beneficial measures (Objective 2), will then be carried out. This integrated research will overcome the current situation where we see climatic research being carried out in isolation from research into what climate change actually means for affected stakeholders on the ground.

The Lincoln University team comprises researchers with an excellent track record in both integrated and collaborative approaches, and the transfer of knowledge to end users. This capability will be complemented by experts Dr. Hendrikx (NIWA), Dr. Reisinger (VUW), and Prof Scott of University of Waterloo (Canada), who have all worked extensively with stakeholders in the area of climate change vulnerability and adaptation. Mr Edmonds (advisor on Maori issues) and Mr Butcher (regional economist) will further enhance and grow the expertise of the team.

A range of end-users (e.g the Ministry of Tourism, Ski Area Association NZ, Christchurch City Council, Ministry for the Environment) have been involved in the development of this research proposal. We will also build on well-established partnerships (e.g. with TIANZ, TNZ, Christchurch Canterbury Tourism) to ensure efficient transfer of knowledge to end users. Implementation will also be aided through the direct involvement of businesses (e.g. KEA Campers) and the Hikurangi Foundation whose goal it is to implement knowledge on climate change into real action on the ground.