



Far North
District Council



MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
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FREEDOM CAMPING INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

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Introduction

Huge growth in camper numbers is putting pressure on campsites across the region with commercial sites fully booked months ahead of peak. More campers are spending time freedom camping. This report looks at what impact this has on infrastructure requirements across the Far North (especially at peak) and makes recommendations for future changes and investment.

It examines past, present and possible future freedom camping patterns within the district and considers the various management options available to Council. A range of work undertaken in recent years to understand the Northland freedom camping experience has indicated a need for the development of a freedom camping policy, direct provision of designated sites and facilities, provision of Rangers at peak periods, and basic leaflets and website content.

This report provides guidance (looking up to five years ahead) on futureproofing related to freedom camping and how Council can anticipate the growth in demand. It focuses primarily on recommendations related to infrastructure but also provides guidance for future operating models and input to both operating and capital budgets.

Timing and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

This report would originally have been presented in December 2020, but it was delayed intentionally to ensure that we were able to capture the impact of the pandemic over the peak periods of Summer 2020/2021 and Easter 2021. We wanted to take advantage of the unique opportunity to assess the Northland freedom camping landscape in the context of an almost-exclusively domestic visitor base.

Covid-19 continues to cause major disruption to international and regional travel. The Delta strain is changing the way we approach the pandemic and the shape of the upcoming 2021/22 peak tourist season is an unknown. The infrastructure issues addressed in this report are still relevant.

Scope

The report considers all forms of camping across the Far North district, but the primary focus is on demand for low-cost or free camping. It considers the current supply of campsites and holiday parks across the district, including those provided by commercial operators, DoC and others.

It addresses all campers visiting the district regardless of origin (locals, Northlanders, other New Zealanders and overseas visitors).

The work began with an infrastructure focus but uncovered some wider issues which are included in the report as they should influence infrastructure planning.

As a result, the report also considers:

- Environmental issues at unapproved sites
- Options for reducing operational costs and
- How to extract additional value from visitor numbers
- How to improve the provision of information

For the purposes of this report infrastructure includes parking, toilets, potable water, showers, dump-stations and waste/rubbish collection. Terms used in this report to describe camping and site types are included in the Definitions appendix.

Any changes beyond five years ahead, business cases and consultation are out of scope.

This work was made possible with funding support from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) through the TIF (Tourism Infrastructure Fund).

Executive Summary

The Key Issue

An ever-increasing number of Far North residents and visitors are choosing to camp at a wide range of camp-sites and scenic spots right across the district. This is putting significant pressure on DoC and commercial camping sites.

Those who cannot find 'formal' camping sites then tend to join the large number of people already enjoying the freedom camping experience, turning scenic public areas into freedom camping 'hotspots' - particularly in peak season.

Complicating this picture is the fact that freedom camping in the Far North is now largely unregulated. Many restrictive camping signs and policy documents relating to a now-expired Reserves bylaw simply aggravate the confusion, among ratepayers and campers alike, surrounding freedom camping in the district.

Doing nothing is not an option, in our view. Camper numbers will continue to grow. Numbers will become unmanageable at some locations. Resident and visitor dissatisfaction will result. Health and safety of visitors, residents, and staff will be compromised.

The Freedom Camping Act does not allow local authorities simply to ban freedom camping so the activity needs to be managed. This means encouraging and enabling responsible freedom camping behaviour and ensuring that there is adequate supply to meet demand. 'Supply' should not be read exclusively as freedom camping locations - it can also mean low-cost commercial or privately managed camping spots and overnight park-up areas in our towns where campers can safely stay while supporting local businesses.

A permissive Freedom Camping Act

The scope of the Freedom Camping Act 2011 applies to "camping, other than at a camping ground, using one or more of the following:

- a tent or other temporary structure
- a caravan
- a car, campervan, house truck or other motor vehicle.

More broadly, freedom camping can be described as camping for free outside of an established camping area, either in a vehicle or tent on public land close to roads, the foreshore or a walking /cycling trail. The Freedom Camping Act permits freedom camping on local authority and conservation land, unless the administrators of that land prohibit or restrict it under a bylaw, or any other enactment.

Feedback from Northland's Kaitiaki Rangers supports the assumption that many New Zealanders now view freedom camping as a right or entitlement.

MBIE has recently sought feedback on specific changes related to self-containment and regulatory tools but is not seeking to make wider changes to the Freedom Camping Act.

Inconsistency across Councils is confusing

Most travellers want to do the right thing, but it is frequently difficult for them to know or find out where they can stop and camp legally. There is little consistency across the country and travellers can unwittingly travel from one council jurisdiction to another and be subject to an entirely different set of freedom camping restrictions. Some councils have developed bylaws governing freedom camping, some use a reserves bylaw, some have guidelines and yet others have none of these, meaning they choose to take a permissive approach.

Similarly, there is no national standard for signage and interpretative material. Nor any centralised repository for freedom camping information. And sources of local information can be hard to find.

The Far North - strategic and regulatory gaps

Freedom camping has not been formally addressed by the Far North District Council since 2016 when a freedom camping policy was developed. At that time the Council chose not to develop a Freedom Camping bylaw but to use instead the Reserves bylaw to restrict freedom camping in some areas. The reserves bylaw has since expired but many of the restrictive camping signs remain in place. In addition, some out-of-date documents, such as the policy, are still in the public domain. This all serves to confuse campers.

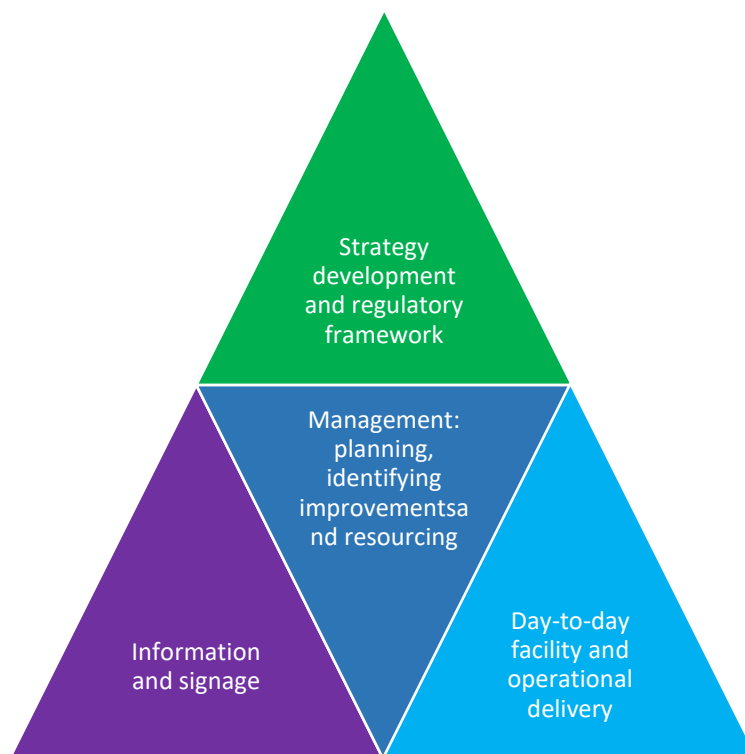
The stated objectives of the 2016 policy were:

- Ensure visitors are aware of where they may camp in public places
- Ensure visitors are safe
- Prevent nuisance
- Prevent damage to the environment and facilities¹

The first of these objectives is not being met and overcrowding poses risks to the other objectives.

There is no clearly nominated 'owner' within the Far North District Council of freedom camping issues and opportunities; nobody who really understands the issues and represents the topic in strategic discussions, policy development or in planning changes. Management of freedom camping is dependent on MBIE funding and, at peak, must often be rushed. This report outlines many opportunities to manage the freedom camping challenges the district faces more effectively.

This diagram shows the typical elements required to successfully manage freedom camping. Currently there are gaps in the Far North District Council's approach in all four areas, with all effort initiated and expended at the day-to-day operational level (bottom right). This team appears stretched. We feel there are significant opportunities for improvement.



¹ FNDC "Camping in Public Places Policy" document no A1788685

Recommendations

1. Develop a Responsible Camping strategy for the Far North

Develop a strategy² for freedom, or 'responsible', camping across the district so that future provision and delivery is intentional and consistent rather than accidental and ad hoc. This should:

- be guided by the Freedom Camping Act and encompass all camper types and modes
- makes it easy for campers to behave responsibly / do the right thing
- focus on education over enforcement
- ensure that freedom camping considerations are routinely considered in other strategic planning discussions

The strategy would set Far North District Council's goals for responsible camping and would set out the preferred regulatory approach (permissive/restricted, bylaw-defined/policy-defined - see section 5 below). It would set standards for matters such as camping infrastructure provision (to drive consistency and improve suitability over time) and communication and information-sharing (including signage) to align with the regulatory approach and good practice.

The first steps would be to agree goals and develop a Terms of Reference. More information is included later in the body of the report, but the strategy should incorporate the following considerations:

2. Better leverage and publicise existing infrastructure

There are many ways that the Far North District Council might increase camping supply and spread the infrastructure burden over peak camping periods:

- At peak season council could allow dusk-till-dawn (5:30pm to 8:00am) overnight parking/camping (one night only) at all public car parks with toilets – specifying a three-metre spacing for safety (as many vehicles will use gas for heating and cooking). Put signage in place and website information to support this.
- Consider opening up other reserves where outdated signage indicates camping is not permitted.
- Work out a simple set of rules that allows individuals/businesses/schools/clubs to give over some of their private land to 'user pays' camping for self-contained campers. It is suggested that this occurs only at peak times and only for up to 60 days a year³. List these locations, along with all commercial and DoC sites, on the website and relevant apps.
- Ensure that all public toilets, showers, transfer stations and dump-stations are listed on all popular maps and apps (e.g.: Campermate, Google Maps, AA maps). There are currently some omissions. Maintain the currency of this information as new facilities are added.
- Set and maintain minimum facility standards for designated Far North District Council 'Responsible Camping' sites. For example: toilets, some hard-standing parking, grass for tents, good clear signage.
- Change some standards to ensure that all public toilets are available 24/7 and all contain waste bins for toilet-related waste such as nappies. New approaches should be investigated for security (such as cameras and encouraging community reporting direct to the police). All toilet facilities should have at least one toilet open 24 hours. In the past it seems that if there has been bad behaviour such as vandalism FNDC has chosen to close locations overnight, using gates, or lock toilets. This makes the facilities inaccessible for all and can drive the wrong behaviour, such as forcing campers to toilet in the wild.
- Open up and promote existing locations with public showers (such as Melba St Kaitaia, and Te Hononga at Kawakawa.)
- Liaise with commercial campgrounds, and where operators allow dump-station access for a fee, add this information to the website.

² More information in "Project 7" later in this report

³ To be assessed on a case by case basis for each location

3. Provide more toilets and dump-stations on key tourist routes

The original focus of this work was to identify infrastructure gaps. The review identified a shortage of dump-stations (particularly the Cape Reinga area, the Hokianga and Doubtless Bay) with campers having to travel long distances to safely dispose of toilet waste (see 'Current toilet provision in the district' on page 40.)

Campers frequently need to empty their toilet cassettes every few days and they are unlikely to travel long distances to do this. The absence of a good network of dump-stations is likely to drive the wrong behaviour such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location. All toilet and dump-stations should be added to public maps and apps.

Projects recommended for priority delivery are:

- New dump-stations at
 - Te Paki Road/Cape Reinga Road (project 1)
 - Kohukohu (project 4)
 - Taipa (project 3)
 - Waipapa Sports hub (project 6). This dump station will replace Cobham Rd which is not easily accessible by large vehicles.
- A new toilet block is also recommended at Te Paki Stream (project 2)

The Te Paki developments would be a partnership between Far North District Council and Ngati Kuri. Council would provide and own the asset and Ngati Kuri would provide land access through a formal structure such as a license to occupy or MOU. There are other commercial opportunities for tourist activities near the site at Te Paki Stream, notably overflow for overnight stays, but without waste management infrastructure these cannot go ahead.

Far North District Council should set a standard for in-town dump-stations and remote, vault-style dump-stations. And all toilets and public dump-stations should be added to public maps and signposted well from main roads.

4. Provide better information

We know that most campers want to do the right thing and behave responsibly but we do not currently provide information that is sufficiently clear and complete to help them do the right thing.

Signage should be upgraded to be clearer and aligned with the Act, and should clearly communicate:

- what campers can and can't do at each location and exactly where they can set up camp
- information on how to avoid damage to local features such as waterways, dunes, wildlife
- information on nearest location of dump-stations and waste recycling and disposal points.

Rangers should have specifically designed handout information, in a dedicated pack, to share with campers.

The Far North District Council website should be updated to include responsible camping information, where camping is and isn't permitted, and links to other providers - for example, commercial operators, DoC, etc.

Providing greater clarity on where people can and can't camp is key. Ideally actions will spread the load of campers across more locations. For example, opening all car-parks with toilets to overnight responsible campers, as discussed in section 2 above.

The NZMCA survey data shows that many freedom campers assume we do have a bylaw and that they can only camp at designated spots or those listed in various apps. This is only reinforced by the legacy 'no camping' signs that they see on some reserves and car parks throughout the district. This is confusing for campers and only serves to contribute to overcrowding in some spots at peak. These signs should be removed, and key camper apps and maps updated with complete data.

5. Adopt a regulatory approach where education trumps enforcement

A freedom camping bylaw is not recommended. Lessons learned from other councils indicate that it does not provide much benefit and results in increased enforcement and legal costs. In addition, a bylaw would require a detailed site assessment for every potential freedom camping area in the district and would have to be reviewed regularly.

So far, an educational approach (rather than a focus on enforcement) has been successful for Far North District Council, with low levels of complaints since the introduction of the Kaitiaki Ranger programme (see page 29). However, any strategy work does need to consider the legal context, including an update on whether the Reserves bylaw will be updated and exploring how this would impact campers and information sharing.

The Kaitiaki Ranger programme should be resourced sufficiently to allow:

- training for all rangers before the season starts
- coverage of all key areas
- uniforms for visibility and safety
- use of technology for better data collection

6. Encourage campers to take responsibility

Freedom camping is not free of responsibility. Responsibility for the environment, responsibility for the safety of others, etc. The information programme will help this but there are infrastructure impacts too. While recognising that some rubbish facilities are essential at recreational areas it is recommended that a 'pack in and pack out' approach is encouraged. This is fair to ratepayers who pay to dispose of their waste. Educate campers to come prepared to pack-in and pack-out and tell them where they can buy approved rubbish bags and dispose of rubbish as they travel out. The exception may be wharfs and any hotspots where RSL says there is a big issue, such as bins for toilet-related waste (e.g.: nappies) in public toilets. This is discussed further in section 7 below.

Where campers see or experience unsafe or illegal behaviour (e.g.: violent or threatening behaviour, unsafe driving on beaches, etc) they should be encouraged and enabled to call police on *105.

7. Trial 'smart bins' at four locations

A 'pack in and pack out' policy notwithstanding (see section 6 above), there are some camping and recreation hotspots where rubbish accumulates from a combination of day visitors, locals, boaters and campers. The worst locations are Ramp Rd car-park and Taipa. Russell Wharf and Pukenui Wharf also have the same issue with rubbish from boat users.

Project 5 recommends the use of 'smart bins' at these locations. Smart bins use sensors to detect rubbish levels and alert maintenance contractors when they are nearing capacity and need to be emptied. A built-in, solar cell-powered compactor means the bins can take up to eight times more rubbish than a standard waste bin, helping to deal with the influx of day-trippers and campers at peak.

The compacting and online alert systems also ensure optimum use of waste collectors' time while the technology prevents rubbish overflow.

8. Extract additional value from camping visitors

The provision of adequate facilities will encourage campers to stay longer, visit more commercial visitor attractions and continue to spend money in the area. Some campers have said that they move on because they need to empty their toilet cassettes and there is no nearby dump-station, or they feel too crowded. If campers cannot find suitable places to park (even during the day) they cannot stop to spend money in that location. One example is Kerikeri town centre where there is no suitable sized parking for larger (or towing) vehicles.

Encourage other providers to offer low-cost facilities at peak

There are opportunities to allow other individuals or organisations with suitable land to provide camping spaces at peak season. This could be a win/win as it allows income generation for locals. This aligns well with Far North District Council's strategy of 'creating great places, supporting our people.'

It is important to make the point that this approach is not intended to impact or disadvantage commercial campground operators. As outlined elsewhere in this document, demand for camping facilities in Northland is increasing while supply is dwindling.

This document includes suggestions in the Appendix of possible partnerships at specific locations, but this is not intended to be exhaustive. There could be other individuals or groups who are interested, and some could offer added value benefits to campers for additional cost. For example, Far North golf clubs might want to offer golf tour pricing, or community halls may want to give historic tours/ introductions to their own local areas. Marae may want to offer cultural options. These approaches would bring more money into the region and offer opportunities to grow new businesses and tourism offerings.

Taking this approach will require dedicated resource within Council ahead of the season. This will include effort from the community development team and the planning team to ensure a successful fast-track template and training pack approach for simple no-cost compliance (for a maximum 60-day opening, to be assessed on a case by case basis for each location).

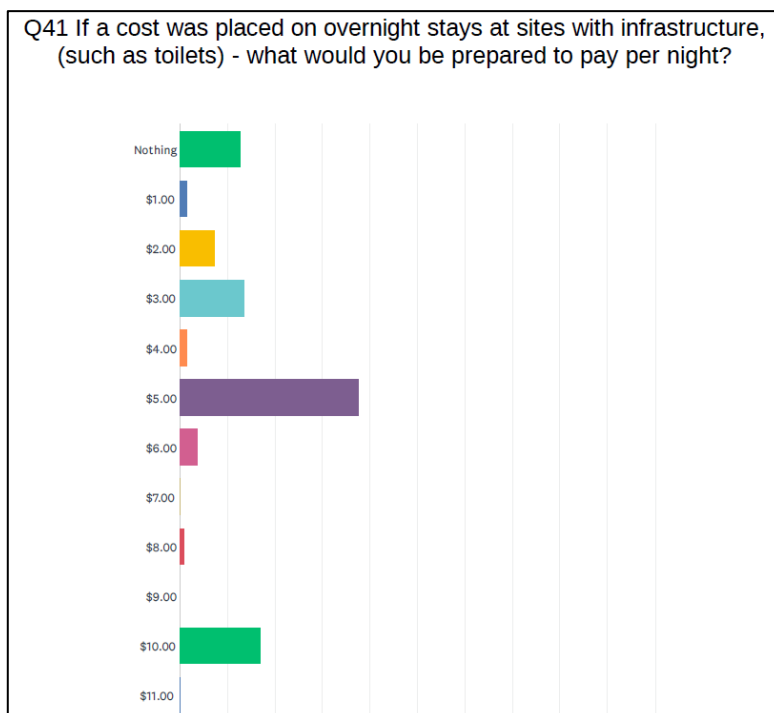
Council could provide simple guidance for each site, guidance on health and safety and maximum fee, and promote the site on that year's leaflet/website. In exchange the provider guarantees to open and to follow the guidelines. The goal is to spread the load, add options and interest for visitors but also give locals some income generation capability.

The assumption is that sites without toilets available could offer space for self-contained responsible campers, sites with toilets could potentially charge more and accommodate all camper types. This proposal also assumes that these are low-cost camping options (similar to DoC pricing) to help spread the load of campers around the region and are not competing directly with commercial sites. By limiting this approach to 60 days or less per year planning considerations should be minimised.

Any provider wanting to offer camping facilities for longer than 60 days per year would need to follow normal council procedures.

Exploring 'user pays'

Many freedom campers are simply there because the commercial grounds are full or because there is no NZMCA site in the area. Others are there because they do not need a full-service commercial site but there is no basic low-cost option available in the particular area they are exploring. Our survey (see 'Approach followed' on page 14) indicates that more than 85 percent of freedom campers would be willing to pay an overnight camping fee, while more than 65 percent would be happy with a 'user pays' charge for services such as designated overnight parking, hot showers and potable water.



As part of the freedom camping strategy mentioned in Section 1 above, Far North District Council could explore the possibility of developing a stable of 'user pays' facilities. As part of this council could explore working with NZMCA on a pay-per-use (push button) water trial. NZMCA have indicated they are keen to do this.

That said, it must be acknowledged that 'user pays' is a thorny topic, not least because the technology and means of collection are not easily retrofitted. It is possibly an option for new infrastructure.

Council might consider a 'one stop shop' concept for short-term and overnight parking, toilets, dump-stations, water fill-up and rubbish disposal. These facilities would be located close to main highways and in walking/biking distance from shops, cafes, etc. Such facilities allow travellers to break their journeys safely and can be future proofed by including electric vehicle charging spots. Many visitors from Europe will be familiar with this concept; there these are called Aires. The Scottish Highlands region is [now introducing these](#) too.

Council could explore the possibility of providing a range of payment options, one being Kiwicash ⁴: Many campers will already be familiar with this concept from staying at Kiwicamps elsewhere.

Charging for use of dump-stations and toilets should be avoided as it could drive undesirable behaviour.

⁴ <https://www.kiwicamp.nz/why-use-kiwicamp/>

9. Allocate dedicated resource/s

Allocate dedicated resource and strategic guidance and ownership to this topic so that a strategy can be developed and supported effectively on an ongoing basis.

Currently much of the operational responsibility related to freedom camping falls to the leader of Far North District Council's Facilities and Operations team who has been a key player in building good relationships with the Department of Conservation, Northland Regional Council and others, and has helped build the Kaitiaki programme. But a clear strategic owner and dedicated resource is needed here as the work continues to grow.

The strategic owner can ensure that campers' needs are considered in other council initiatives and development plans for complementary projects and infrastructure such as roading, facilities, parking, reserves and recreational areas/zones. The role would also involve working towards a more 'joined up' approach to freedom camping around the region (see section 10 below).

Whangarei District Council has engaged a contractor to coordinate its ambassador programme, develop the information packs provided to campers, and deliver the training. Far North District Council's requirements would be different but additional resource should be considered to allow development of materials and recruitment, and staff training ahead of the peak.

10. Work towards a more 'joined up' approach

Campers find it confusing as they move between Districts and rules and signage changes. The Far North District Council should work with adjoining local authorities to develop common standards for signage so that campers are not confused when they move from area to area. Campers do not know where local boundaries are so, where possible, Council should think Northland-wide in terms of information sharing.

Council should also participate in the national Responsible Camping Forum to help develop national standards and approaches.

Far North District Council has a strong history of working collaboratively with other organisations such as DoC to deliver the Kaitiaki Ranger Programme. This helps ensure consistency. This work should continue and be supported further.

Acknowledgments

Many parties were helpful in providing information and data which informed this study. These include:

- Department of Conservation
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE)
- Whangarei District Council
- Northland Regional Council
- Geozone
- NZMCA members (via survey) and staff
- Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ)
- Marlborough District Council
- Tourism New Zealand
- Tourism Industry Association (TIA)
- New Zealand Transport Authority (NZTA)
- Responsible Campers Association Inc (RCAi)
- Recreational Services (RSL) (Operations manager and Team Leader)
- Kaitiaki Rangers
- Far North District Council staff including:
 - Team leader, Facilities Operations
 - Manager, Strategy Development
 - Project Manager, Facilities
 - Asset Manager, District Facilities
 - Strategy Planner
 - Transport Planner
 - Strategy and Policy Specialist
 - Parking Enforcement Officer
 - Policy Planner
 - Strategic Planning and Policy Support Officer

Approach followed

Surveys and desk research

Information on campers and suitability/capacity of sites and management approach was gathered from a variety of sources:

- Work was guided by the Freedom Camping Act 2011, and good practice information from MBIE and LGNZ.
- We conducted a survey of NZMCA members, generating 1,250 complete responses. The survey asked about the camping experience in the Far North, spending patterns and awareness of Council facilities.
- We also contacted commercial holiday park and site operators to obtain information about demand and capacity issues.
- We purchased Northland data from Geozone, the developer of many successful camping apps such as Campermate. This provides historical and real-time location-specific data about campers in the region.
- Kaitiaki Ranger data collection sheets for activity at peak season were also a rich source of data and ideas.
- Council's current approach was compared with neighbouring districts (Whangarei and Kaipara) and areas with similar geographical characteristics to the Far North such as Thames Coromandel and Marlborough (rural yet tourist intense)

Note: There is no single source of verified freedom camper volume data. The NZ Responsible Camping Forum acknowledges in its Literature Review that this is an issue. In our work we have leveraged what data is available nationally and we have used Campermate data and our own surveys and observations to supplement this.

Stakeholder meetings and interviews

Meetings were held to better understand the history of responsible camping in the district. The stakeholders included FNDC staff and contractors, and Kaitiaki Rangers (including DoC and other involved groups). At this stage other community stakeholders have not been involved.

Questions explored were:

- What has been done already and why?
- What is working well and what are the challenges?
- What facilities exist now and what changes are already planned / funded?
- Why does Council have a policy rather than a bylaw?
- Who owns the strategy and the operational support?
- What opportunities have already been identified and are changes underway?
- What have other councils done and what has worked well?

Site assessments to inform current state and future opportunities.

We visited existing FNDC freedom-camping designated sites and some less formal 'hotspots' to gather complete and accurate information. Assessments included a review of the toilet and rubbish facilities, clarity and placement of signage, available camping space, access, surface type, and evaluation of any criteria that could lead to restrictions under the Act.

Availability and distribution of possible sites was assessed against demand and camper travel patterns. Options were identified and fed into the options assessment.

Options assessment leading to recommendation.

Different options were assessed for positive and negative impacts to arrive at preferred recommendations. These were discussed and tested at a summary level within the review team, and then tested with the representatives from the Operations, DoC team and Kaitiaki Rangers before inclusion in this report.

The options assessment is included in the Appendix.

Action plan development

A plan of action was then developed with priorities and high-level costs for the most urgent projects.

The Freedom Camping Act – what does it mean?

Freedom Camping defined

Freedom camping is defined under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 as “camping, other than at a camping ground, using one or more of the following:

- a tent or other temporary structure
- a caravan
- a car, campervan, house truck or other motor vehicle.

Freedom camping does not include the following activities:

- temporary or short-term parking of a vehicle
- day-trip excursions, or
- resting or sleeping on the roadside in a caravan or motor vehicle to avoid driver fatigue (Department of Internal Affairs, 2017).”

More broadly, freedom camping can be described as camping at no charge outside an established camping area, either in a vehicle or tent on public land close to roads, the foreshore or a walking /cycling trail.

Regulatory framework

The Freedom Camping Act 2011 permits freedom camping on local authority and conservation land, unless the administrators of that land prohibit or restrict it under a bylaw, or any other enactment.

To introduce, amend, review or revoke a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 the council must follow the special consultative procedure prescribed by Section 80 of the Local Government Act 2002.

If a freedom camping site is to be assessed as a prohibited or restricted site, certain criteria must be met under the Freedom Camping Act.

These three criteria are to:

- protect the area
- protect health and safety of people who may visit the area, or
- protect access to the area

*Note: under the Freedom Camping Act **only** the above criteria can be used to restrict or prohibit camping; Nimbyism and/or objections from commercial operators are not legitimate reasons to restrict camping under the Act.*

A bylaw made under the Act allows the council to impose immediate infringement fines of \$200 on campers who may breach conditions on a site.

Responsible Camping

Responsible camping is a term used to reflect the desired behaviour of all campers enjoying the New Zealand outdoors, irrespective of the sites and locations they choose to stay at, the type of vehicle they drive, or equipment they have. It is about travelling safely and respecting the environment and the communities they visit.

Many councils now use the term “responsible camping” in their messaging.

This responsible camping message has been the subject of recent promotions by Tourism New Zealand (TNZ), Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) and Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust (TINZT). Messaging has included the Tiaki promise:

TIAKI PROMISE

WHILE TRAVELLING IN NEW ZEALAND I WILL

—

CARE FOR LAND, SEA AND NATURE, TREADING LIGHTLY AND LEAVING NO TRACE

⤴

TRAVEL SAFELY, SHOWING CARE AND CONSIDERATION FOR ALL

⤴

RESPECT CULTURE, TRAVELLING WITH AN OPEN HEART AND MIND

⤴

TIAKINEWZEALAND.COM | #TIAKIPROMISE

HOW TO
CARE FOR NEW ZEALAND

 **PROTECT NATURE**

 **KEEP NZ CLEAN**

 **DRIVE CAREFULLY**

 **BE PREPARED**

 **SHOW RESPECT**

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Suggested goals

For the purposes of this review, it is assumed that Council wants to achieve the following goals:

- Protect and enhance the natural environment
- Maintain the quality of life of local communities
- Encourage sustainable economic activity that benefits the local community
- Plan for and welcome responsible campers so that they can enjoy their stay



5

What are other councils doing, and what is recommended?

Councils across the country have responded in various ways to the Freedom Camping Act:

Some have developed bylaws which restrict permit camping in certain areas. This requires detailed site assessments of all locations and camping can only be disallowed for one of the three reasons in the Freedom Camping Act. Others have relied on the Reserves Act, and developed a bylaw through that, to make camping illegal on reserves. This seems to be the approach that FNDC took in 2016, but as that bylaw is now expired it appears to no longer apply. Other councils have gone beyond the Act and restricted camping in nearly all locations (Queenstown Lakes and Marlborough are often quoted as an example of this). Other councils have embraced campers and taken proactive steps to design infrastructure to attract them.

⁵ Typical goals – these were taken from Marlborough District Council review

The National Situational Analysis⁶ in 2016 provides a full look at all options so that analysis is not repeated here. The report makes interesting reading and dispels (with data) many of the common misconceptions about freedom camping. The report concludes with the following (national) suggested next steps (abbreviated here):

- *Address the increase in supply.* There is a need for more suitable infrastructure for public camping, from toilets and bins through to camping grounds. That includes making current facilities available (e.g.: 24hr toilets) and increasing the levels of service (e.g.: more rubbish collections). An analysis of camping facilities may suggest that there are commercial opportunities to meet some of the gaps in the market.
- *Address the management and understanding of the freedom camping demand.* Make available more accurate information about the restrictions on freedom camping.
- *Address buy-in and understanding of communities about opportunities and impacts of freedom camping*
- *Address inconsistency in rules, regulation and management of freedom camping.* Careful and comprehensive assessments should take place prior to a decision to adopt bylaws, including under section 155 of the Local Government Act 2002.
- *Address the increase in opportunities for voluntary compliance.* Legislative framework is ambiguous/complex.
- *Address improvements in national information on freedom camping and freedom campers.* There are information gaps nationally which result in a lack of understanding about the nature and significance of problems. Relevant data is required to better understand and define problems their solutions.

What are our neighbouring councils doing?

Whangarei DC manages 9,449 hectares and has 22 different council locations where responsible camping is promoted. They have a Freedom Camping bylaw and have recently updated this, changing some site availability - especially at peak. They also describe themselves as a motorhome friendly district. At peak they use Ambassadors to promote responsible camping.

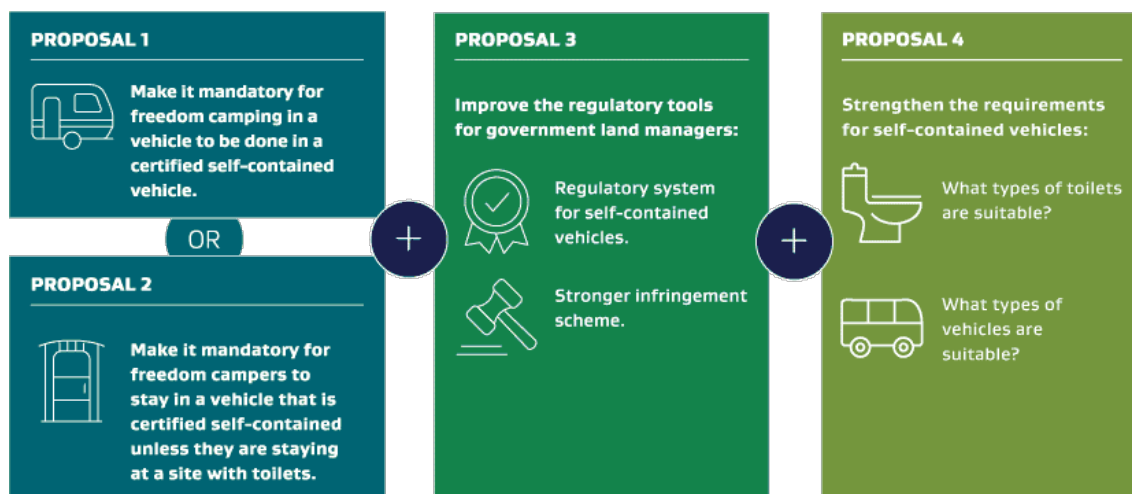
Kaipara’s website promotes two large fully serviced sites (Kai Iwi Lakes and Mangawhai) but also lists all campsite options (including commercial) in their district.

Recent developments

There are some recent developments that could influence the approaches that councils take in the future. Many of these themes have been in the news recently:

Minister for Tourism / MBIE

At the request of the current Minister for Tourism MBIE is promoting changes which include requiring self-containment of waste for all camping vehicles. The discussion document presented four proposals:



⁶ <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/Uploads/d3b76e001c/Freedom-Camping-Situational-Analysis-16.12.pdf>

Submissions are now closed on the discussion document⁷ and the outcome is still unknown, but the options outlined have produced vigorous debate amongst many interest groups and Councils.

The Minister has also separately stated an intent for New Zealand to attract higher-value overseas travellers. If this goes ahead this may decrease the number of budget overseas travellers in the future.

Other challenges by interest groups

- NZMCA are legally challenging two councils as they believe their current bylaws are too restrictive and not aligned with the Freedom Camping Act
- RCAi is challenging the legal status of the self-containment 'standard'. As a result, any mention of the standard seems to now be removed from most government websites.
 - RCAi focuses on education, rather than restriction, as the desired approach. They oppose use of the NZMCA self-containment standard as it cannot apply to all types of campers - it assumes that all freedom campers are caravans and motorhomes. The Freedom Camping Act itself covers all types, including tents and cars, so RCAi sees the standard as discriminatory.
 - RCAi encourages all campers (however they are travelling) to contain their own waste and camp responsibly and has also developed an accreditation programme.

Freedom camping in the Far North

Freedom camping facilities and the Kaitiaki Ranger programme do not match growth:

- *Our approach to freedom camping hasn't been updated as our bylaws have expired*
- *Camper demand and volumes of tourist traffic are not formally considered as part of the facility planning and provision process*
- *Council's website and signage do not provide complete and wholly accurate Responsible Camping information*
- *There are insufficient dumpsites in key camping areas*

For many travellers 'freedom camping' doesn't necessarily mean camping for free but, instead, being able to travel without a plan and the need to book ahead, and the ability to stop where and when they choose. They tend to select a mix of roadside reserves, DoC camps, NZMCA properties and commercial grounds but many, along with locals, are unclear about where they are allowed to camp and how long for.

Some areas (especially those shared with boaties) receive too much rubbish for standard bin capacities.

Camping visitors, including freedom campers, bring economic benefit (see page 28) to the area as they shop here and spend money at visitor attractions, cafes, etc.

Some characteristics are changing, but volumes continue to grow:

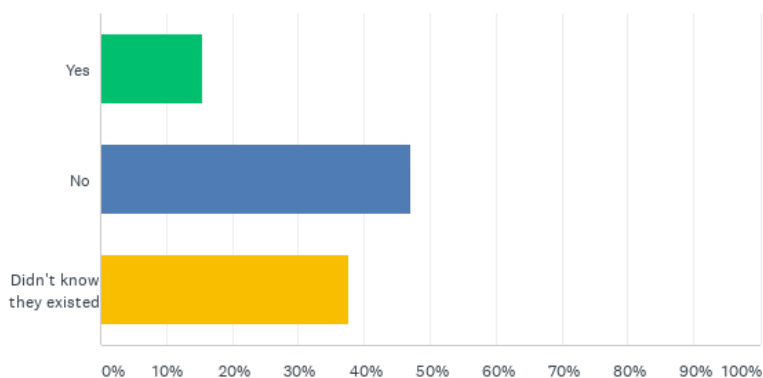
- The size of motorhomes and caravans is generally increasing, and the use of rooftop tents (often on utes) was a new trend this year (2020/2021). Most camp in (or on) vehicles; there are fewer tents in use.
- Increasingly, homeless people can be found sleeping in cars at freedom camping spots.
- Some areas (referred to here as 'hotspots') are now bursting at the seams in peak season. They include Ramp Rd Reserve and car park, Rangiputa, Tokerau, Taipa, Mangonui, Ahipara, Tauroa, Puwheke beach, Rarawa beach, Kaimaumu, Lake Ngatu, Utea Park and the access ramps to Ninety Mile Beach.

⁷ <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/13853-discussion-document-supporting-sustainable-freedom-camping-in-aotearoa-new-zealand>

Council promotes seven locations which are designated as available for free camping. Most of these have about five allocated spaces. The current locations are not all in areas where there is demand from campers and some are not suitable for tents. Demand (and the level of facility provision) varies significantly across the locations with Mangonui and Kawakawa proving the most popular. Beyond these locations the Far North District Council does not inform campers of any other locations where they can freedom camp.

Our survey (see 'Approach followed' on page 14) indicates that only 15 percent of the 1,250 respondents had used any council-owned camping site while 38 percent didn't know they existed.

Q7 Have you stayed at one of the FNDC overnight campsites designated on the website?



The council's website states: "camping or parking overnight at council-controlled parks, reserves and beaches is not permitted⁸". Given that the Reserves bylaw is expired this appears misaligned with the Act. Some areas signed as non-permitted areas are used more than the permitted ones and are covered by Rangers at peak season.

Other public facilities used by visiting campers are toilets, dump-stations (to dispose of grey and black water waste), drinking water taps, and parking areas. Some shortages have been identified in key tourist locations, and some existing dump-stations are no longer suitable for vehicles sizes and traffic volumes.

In the peak season council leverages annual MBIE funding to provide Kaitiaki Rangers. This group takes an education approach (rather than enforcement) and helps to improve behaviour and safety by giving campers additional local information about what they can and cannot do in the area. The Kaitiaki Ranger programme is popular with campers and locals, and helps reduce harm and issues, but is often resourced hurriedly due to the timing of the funding round. Due to resource limitations the Kaitiaki Rangers do not cover all tourist routes.

⁸ <https://www.fndc.govt.nz/Visiting-the-Far-North/Responsible-camping> as at 17/6/21

Camper numbers are growing

Despite closed borders due to COVID-19 many Far North camp sites and freedom camping spots were busier in 2020/2021 than they have ever been before at peak.

The Far North district continues to be popular with campers, many of whom freedom camp as part of their trip. Before the COVID-19 global pandemic growth was high (estimated at 12% per annum). Even in the summer of 2020 / 2021, when borders were closed and travel was impacted by lockdowns, we saw an increase in domestic freedom campers. Geozone data shows a six percent increase (on the previous year) in domestic campers staying in our region between November 2020 and March 2021.

When other areas of the country were reporting peak season camper volumes lower than previous years the Far North still had full commercial sites and more freedom campers than ever before in popular areas.

Our district always has very high numbers of domestic campers, and it is challenging to obtain accurate data as many locals will not use the camping apps as they already know their favourite spots. Local population growth will impact camper numbers.

Commercial campgrounds are closing – shortage of supply

Primarily because of the high price owners can get for the land, the trend has been for privately held camping grounds to be sold and developed. This reduction in capacity has not been replaced by new entrants into the market. Supply has, therefore, reduced.

We contacted most of the commercial campgrounds in July 2020. We had responses from sites representing 33 percent of the region's actual capacity, with a good spread across the region. All of these were expecting to be full over the summer of 2020/2021, based on their booking levels at that time compared to previous seasons.

The Kaitiaki Rangers tell us that many people were freedom camping only because they could not find space in a commercial campground. They were surprised and had assumed they could just turn up or contact the grounds a few days ahead.

At peak holiday season the commercial campgrounds in the area are fully booked. Those we surveyed told us these peak season bookings are often made six months in advance, and many are repeat annual bookings made by local families. Many campers head into our areas expecting to stay at commercial grounds and end up freedom camping. Some of them may be ill-prepared and many of them are willing to pay to stay somewhere if there is space available.

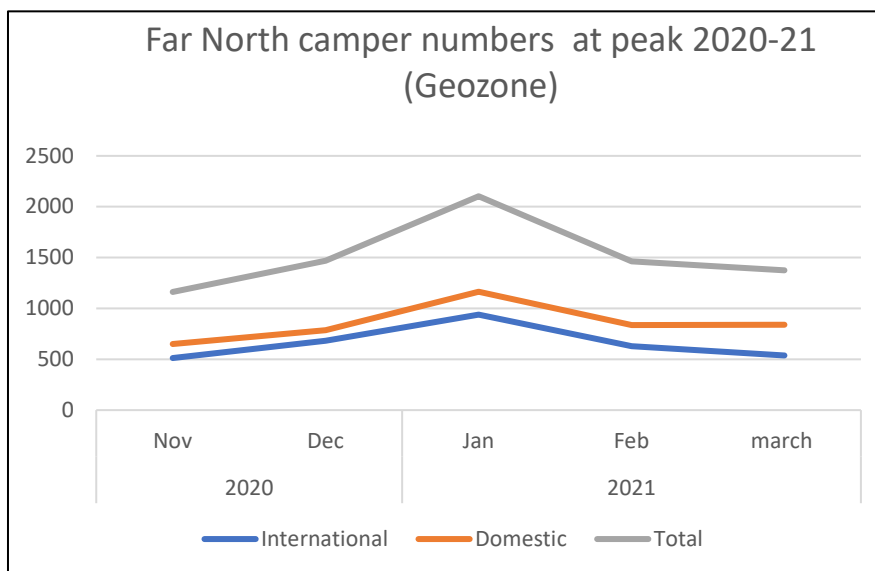
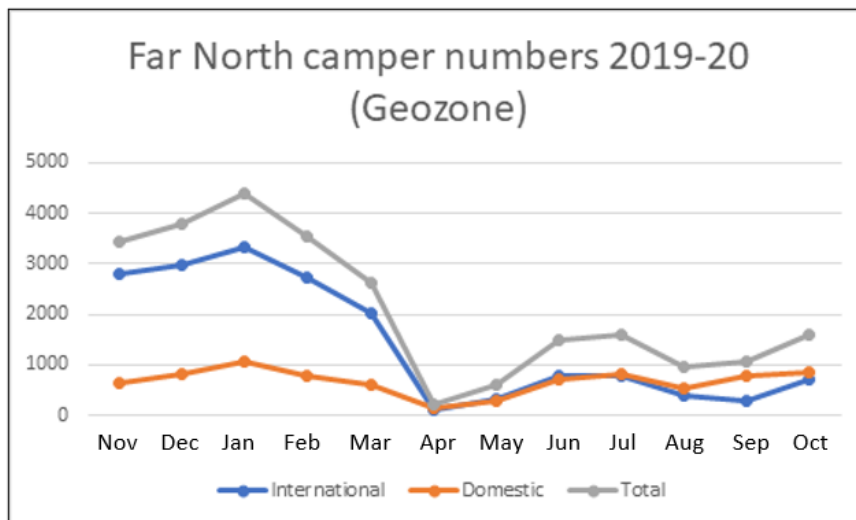
Some freedom camping areas are becoming so popular at peak that DoC opened an overflow site at short notice to ensure safe camping conditions. Top camping hotspots were the Ahipara and Karikari Peninsula areas which were overloaded this year at peak. Camper numbers have also built significantly at Taupo Bay, Tauranga Bay and in Russell. There is a clear need to identify more suitable freedom camping spots, or low-cost options for peak season use, and to promote these ahead of time.

What we know about our campers

There are many different types of campers, each with its own demographic, behaviour and motivation profile. We have developed the following 'camper type' profiles after data analysis and discussions with staff, contractors and Kaitiaki Rangers.

- **Grey Nomads**
Retired or semi-retired NZ or Australian travellers, often in larger self-contained vehicles travelling over longer periods seeking a range of sites.
- **NZ Outdoor Recreation Users**
Locals camping or staying in owned vehicles (self-contained or not) at more remote locations used as bases for fishing, hunting or other outdoor recreation.
- **NZ Lifestyle Nomads**
Lifestyle travellers/young people on a road trip over longer periods seeking free camping.
- **International Budget Free Roamers**
Young budget travellers primarily from Europe in small hired or owned vehicles (self-contained or not) spending weeks or months in NZ, seeking free or budget sites
- **Independent Tourists (some international)**
Travellers in larger hired self-contained campervans usually staying in commercial campgrounds, on relatively short visits seeking key tourist highlights.
- **Cycle Tourists or Trampers**
Staying in tents near tracks and trails
- **Touring Family**
Common over the summer months and school holidays, this group, primarily from NZ or Australia, tour in caravans or owned or hired campervans, staying mainly in commercial or DoC campgrounds when available.
- **Single Destination Family**
Primarily NZ families travelling over the summer months, based in one location, usually commercial or DoC campgrounds.
- **Seasonal Workers**
International or NZ young people seeking work and free or low-cost accommodation.
- **Homeless/Rough Sleepers**
People without anywhere to live, some local, some not.

Camper numbers in the Far North



The information above is graphed from Geozone app data. This is not a full picture as we know many people (especially locals who already know the area) do not use apps and the Rangers report that, at peak, many locations were busier in 2020/2021 than in 2019/2020. Many commercial campgrounds were also full for longer.

It seems that the Far North has followed a different pattern from many other areas of the country. Perhaps this area is perceived as a safe place to escape to in a pandemic, or it could just be that (understandably) it appeals more (and is within driving distance) to many of the New Zealanders taking the government’s advice to explore their own back yard.

The combined data paints a picture of many local and NZ campers visiting our area and indicates that many of the normal users of the apps are overseas visitors less familiar with our geography.

Northland has high numbers of its own residents camping and freedom camping here (even before the COVID-19 pandemic). The region’s milder climate attracts a lot of full-timers who move north over the winter and either freedom camp or book long-term stays at local sites.

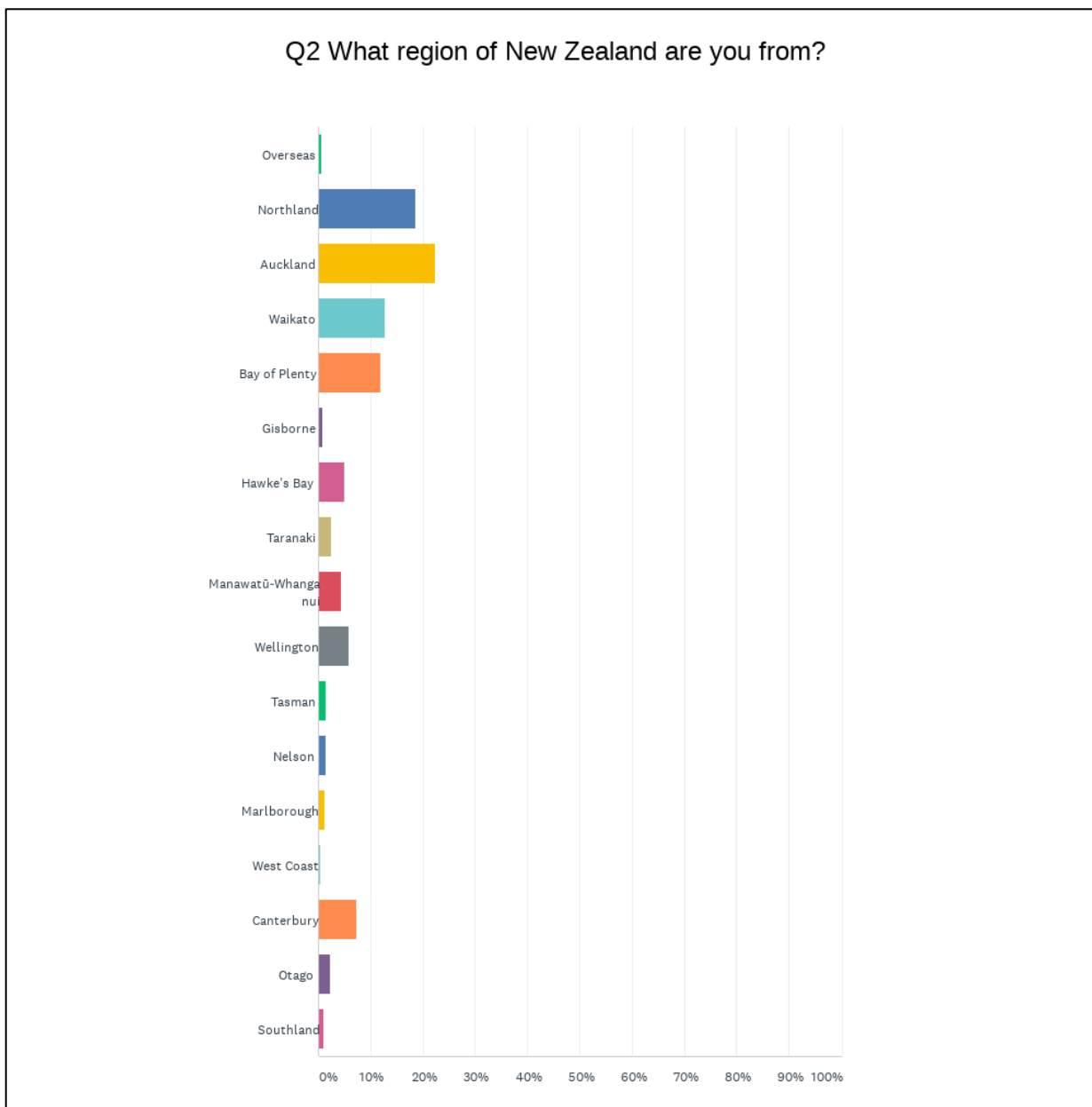
Where do they come from?

Many of our freedom campers are New Zealanders (most of them living in Northland and Auckland). This has always been the case and is not a result of border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Geozone data from 2021 spans the peak camping season during which New Zealand’s borders were closed to international visitors because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from this period indicates that 65% of the users of apps such as Campermate were domestic. Given that a great many domestic campers do not use, or need to use, apps such as Campermate the actual proportion of domestic campers will likely be a lot higher.

Data capture for domestic camping behaviour is notoriously difficult to capture. How do you capture information about the family who head off to a favourite camping spot because of a spur-of-the-moment decision at 4pm on a Friday?

Our survey of NZMCA members (see ‘Approach followed’ on page 13) indicates that by far the greatest proportion of New Zealanders camping in the Far North are from Auckland, followed by Northland, and then by Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.



What do we know about international visitors?

Nationally, the International Visitor Survey (IVS) provides two measures of the extent of freedom camping:

- the number of visitors for whom freedom camping was their main form of accommodation.
- the number of visitors who freedom camped at least once.

The IVS shows that (before the COVID-19 pandemic)

- The number of freedom campers was small but growing. Only 3.4% did some freedom camping in 2018.
- German visitors were more likely to freedom camp than others.
- International freedom campers tend to stay longer than other visitors and spend about \$99 per day, with an average total spend per stay of \$4,400 per visitor (IVS 2018).

NZMCA member survey data related to the Far North

In 2020 we conducted a survey of NZMCA members who had visited the Far North. From this sample:

- More than 90% are over 55 years old.
- 19% were from Northland, 22% from Auckland, 13% Waikato, 11% Bay of Plenty.
- 90% regularly use at least one Geozone app (the NZMCA app is a Geozone app⁹, Campermate is another).
- 87% have toured the Far North and 65% plan to do so again.
- Over 95% of them have stayed for over a week, with 56% staying three weeks and longer, and 10% staying over 10 weeks.
- 15% of those surveyed have stayed at one of our designated freedom camping areas.
 - 38% did not know they existed.
- 30% had difficulty accessing potable water (the Far North was in drought over the peak season and many public taps were turned off).
- Satisfaction with cleanliness of public toilets was good (87% said they met or exceeded expectations).
- 89% support limited and time-restricted overnight parking in reserve and council car parks (5pm – 8:30 am being the times most indicated as reasonable).

Data obtained from NZMCA shows significant growth in membership. In February 2021 the numbers were:

- Far North - 975 memberships representing 1,768 individual members
- Northland - 2,936 memberships representing 5,406 individual members
- The total number of memberships was 55,255 and individual members 101,560

(Note that NZMCA Area boundaries are not necessarily aligned with Council boundaries)

Where else do campers stay if they do not freedom camp?

We know that many campers use camp site types where charges apply, such as:

- Commercial campgrounds
- NZMCA sites (members only and certified self-contained vehicles allowed)
- NZMCA POPs (Park Over Properties) and CAPs (Charges Apply Properties)
- DoC sites
- Kiwicamps¹⁰– low-cost camping facilities using KiwiCash on a pay-to-use model. These sites are set up quickly with all facilities pre-built in transportable buildings.

⁹ This was the case as this report was compiled. A new NZMCA app has since launched and may not be Geozone based.

¹⁰ <https://www.kiwicamp.nz/what-is-kiwi-camp/>

How do campers decide where to camp?

Many campers use apps or Facebook group recommendations to find information about where to camp. Some of these are specific to freedom camping but others include all options, such as commercial sites. There are many sources but some of the most popular ones are:

- Campermate
- Rankers camping NZ
- NZMCA app (and paper directory)
- Facebook groups for specific interests
- Campable
- Wikicamps
- Rvexplorer.co.nz
- Freedomcamping.org

Other tools are Google, travel websites and local authority websites.

Many campers, even those with toilets on board their vehicles, prefer to stay near toilets so that they can stay longer without needing to empty their onboard tanks.

Economic benefits of freedom campers

Research tells us that freedom campers help our economy. A 2020 TIA report¹¹ says that:

“Visitors who camp in a vehicle are an important sector of New Zealand’s tourism industry. They travel widely through the country, tend to stay a long time (or if a domestic visitor travels regularly) and spend money on a wide range of goods and activities. Spending data from MBIE’s recent research notes:

- Domestic campers spent an average of \$729 per person per trip, with \$234 being spent on food and drink and \$213 on vehicle fuel and maintenance

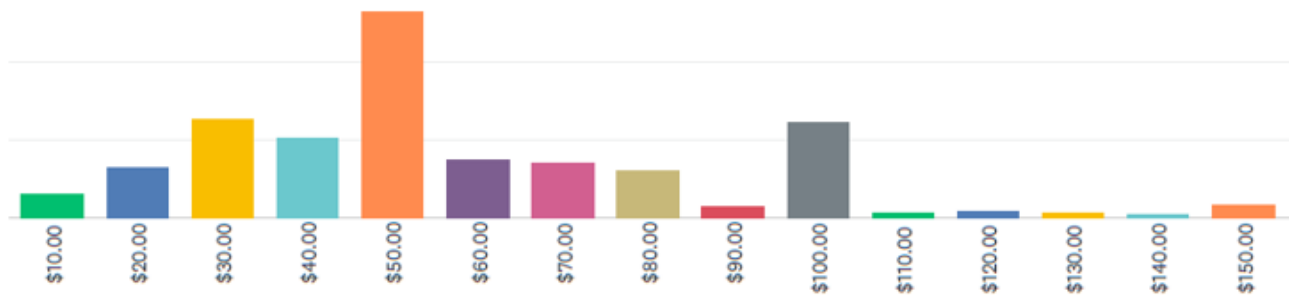
- International campers who purchased their own vehicles spent an average of \$7,912 per person per trip, compared with \$5,864 for those who hired a budget vehicle and \$4,890 for those who hired a premium vehicle.

This data illustrates that it is simplistic and inaccurate to label international freedom campers as ‘low-value visitors’.”

¹¹ <https://www.tia.org.nz/assets/Advocacy/ff9c3b1e09/Final-TIA-Position-Paper-6-Responsible-Camping-15-September-2020.pdf>

Our survey of NZMCA ¹²members who have visited our area (see 'Approach followed' on page 14) shows that most people spend about \$50 a day.

Q48 When touring what do you estimate your daily local spend to be?



This is broken down as follows:

Category	N/A	Less than \$50	\$50-\$100	\$100-\$200	\$200 plus
Fuel	1.41%	11.99%	47.36%	30.90%	8.34%
Vehicle repairs	42.13%	51.30%	5.08%	0.99%	0.50%
Camping Grounds	10.82%	35.32%	30.44%	17.24%	6.18%
Groceries	0.94%	8.94%	38.47%	42.47%	9.18%
Dining Out/Cafes	6.95%	35.34%	38.04%	17.55%	2.12%
Local Bars/Pubs	34.34%	43.13%	17.83%	3.73%	0.96%
Tourist Attractions	12.68%	41.75%	31.82%	10.29%	3.47%
Golf	89.12%	5.81%	4.08%	0.74%	0.25%
Fishing Charters	85.82%	5.55%	4.69%	2.34%	1.60%
Retail	11.28%	43.11%	32.07%	11.88%	1.66%

¹² Study survey via NZMCA

What types of enquiries / complaints does Council receive related to Freedom Camping?

Council receives relatively few complaints about freedom camper behaviour.

Nearly four years of data from RFS ¹³reports were analysed during this project. The period covered was January 2017 – October 2020. 157 requests were made in this period (an average count of 41 per year).

Top query types	% of RFS	Average / year
Seeking information on the rules and signage, and where camping is allowed	31%	13
Reporting overstayers or those staying in non-permitted locations	19%	8
Requesting improvements or repairs	15	6
Bad behaviour (e.g.: littering, fires, noise)	13	5
Safety and security concerns	6	2
<i>Total RFS queries related to freedom camping</i>		<i>41</i>

- The nature of the queries reinforces the view that the council has gaps in the provision of clear information and signage. The most common enquiry was from campers and locals trying to understand signage, rules and where people can camp.
- The next most common category was reports of campers staying in non-permitted locations or staying longer than permitted.
 - However, where there were sufficient data recorded against the RFS entry it appeared that some of these were related to NZTA land (which Council does not enforce), or simply the result of confusion about the rules by locals or campers.
 - One location often mentioned was Te Haumi.
- In 2020 six requests were seeking specific information related to COVID-19.

What those on the front line tell us

The following information was gathered from the Kaitiaki Rangers, DoC and FNDC operations staff:

Volumes

Rangers expected the numbers to be down because of COVID-19 but in fact many of our key locations e.g.: Karikari Peninsula, Mangonui, and The Cape, saw increases in numbers at peak season. They told us that local campsites had ‘full’ signs up earlier and for longer than ever before. There were fewer overseas campers as the borders were closed.

- “Ramp Rd reserve – lots of people turning up because it’s listed on the app”.
- “Many part-time seasonal workers staying in campgrounds for part of the week and freedom camping for the rest of the time.”
- “A lot of homeless people.”
- “More large extended family groups this year, some with groups of vehicles”
- “Increasing numbers of older travellers travelling all year.”

¹³ Request for Service

Vehicle types

- “More bikers and hikers this year and lots of 4wd utes with roof tents¹⁴.”
- “Roof-tent campers can get anywhere and were camping actually on the beach – not interested in what’s allowed, they just do it.”



The size of motorhomes is increasing. In addition, there are boats and other vehicles being towed by motorhomes which add to the length and weight of the vehicles.

¹⁴ These three photos were provided by Ahipara-based Kaitiaki Rangers

Homelessness

A huge increase in the number of homeless people living in cars, vans and tents was observed in 2021. Ahipara rangers reported up to 50 people sleeping in cars at peak season. Rangers in some areas (e.g.: Kawakawa) have contacts they share to get them help, others don't, and some homeless do not want help. Some have drug and alcohol problems. A lot of the homeless have "come home" from Australia and other places due to COVID-19 or job losses.

Behavioural issues

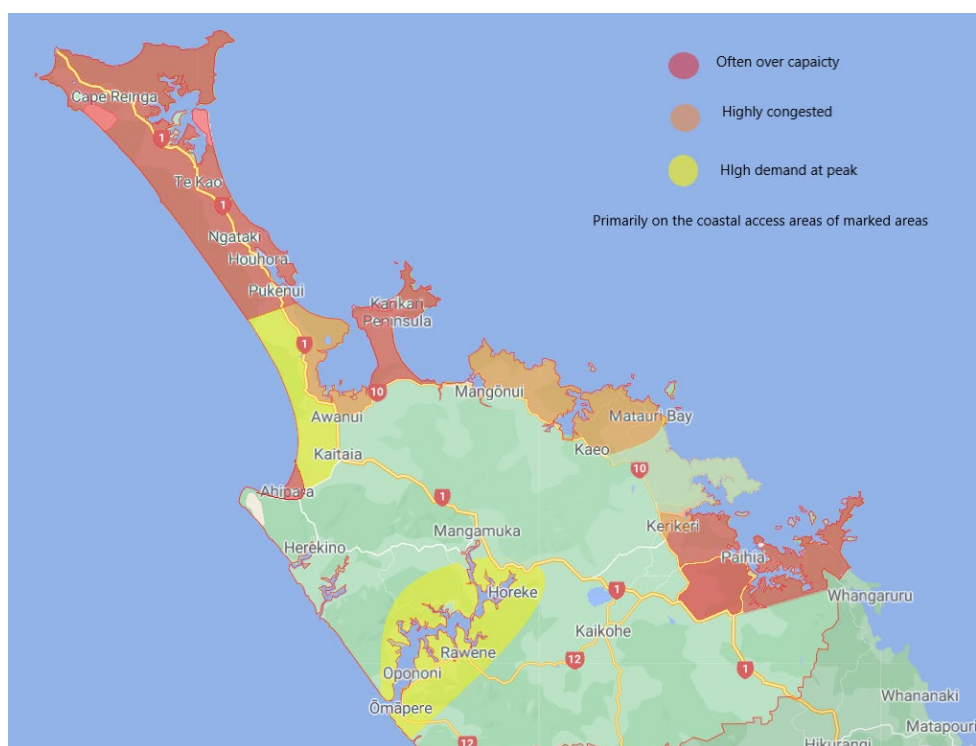
This season the Rangers found New Zealanders (both visitors and locals) less receptive to education and hearing the Rangers' message; they feel this is due to a sense of entitlement. There were problems with motorbikes and utility vehicles speeding on beaches (and going on dunes); some are day visitors, others are campers.

Some Rangers reported a drop in littering, others say it is worse than ever and that locals are the main culprits. RSL and Rangers reported issues with boats dumping rubbish at wharfs and ramps, and they collect a lot of "sea rubbish" from the beaches.

Hotspots

Some areas which we will call 'hotspots' were bursting at the seams. They included Ramp Rd Reserve and car-park, Rangiputa, Tokerau, Taipa, Mangonui, Ahipara, Tauroa, Puwheke beach, Rarawa beach, Kaimaumau, Lake Ngatu, Utea Park, and the access ramps to Ninety Mile Beach. In some of these areas campers in 4wd vehicles with rooftop tents were camping right on the beach (see page 30).

During 2020/21 it was noted that Taupo Bay and Tauranga Bay were also hotspots, but these areas were not manned by Kaitiaki Rangers. Similarly, no volume data was available for Hokianga as there were no Rangers there this year. RSL did indicate that there were a lot of campers in the Hokianga area.



How long was the peak?

Rangers tell us the peak times are from the beginning of December to the end of February, plus holiday weekends or times when there are fishing events or good fishing or surfing conditions.

Traffic volumes on tourist routes

Tourist traffic generally follows the Twin Coast route up State Highway 10 and down State Highway 1 or vice versa. Russell and Surrounds, Karikari Peninsula and the Awanui to Cape Reinga routes experience significant peak period demands.

Unsealed roads on tourist routes are of more concern from both a safety and environmental (dust) point of view. The Northland Transportation Alliance (NTA) has identified key roads that experience significant tourist traffic and has prioritised a matrix.

1	Bayly Road	Waitangi Mountain Bike Park
2	Te Paki Stream Road	Giant Te Paki Sand Dunes, Cape Reinga & Far North Cycleway (Cape Reinga to Rawene)
3	Haruru Falls Road	Te Araroa Trail (Cape Reinga to Bluff) & Waitangi Mountain Bike Park
4	Waiare Road	Puketi Forest Recreation Area
5	Matai Bay Road	Matai Bay Campsite, Karikari
6	Wreck Bay Road	Popular Ahipara Beach Front Camp Site
7	Heath Road	Gumdiggers Park, Waiharara
8	Koutu Loop Road	Koutu Boulders (car park), Pakanae
9	McDonnell Road	Wairere Boulders, Horeke
10	Purerua Road	Marsden Cross Monument



FNDC's current approach

Information and education prior to choosing where to camp

The council website has a single page on responsible camping. It is mostly a static (non-interactive) map which shows the seven designated free sites and six public dump-stations. It is hard to read and does not include GPS coordinates or descriptions of the facilities at each location. The page also encourages visitors to use commercial sites but provides no information on these. Some of the council facilities are not promoted on common camping apps.

There is a paper leaflet available (similar to the web page), but this is not promoted at all i-sites and some i-site staff are not aware of it.

The webpages have limited information about protecting the environment, and no information about how long campers can stay at the seven locations.

FNDC has a permissive approach

According to LGNZ guidance, the Freedom Camping Act (section 10) affirms that freedom camping is permitted everywhere in a local authority area unless it is prohibited or restricted in accordance with a by-law.

FNDC has a 'Camping in public places' policy (last updated in 2016) but not a freedom camping bylaw.¹⁵

In 2016 it was recommended that Council move to a bylaw¹⁶ but this recommendation was not adopted. The Reserves bylaw was relied on to control where campers could and could not camp. Freedom camping is effectively prohibited under the Reserves Act 1977 (section 44(1)) but our Reserves Bylaw expired in 2017 and it is not clear if a new one will be put in place or simply the adoption of a policy¹⁷. The Far North's parking bylaw is also expired with a new one expected to be in place by June 2022¹⁸.

So, council's approach is currently very permissive. It is possible that this has occurred by accident rather than by intent. However, a permissive approach is not necessarily a bad thing as, if this was followed through, it could help spread the load of campers, minimising hotspots and reducing enforcement effort and costs. Many councils with bylaws have found it hard to enforce and recover infringements. Other legislation such as littering infringements can still be applied where needed.

However, FNDC does not openly communicate the current permissive status and many signs in car parks and reserves are inaccurate and misaligned with the Act. This could lead less experienced freedom campers to believe that freedom camping is restricted and not permitted. In addition, at peak, the Kaitiaki Rangers visit and permit campers to stay at some locations that still display 'no camping' signs.

Use of Kaitiaki Rangers

At peak season MBIE funding is used to provide Kaitiaki Rangers at key locations. These local ambassadors help to promote safe and sanitary practices by welcoming campers to the area and making sure they know where facilities are and how to best protect the environment. They also share information on local attractions.

They are managed through a partnership with DoC and other local groups and the budget is managed by the FNDC Operations and Infrastructure team. Training is normally provided at the start of the season.

¹⁵ The LGNZ guidance document says FNDC does have a bylaw (pg. 12). There is a lot of misinformation around this.

¹⁶ Council document A1754105

¹⁷ Meeting 22/1/21

¹⁸ Meeting 4/2/21

The Rangers do not have any enforcement capability but if there are issues, they can generally encourage campers to step up through building rapport and dialogue with them.

In the absence of current bylaws, and accurate signage the role is tricky and relies on initiative. What do they say to people camping where there are outdated no camping signs? What do they say when people ask where else they can camp, and all of the commercial and DoC campgrounds are full?

Due to funding constraints the Rangers do not currently cover some areas of BOI, and Hokianga is not covered at all. Russell and Kawakawa were new this year. The way that the Ranger role is carried out varies slightly by location.

Resourcing is often hurried due to the tight funding timelines and for the 2020/2021 season this meant that training did not occur before the start of the season.

The feedback on the programme from campers and communities is great. Since the Rangers have been operating there have been very few RFS complaints related to campers.

One of the key strengths of the programme is that it had developed strong working relationships across a range of agencies and community groups. Those involved should be commended for this and this approach can be further leveraged in the future.

Recent Development: Post report completion MBIE have notified that the Responsible camping funding will no longer be available. The absence of funding for the Ranger program will need to be addressed by FNDC.

“Since 2018, MBIE has invested \$24.5m in Responsible Camping initiatives for local councils. Funding has been well received and we have realised a number of positive outcomes for communities and campers alike in terms of improved camper awareness and behaviour. However, this funding stream is now coming to a close and at this stage no further contestable funding rounds are planned for Responsible Camping initiatives.”

MBIE 30 August 2021

Council camping infrastructure today

Council maintains around 500 hectares of parks and reserves in over 30 locations throughout the district. Of these 30 locations, only seven are designated as available for camping. Most of these have about five allocated spaces. The current locations are not all in areas where there is demand from campers.



FNDC designated freedom camping sites - locations where no-fee overnight camping is encouraged

Location	No of vehicles allowed	Self-contained vehicles only?	Toilets	Dump station	Potable water	Shower	Notes
Te Corner, Ohaeawai	4 for 24 hrs	✗	✓	✗		✗	Toilets are across road (a new block)
Lindvart Park, Kaikohe	4 for 24 hrs	✓	✗	✗ Dump station is further down the same road	✗	✗	Some RFS data indicates security concerns
Two Ponga Park, Okaihau	4 for 24 hrs	✗	✓	✗		✗	Contradictory signage on site. Some contain “no camping”.
Totara North	5 for 24 hrs	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	Sign has been defaced
Lions Park, Mangonui	4 for 24 hrs	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	Camper numbers often exceeded at peak
Awanui Park	“Park in marked spaces” but no markings	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	No spaces are marked. Very small car park unsuitable for large or towing vehicles
Te Hononga, Kawakawa	No signage 10 +?	✗	✓	✗ Dump station is less than 5 mins drive	✗	✓ charge for hot	This site has marked spaces (longer than standard car length but no safety spacing between them to allow safe use of gas appliances)

Notes:

- 1) at most locations external bins are not provided. Experience has shown that when they are they quickly become filled with local household rubbish, so a “pack in, pack out” approach is expected from campers. This should be communicated more clearly in advance so that campers are prepared. RSL did however recommend that all public toilets should have bins inside the building for waste such as nappies. If these are not provided, nappies get dumped.
- 2) Most of these sites do not have signage from the main highway and Te Hononga currently has no signage at all.
- 3) Since 2016 (the date of the last review) it appears that a number of sites previously designated as camping permitted have now been designated as not available for camping e.g.: Lake Waiparera, Pukenui, Kaimaumu. The reasons for this are unknown.
- 4) The two most popular sites are Mangonui and Kawakawa (Te Hononga).

What information do campers get at these locations?

Two Ponga Park, Okaihau

Three signs (conflicting):



At some sites there is some level of consistency...

Lindvart Park, Kaikohe



Mangonui Lions Park, Mangonui



Totara North



Te Corner, Ohaeawai



... but at others there is not:

Taipa



Ramp Rd, Tokerau Beach



Awanui



Sites where other FNDC camper facilities are located

Location with other facilities aimed at campers	No of camping spaces	Dump station	Potable water	Rubbish bins	Notes
Cobham Rd, Kerikeri	0	✓	✓	✘	Open but currently not promoted by FNDC due to poor access issues.
Recreation Rd, Kaikohe	0	✓		✘	Often more than 5 campers on site
Lions Park, Mangonui	5	✓	✓		Often long queues for dump station at peak, and more campers than 5 vehicles
Waiomio Road, Kawakawa	0	✓	✓	✘	
Te Ahu, South Road, Kaitia	0	✓	✓	✓	
SH 12, Omapere	0	✓			NZMCA survey data indicate signage and access could be improved.
Whatuwhiwi Fire Station	0	✓		✘	
Williams Rd car park Paihia	13 (fee applies)	✘	✘	✘	Run by Far North Holdings but not promoted on FNDC website. There is a parking charge for these spaces (\$2 per hour / \$48 per 24 hrs) and there is no safety spacing. They have attracted negative press because of this ¹⁹

¹⁹ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/woman-shocked-at-dangerous-motorhome-parking-in-paihia/ZZUYH67FWTPL2ZNTZ7EUSOKWDQ/>

Kaikohe dump-station



Kerikeri (Cobham Rd) dump-station



Paihia pay-to-use motorhome parking at Williams Rd car park



Kawakawa (Te Hononga) no-charge parking



Council owned campsites

The "Council owned campgrounds policy (#5020) (2016) states that Council owns three campgrounds that are leased out to commercial operators. These are located at Houhora Heads, Tauranga Bay and Russell.

Recent significant improvement in Kawakawa

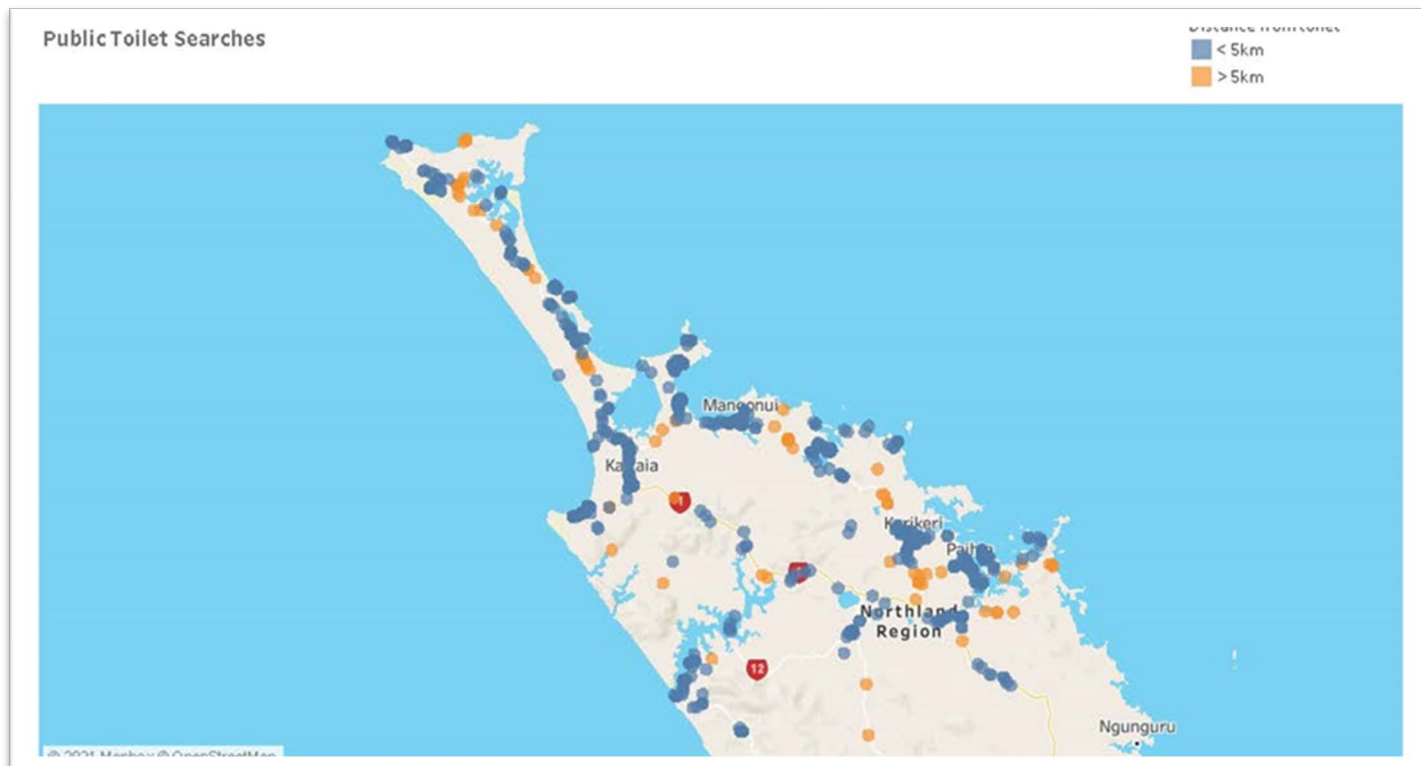
Significant improvements have been made recently to the freedom camping facilities in Kawakawa as part of the Te Hononga Trust project. There are now dedicated larger car-parking spaces and new toilets and user-pays showers available. It is a facility that has received excellent feedback from freedom campers and although Council has not yet actively promoted it, and full signage is not in place, it is often recommended via social media groups and usage is high.

This facility is perfectly placed to be used as a welcome hub where good responsible camping information can be shared with those visiting the region.

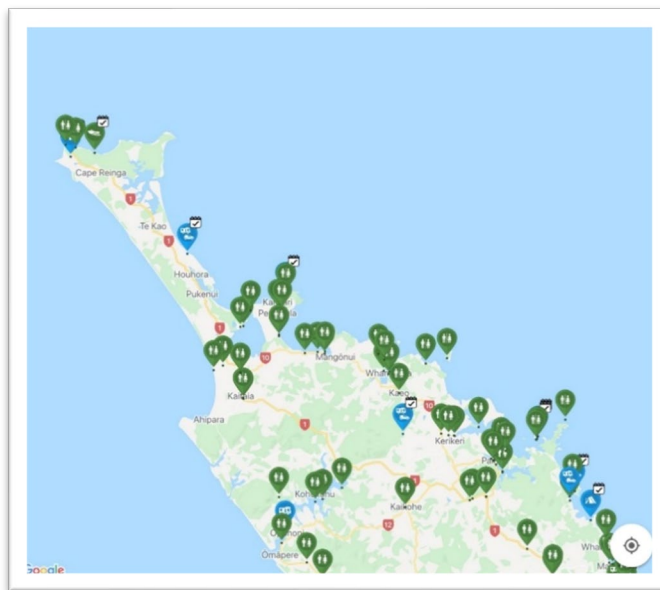
No evidence was found that this facility was developed as part of a broader freedom camping strategy.

Current public toilet provision in the district

Although not provided exclusively for this group, campers use public toilets too. Feedback from the NZMCA survey indicated a high level of satisfaction with the cleanliness of toilet facilities in the Far North, but Campermate data indicates that users are often searching for toilets but cannot find any within five kilometres.

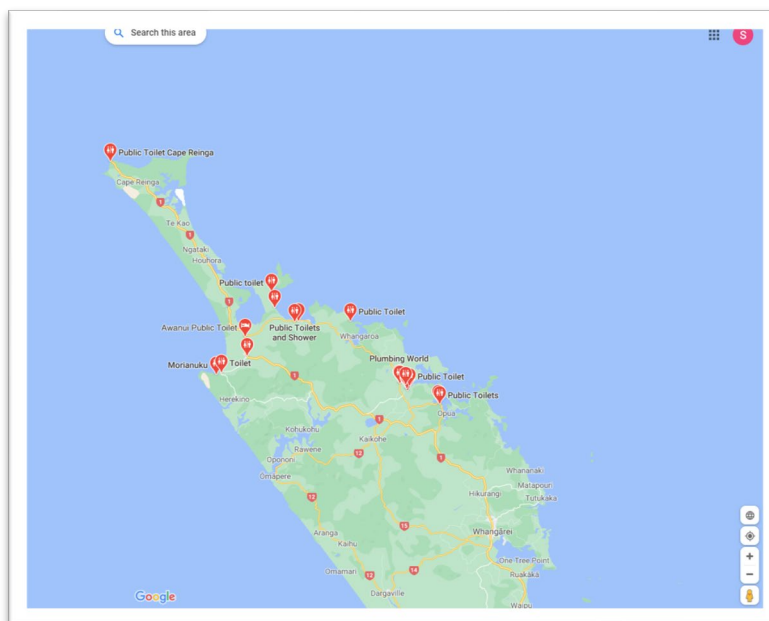


Campermate shows no toilets between Cape Reinga and Awanui:



When we compared the Campermate public toilet locations, with the list of toilets that RSL service it became apparent that some of them (e.g.: on the Cape) are not shown on the map. This could be a contributing factor to campers ‘going in the bushes’ as they cannot locate the facilities they need.

Similarly, Google maps does not show many of the public toilets that do exist:



In summary, both maps show no public toilets between Awanui and the Cape. ‘Missing’ public toilets include Unahi, Awanui (portaloo), Pukenui, Houhora, Kaimaumau, Te Kao and Waipapakauri Ramp.

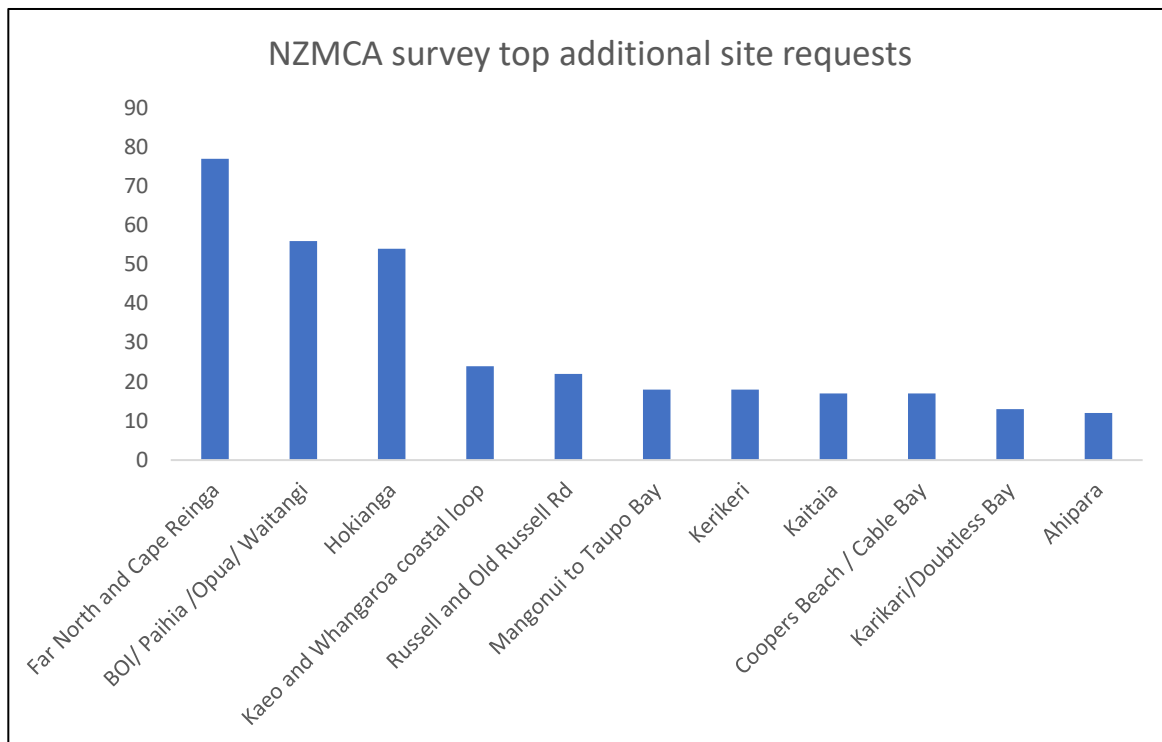
By combining the RSL facility list with feedback from RSL and the Rangers it was possible to identify some areas where additional toilet facilities would better serve visitors and protect the environment. But the most urgent action is to make sure that all toilets are well signed and marked on key maps and apps.

What do campers think about facilities in the Far North?

Where do we need additional freedom camping or low-cost camping options?

The responses from the NZMCA survey mirror in many ways what the Kaitiaki Rangers are telling us and what the Geozone data shows us about travel patterns.

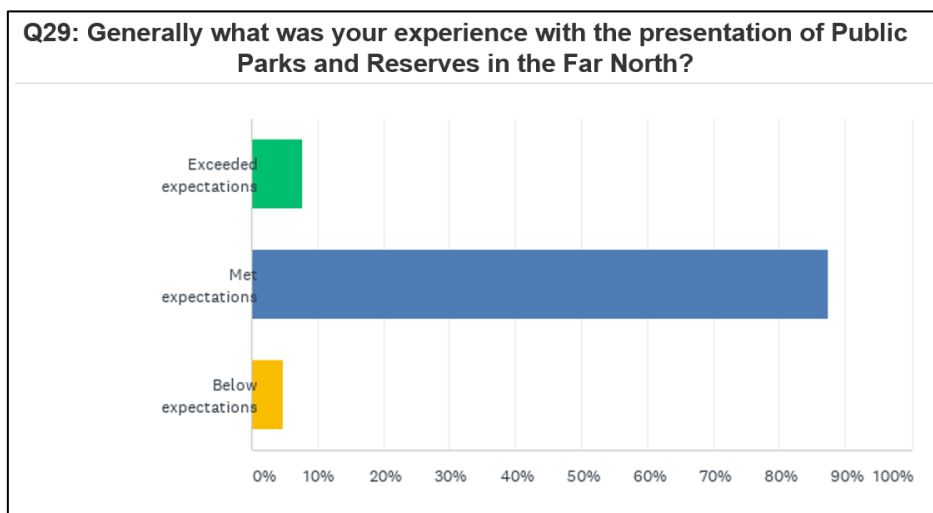
Areas under strain are the The Cape, The Karikari Peninsula and Bay of Islands. Hokianga is also an area that needs attention as there are few facilities and the new Footprints of Kupe centre is likely to attract more visitors. Kaitiaki Rangers did not cover Hokianga this year so data is not available from them.



The NZMCA survey also indicated that many were willing to pay to stay. Many wanted dog-friendly sites and sites near local attractions such as the bike trail and Ngawha Springs.

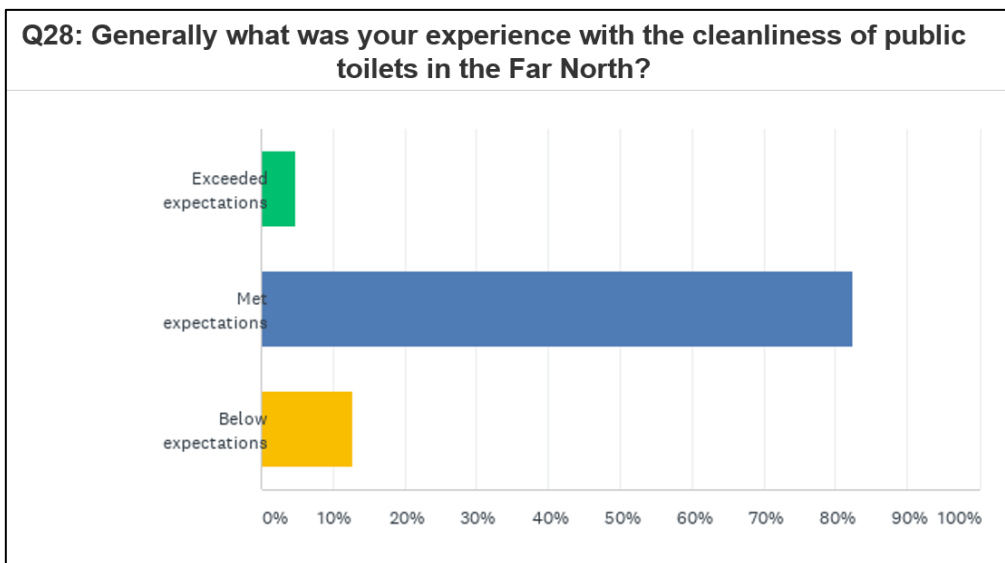
Presentation of parks and reserves

The NZMCA survey tells us that 95% of campers felt that the presentation of parks and reserves met or exceeded their expectations.



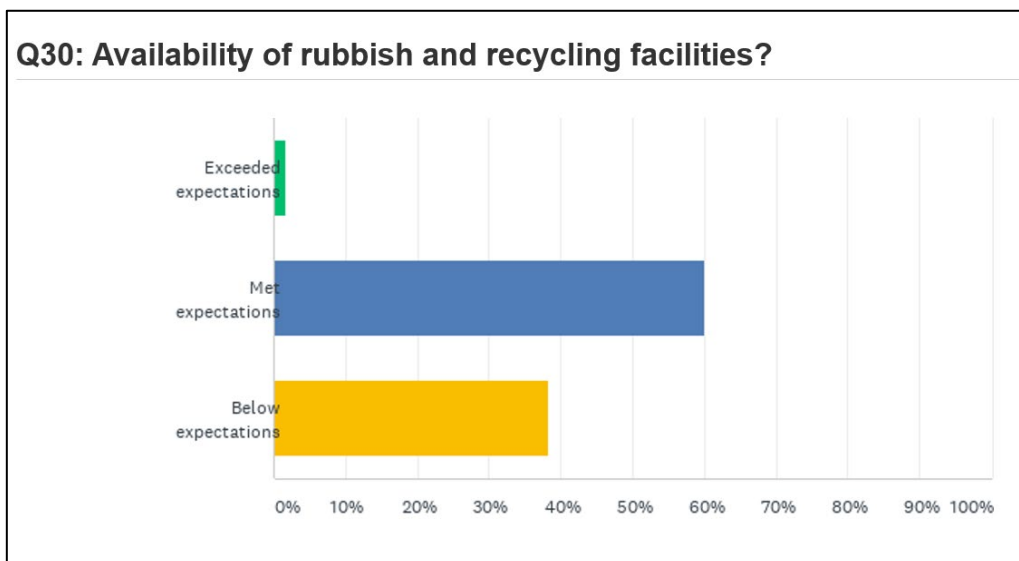
Cleanliness of toilets

The NZMCA survey tells us that 87% of campers felt that the cleanliness of toilets met or exceeded their expectations.



Rubbish facilities

The NZMCA survey tells us that nearly 40% of campers felt that rubbish and recycling facilities did not meet their expectations.



Potable water

29% had issues accessing potable water.

FNDC designated sites

NZMCA data – 38% of respondents were not aware of the FNDC designated sites.

Most of those who had used the sites rated them as adequate (note the survey pre-dated the Te Hononga opening).

Summary of issues

Shortage of camping spaces at peak

At peak holiday season the commercial campgrounds in the area are fully booked. Many campers head into our area expecting to stay at commercial grounds and end up freedom camping. Top freedom hotspots were the Ahipara and Karikari Peninsula areas which were overloaded this year at peak. Camper numbers have also built significantly at Taupo Bay, Tauranga Bay and in Russell.

There is a clear need to identify more suitable freedom camping spots, or low-cost options for peak season use, and to promote these ahead of time.

The rules are not clear

Many campers, locals and even FNDC staff do not understand what is allowed with regards to freedom camping. Most signage was installed when the Reserves Bylaw was active and is now inaccurate. The policy (publicly available via the website) is outdated, and the website points campers to a small number of designated sites implying that they cannot camp on other public land. Information and signage can be improved.

Busting to dump, but too far to drive

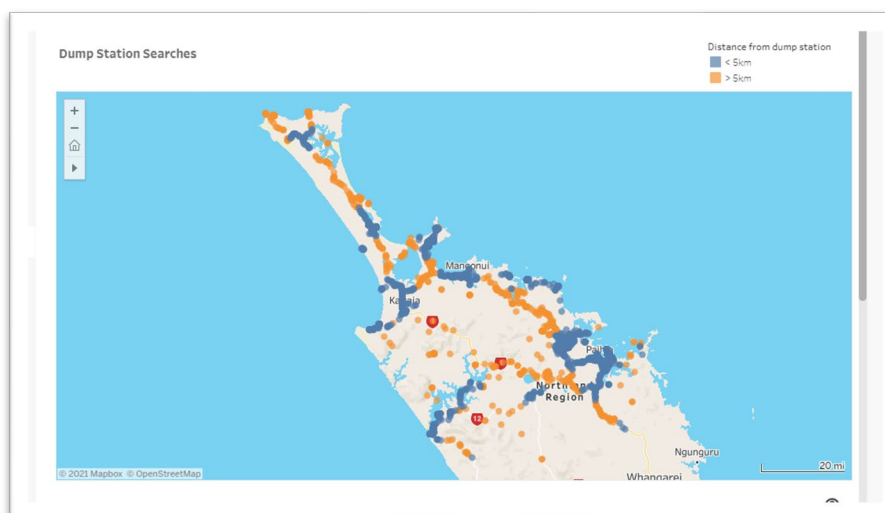
Some areas of the Far North have a shortage of dump-stations and toilets. We have Geozone data that shows large numbers of campers are searching for these facilities, then having to travel long distances to reach them and dispose of waste appropriately. There is opportunity to address this through installing more dump-stations (for campers' toilets to be emptied into) and toilets on these key routes.

Public toilets

RSL and Kaitiaki Rangers informed the team that some facilities are inadequate at peak. These have been noted for future infrastructure projects later in this report. In addition, some existing public toilets are not marked on key maps and apps so the public may not know they exist.

Public dump-stations

Campermate data for December 2020-February 2021 shows the areas (orange dots in the map below) where users searched for a dump station and were more than five kilometres away from one. Some dump-stations on the app are in private/commercial campgrounds and only accessible with an overnight stay at the campground. We have used this search data to identify areas of best benefit for new facilities.



The survey of NZMCA members who had visited our area also indicated a strong need for more dump-stations. Many indicated they would expect them in each medium sized town. Some cited the lack of such facilities as the reason for moving on. The main areas in which they said these were needed were between Awanui and Cape Reinga (25% of respondees), Paihia (7%), Russell (5%) Hokianga and the Kaeo/Whangaroa area. The dump station at Mangonui becomes very busy at peak times, with long waits and traffic congestion often blocking access to the toilets.

The NZMCA survey also indicated concern about the design of some of the current dump-stations. The comments suggested dump-stations should all:

- be suitable for large rigs
- allow vehicles to dump from either side of the dump station
- have potable water located separately from the rinse/dump point (for hygiene reasons)
- have better signage from the highway

It is recommended that this feedback is incorporated in the standard of any suitable new public facilities that are proposed - such as Waipapa sportshub, Te Hiku Sports Hub and the Lindvart Park development - where the site and size allow. The size of freedom camping vehicles is growing and some are designed to dump from the left and others from the right. Some tow boats and cars.

Water shortage

Campers generally expect good access to potable water (at most locations) and the ability to access hot showers (pay per use). The NZMCA survey indicated that many of those campers were impacted by district-wide water shortages.

This report has taken these seasonal shortages into account and so has not made immediate recommendations to increase potable water availability. But this should be reviewed once the shortages are resolved, and any new dump station developments should include water provision where a safe supply is available.

It is pleasing to see that the recent Te Hononga development includes pay per use hot showers. This has been very positively received by campers.

Overflowing bins and rubbish pollution

While responsible camping groups encourage all campers to pack-in and pack-out this does not reflect the current reality. Most people do the right thing, but some do not. Kaitiaki Rangers let campers know where the nearest transfer stations are, and they collect rubbish from camping areas and adjacent beaches and reserves. In some camping areas the Rangers tell us a lot of the rubbish comes from locals and not campers.

Poor behaviour by the few, and lack of good information

Most campers want to do the right thing, but they do not always know what the right thing is. For instance, they may not realise that walking on dunes can threaten endangered birds, or that washing in the lake or sea using normal commercial soaps can contaminate the water and kai moana. A few even drive their trucks and motorbikes at speed on the edge of dunes, creating a danger to other visitors and the environment. Effective messaging is key to driving desired behaviour. We can continue to do this via Kaitiaki Rangers (who are very well received) but we also need consistent, permanent messaging available via updated and improved signage, accurate information fed into the camping apps, and a recreation-themed website that contains all the information campers (and other visitors) need to know in advance.

No strategy or plan to guide current approach

It is impossible to develop an efficient travel plan without clarity on the destination you want to reach. Similarly, an operational plan for freedom camping should not be developed without a strategy and vision. These do not exist today. This review work continued because there were clear infrastructure gaps and opportunities to improve information sharing and leverage existing infrastructure. It is impossible however to develop a complete operational plan without a strategy. This review, and the data sources in the appendices, can help inform the development of a strategy.

Growing costs

Specific data has not been gathered on costs but inevitably as more infrastructure is rolled out and more people travel throughout the area, using district amenities, costs will grow (some operational and some capital). This will be offset, to some degree, by the business brought into the district. Most facilities such as toilets, showers and parking are also well-used by locals and other visitors who are not camping.

There is heavy reliance on external annual funding for improvements to visitor infrastructure and funding of the Kaitiaki Ranger programme.

Difficulty obtaining data on camper numbers

There is no perfect way to obtain data on camper numbers. Plans are already underway to improve the method the Rangers use to gather peak numbers at popular locations during the 2021/2022 peak season using mobile devices and a QR code. In addition, MBIE has stated that it is working on developing methods for this.

Resourcing and training of Kaitiaki Rangers is rushed

The Kaitiaki Ranger programme is successful, but the resourcing is often rushed, and training is not always completed ahead of the season.

Suggested Timeline

Strategy work needs to guide future plans

This work uncovered a plethora of other opportunities for FNDC to revitalise the approach to Responsible Freedom Camping, leverage existing infrastructure and futureproof the approach to accommodate growth.

These other suggested activities are listed in the Appendices and are listed by geographical area. These suggestions have not yet been allocated budget or timeframes as they should be considered in the context of a new Responsible Camping Strategy. If they align with strategic intent, they should then be explored in more detail.

Suggested top priorities are listed below and are described in more detail later by project number.

Number	Description / purpose	Project type	Suggested Timeframe	Approximate Cost
Project 1	Te Paki Road/Cape Reinga Road Dump Station	TIF	TIF round 5 funding applied for	\$115.5 k
Project 2	Te Paki Road/Cape Reinga Road toilet block	TIF	TIF round 5 funding applied for	\$246.3 k
Project 3	Taipa dump station	TIF	Potential future TIF funding	\$50 k
Project 4	Kohukohu dump station	TIF	Potential future TIF funding	\$65 k
Project 5	Smart Bins	TIF	TIF round 5 funding applied for	\$88 k (for four sites)
Project 6	Waipapa Sportshub dump station	BAU	TBC depends on wider project	Uncosted (needs to be priced within larger project). Minimum \$50k
Project 7	Develop a Responsible Camping Strategy and update the policy document	BAU	Immediate	Uncosted (out of scope for this review)
Project 8	Better information and signage	BAU	ASAP but dependent on strategy TOR	Uncosted (out of scope for this review)

Notes: Once these projects are developed to final design stage the operating and maintenance costs can be identified and budgeted for.

Some of these projects may be suitable for partial funding support from Tourism Infrastructure Fund (TIF) or in the case of the dump station projects there could be contributions obtained from NZMCA. There is more information on these funds in the Appendices.

Recommended High Priority Projects

Project 1: Te Paki Road/Cape Reinga Road Dump Station

Project 2: Te Paki Stream Toilet Block

Project 3: Taipa Dump Station

Project 4: Kohukohu Dump Station

Project 5: Smart Bins

Project 6: Waipapa sports hub Dump Station

Project 7: Develop a Responsible Camping Strategy

Project 8: Information and signage

Project 1: Te Paki Road/Cape Reinga Road Dump Station

Background

It has been identified some areas of the Far North have a shortage of dump stations and toilets. Geozone data shows large numbers of campers are searching for these facilities, then having to travel long distances to reach them and dispose of waste appropriately. There is opportunity to address this through installing more dump stations (for campers toilets to be emptied into) and toilets on these key routes.

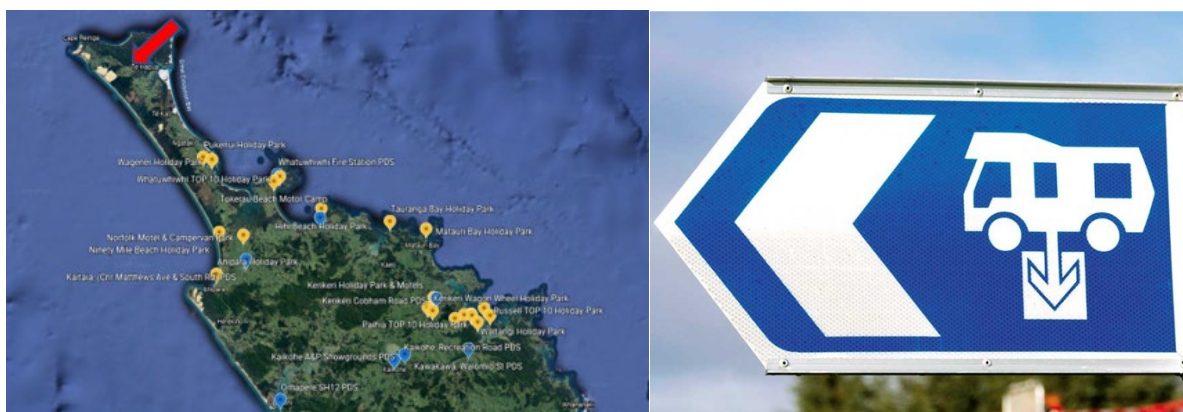
The area around Cape Reinga was the number 1 area for additional camping sites in our survey of NZMCA members. The addition of toilets at Te Paki opens up the option for Ngati Kuri to operate an overnighting area to meet some of the demand.

The survey of NZMCA members who had visited our area also indicated a strong need for more dump stations. Some cited the lack of such facilities as the reason for moving on. The top areas they said they were needed were between Awanui and Cape Reinga (25% of respondees), Paihia (7%), Russell (5%) Hokianga and the Kaeo/Whangaroa area.

There is a shortage of dump stations on the Cape with campers having to travel long distances to safely dispose of toilet waste. Often campers need to empty their toilet cassettes every few days and they are unlikely to travel long distances to do this. Absence of a good network of dump stations is likely to drive the wrong behavior such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location.

This would be a partnership between FNDC and Ngati Kuri. FNDC to provide and own the Asset, Ngati Kuri to provide land access through a formal structure such as a license to occupy or MOU.

Stakeholders: FNDC, Te Hiku Community Board, Ngati Kuri, DoC



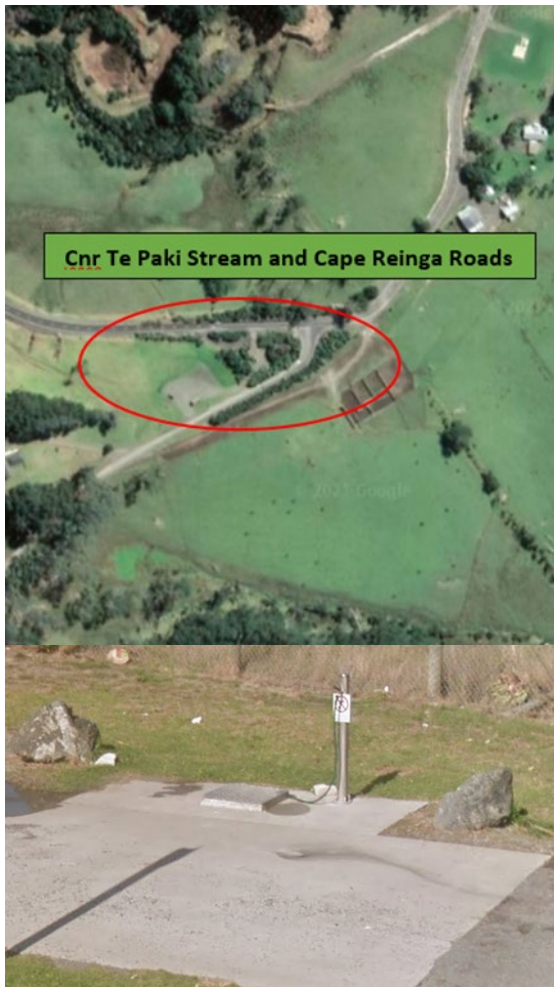
Infrastructure Issues

The dunes at Te Paki and Cape Reinga are major tourist attractions in the Far North. There are a number of DoC camping grounds close to the Cape with significant capacity. Visitor numbers are increasing and there are no dump station facilities north of Houhora.

Absence of a good network of dump stations is likely to drive the wrong behavior such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location.

There are additional commercial opportunities for tourist activities near the site at Te Paki Stream, notably overflow for overnight stays, but without waste management infrastructure these cannot go ahead.

Project Details



Collaborative project with Ngati Kuri, Department of Conservation, and FNDC to install a vault dump station on land at the corner of Cape Reinga Road and Te Paki Stream Road.

Land access provide by Ngati Kuri with DoC support. FNDC to own the asset.

Intent is to develop the site further in the future with a toilet block and potentially an electric charging station and café.

This will be the only dump station north of Houhora.

- Installation of Concrete holding tank Dump Station with up to 10,000litre capacity.
- Water connections
- Allowance for 50m of form access and manoeuvring area



Cost Estimate

Construction	82%	\$ 95,000
Project Management	7%	\$ 8,000
Specialist Consultancy	2%	\$ 2,000
Contingency (Risk Based)	9%	\$ 10,500
		\$ 115,500

Benefits

- Reduce negative environmental outcomes.
- Improve visitor experience.
- Provide additional commercial opportunity.

Project 2: Te Paki Stream Toilet Block

Background

Te Paki stream is the access point to the Giant Sand Dunes tourist attraction, a natural feature of constantly shifting sand dunes, popular for sandboarding. The Te Paki Sand Dunes are the largest in the Southern Hemisphere and are a popular destination for scheduled tours and independent travellers. Ngati Kuri have noted significant increases in visitor numbers in the last three to five years, with numbers approaching a 600% increase.

There are no toilet facilities at the Sand dunes or anywhere nearby and environmental concerns have rightly been raised as visitor numbers continue to increase.

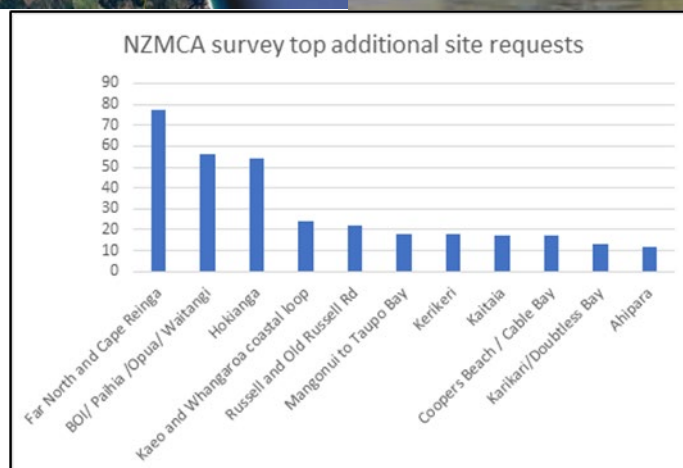
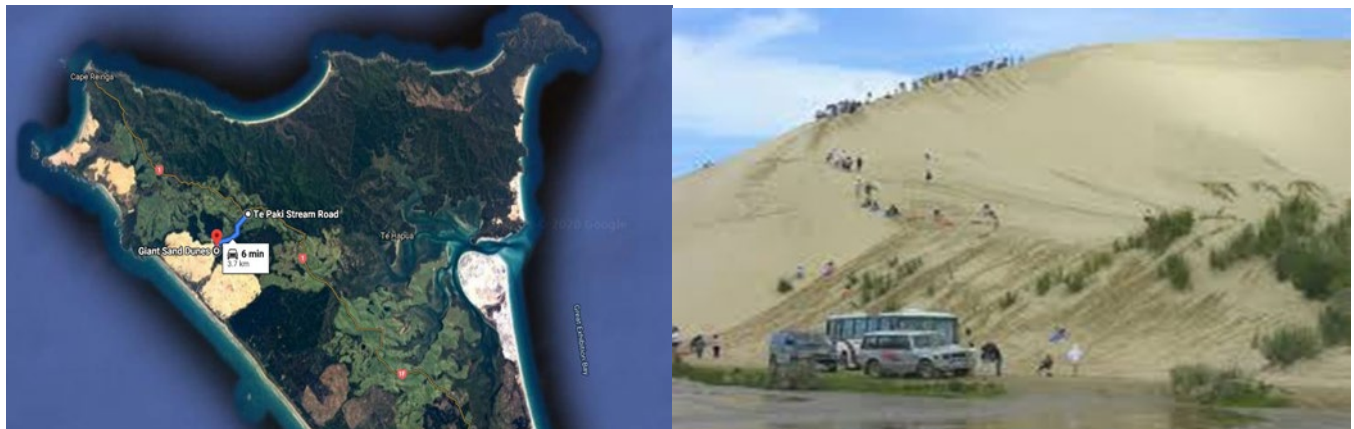
The area around Cape Reinga was the number 1 area for additional camping sites in our survey of NZMCA members. The addition of toilets at Te Paki opens up the option for Ngati Kuri to operate an overnighting area to meet some of the demand

Ngati Kuri regularly open overflow parking on farmland near the dune access. With the addition of toilets this area could be developed further to include overnighting during peak seasons and provide the foundation for additional tourist attractions operated by Ngati Kuri such as walks and cycle tracks.

Sealing the road also has high priority from a safety and environmental perspective but the upgraded road would also see significant increases in visitors. The recommendation from Ngati Kuri is not to seal the road until there is infrastructure to support visitors to the site.

This would be a partnership between FNDC and Ngati Kuri. FNDC to provide and own the Asset, Ngati Kuri to provide land access through a formal structure such as a license to occupy or MOU.

Stakeholders: FNDC, Te Hiku Community Board, Ngati Kuri,



Infrastructure Issues

The dunes at Te Paki are a major tourist attraction in the area. Visitor numbers are increasing and there are no toilet facilities. Ngati Kuri have been hiring a portaloos over peak season to try and mitigate environmental issues, with limited success.

There are additional commercial opportunities for tourist activities at the site but without waste management infrastructure these cannot go ahead.

Project Details



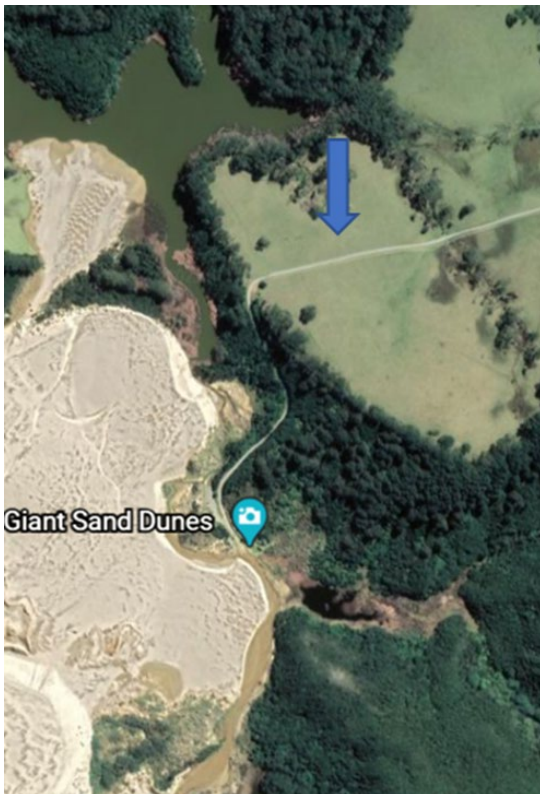
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Land access provide by Ngati Kuri with DoC support. FNDC to own the asset.

Intent is to develop the site further in the future with a toilet block and potentially an electric charging station and café.

This will be the only dump station north of Houhora.

- Installation of Concrete holding tank Dump Station with up to 10,000litre capacity.
- Water connections
- Allowance for 50m of form access and manoeuvring area



Cost Estimate

Construction	82%	\$ 95,000
Project Management	7%	\$ 8,000
Specialist Consultancy	2%	\$ 2,000
Contingency (Risk Based)	9%	\$ 10,500
		\$ 115,500

Benefits

- Reduce negative environmental outcomes.
- Improve visitor experience.
- Provide additional commercial opportunity.
- Provide visitor overnight overflow capacity

Project 3: Taipa Dump Station

Background

The public dump station on the Karikari Peninsula is located at the Karikari Fire station in Whatuwhiwhi. This location is not sustainable for future needs due to competing requirements for the land area. It is also a 13km back track for freedom campers using the popular DoC Ramp Road camping area.

Doubtless Bay is a high demand area and the other public dump station at Mangonui Lions Park is a one camper at a time set-up and is often oversubscribed during summer. There are no back up options in Doubtless Bay should Mangonui be closed for servicing.

Absence of a good network of dump stations is likely to drive the wrong behaviour such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location.

The location at Taipa been chosen to give an easy pull off from the road for large vehicles, and there is access to water and the sewage network.

NOTE: Any decision to implement this project will need to be incorporated into a Taipa Beach development plan so we are building / adding assets to a plan rather than reacting. There are a number of considerations: safe access to and from the toilet, safe and appropriate parking on Council land. This area can be heavily populated in Summer with fishers and their vehicles / crafts etc.

Stakeholders: FNDC, Te Hiku Community Board,



Infrastructure Issues

New facility to meet increased demand.

Project Details



- Install dump station access point.
- Connect to existing services.
- Signage to guide users

This location has been chosen to give an easy pull off from the road for large vehicles, and there is access to water and a treatment plant (see diagram below).



Cost Estimate

Final costs are site dependent and will required engineering assessment and estimates for the connect of services.

Basic set-ups start at \$15,000. Fully serviced and concreted \$ 50,000.

For budgetary purposes \$ 50,000

Benefits

- Reduce negative environmental outcomes.
- Improve visitor experience.

Project 4: Kohukohu Dump Station

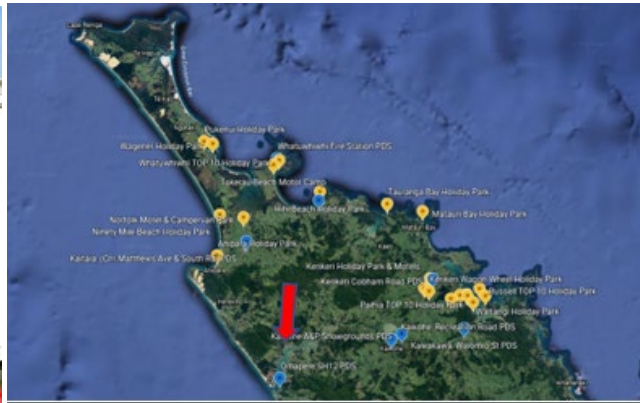
Background

There is a shortage of dump stations in Hokianga with campers having to travel long distances to safely dispose of toilet waste. Often campers need to empty their toilet cassettes every few days and they are unlikely to travel long distances to do this. Absence of a good network of dump stations is likely to drive the wrong behaviour such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location.

There is no public dump station on the Kohukohu side of the Hokianga and Campermate searches indicates demand from users.

This location has been chosen to give an easy pull off from the road for large vehicles, and there is access to water and a treatment plant (see diagram below).

Stakeholders: FNDC, Kaikohe-Hokianga Community Board, NTA



Infrastructure Issues

New facility to meet increased demand.

Project Details



- Install dump station access point.
- Connect to existing services.
- Signage to guide users

This location has been chosen to give an easy pull off from the road for large vehicles, and there is access to water and a treatment plant (see diagram below).



Cost Estimate

Final costs are site dependent and will require engineering assessment and estimates for the connect of services.

Basic set-ups start at \$15,000. Fully serviced and concreted \$ 50,000.

For budgetary purposes \$ 50,000

Benefits

- Reduce negative environmental outcomes.
- Improve visitor experience.
- Provide additional commercial opportunity.

Project 5: Smart Bins

Background

Freedom campers should “pack in and pack out” so that parity is maintained with ratepayers who pay (via bags) to dispose of household waste. FNDC will improve education and signage related to this so that campers are better informed early (see information project above)

However, there are some camping and recreation hotspots where rubbish accumulates from a combination of day visitors, locals, boaters, and campers. The worst locations are Ramp Rd car park and Taipa. Russell wharf and Pukenui wharf also have the same issue with rubbish from boat users. These locations have suffered from overflowing rubbish bins. Overflowing bins are not a good look nor environmentally responsible.

Smart bins utilise smart sensors that detect rubbish levels and alert maintenance contractors when they are nearing capacity and need to be emptied. A built-in solar cell-powered compactor means the bins can take up to eight times more rubbish than a standard waste bin, helping to deal with the influx of day-trippers and campers at peak.

The compacting and online alert systems also ensure optimum use of waste collectors’ time while the technology prevents rubbish overflow.

Stakeholders: FNDC, Community Boards, RSL



Infrastructure Issues

Popular tourist destinations across the Far North region often struggle to deal with surges in visitors over short periods of time. This can result in overflowing rubbish bins. This situation causes additional operational strain on services and additional contractor requirements add additional cost.

The introduction of smart city Wi-Fi (subject to TIF approval) at Paihia and Russell provide the opportunity to deploy smart bin technology on an initial small scale. Solar powered options will enable deployment of compactor bins at other hotspots. Feedback from Palmerston North Council (Clean Cube Bins) and Taupo (Big Belly Bins) has been positive.

Project Details



Deploy smart bins to four selected high use locations such as, Russell, Karikari Peninsula, Pukenui Wharf and Taipa

Option exists to deploy a remote 3G or 4G bin unit where Wi-Fi networks are unavailable.

FNDC Operations management staff to be involved in site selection, model selection and in benefits tracking. Consultation with contracted service providers.

Big Belly Bins (Manco Engineering) are one of the options used by several Councils in New Zealand and form the cost basis for this project funding estimate. Installation costs will be relatively standard across the brands, with proprietary software charges the main variable outside of hardware cost.

Big Belly Bins also have the option to host the Wi-Fi network infrastructure from the bin. There are also remote 3G and 4G communication options.

Note: Big Belly bins pricing estimates are for a double bin set-up.

Cost Estimate

Double unit costs are estimated at \$22,000 including communication fit out. Pricing will vary subject to available services.

Benefits

- Reduces waste overflow.
- Reduces collection trips and operational cost.
- Compaction increases bin capacity.
- Supports the use of renewable energy.

Project 6: Waipapa sports hub Dump Station

Background

The current dump station at Cobham Rd Kerikeri is no longer fit for purpose. Now that the adjoining land has been sold, the space does not allow safe access and queuing by larger vehicles at busy times (see picture one below showing small vehicles at Cobham Rd). The second picture shows the size of some vehicles regularly using dump-stations in New Zealand.

This project incorporates the installation of a new purpose-built dump station at the proposed sports hub development in Waipapa.

Kerikeri/ Waipapa is a high demand area and the existing public dump station at Cobham Rd is a one camper at a time set-up and is too small for larger vehicles.

Absence of a good network of dump-stations is likely to drive the wrong behaviour such as campers toileting in the wild (to avoid having to empty their on-board toilet) or emptying the toilet in an environmentally unsafe location.

The location at Waipapa has been chosen to give an easy pull off from the main road for large vehicles, and with the proposed sports development there will be ready access to water and the sewage network.

NOTE: Any decision to implement this project will need to be incorporated into the Sportshub development plan so that council is building / adding assets to a plan rather than reacting. There is an opportunity to here to develop an overnight stopover.

Stakeholders: FNDC, Adjoining landowner, Bay of Islands and Whangaroa Community Board



Infrastructure Issues

New facility to meet increased demand.

Project Details

Current plans for the site are unknown as the Waipapa Sports Hub development is in the final design and planning stages.

- Washdown water and potable water will also be required.
- Access to the potable water tap should be located a safe/sanitary. distance away from the dump station.
- Access must be 24/7 and accessible from both sides by large vehicles.
- Signage also required to minimise misuse. (No wet wipes or rubbish, only human waste and toilet paper.)

Cost Estimate

This project needs to be costed as part of the wider project. The key requirement is to incorporate this facility into the wider project planning for Waipapa sports hub.

Final costs are site dependent and will require engineering assessment and estimates for the connection of services to new infrastructure.

For budgetary purposes \$ 50,000

Benefits

- Reduce negative environmental outcomes.
- Improve visitor experience.
- Provide additional commercial opportunity.
- Safer access for larger vehicles

Project 7: Develop a Responsible Camping Strategy

Background

No strategy exists and the related policy and information are out of date. Operational decisions, and some investments, are made in a strategic vacuum with no articulated vision. This can be haphazard and reactive. Developing a strategy will allow better planning over longer time horizons and kick off some proactive initiatives that were identified in this review

Stakeholders: FNDC

Infrastructure Issues

None – this is not an infrastructure project but may guide future infrastructure decisions.

Project Details

Develop a strategy for responsible camping that is guided by these principles:

- Is guided by the Freedom Camping Act and considers all camper types e.g.: includes tents
- Makes it easy for campers to behave responsibly and do the right thing
- Focuses on education over enforcement

The strategy should incorporate the following considerations:

- Where should ownership of strategy and management of freedom camping sit?
- How should it be resourced?
- How best to maintain and share accurate information widely in easy-to-understand formats.
- Develop clear and informative signage and web site that promotes leisure activities but protects the environment and continued access for locals
- How best to leverage existing facilities and parking areas to spread the load.
- How to retain availability of land across the district for commercial campgrounds
- Encourages other providers e.g.: NZMCA, schools, clubs, marae and individuals with spare suitably located land to provide peak sites at low cost.

- Develops minimum facility standards for designated FNDC sites e.g.: toilets, some hardstanding parking, some grass for tents, good clear signage
- Develops minimum facility standards for overnight car parks – e.g.: toilets, security camera, safety spacing
- Develops a standard for in town dump-stations and remote vault-style dump-stations.
- Agrees a user pays strategy and roll out plan. Explore the use of Kiwicash as many campers will already be familiar with this concept from staying at Kiwicamps elsewhere.
- Develops the concept for a one-stop-shop for short term and overnight parking, toilet, dump station, water fill up and rubbish disposal located close to main highways and in walking/biking distance from shops/cafes etc. Such facilities allow travellers to break their journeys safely.
- Actively considers camper needs and camper impacts when developing strategies related to roading, facilities, parking, reserves, and recreational areas/zones.
- Updates the Policy document that is publicly available.
- Updates the Council-owned Campgrounds policy where it is outdated.
- Takes account of other work in progress at FNDC related to Roading and Reserves – (see appendix for complementary projects)

Cost Estimate

This work is not costed as beyond the scope of this review

Benefits

- Clarity of vision and goals to guide future operations and investment related to Freedom Camping
- Allows alignment with other strategic work
- Can explore user pays to generate future revenue
- Avoids haphazard decision making
- Futureproofing

Project 8: Information and signage

Background

Note: this project should not proceed until the terms of reference for the strategy work have been agreed.

Signage and information are key to managing freedom camping. It is an area where FNDC has some significant gaps.

- Some facilities (e.g.: many toilets) are not marked on key maps and apps
- Signage to facilities (from main highways) and at camping locations is either missing or outdated and unclear.

When campers access the FNDC website for more information on freedom camping the information provided is very basic and does not accurately portray where and how campers can camp in line with the Freedom Camping Act.

This project better leverages existing infrastructure by better communicating where existing toilets, dump-stations and rubbish facilities are located and supports this with information to drive more responsible camping behaviour. The goal is to make it easy for campers to do the right thing.

Stakeholders: FNDC, all Community Boards, RSL, Commercial campground operators, DoC

Infrastructure Issues

Better leverage of existing infrastructure by better communicating where existing toilets, dump-stations and rubbish facilities are located and support this with information to drive more responsible camping behaviour. The goal is to make it easy for campers to do the right thing.

- Conflicting and outdated signage
- Gaps and omissions in online information



Project Details

This project will provide information suitable for all camper types (as defined by the Act) and will leverage existing good practice information where available.

1. All public toilets, dump-stations and rubbish transfer stations will be added to key camping apps and google maps.
2. Processes will be established to ensure data is kept current in the future.
3. After a full assessment, new standards will be developed for signage at designated freedom camping sites and hot spots. New signage will include information about how to camp responsibly and will align with LGNZ good practice guide (2018). These signs will be put in place at all designated camping locations and hotspots.
4. New standards will be developed for signage at designated overnight parking spots. Overnight parking signs (limited time and camper numbers) will be put in place at suitable car parks. Where possible signage will use simple symbols and language to be easily understood by all visitors regardless of language. Signage will not refer to “certified” self-contained but where there is good reason (no toilets) reference to “self-containment” could be considered if this aligns with the Act. Standards will need to be provided for input to the appropriate Engineering Standards and agreed with the Communication team to ensure Council branding is being maintained etc.
5. New standards will be developed for signage at dump-stations. This will include guidance on what can be dumped and how to use the station correctly and hygienically. This will educate users not to dump wet-wipes (even those that say they are flushable). The signage will be installed at current and new dump-stations.
6. Outdated (therefore confusing) “no camping signs” will be removed from reserves.
7. The council website information on freedom camping will be updated to be current and accurate and will include comprehensive information on camping in the district.
 - It will encourage campers to plan trips ahead (commercial sites and hot spots are often unavailable at peak), provide better advice on how to camp responsibly,
 - links to information on other commercial and DoC campgrounds, and other recreational activities in the area.
 - The website will promote the popular camper apps, but FNDC will ensure that local data on public facilities on those apps
8. The pages will be mobile accessible.

9. A tailored pack of content (for the 21/22 season) will be developed for Kaitiaki Rangers to give to campers.
10. Badges, tee-shirts, hi-vis vests, and caps will be designed (ready to be produced when needed for next season) so that the Kaitiaki Rangers can be more easily identified by campers providing reassurance and safety.

Cost Estimate

This project is currently not costed as it is subject to FNDC internal resourcing considerations.

Benefits

- Leverages existing infrastructure
 - Drives responsible behaviour
 - Encourages campers to plan ahead
 - Aligned with good practice
-

Appendices

Appendix 1: Full list of infrastructure related projects for consideration (by area)

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document. Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

Route to Cape Reinga, (north of Awanui)

Hotspots are Waipapakauri Ramp, Utea Park, Rarawa, Kaimaumu and Lake Ngatu

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Improve signage and map entries for all public toilets in the Far North but focus on the Cape first.	Yes		Many public toilets in this area do not show on google maps and Campermate. Campermate shows people actively searching. Remove mention of a dry vault toilet at Te Paki from Campermate. There is no toilet there
Dump station and toilets at Te Paki	Yes		Campermate data shows need. This is the access to Te Paki stream and dunes. Agreement needed noting ownership, roles and responsibilities.
Signage at hotspots	Yes		Responsible camping focus
Dump station at Houhora	N/A see notes		There is a dump station at Houhora Heads campground that allows public use for \$5. Recommend this information is shared via website and apps.
Upgrade toilets at Te Kao	Yes		Currently just one at the store – non council facility. Not maintained by RSL. May not be 24 hrs. Agreement to be progressed. Toilet on private property and services provided by local Marae etc. System inherited and details need finalising with local Hapu.
Toilets at Houhora or Pukenui	N/A see notes		There are toilets at Houhora and Pukenui, but they do not show on maps and apps. Recommend this information is shared via website and apps.
Lobby DoC to upgrade toilets at Cape Reinga	Yes		RSL and Operations team say the current (and fairly new) toilet block at the Cape is not coping with the visitor numbers during the summer period BUT this area is owned / managed by local Iwi and DoC. Council is not involved.
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)	No	Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc

Kaitaia / Awanui area

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Open up East Lane Remembrance Park area car park as a designated site for overnight stops, currently has toilets and free hot shower. Currently closed overnight.	Yes		Operations team think it will help security in the area to have campers present.

Ahipara area

Hotspots are Ahipara, Tauroa

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document. Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Ahipara – signage	Yes		To reduce dangerous driving on beach and keep people off dunes (dune restoration) Better signage to refuse centre
Signage at hotspots		Yes	Responsible camping focus
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)	No peak only	Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc
Ahipara foreshore toilet-ensure 24 hrs	Yes		Make 24 hrs.

Mangonui / Karikari peninsula area

Hotspots are Ramp Rd, Coca Cola Lake, Rangiputa, Tokerau Beach, Puwheke beach, Taipa, Mangonui

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Dump station at Taipa.	Yes		High numbers require this – see Campermate data. Can this be connected to existing toilet infrastructure?
Signage at hotspots and designated sites		Yes	Responsible camping focus
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)		Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc
“FULL” signage for Ranger use at Ramp Rd		Yes	Requested by Rangers.
Toilet at Totara North designated site. No water so may be portaloo initially to test usage levels	Yes		Make all designated sites suitable for all travellers
Portaloo at Puwheke beach		Yes	This is a surf beach. Trial a portaloo and assess demand

Russell

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	permanent	Peak only	Notes
Signage encouraging larger camping vehicles not to drive through Russell	Yes		As there are limited turning and parking options for larger vehicles
Signage at hotspots and designated sites		Yes	Responsible camping focus
Dump station in Russell	Yes		None currently on that side – nearest is Kawakawa. If a suitable designated site is found (below) co-locate dump station there
Long Beach toilets	N/A see notes		Current toilets under stress but project already underway to replace these in May/June
Designated Camping site, hard standing surrounded by grass. Toilets. Before final approach to Russell – walking distance to town.	Yes		Will reduce vans into town and beyond to beaches. A suitable spot to send campers back to at peak. Need to find suitable location.
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)		Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc

Paihia / Waitangi/ Opuia area

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Signage at Opuia ferry re limited freedom camping and camping parking on Russell side.	Yes		Encourage use of Kawakawa to overnight. Encourage campers to visit Russell as day trip using the foot ferry from Paihia and parking in main Paihia car park
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)	No	Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc

Kerikeri/ Waipapa / Kaeo area

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Waipapa at planned sports hub facility New dump station with better access and overnight parking area. Makes sense to include toilets too so that this becomes a new designed overnight site.	Yes		Feed this requirement into project planning urgently
Landing Rd car park (other side of river from Stone Store) Overnight parking dusk till dawn Day parking max 3 hrs	Yes		Clarify who owns this land
Lake Manuwai, Sandys Rd. Replace portaloo with permanent toilet. Daytime parking only.	Yes		Clarify who owns this land – liaise with them. Already planned.
Rangitane Reserve Replace portaloo with permanent toilet. Daytime limited hours parking only as parking space is limited.	Yes		Investigate who owns the land. Currently being developed as part of boat ramp project.
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)	No	Yes	Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc

Hokianga area

NOTE - as there were no Rangers in this area at peak, we have less validation of this information.

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Dump station in Kohukohu	Yes		Campermate data supports this.
Welcome to the area information hub signage and designated overnight stop near new Kupe centre. Also, toilets and new dump station if space allows	Yes		Huge growth expected in this area. New footprints of Kupe centre will add to this. Current dump station at Omapere has poor user feedback. (See below)
Partnership sites open at peak (60 days maximum per year)	No		Explore partnership sites at suitable marae, schools, sports clubs, community halls etc
Toilet at Koutu boulders car park Portaloo initially.	Yes		Test demand. Who owns this land?
Horeke. Improved toilets for end of cycle trail and those transferring by boat to Kohukohu.	Yes		Currently the toilet is in the hall and serviced by FNDC. Who owns this land? Is this already planned, if so, can this be brought forward?
Improve or replace dump station at Omapere	Yes		Comments (on Campermate and NZMCA survey) indicate poor signage and access is poor for large vehicles. This is currently the only one in the area

Kaikohe area

NOTE – those rows that are coloured are considered urgent and included in the projects listed in the main document.

Those that are not coloured are to be considered later.

New facility What type / location	Permanent	Peak only	Notes
Toilets at Lindvart park designated area	Yes		Make all designated sites suitable for all travellers. There are already 2 new toilet developments planned in the Kaikohe area. Does this make one of those locations more suitable as a designated site than Lindvart Park? The meeting with the asset manager did not reveal any plans for Lindvart Park but a redevelopment is mentioned in the Long Term Plan documents. More information is required.

Appendix 2: Possible funding sources

About the Tourism Infrastructure Fund

The Tourism Infrastructure Fund is administered by MBIE and provides up to \$25 million annually to develop tourism-related infrastructure that supports regions facing pressure from tourism growth

The fund aims to protect and enhance New Zealand's reputation both domestically and internationally. Supporting robust infrastructure contributes to quality experiences for visitors and maintains the social licence for the sector to operate.

The Tourism Infrastructure Fund is open to all local councils and not-for-profit community organisations that can demonstrate support from their local council.

Eligibility Criteria

The following criteria set out which types of projects are eligible for grants from the Tourism Infrastructure Fund

- Only publicly available infrastructure used significantly by tourists is eligible.
- Projects need to be for new facilities, or enhancements. Like-for-like replacement will not be funded.
- Development of new attractions, accommodation, and commercial activity is not eligible.
- Projects must demonstrate that they do not compete with commercial activities in the region.
- Projects will not be eligible if seeking funding under \$25,000 (though a series of linked projects can be joined in one application).
- Projects already receiving funding from NZTA are not eligible.
- Councils must meet at least one of the following tests (now or within 5 years), priority will be given to councils that meet two or more of these tests:
 - Visitor: rating unit ratio >5
 - Revenue from tourism in the region <\$1 billion per annum
 - Local Government Finance Agency lending limits have been reached.

Applicants are expected to co-fund their project to the maximum extent they are able, and to a minimum of 50%.

Assessment Criteria

In summary, the key assessments criteria are:

- *Addresses Infrastructure capacity constraints*
- *Represents value for money*
- *Other funding options have been investigated*
- *The balance of visitor and resident demand*
- *Supports the attraction of visitors to a region*
- *Otherwise, may not happen, or happen more slowly*
- *Applicant has maximised funding contribution*

About NZMCA Dump Station Subsidy Scheme

This information was obtained from the NZMCA website:

“Dump-stations help to ensure users of recreational vehicles (e.g.: motor caravanners, boaties) have somewhere safe to dispose waste-water and fill their freshwater tanks.

The NZMCA lobbies local government to install public dump-stations in their districts to promote and encourage responsible waste-water disposal. Dump-stations must be installed in areas where large vehicles can access them 24/7 so are usually located adjacent to public toilets, large parking areas and service stations.

NZMCA’s aim is to improve on the current network of public dump-stations across New Zealand so, the NZMCA offers financial assistance to any organisation wishing to install a public dump station.

NZMCA offer financial assistance for the installation of new public dump-stations through the provision of a pre-cast concrete unit, which requires minimal work to assemble and install, and the appropriate signage to assist the public in locating the site. In return, we require the dump station to meet certain conditions.

NZMCA provide the pre-cast unit (built to NZ Standards) and signage valued at \$1,200.00 should the project meet the necessary criteria. In special circumstances they may also provide further financial assistance.”

Note: a conversation with Whangarei DC (Andy Keith) revealed that the NZMCA design is not always suitable depending on the site. So therefore, this funding should not be assumed.

Appendix 3: Definitions used (in alphabetical order)

Black water

Any water that contains human body waste.

Campervan (see motorhome)

The difference between motorhome vs campervan is that motorhomes tend to be larger, built into truck/bus/large van style bodies. Campervans tend to be smaller, simpler, and more conventional van sized.

Camping Ground

See "holiday park"

Campsite

An approved camping location. Facilities will vary across provider e.g.: DoC, Council etc. Sometimes charges will apply, and sometimes not. Some campsites may be designated as suitable for self-contained vehicles only.

Caravan

"Any structure designed for human habitation, which is capable of being moved from one place to another, by being towed, or transported on another vehicle"

Taken from the New Zealand self-containment standard NZS 5465:2001

Certified self-contained

A "standard" developed by NZMCA and a requirement for vehicles using NZMCA sites. Defined by the New Zealand self-containment standard NZS 5465:2001 as: "the ability to meet the ablutionary and sanitary needs of the occupants of the motor caravan or caravan for a minimum of three days without requiring any external services or discharging any waste." The standard also refers to self-containment certificate, warrant, and sticker.

Note: this standard's legal status is currently being challenged and it is not part of the Freedom Camping Act as the Act also applies to other camping forms such as tents which cannot meet this standard.

Dump station

"A dump station is a small facility designed to protect public health and the environment by ensuring the proper disposal of wastewater from recreational vehicles e.g.: motorhomes, campervans, and boats": <https://www.nzmca.org.nz/dump-stations>

Dump-stations are used to dispose of grey water and black water.

Freedom Camping Act / FCA

The Freedom Camping Act (FCA) defines freedom camping as:

"to camp (other than at a camping ground) within 200 m of a motor vehicle accessible area or the mean low-water springs line of any sea or harbour, or on or within 200 m of a formed road or a Great Walks Track, using 1 or more of the following:

- a tent or other temporary structure:
- a caravan:
- a car, campervan, house truck, or other motor vehicle"

The FCA also makes it clear that short term parking, parking for day-trips and resting to avoid driver fatigue are not freedom camping. Further, if a person can prove they were not camping nor preparing to camp, they are not subject to the provisions of the FCA. 'Camp' is not defined by the FCA but can reasonably be taken to mean lodging overnight at a particular location in a temporary structure such as a tent, a caravan, car, campervan, house-truck or other motor vehicle."

Grey water

Any wastewater that does not contain human body waste. Usually this is water from showers and sinks.

Holiday Park

A commercial operation providing camping areas and a range of facilities targeted at campers. Facilities will vary by operator. See “camping ground”

Motor caravan

A motor caravan is a motor vehicle, which can be used as a place of abode and contains facilities for cooking, eating, sleeping and washing. Some are self-contained, some are not.

Motorhome

See motor caravan (above)

Potable water

Any water that is fit for human consumption.

Responsible camping

"Responsible camping is a wider term used to reflect the desired behaviour of all campers enjoying the New Zealand outdoors, irrespective of the sites and locations they seek to stay at, the type of vehicle they drive, or equipment they have. It is about travelling safely and respecting the environment and the communities in which they visit.

This responsible camping message has been the subject of recent promotions by Tourism New Zealand (TNZ), Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) and Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust (TINZT)." Marlborough Responsible Camping Review 2020

Self-containment / self-contained (see also “certified self-contained”)

Where a camper makes adequate provision to hygienically contain all waste and does not need to dispose of anything while on site (water waste, human waste, and rubbish). Provision will vary dependent on preference and the type of vehicle or camping set up.

Note that tents and many smaller vehicles, walkers and cyclists, will be unable to meet the “certified self-contained” “standard” developed by NZMCA so some groups e.g.: RCAi are lobbying government to remove all reference to that standard, and the use of it in any restrictions, as it does not cover all modes of camping that are allowed under the Act.

Wastewater

Includes both grey water and black water.

Appendix 4: Key Abbreviations (in alphabetical order)

Abbreviation	Meaning
CAP	Charges Apply Property (an NZMCA term) for a location that is not a full NZMCA camp, but where members can camp for a small fee
DIA	Department of Internal Affairs
DoC	Department of Conservation
FNDC	Far North District Council
FCB	Freedom Camping Bylaw
The Act or FCA	Freedom Camping Act 2011
GPS	Global Positioning System
LGA	Local Government Act 2002
LGNZ	Local Government New Zealand
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
NSC	Non-Self-Contained (site)
NZMCA	New Zealand Motor Caravan Association
RCAi	Responsible Campers Association Inc
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
TIA	Tourism Industry Aotearoa
TIF	Tourism Infrastructure Fund
TINZT	Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust
TNZ	Tourism New Zealand

Appendix 5: Publicly available references used / reading list

This is a good start point for anyone interested in this topic and will be helpful to the new owner at FNDC.

Source	Description / link
FNDC	Camping in Public Places Policy Document number: A1754105 July 2016 Link
	Emails, meetings and Responsible Camping webpage: Link
Local Government NZ (LGNZ)	2012 – Freedom Camping Act 2011 – updated guidance for Local Authorities Link
	2018 Good practice guide for freedom camping A resource prepared for councils and tourism operators. Link
	2016. Managing Freedom Camping in Public Places – a National situational analysis: A look at the opportunities to improve national and local responses to the harms associated with freedom camping, as defined under the Freedom Camping Act 2011. Link
Legislation	Freedom Camping Act 2011. Link
Minister for Environment	February 2021 Not 100% but 4 steps closer to sustainable tourism. Link
Whangarei DC	Emails and updates to bylaw: Link
TIA	A Stronger Stance on Responsible Camping 15 September 2020. Link
	Mood of the Nation Research. Link
	Camping in New Zealand is a website that provides tools and information to drive good planning and behaviour related to freedom camping and contains links to tools that can help campers to plan ahead. Link
	Freedom Camping literature review 2017 Link
MBIE	2019-20 Responsible Camping research. This document makes some assumptions to arrive at camper numbers and focuses primarily on issues related to self-containment and toilet types in motorhomes and campervans. Also, some ideas from the regions are interesting. Link
	Freedom camping by international visitors in New Zealand This page contains statistics and information about freedom camping by international visitors in New Zealand, based on data from the International Visitor Survey (IVS). Link
	Managing Freedom Camping in public places – National situational analysis. November 2016 Link
Apps	Rankers app Link
	Campermate app Link
Marlborough DC	Responsible Camping Review May 2020. Link

Appendix 6: Interrelated work currently underway in the Far North and Northland

Project / workstream	Description	Impact for freedom camping
FNDC Long term plan and annual plans	The new FNDC Long Term Plan is under development and includes a new 30-year infrastructure strategy	Unclear at this stage.
Twin Coast Discovery Route (TCDR) Programme	Development of a comprehensive investment programme to improve the TCDR. Business cases are being finalised for SH11 and SH12, wayfinding, passing lanes and rest areas, cycling and townships	Consideration should be given to campers wanting to follow these routes and their needs e.g.: camping spots, early signage for passing lanes and rest areas (to allow others to pass), and suitable size parking spaces in the towns.
FNDC Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS)	10-year transport programme investment map.	Parking and road access for visitors. Ability to park and ride or park and cycle in the future. Possible impact on TIF funding.
Reserves and Parks Strategy Work	Scope is Reserves and Parks. Could take 1.5 years to complete.	Unclear at this stage. Too early.
Northland Destination Management Plan	Northland wide approach to destination management. Wider approach (considering economic benefits) rather than previous (marketing focused) plans.	Unclear as not yet published

Note: these are the activities we were made aware of. This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

Appendix 7: Stakeholder starter list to consider in future planning and communication

Some future work will require consultation and change management activities to take place. This is a running list of stakeholders to consider at the appropriate stages of future work. It may not be exhaustive.

NOTE: these have been grouped but in some cases the impacts will be different within a group

Campers and camper groups

- Various types by vehicle type (including caravan, tent etc), owner/renter, local vs non-local, NZ vs non NZers, self-contained vs non-self-contained
- NZMCA
- RCAi

Locals/ Ratepayers

- Adjoining landowners/neighbours to sites
- Hapu /Iwi

Council employees

- Servicing of facilities e.g.: cleaning
- Operations team leader and seasonal Rangers
- FNDC i-site staff
- FNDC Website administration and communications and signage staff
- FNDC Councillors and staff responsible for making decisions on freedom policy/bylaw
- Legal
- Community Board members
- Strategic owner at FNDC (tbd)
- Owners of interrelated projects and strategies e.g.: Reserves and Roading

Local businesses and business community groups

- Existing campground operators
- Prospective peak operators
- Retail and hospitality businesses and associations

Other Third parties

- DoC
- Tourism promotional groups / organisations including regional
- Rental companies and their customers
- Administrators of other apps and sites that hold camping information
- Relevant staff at neighbouring councils in Northland region
- Police
- NRC
- NZTA
- Administrators of popular maps

Appendix 8: Options assessment - Analysis of potential solutions

The table below looks at the many options considered to address the issues identified. **NOTE:** Options are not Recommendations

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
<p>Too many freedom campers in some key pressure spots at peak e.g.: Ramp Road car park. This feels unsustainable and potentially unsafe. Nowhere else nearby to send them.</p>	<p>Spread the load more</p>	<p>Open up more free or low-cost camping places e.g.: Council car parks and reserves, DoC, Iwi, Private stopovers, Commercial, NZMCA, schools, sports clubs etc etc, and ensure these are added to the website and apps so that campers know they are available</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares the solution. • Allows locals to generate income and be part of the solution. • Leverages existing infrastructure • Flexibility: some of these options can be just available at peak season • Very aligned with FNDC strategy “Creating great places, supporting our people.” • Some income generation options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires templates/ FNDC support and ease of consent etc to “make it easy” for other providers to come on board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify new designated public land locations and provide facilities • May need partnerships with others if not on council land • Signage, website and apps showing other nearby options when full • Investigate Kiwicamp as an option to partner with • Solar compressor bins to offer more capacity
		<p>Charge for access to prime spots and limit numbers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps pay for management. • Solution can also gather information on numbers. • Cost to implement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May just push some campers to other spots • Requires enforcement and management effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice of charging mechanism and costs to implement and maintain • Investigate Kiwicash as a potential option that some campers will be familiar with
		<p>Add toilets to other freedom camping areas. Campers currently cluster around the spots with toilets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better facilities at key visitor spots for use by locals and tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget and ongoing servicing costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify suitable locations and provide facilities, then service the facilities

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns with FNDC public toilet policy ²⁰ 		
		Education and information about capacity at peak and the fact that many sites are fully booked. encourage people to “plan ahead and travel at quieter times”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helpful to those who are taken by surprise Camper who are not date constrained may choose to travel at other times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to get message to target audience in advance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit numbers on signage. Consider limit on length of stay
		Education and information about the Act and better information about location of facilities in the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverages existing infrastructure Helps to educate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will not be sufficient on its own May create new hotspots 	
		Information about other lesser-known locations & things to do/ see in the district via website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chance to promote some lesser-known spots and attractions or activities Communities can get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will not be sufficient on its own May create new hotspots 	
		Close these locations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires a Freedom camping bylaw – lengthy and costly. Enforcement costs May just move campers elsewhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage
Campers are confused about where they can and cannot camp	Campers are clear on their options	Education and information are shared openly and comprehensively using different channels e.g.: website, apps, signage, Rangers, I-sites etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helpful and comprehensive Welcoming to visitors Builds on the current successful approach taken by the Rangers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effort for content creation and maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate signage is rolled out

²⁰ <https://www.fndc.govt.nz/Your-Council/Plans-Policies-Bylaws-Projects/Policies-WIP/Public-Toilets-Policy-2016>

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
		Develop a freedom camping bylaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows enforcement under the Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a lot of work and then needs updating every 5 years The new tourism minister is actively seeking changes to the Freedom Camping Act so this could be wasted effort Any enforcement effort is costly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each potential camping location will be site reviewed and then assessed against the Act then designed as camping or no camping. Appropriate signage is rolled out
Identified shortage of infrastructure (parking, toilets, dump-stations, potable water etc) in areas where campers travel	Provide adequate facilities to allow campers to stop safely and behave hygienically	Overnight service hubs in key areas. At each of these sites there will be a small toilet block, a dump station, potable water and a rubbish collection point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spreads the load Enables campers to do the right thing Service hubs can help bring \$ to local shops and cafes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to identify suitable land in the desired locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewals and new builds Apply for funding contribution from MBIE and NZMCA
		Add targeted new facilities (e.g.: toilets, showers and dump-stations) in areas where need is clear and not in competition with other providers including commercial operators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better facilities at key visitor spots for use by locals and tourists Aligns with FNDC public toilet policy²¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget and ongoing servicing costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify suitable locations and provide facilities, then service the facilities FNDC asset list of toilets is incomplete, and some existing toilets do not show on many maps. Care is needed
		Add inside bins to all toilet blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nappies can be disposed of safely Environmental protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of bins

²¹ <https://www.fndc.govt.nz/Your-Council/Plans-Policies-Bylaws-Projects/Policies-WIP/Public-Toilets-Policy-2016>

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
<p>Some of current dump-stations are not fit for purpose for use by larger vehicles, or only have access on one side, also potable water is located too close to dump point (risk of cross contamination)</p>	<p>New dump-stations meet all users' needs, and design facilitates good hygienic practices</p>	<p>Develop new design standards that accommodate all vehicle types and sizes (see NZMCA guidelines)</p> <p>Use new standard for new sites.</p> <p>Upgrade old sites to new standards.</p> <p>Close and relocate Cobham Road site.</p> <p>Close and relocate Whatuwhiwhi site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes it easier for campers to discharge waste hygienically • Future proofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dump-stations will need to be larger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New design • Renewals and new builds • Apply for funding contribution from NZMCA
<p>Campers not behaving responsibly (dune damage, littering, defecation, fires, unsafe driving on beaches)</p>	<p>Minimise this irresponsible behaviour</p>	<p>Education and information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels right and aligns with the Freedom Camping Act • Respectful/ helpful • Appreciated by locals and visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be more effective with a central govt approach or Northland wide for consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage and better educational information on website and leaflets • Continue to partner with other groups to educate and inform e.g.: Ranger programme but support with better tools info and signage
		<p>Catch them and fine or charge them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May deter others from offending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires evidence and good quick connection to enforcement (police and council). Hard in remote areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security Cameras
		<p>Install cameras and signs include a "dob them in"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be a deterrent • Encourages others to help by phoning in or emailing in details and evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires evidence and good quick connection to enforcement (police and council). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security Cameras • Signage improvements

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
		phone and email address to send photo evidence to			
		Close down these areas to freedom campers in line with the Freedom Camping Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area protected and more accessible to locals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will not help “spread the load” Punishes everyone not just the few Will be costly and complex if it requires a bylaw to be created Need proof that it’s the campers causing the problem Requires allocated resource to enforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage impacts
		Improve rubbish facilities. Trial solar compactor bins at hotspots and add inside bins to all toilet blocks for disposal of nappies etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes it easier for campers and other visitors to do the right thing Keeps the area tidier for better enjoyment by others Bins send signal when they need emptying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locals may object as campers are avoiding rubbish disposal costs Locals may use to dispose of household rubbish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trial solar compactor bins at key locations with heavy traffic Bin provision
		Add toilets to some desirable freedom camping areas that don’t have them. Campers currently cluster around the spots with toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better facilities at key visitor spots for use by locals and tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget and ongoing servicing costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify suitable locations and provide facilities, then service the facilities
Lack of resource and strategy: Camping volumes, and complexity is growing yet ownership is just	Clearly allocate strategic ownership and provide dedicated	Dedicate additional management resource to planning, strategy development, the updating of policy and managing freedom camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy guides decision making Camping gets an advocate and is always considered in other relevant strategic work and developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a cost The role needs good access to strategic decision makers The right person is critical (a strategic thinker, with good community) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct impact– this is strategic and operational. However better resourcing will allow a strategy to be

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
part of an already broad role. There is no strategy. Policy is outdated.	resource to allow planning and co-ordination work to happen		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better planning and preparedness can improve outcomes A proactive approach and better consistency Many of the opportunities identified in this review can be further explored and then delivered in the right way 	relationships, and practical /able to deliver)	developed to guide future development
Growing costs	Contain or recover some costs	<p>Charge for overnight parking where there are facilities and use the income to fund management.</p> <p>Consider other user-pay options including showers and water?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps pay for management Solution can also gather information on numbers Cost to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May just push some campers to other spots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choice of charging mechanism and costs to implement and maintain Investigate Kiwicash (as a payment method that some campers will already be familiar with)
		Open up more free or low-cost camping places e.g.: Council, DoC, Iwi, Private stopovers, Commercial, NZMCA, schools etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shares the solution, allows local people to generate income and be part of the solution Income generation possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires development of templates/ support and ease of consent etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May need to allocate money to other agencies or build facilities on non- council land Some seasonal solutions needed Signage, website and apps showing other nearby options when full

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate partnering with Kiwicamp
<p>Obtaining accurate data on numbers of campers is problematic. Geozone data is helpful but incomplete as not all campers use it, and it includes those staying at commercial sites and other accommodation options.</p>	Better understand who our campers are and what the freedom camping volumes and traffic patterns	<p>In the longer-term work with the responsible camping forum as they move to develop standard ways to gather and report such data.</p> <p>In the shorter term have Kaitiaki Rangers capture numbers daily at peak in key locations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better data allows better planning Consistency across council boundaries 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure planning can be refined as better data is obtained
<p>Resourcing of Kaitiaki Rangers for peak is hurried.</p>	Planning starts earlier and team is trained and ready ahead of peak	Lobby MBIE to allocate funding earlier so that outcomes are better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training can be completed for all Rangers before the season starts Better consistency and better outcomes Better health and safety Ongoing opportunity for partnership options with local communities, Hapu / Iwi and / or agencies DoC, MSD etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational costs Secure on-going OPEX funding should MBIE not continue with funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
	Develop Kaitiaki Rangers plan	Prepare a plan that includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training can be completed for all Rangers before the season starts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None

Issue	Goal	Solutions	Benefits of this approach	Challenges of this approach	Infrastructure impact
	and information pack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programme of training, get together – pre and post debriefing sessions • Uniform requirements • Equipment requirements and suppliers e.g.: vehicles, walkie talkies (contact / emergencies), mobiles (cameras for photos) • Forms / apps to be used on site to capture key info / data e.g.: for reports • Handouts / website details etc of key information, key messages and key contacts etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better consistency and better outcomes • Better health and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure on-going OPEX funding should MBIE not continue with funding 	