

Content of Remit: THAT *Local Government New Zealand* develop recommendations for, and advocate for a range of legislative and regulatory measures to better manage freedom camping issues and strengthen existing enforcement powers for freedom camping related offences.

Proposed by: Westland District Council

Supported by: Zones 5 & 6

Background Information

The Freedom Camping Forum (the forum) is a group of organisations and businesses who have partnered with the aim of curbing the negative impact of freedom camping. The local government sector is represented on the forum by both *Local Government New Zealand* and several affected councils.

The approach taken by the forum to date has been to utilise voluntary approaches to encourage responsible camping. Unfortunately the voluntary approach is not working. Each summer is still beset with damage and nuisance created by increasing numbers of freedom campers. At the most recent 21 April 2010 meeting of the forum, all participants present were in agreement that even greater efforts must be made to combat the negative impact of freedom camping.

It must also be pointed out that while the focus of this issue is currently on “tourists” and camper vans (by implication from overseas) it is clear that in some parts of the country domestic holiday makers are also a significant problem. It may be that one set of interventions will address both problems but this is still to be tested.

The National Freedom Camping Guiding Principles

In 2008, a set of key principles were developed, and adopted by all members of the forum. These principles were also endorsed by Zone 5 and 6.

The National Freedom Camping Guiding Principles state that campers should:

1. Respect the New Zealand environment - leave the site clear of all rubbish, waste and damage.
 - *Understand that dumping of waste and litter is an offence and will result in instant fines or prosecution.*
2. Act responsibly, and respect the access and enjoyment rights of other public space users.
3. Have immediate access to, or on-board, toilet, wastewater collection and rubbish disposal facilities.

4. Use designated public spaces, camping areas (eg Department of Conservation sites) or commercial premises as available.
 - *Seek the local i-SITE, DOC Visitor Centre, camping grounds, other camping guides or the local council web site, for information about the location of camping sites in the area.*
 - *Appreciate that some environmentally or culturally sensitive, and built-up, areas will not permit any form of camping.*
5. Understand that freedom camping is a temporary activity, generally considered to be two days unless otherwise informed.

These principles are still active, but have not been widely implemented. It is recommended in the interim that all councils be encouraged to adopt and implement the National Freedom Camping Guiding Principles.

Outcome of April 21 Freedom Camping Forum

In response to growing public pressure, the Freedom Camping Forum met on 21 April 2010 to discuss possible responses.

Forum members took a stronger stance with the following message:

“Forum members unanimously agree that users of both self-contained and non-self-contained vehicles should camp overnight only in holiday parks, Department of Conservation (DOC) camping grounds and other designated camping spaces.

Vehicle users will be clearly instructed about these provisions; particular emphasis shall be placed on explaining the camping provisions and the reasons for them, to the users of non-self-contained vehicles.”

At this meeting, all sectors represented on the forum also made commitments towards an action plan. The commitments from the local government sector were:

1. Urge local government, via *Local Government New Zealand*, to link camping information to and fully support forum actions.
2. Promote local freedom camping rules to make them well understood by the local community.
3. *Local Government New Zealand* will advocate for regulation change under S. 259 of the Local Government Act and legislation change (if required following further discussion) to establish a national instant fine and the opportunity for a nationally consistent enforcement regime.
4. Present to Zone 5 & 6 on the Forum results and recommend that a remit go to the *Local Government New Zealand* 2010 AGM.
5. Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) and Tourist Industry Association New Zealand (TIANZ) to support any legislation change that would give local government more enforcement tools for freedom camping.

National Relevance

Freedom camping (predominantly by non self-contained vehicles) creates real costs for councils. It must also be pointed out that while the focus of this issue is currently on “tourists” and camper vans (by implication from overseas) it is clear that in some parts of the country domestic holiday makers are also a significant problem.

Councils have used a variety of approaches to address freedom camping. These include:

- local by-laws
- permits for freedom camping
- banning of all camping in public places
- allowing self-contained vehicles in identified locations, for specified time periods
- limiting access to self-contained vehicles
- allowing all freedom camping, allowed in identified locations.

These approaches have been supplemented in a number of ways including; education, signage, bylaws, enforcement officers, penalty regimes, and even council provision of camping services. However, the existing mechanisms for dealing with the problem are generally proving to be ineffective for discouraging irresponsible and damaging camping activities taking place.

Tourism is a vital part of our economy. It is essential that any measures implemented to mitigate the problem caused by freedom campers do not discourage tourists. However, the damage caused by freedom campers to our pristine natural environments undermines our “clean, green” image. Many communities are also no longer prepared to keep suffering from the reckless behaviour of freedom campers. The status quo is not an option.

Level of Significance

It is a current and growing issue which will become increasingly important as the tourist population grows, and camping ground prices rise. The problem manifests itself in different ways and to different levels across the country.

Though predominantly a South Island phenomenon, and around Taupo and the Coromandel, freedom camping is becoming a national issue that is growing in scope and frequency. Nuisance manifests in a variety of forms, most commonly including; human waste, littering, fire hazard, and amenity (in urban areas).

Alternative Strategies Available

It is likely that this approach would not negate the need for ongoing alternative approaches (as identified earlier). Councils would still need to put in place local by-laws, and determine their own boundaries; with the strengthened enforcement powers for freedom camping related offenses.

Supporting Documentation

Nature of the Issue

Freedom camping (predominantly by non-self contained vehicles) creates real costs for councils. Though predominantly manifested in the South Island, the problem is systemic nationally and growing. It presents in a variety of forms, which include: human waste, littering, fire hazard, and impact on place (inclusive of residential areas and recreational areas).

There are a variety of approaches in place across the country, to address freedom camping. These include:

- Local by-laws
- Permits for freedom camping
- Ban of all camping in public places
- Self-contained vehicles allowed in identified locations, for specified time periods
- Self-contained vehicles allowed
- All freedom camping allowed in identified locations.

Current mechanisms for dealing with the problem are proving to be ineffective (education, signage, bylaws, enforcement officers, penalty regime, council provision of camping services). Legislative intervention is now required to increase councils' toolbox for dealing with this problem. However, it is likely that there are no silver bullets, and a wider package of non-legislative measures will also be necessary.

Background Information

In December 2007 a group of organisations and businesses partnered, through the New Zealand Freedom Camping Forum, with the aim of curbing the negative impact of freedom camping in the wrong places and/or without concern for the environment.

The approach of the forum to date has been to utilise voluntary approaches to encourage responsible camping. At their meeting of April 2009, the forum adopted the key message to visitors:

'As you travel around New Zealand in your campervan, please check with communities about camping opportunities in their regions. You can seek advice from staff at one or more of the following: information centres (i-SITES); Department of Conservation visitor centres; camping grounds. Assume nothing – always ask a local.'

The forum has upheld the principles of "Kaitiakitanga"; the guardianship and sustainable management of natural, built and cultural resources for the collective benefit of current and future generations.

In 2008, a set of key principles were developed, and adopted by all members of the forum. These principles were also endorsed by Zone 5 and 6.

The National Freedom Camping Guiding Principles state that campers should:

6. Respect the New Zealand environment – leave the site clear of all rubbish, waste and damage.
 - *Understand that dumping of waste and litter is an offence and will result in instant fines or prosecution.*
7. Act responsibly, and respect the access and enjoyment rights of other public space users.
8. Have immediate access to, or on-board, toilet, wastewater collection and rubbish disposal facilities.
9. Use designated public spaces, camping areas (e.g. Department of Conservation sites) or commercial premises as available.
 - *Seek the local i-SITE, DOC Visitor Centre, camping grounds, other camping guides or the local council web site, for information about the location of camping sites in the area.*
 - *Appreciate that some environmentally or culturally sensitive, and built-up, areas will not permit any form of camping.*
10. Understand that freedom camping is a temporary activity, generally considered to be two days unless otherwise informed.

Though the methods adopted by the forum are now established across the country, there has been little change “on the ground”. This is now a current public issue, which has been highlighted both as a consequence of the long summer of 2010, and the planning for Rugby World Cup 2011.

In response to the current situation, at a recent meeting (April 2010) the forum members took a stronger stance with the following message:

“Forum members unanimously agree that users of both self-contained and non-self-contained vehicles should camp overnight only in holiday parks, Department of Conservation (DOC) camping grounds and other designated camping spaces.

Vehicle users will be clearly instructed about these provisions; particular emphasis shall be placed on explaining the camping provisions and the reasons for them, to the users of non-self-contained vehicles.”

At this meeting, all sectors represented on the forum, made commitments towards an action plan. The commitments from the local government sector were:

6. Urge local government, via LGNZ, to link camping information to and fully support Forum actions.
7. Promote local freedom camping rules to make them well understood by the local community.
8. LGNZ will advocate for regulation change under S. 259 of Local Govt Act and legislation change (if required following further discussion) to establish a national instant fine and the opportunity for a nationally consistent enforcement regime.
9. Present to Zone 5 & 6 on the Forum results with remit to go to LGNZ AGM.
10. TNZ and TIA to support any legislation change that would give local govt more enforcement tools for freedom camping.
11. Council officers to communicate Forum activities internally.
12. Work towards an enforcement model that allows for collection of infringement fees.
13. Develop a model bylaw and promote best-practice models e.g. Rotorua (post establishment of new regulation).
14. Support a review of NZS 5465-2001 (to include stipulation of green diamond sign or other standard sign).
15. Communicate with the tourism industry re local freedom camping policies.

New or Confirming Existing Policy

New

What work or action on the issue has been done on it, and the outcome

- Launch of the "Camping our way" website www.camping.org.nz.
- Promotion - Holiday parks, DOC centres, rental companies and i-Sites etc have been visited and/or sent information so they can better help visitors.
- Information Material - i-Site New Zealand has developed a range of images to help educate visitors on 'camping our way' principles and a "Waste On Board" sticker developed.
- Signage - a standard "No Camping" sign has been developed and gazetted.
- National Freedom Camping Guidelines - individual Council policies are to sit under the National Guidelines.

- Funding - \$20,000 from the Ministry of Tourism Strategy 2015 fund has been used to develop the camping website and associated information.

Any existing relevant legislation, policy or practice

Adoption of the Freedom Camping – Guiding Principles by both Zones 5 and 6.

Outcome or any prior discussion at a Zone or Sector meeting

1. Zone 5 Meeting - 7 March 2008

Tourism Industry Association – Freedom Camping

Mr. Geoff Ensor, Tourism Industry Association gave a presentation regarding the Freedom Camping Forum.

Mr. Ensor advised that the Freedom Camping Forum comprises of representatives from Local Government New Zealand, Tourism New Zealand, I-Site Network, Holiday Accommodation Parks NZ, Rental Vehicle Companies, New Zealand Police, Regional Tourism Organisations, Transit New Zealand, NZMCA, The Ministry of Tourism, Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, RVANZ, Keep NZ Beautiful, AA, The Maori Tourism Council, the Tourism Industry Association NZ.

Mr. Ensor further advised that the Tourism Industry Association supports the development of a National Freedom Camping Code and would like to assist with Local Government Policy Framework Development, develop visitor education initiatives and lobby for funding as part of funding the NZ Tourism Strategy.

Mr. Ensor asked Zone 5 to support the group and its current direction/activity and to work with the TIA and the Tourism Industry Group, through representatives, to assist with the management of freedom camping.

Chair Maureen Pugh agreed that generally there needs to be a guiding framework, with individual districts having room for manoeuvre. The Chair advised that Westland District Council has taken a thorough approach and worked closely with Transit and Department of Conservation to come up with very good responses for the problems on the State Highways.

Chair Maureen Pugh advised that on 6 March 2008, Zone 6 resolved to support the promotion of a coloured identification sticker system for camper vans as outlined below and seeks support from Zone 5 for this approach.

- Vans bearing green stickers may park anywhere in accordance with local freedom camping policies and no time is wasted by enforcement officers investigating on-board facilities.
- Vans bearing orange stickers may park in accordance with local freedom camping policies only where there is a toilet facility.
- Vans with red stickers may park only in recognised camping grounds.

Resolved:

- i) **THAT Zone 5 supports the concept of a coloured identification sticker system as outlined by Zone 6.**
- ii) **THAT the Local Government Working Group be asked to support this system and seek Government/Industry implementation of it.**

2. Zone 5 and 6 Combined Meeting – 8 and 9 May 2008

Report to Zones 5 and 6 – Local Government New Zealand

The general principles were agreed to at the Freedom Camping Forum hosted by Tourism Industry Association in Wellington on 2 April 2008. Present at the meeting were representatives from Clutha DC, Westland DC, Kaikoura DC, Queenstown Lakes DC, LGNZ, TNZ i-Site Network, Holiday Parks Assoc, BCA, THL, Kea Campers, Wicked Campers, Spaceships, Police, Destination Rotorua, Transit, NZMCA, Min of Tourism, TIA, DOC. Apologies were received from many other interested parties.

It was generally agreed that in order to be effective as a country in promoting “responsible” freedom camping that a consistent approach is essential. Other work is continuing in an effort to bring about this consistent approach in time for the next tourist season. Transit, DOC, LGNZ and two South Island Councils are working together on signage while another group is looking at essential information that can be distributed via camper van companies. The general principles would sit above Freedom Camping policies and by-laws.

Chair Maureen Pugh and Mayor Kevin Heays gave a presentation regarding freedom camping issues and advised that a copy of the Framework for Development of a Freedom Camping Policy or Plan, along with Westland District Council’s Freedom Camping Policy was available for members.

Resolved that:

- i) **Zones 5 and 6 adopted the Freedom Camping - General Principles.**

- ii) Zones 5 and 6 resolved to ask Local Government New Zealand to address with relevant Government agencies, the issue of self contained campervans carrying appropriate signage. The required legislative changes to be effective as soon as possible.

3. Zone 5 and 6 Combined Meeting – 7-8 May 2009

Geoff Ensor, Advocacy Manager, Tourism Industry Association New Zealand gave a presentation regarding Tourism Industry Association/Local Government Looking Ahead and Freedom Camping

The TIA is the umbrella organisation for tourism throughout NZ and is funded by its membership of approximately 1700 tourism operators.

In 2007, the TIA became aware that local government would appreciate support regarding freedom camping and pulled together a working party to create a united view, the New Zealand Freedom Camping Forum. It has membership from 20 interested bodies including local government, all with the common view that there was an issue around freedom camping. The forum focused on identifying the issues and how to handle them and the key outcome was that while we welcome freedom camping, we don't want it to have adverse effects. The forum favoured an educational and regional approach and simplicity to achieve this. Unfortunately at some stage it will also require a regulatory approach but they hope to minimise this.

Outcomes from the forum included:

- i. 'Camping our way' website launched www.camping.org.nz
The Ministry of Tourism helped with funding. The website is designed to promote the 'ask a local' message but also includes information on ecowise practices, keeping safe, facilities, regional camping and links to various other website such as iSites, petrol stations, holiday parks, driving safety, police stations, public toilets, dump stations etc. The site was promoted to 34 camper van rental companies which have been asked to link to the site and actively promote it to their customers during their booking process. Feedback is that many users of the site are using it before they arrive in New Zealand and it is a very powerful way to help manage freedom camping and already has generated thousands of hits.

He urged members that if their councils are not linked to the site then to encourage their officers toward it and to ensure that the information is user friendly, not just a reference to your policy.

- ii. Training
Holiday parks, DOC centres, rental companies and i-Sites etc have been visited and/or sent information so they can better help visitors.
- iii. Promotion-Information Material
i-Site New Zealand has developed a range of images to help educate visitors on 'camping our way' principles. They are available electronically to businesses and organisations to use. A 'Waste contained on board' sticker has been developed to help identify campervans that have waste water and toilet waste on board.
- iv. Signage
A standard 'No Camping' has been developed and gazetted sign developed. The forum recommends sparing use as it doesn't want New Zealand littered with this sign but recognises it is appropriate for sacrosanct sites. It was noted that if you're going to prohibit be prepared to enforce!
- v. Unity
For the first time New Zealand has a unified stance on how best to manage freedom camping with the National Freedom Camping Guidelines now completed. Individual councils' policies are to fit under this umbrella.
- vi. Funding
\$20,000 from the Ministry of Tourism Strategy 2015 fund had been used to develop the camping website and associated information.
- vii. Tourism and local government
The TIA is totally aware how crucial local government is to the tourism industry and appreciates its work. TIA considers it has a role to work with local government but as it is a very small, resource strapped organisation, he advised it may be difficult to achieve direct work with each council. It has provided its members with a template for working with LTCCP's and he requested those here today to talk to their local tourism operators about what is working well with their visitors, are there any negative aspects and how can we manage them better and how can we protect and enhance visitor experiences to our regions and make them stay that extra night?

4. Zones 5 and 6 Combined Meeting – 6-7 May 2010

Email from Zone 5 Chair to Zones 5 and 6 Members for the Combined Meeting – 3 May 2010

One of the issues that was discussed at the Freedom Camping Forum on 21 April was that Zones 5 & 6 had already adopted the General Principles for Freedom Camping with agreement that we would all provide a web link to the Tourism Industry Association. In preparation for the meeting, Mayor Pugh asked that this item be actioned.

Freedom Camping

Mayor Pugh submitted an update report from the New Zealand Freedom Camping Forum, a group of organisations and businesses partnered with the aim of curbing the negative impact of freedom camping in the wrong places and/or without concern for the environment.

Though the methods adopted by the forum are now established across the country, there has been little change “on the ground”. This is now a current public issue, which has been highlighted both as a consequence of the long summer of 2010, and the planning for Rugby World Cup 2011.

Resolved:

THAT Zones 5 and 6 endorse a remit to the 2010 *Local Government New Zealand* Annual General Meeting requesting that *Local Government New Zealand* develop recommendations for, and advocate for a range of legislative and regulatory measures to better manage freedom camping issues and strengthen existing enforcement powers for freedom camping related offences.

Evidence of support from Zone/Sector meeting of five Councils

The above remit was moved and seconded by Zones 5 and 6 at the Combined Meeting held on the 6-7 May 2010.

Suggested course of action envisaged

That Local Government New Zealand develop recommendations for, and advocate for a range of legislative and regulatory measures to better manage freedom camping issues and strengthen existing enforcement powers for freedom camping related offences.