

Office of the Minister of Tourism
Office of the Minister of Local Government

Chair
Cabinet Economic Growth and Infrastructure Committee

Release of the *Freedom Camping in New Zealand* discussion document

Proposal

1. The discussion document: *Freedom Camping in New Zealand*, aims to start a public discussion on the future of freedom camping in New Zealand. We seek Cabinet's approval to release the discussion document on or before 14 July 2017 for public consultation.

Background

2. In 2011, the Freedom Camping Act (the Act) established in legislation the opportunity for anyone to camp in public places in New Zealand. The Act empowered the Department of Conservation and local authorities to moderate that opportunity by prohibiting and restricting freedom camping on the land they administer and to issue infringement offence notices for breaches. The Act balanced accessing the outdoors and our culture of camping with the need to protect the environment and public health.
3. By 2016, tourism had grown to become New Zealand's largest export industry. International arrivals grew 10 per cent for the year to April 2017 (total arrivals 3.6 million). Since enacting the Freedom Camping Act international arrivals have grown by around 30 per cent. During the same period domestic tourism also grew significantly.
4. During the summers of 2015/16 and 2017/18 the pressure on some communities from freedom camping grew to problematic levels. Communities have responded by using the Act to constrain the supply of areas accessible to freedom campers this further exacerbated the problems in some places by concentrating campers in locations or providing insufficient alternative options.
5. The context within which the Act was developed has changed with the growth of tourism and the popularity of freedom camping as an accommodation option. There may be a fundamental mismatch between an increasingly restrictive approach diminishing supply of places in tourist hotspots and increasing demand for freedom camping as an accommodation option causing community concerns.
6. Campervans are growing in popularity as mode of transport and accommodation because they enable flexible itineraries with accommodation certainty that appeals to independent travellers. These high levels of demand represent an opportunity for the tourism sector and supporting industries. Freedom camping forms an important part of New Zealand's offering for these visitors.

7. Data from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (the Ministry) suggests that the number of international visitors freedom camping in New Zealand has increased (**Figure 1**). Averaged over the last three years, international visitors who did some freedom camping in New Zealand spend an average of \$5,000 per visitor compared to the average of \$3,300 for all visitors. Visitors who did some form of freedom camping tended to stay much longer in New Zealand than other visitors. International visitors who freedom camped spent about \$380 million a year (based on a three year average) (**Figure 2**).

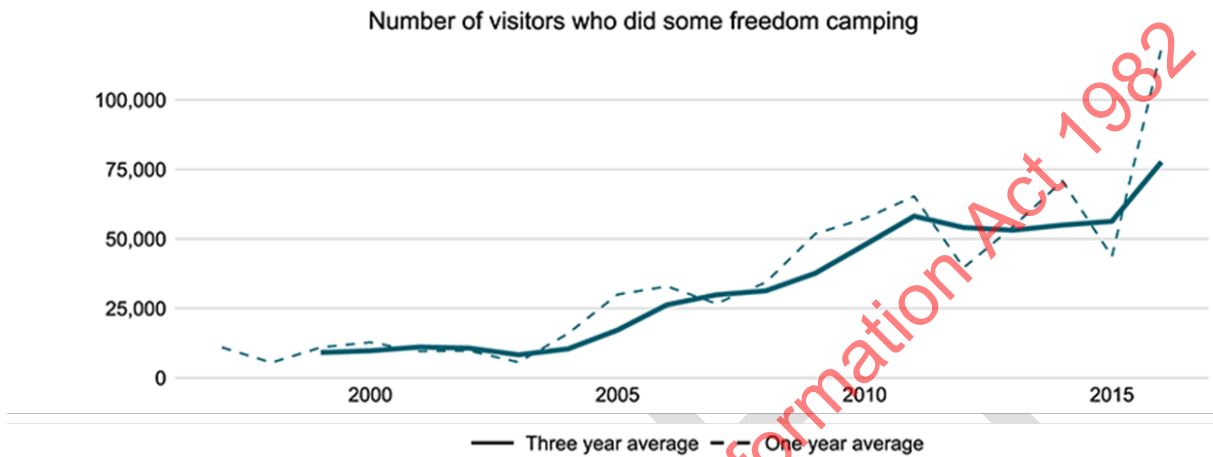


Figure 1: Average number of visitors who did some form of freedom camping¹

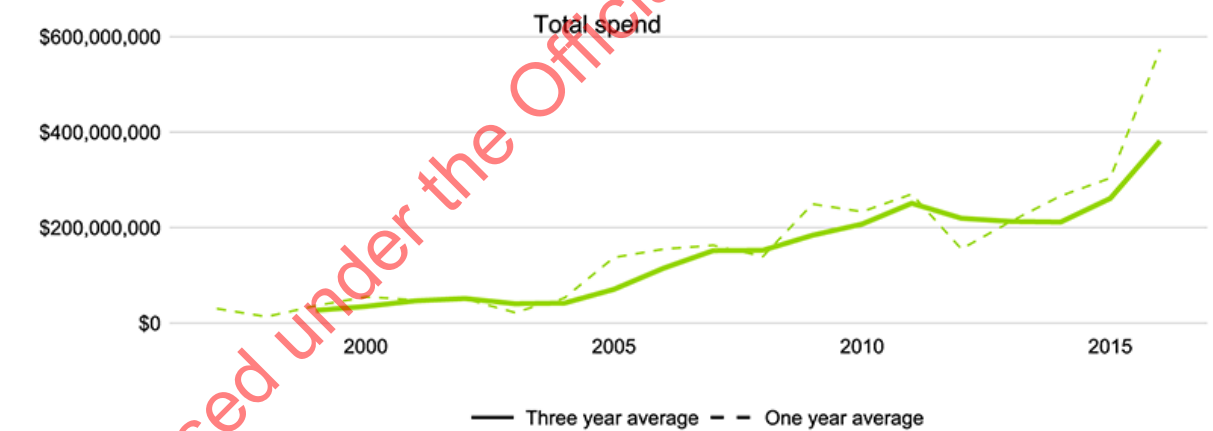


Figure 2: Total spend for visitors who did some form of freedom camping

8. As well as international visitors, there is also a strong domestic market for freedom camping. The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association has 44,500 member vehicles registered and many New Zealanders enjoy freedom camping.

¹ A three year average is used to describe the trend due to the small sample in the International Visitor Survey that freedom camp at some point during their visit.

9. The government has responded to the growth in tourism by providing over \$8 million of funding for local tourism infrastructure. The \$102 million Tourism Infrastructure Fund, announced in Budget 2017 will provide additional financial support for communities that would struggle to fund supporting infrastructure themselves, like toilet blocks used by freedom campers. We are also providing support to identify effective practices for local authorities on managing freedom camping and informing campers of the local rules.
10. The environments where local frustration has been particularly high are where locals and freedom camping visitors are competing for the same space, for example:
 - campers and their vehicles blocking views and spoiling the amenity of an area;
 - campers preventing local access to public areas; and
 - campers damaging the local environment and antisocial behaviours.
11. In light of the significant growth in demand for freedom camping as an accommodation option it is time to have a conversation with New Zealanders about the place for freedom camping in New Zealand.

Proposed discussion document

12. Through the proposed discussion document we seek to gain a better understanding of New Zealanders views on the place of freedom camping in New Zealand. This understanding will allow us to assess whether there is a need to change our approach to regulating and managing freedom camping.
13. The document outlines eight main components of a freedom camping system and seeks New Zealanders feedback on how we should approach each of these.
14. These eight issues are framed as high-level questions that make up the body of the document:
 - What do we mean by freedom camping?
 - Does freedom camping still have a place in New Zealand?
 - Where should people be able to freedom camp?
 - How should people be able to freedom camp?
 - Who should be responsible for making decisions about freedom camping?
 - Who should be responsible for providing the facilities freedom campers need?
 - Who should pay for freedom camping?
 - How do we deal with problems caused by freedom camping?
15. Under each of these questions the paper:
 - highlights the broad choices or trade-offs;
 - identifies the benefits and issues associated with these choices, including the impact on people who freedom camp;
 - notes how the current system deals with these choices;
 - presents a case study or example; and
 - seeks the public's views on how these choices should be made in the future.
16. The document does not put forward policy proposals for how the current system could be changed to better manage freedom camping.

Release of discussion document

17. It is intended that the discussion document will be released in mid-July 2017 and open for comment for a period of five weeks until mid-August. It will be released in a website format with some supporting material for printing and wider distribution.
18. The public feedback can then be used to analyse whether the current regulatory system for managing freedom camping is working for New Zealanders, and whether any change is required.

Consultation

19. The Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry prepared this paper and undertook consultation with:
 - 19.1 The Department of Conservation; Ministries for Primary Industries, Environment; Ministries of Social Development, Culture and Heritage, Health, Transport, Justice; Te Puni Kōiri; Land Information New Zealand; New Zealand Transport Agency; Immigration New Zealand; and New Zealand Customs Service; Tourism New Zealand. The Department of the Prime Minister was informed.
 - 19.2 In addition, the Department also consulted with: Tourism Industry Aotearoa; Local Government New Zealand; the Society of Local Government Managers; New Zealand Motor Caravan Association; and New Zealand Conservation Authority.

Financial implications

20. This paper, seeking approval to release a discussion document, does not have direct financial implications. The cost of releasing the discussion document for public consultation will be met by the Department and the Ministry.

Human rights, disability, or gender implications

21. There are no human rights, disability or gender implications for these proposals.

Legislative implications

22. This paper does not have direct legislative implications.

Regulatory impact analysis

23. The regulatory impact analysis requirements do not apply to the release of the discussion document because it does not contain policy proposals.

Publicity

24. Subject to Cabinet approval, we will release the discussion document on or before 14 July 2017. The consultation period will run for five weeks. The discussion document will be publicised through a media release from our offices and communications to industry stakeholders. The discussion document will be published on the Department's website and the link will be sent directly to stakeholders.

Recommendations

25. The Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Local Government recommend that the Cabinet Economic Growth and Infrastructure Committee:
1. **note** that the significant increase in tourism demand has also resulted in a large increase in the demand for freedom camping as an accommodation option for both domestic and international visitors;
 2. **note** that the attached discussion document presents differing views on seven areas of concern with the current approach to managing and regulating freedom camping;
 3. **note** that the attached discussion document does not propose any policy changes, but does seek feedback on the public's preferences for freedom camping generally and the way it is managed;
 4. **agree** to the release of the discussion document for public consultation in July 2017, which will last five weeks; and
 5. **authorise** the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Local Government to jointly make minor editorial changes to the discussion document prior to its public release.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Paula Bennett

Hon Anne Tolley

Minister of Tourism

Minister of Local Government