

# Managing freedom camping in Auckland

*Findings report*



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1.

# 1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to identify and discuss the key trends and challenges associated with managing freedom camping in Auckland.

The report will be used to help Auckland Council develop its response to freedom camping. In particular, it will inform the council's decision on whether to retain its existing regulations or consult with the public on a new approach.

# 2. Background

## 2.1. Demand for freedom camping in Auckland

Every summer, Auckland receives a large number of local, domestic and international tourists who camp for free on Auckland Council land in their vehicles, tents and in the open air. This activity is referred to as "freedom camping."

The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association estimates that it has around 68,000 members, and is steadily increasing every year. In 2015, the International Visitors Survey, recorded through the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (2017), estimates that the number of freedom campers visiting New Zealand was around 80,000.

Although Auckland is a popular destination campers tend to stay only briefly.

The nature and scale of freedom camping in Auckland is influenced by the following key factors:

- New Zealand's largest commercial airport is located in Auckland, meaning approximately 90<sup>i</sup> per cent of all international visitors to New Zealand start their travels here (Auckland Airport , 2017).
- freedom camping industries, such as camper van hire companies, are well established in Auckland. There is also a strong market for second-hand vehicles in Auckland, such as the Sunday Car Market at Ellerslie and through Trademe.
- Auckland is situated between two popular destinations for members of the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association living in the North Island, namely the Bay of Islands and the Coromandel Peninsula. Domestic freedom campers tend to stop in Auckland on their way to and from these other destinations.
- Auckland frequently hosts major events that attract freedom campers. Freedom camping is promoted as an attractive alternative for travellers, where there are accommodation shortages and/or increased prices during major events. The main proponents are the campervan industry and Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development (a council-controlled organisation).
- The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 also recognises the importance of sharing the benefits of tourism to more remote regions and freedom camping in New Zealand is promoted internationally to attract tourists who are independently mobile and attracted to more secluded areas.
- there has been a reduction in commercial campground capacity in recent years, influenced by increasing property values, especially for coastal properties (Department of Internal Affairs, 2017).



## 2.2. Current provision for freedom camping in Auckland

Currently, the council manages freedom camping through various legacy bylaw provisions (“the legacy bylaws”) inherited in November 2010. After amalgamation the council can use the legacy bylaws to allow freedom camping in certain areas.

To date, the number and geographic spread of designated freedom camping sites has been relatively limited. There are currently 14 sites, with combined capacity for 107 vehicles. These sites are all in the former Rodney (encompassing the Rodney and Hibiscus and Bays Local Boards) and Franklin district (encompassing part of the Franklin Local Board area).

As a result, freedom campers are over-crowding designated sites and/or illegally camping at popular destinations, outside the designated areas. Overcrowding increases the risk of primary and secondary harms, and further entrenches public perceptions about the negative impacts of freedom camping.

Table 1 outlines the primary and secondary harms associated with freedom camping. These are discussed in further detail in Table 3 of this report.

**Table 1 Primary and secondary harms associated with freedom camping**

Primary harms	Secondary harms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• loss of visual amenity due to presence of campers</li><li>• noise and other emanations, e.g. cooking smells</li><li>• conflict between other users including local residents</li><li>• blocked views</li><li>• privatisation of public space.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• littering and dumping</li><li>• remains of human waste, including used toilet paper</li><li>• environmental impacts such as pollution of waterways</li><li>• public safety, including the safety of freedom campers</li><li>• alcohol, and disorderly behaviour</li><li>• traffic safety issues such as obstructing access to areas</li><li>• loss of revenue to paid campgrounds and other accommodation providers</li><li>• international reputation</li><li>• loss of goodwill towards campers.</li></ul>

The council has responded to harms by deploying resources where overcrowding is reducing amenity and causing nuisance to local communities. This approach is resource intensive and may not be the most effective approach for managing freedom camping.

### 2.2.1 Existing regulations

The council’s legacy bylaws were developed under the Local Government Act 2002. Auckland Council inherited the legacy bylaws in November 2010, and confirmed them in October 2015 to avoid them lapsing under the Local Government (Auckland Transitional Provisions) Act 2010 (resolution GB/2015/11).

The council confirmed the legacy bylaws to:

- retain some regulation of freedom camping across Auckland
- allow more time for the council to fully assess the requirements for an Auckland-wide freedom camping bylaw.

The impact of this decision is that the legacy bylaws continue to apply until October 2020, unless the council chooses to amend or revoke them before that date. When making this decision, the council indicated it expected to complete the review well before the 2020 deadline.

Table 2 below identifies the legacy bylaw provisions. Where these bylaws apply, freedom camping is generally prohibited, except in designated sites where restrictions are in place. The eight legacy bylaws can be summarised into three different approaches based on the former legacy council areas, these are the:

- Former Rodney District: includes the area now encompassed by the Hibiscus and Bays and Rodney Local Board areas
- Former Franklin District: applies to that part of the Franklin Local Board that was previously part of the Franklin District (mostly west of the Southern Motorway)
- All other areas: includes the former Papakura District and the former Manukau, Auckland, Waitakere and North Shore City areas, including all regional parks (where the governing body retains decision making powers).

**Table 2 Existing freedom camping sites and legacy bylaw provisions**

Area	Description	
Former Franklin district	Bylaw	<b>Franklin District Council Public Places Bylaw 2007</b>
	Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom camping is prohibited except in the following designated areas, as per the first schedule of the bylaw: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Te Toro Reserve (10 spaces)</li> <li>○ Hamilton's Gap (three spaces)</li> <li>○ Rosa Birch car park (10 spaces)</li> <li>○ Waiuku Service Centre (10 spaces)</li> <li>○ The council would need to consult with the public but a full special consultative procedure would not be required</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camping is subject to the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ must park in designated area</li> <li>○ vehicles must be self-contained i.e. must hold and display current NZS 5465:2001 certification</li> <li>○ overnight stays permitted between 6pm at night and 10am the next morning</li> <li>○ maximum two-night stay in any one location</li> <li>○ all rubbish and other materials must be removed when vacating the designated area</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Former Rodney district	Bylaw	<b>Rodney District Council General Bylaw 1998: Chapter 8 Public Places</b>
	Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom camping is prohibited except in the following designated areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sunburst Reserve, Snells Beach (five spaces)</li> <li>○ Sunrise Boulevard, Snells Beach (five spaces)</li> <li>○ Matheson Bay (five spaces)</li> <li>○ Port Albert Domain (10 spaces)</li> <li>○ Parry Kauri Park (five spaces)</li> <li>○ Gulf Harbour (20 spaces)</li> <li>○ Orewa Reserve (10 spaces)</li> <li>○ Arundel Reserve (four spaces)</li> <li>○ Hatfields Bay (10 spaces)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Allows the council to designate sites for controlled freedom camping using signage</li> </ul>
	Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-contained vehicles may stay up to two nights in any one calendar month</li> </ul>
Rest of region, including regional parks	Bylaws	Auckland City Council Bylaws: Bylaw No. 20 – Public Places 2008 Auckland Regional Council Parks Bylaw 2007 Manukau City Council Consolidated Bylaw 2008: Chapter 9 General Nuisance, Safety and Behaviour in Parks and Public Places North Shore City Council Bylaw 2000 Part 2 Public Places Papakura District Council Public Places Bylaw 2008 Waitakere City Council Public Places Bylaw 2010
	Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently there are no designated sites meaning freedom camping is prohibited unless it is allowed under a reserve management plan</li> </ul>
	Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sites can be designated under officer delegation</li> <li>• In the case of regional parks by way of authorised signage</li> </ul>

## 2.2.2 Other regulations

Along with the legacy bylaw provisions, the council may use other tools to manage the impacts and harms associated with freedom camping, such as the Unitary Plan for environmental impacts, noise and other emanations, and existing bylaws including the:

- Public Safety and Nuisance Bylaw 2013
- Solid Waste Bylaw 2012
- Alcohol Control Bylaw 2014
- Auckland Transport Traffic Bylaw 2012.

Although other tools may be used to manage these impacts and harms, from an enforcement perspective it is difficult to attribute these issues directly to a freedom camper. The council is also restricted in its ability to impose an immediate infringement fine if a breach is made. These harms and relevant controls are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3 Harms associated with freedom camping managed by other tools**

Impacts	Controls	Approach
<b>Public safety and nuisance</b>	Auckland-wide under the Public Safety and Nuisance Bylaw 2013	Noise, fire and obstruction are managed using a graduated response model starting with the issue of warnings and bylaw notices through to prosecutions in extreme circumstances
<b>Litter and dumping</b>	Auckland-wide under the Solid Waste Bylaw 2012	Infringements are given for littering and the dumping of rubbish. The fines range from \$100 for a first time litter offender to \$400 for recidivist offending and the dumping of larger volumes
<b>Dangerous dogs and dog access</b>	Auckland-wide under the Dog Management Policy and Bylaw 2012	Animal management officers issue infringement fines of \$300 and impound animals at a number of dog pounds across Auckland for a range of offences, including unregistered and dangerous dogs and breaches of local dog access rules
<b>Noise and vibration</b>	Auckland-wide under the <a href="#">Auckland Unitary Plan</a>	Environmental Health officers and noise pollution contractors respond to complaints about noise, usually relating to generators, amplified music and large social gatherings.  The response differs depending on the zoning of the land, the noise level, the time of day and the proximity to residential boundaries.
<b>Alcohol-related harm</b>	Auckland-wide under the Alcohol Control Bylaw 2014	There are over 700 alcohol bans throughout Auckland. The New Zealand Police enforce all alcohol bans throughout Auckland as resources allow and according to the level of risk
<b>Managing parking demands</b>	Auckland-wide under the <a href="#">Auckland Transport Traffic Bylaw 2012</a>	Auckland Transport uses the traffic bylaw to regulate the times and vehicle conditions at individual sites throughout Auckland. These are mostly done in urban areas where traffic demands are high. Paid parking is also managed under this bylaw as well as obstructions to traffic.
<b>Environmental damage</b>	Auckland-wide under the <a href="#">Auckland Unitary Plan</a>	The rules differ according to the zone and the form of environmental damage. Water pollution, air pollution, damage to heritage and illegal discharges may result in prosecution and fines

## 2.3 Regulatory framework

### 2.3.1 Freedom Camping Act 2011

Since the legacy bylaw provisions were originally adopted, central government passed the Freedom Camping Act 2011.

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.

Freedom camping is defined under the Act 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).

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 are to:

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

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. There are difficulties however associated with the recovery rate of infringement notices issued to some campers. In some cases there may be associated costs' with managing appeals and administering the infringement process. The recovery rate of infringement fines is discussed in the Responses section.

### 2.3.2 Local Government Act 2002

The Local Government Act also enables local authorities to manage freedom camping. If a local authority believes a bylaw is necessary to address the perceived problems associated with freedom camping, it may create controls.

If the council chooses to use the Local Government Act to design a new control to manage freedom camping, it must carefully consider how that new control corresponds with the Freedom Camping Act. For instance, a bylaw made under the Local Government Act to introduce 'blanket bans' in the region to try control freedom camping, may be considered inconsistent with the Freedom Camping Act and possibly unlawful.

A new control and framework developed under the Local Government Act to manage freedom camping would need to be further investigated with local boards as land owner approvers.



### 2.3.2 Other legislation

Along with the legislation highlighted above, other regimes used to manage freedom camping include those discussed below.

#### *Reserves Act 1977*

This Act applies to land gazetted as a reserve in a local authority area. On these reserves, overnight camping is prohibited unless specifically allowed under a reserve management plan or by ministerial consent. The minister's consenting powers have been delegated to the chief executive of the council. Approximately 60-70 per cent of Auckland Council's 4000 parks are gazetted under this Act.

#### *Camping Grounds Regulations 1985*

These are made pursuant to section 120B of the Health Act 1956 to set minimum standards for the provision of facilities in the commercial camping ground industry. Councils throughout New Zealand, including Auckland Council, issue exemptions from the regulations in recognition of the self-contained nature of many camping vehicles. For example, the council issued an exemption for pop-up freedom camping by certified self-contained vehicles at Wynyard Quarter during the Rugby World Cup 2011.

#### *Resource Management Act 1991*

Any new camping ground outside of a commercial zone in the Auckland Unitary Plan would require resource consent to establish and operate. For the 2017 British and Irish Lions Rugby Tour two sites were granted resource consent under this Act to ensure that environmental effects were sustainably managed.

## 2.4 Other council approaches to manage freedom camping

There are a number of tools that local authorities may use to manage freedom camping.

The different approaches in place across New Zealand have been assessed nationally in 2016. Further analysis of these approaches is provided in the National Situational Analysis prepared by the Department of Internal Affairs.

The following outlines the approaches of Auckland's neighbouring councils:

- **Whangarei District Council** – Whangarei (at the time of writing) have a proposed bylaw out for consultation under the Freedom Camping Act 2011. The bylaw will allow certified self-contained motorhomes at certain popular destinations for more than three nights in any four-week consecutive period in any one area
- **Waikato District Council** – In 2016, the council adopted a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 allowing certified-self-contained motorhomes, except in prohibited areas for a maximum of two nights
- **Kaipara District Council** – The Kaipara District General Bylaw is made pursuant to the Local Government Act 2002 and prohibits camping on any reserve, where it has not been specifically set aside for that purpose. It is not known how many sites have been set aside for this purpose
- **Thames-Coromandel District Council** – the Freedom Camping Bylaw 2014 allows only certified-self-contained motorhomes, except in prohibited areas for a maximum of two nights. For reserves with sports facilities a further conditions requires campers to leave the site early on Saturday mornings to avoid conflict with sporting activities
- **Hauraki District Council**– Part 3 (Public Safety) of the Hauraki District Council Consolidated Bylaw deals with freedom camping. Campers may stay between one and two nights, depending on the site. A number of private properties are also on the council's website charging a small fee to stay overnight.

### 2.4.1 Non-regulatory approaches

In addition to bylaws the council may use non-regulatory approaches to manage freedom camping. The Auckland Visitor and Major Events strategies are examples of this. Other examples include:

- partnerships between the tourism industry and council
- awareness campaigns
- promotion of holiday parks and other paid accommodation
- funding agreements and policies
- social media platforms and information brochures
- communication strategies.

Further examples of non-regulatory approaches to manage freedom camping are further discussed in Section 6 below.

## 2.5 National Situational Analysis

In 2016, the council took part in a national working group to improve the effectiveness of bylaws through a Department of Internal Affairs project called the Bylaw Toolbox Review. As part of that review, the working group completed a National Situational Analysis of local government and central government policy associated with freedom camping (Department of Internal Affairs, 2017).

The purpose of that analysis was to:

- assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the freedom camping regulatory regime administered by local government
- understand the challenges for implementing national policy throughout New Zealand.

The key findings from that report have influenced the council's review and are summarised as follows:

#### *Perceptions of harm are driving a decrease in supply*

- There is an emerging trend whereby councils are increasingly limiting the number of sites available for freedom camping. This trend is largely driven by community perceptions and media attention about the negative impacts of freedom camping.
- A decrease in supply when combined with an increase in demand has resulted in overcrowding, and subsequently increased risk of the real and perceived harms that are often associated with freedom camping.

#### *Local government's role is broader than just regulation*

Local authorities play a crucial role in the provision and promotion of services and infrastructure for tourism. In relation to freedom camping, most local authorities have introduced regulations and controls in an attempt to manage the activity of freedom camping. Such regulations have been introduced to try and reduce the harms and impacts to a district or region. This is often done in lieu of more strategic discussions highlighting the benefits that freedom camping may bring to a region, such as tourism or economic benefits, that may also be aligned with national policy and goals.

Exploring the opportunities for communities using positive engagement techniques may help to shift perceptions about freedom camping and change the public discourse around suitable freedom camping areas.

A shift of focus to a more proactive approach to managing the activity of freedom camping rather than restricting and prohibiting it, could help shift the negative perceptions the public has towards freedom camping.

### 3. Methodology

The following matters were considered when developing the methods for the review:

- **Current trends** – the supply of freedom camping sites in Auckland are not meeting demands
- **Reactive approach not working** – the current approach of responding to issues rather than managing risks is resource intensive and may not be the most effective approach for managing freedom camping
- **National situational analysis complete** – the joint review of the freedom camping regulatory regime was completed in November 2016. The findings from the analysis help define the problems associated with freedom camping, and provide guidance to councils to move beyond a regulatory-focussed approach.

#### 3.1 Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review was to:

- identify current freedom camping patterns and behaviours within the Auckland region
- understand and prioritise the issues associated with freedom camping in Auckland
- evaluate the different approaches available to the council to manage freedom camping, including both regulatory and non-regulatory responses.

The review findings will inform the council's decision on whether to retain its existing regulations, or consult with the public on a new freedom camping bylaw.

#### 3.2 The questions we asked

The review asked the following key research questions, in line with the above research objectives (Figure 1).

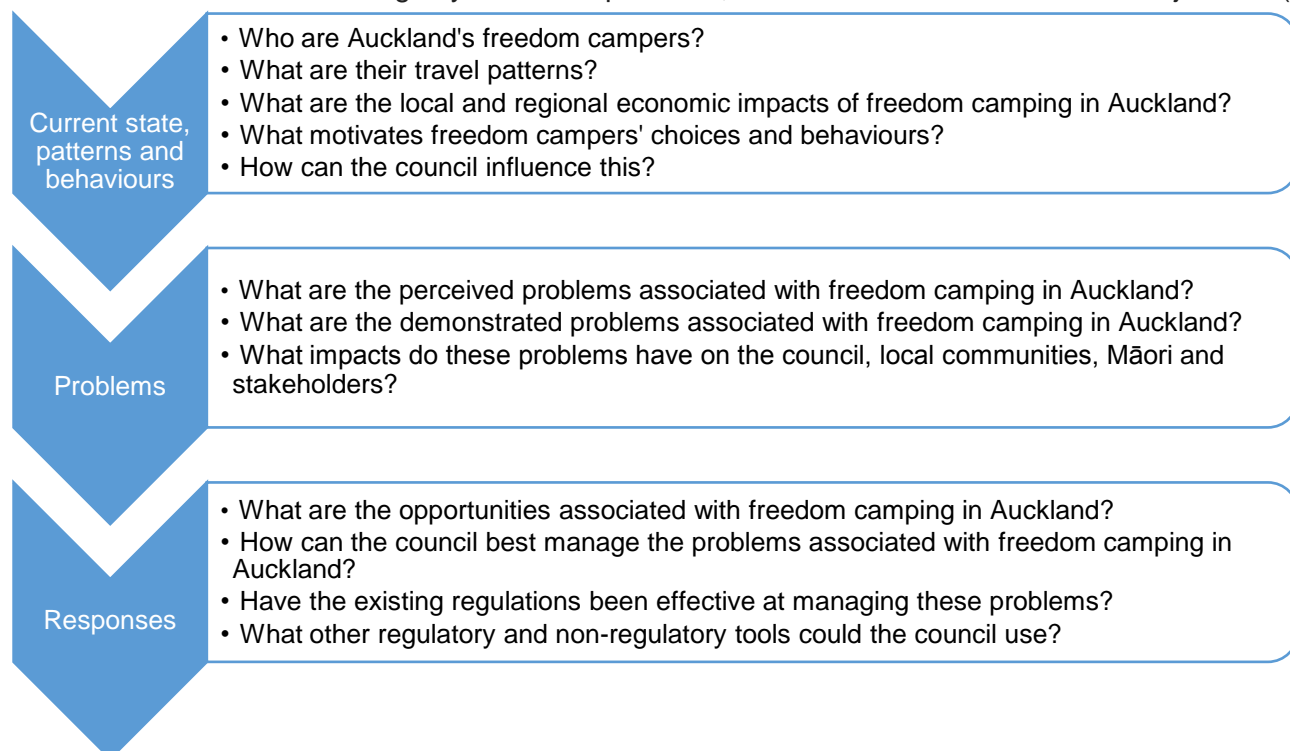


Figure 1 Research questions

### 3.1. How we conducted the review

To conduct the review, staff completed a range of research and engagement activities:

- literature-based research
- analysis of quantitative data on current trends and impacts of freedom camping
- review of domestic and international responses to freedom camping
- People's Panel survey
- assessment of Auckland's existing freedom camping regulations and their operation
- design and completion of a pilot project, which involved collecting data and insights into the social and economic impacts of freedom camping under managed conditions. As part of this, the council:
  - commissioned an independent research company, Gravitas Ltd, to conduct a quantitative survey and undertake key informant interviews
  - assessed operational information, including customer complaints data, field notes both during and outside of the pilot
  - worked with local boards on pilot design and evaluation
- engagement with Māori as land owners and significant tourism operators in the region
- collaboration with other councils, including on the Bylaw Toolbox Review.

**Table 4** summarises the qualitative and quantitative data sources used to inform the review findings.

**Table 4 Qualitative and quantitative information**

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information from the International Visitor Survey (IVS) from Statistics New Zealand</li><li>• Data on national economic spend by freedom campers from MBIE</li><li>• Numbers and trends from the NZMCA</li><li>• Number of complaints from Auckland Council departments</li><li>• Service impact on council departments</li><li>• Survey responses from the Auckland Council Freedom Camping Pilot.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Literature Review by the New Zealand Responsible Camping Forum</li><li>• Local and international examples on regulations and behaviour</li><li>• Analysis of other councils' regulatory and non-regulatory tools</li><li>• Feedback from participating local boards and communities</li><li>• People's Panel survey</li><li>• Department of Internal Affairs Bylaw Toolkit Review engagement</li><li>• Survey responses from council contracted research organisation.</li></ul>

### 3.2. Participatory action research: piloting a new approach

To further understand perceived problems and to determine how the council can improve the way it manages freedom camping, staff developed a pilot project using an action research approach. The council commenced the pilot to understand whether increasing the number of freedom camping sites in Auckland would help reduce the overcrowding in pre-existing 'hot spots'.

The pilot ran between February and April 2017 and included 28 sites throughout the region. The approved sites were located in urban, coastal, rural, and suburban areas. Some of these sites were existing freedom camping sites, while others were introduced and approved by eight participating local boards. These sites are listed in **Appendix 1**.

Further detail about the pilot is summarised below.

### 3.3.3 Pilot objectives

The objectives of the pilot were to:

- improve the council's understanding of who freedom campers are in Auckland
- increase the council's understanding of freedom camper behaviour, including:
  - compliant and non-complaint issues
  - attraction and awareness to freedom camping sites
  - social and economic impacts on communities
- influence freedom camper behaviour through a dispersal strategy
- understand the responses and feedback around freedom camping sites in different areas throughout the region.

### 3.3.4 Pilot set up and operation

Staff took a cross departmental approach to establish and set up the pilot. This comprised Auckland Transport, Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development, Watercare and other operational departments within the council.

Once staff identified suitable sites, an initial survey with the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association was completed. The survey helped determine that more coastal and secluded sites were required to manage demand effectively through the pilot.

Staff applied a dispersal strategy to influence camper demand for sites, raising awareness of the new sites mainly using social media platforms. This strategy also helped to promote attractions near those sites and encourage more campers to head or stay south.

Staff then worked with local boards to conduct detailed assessment to understand the impact the sites may have on their communities. This process led to several design improvements for a number of the sites. In the weeks preceding the pilot, local boards gave approvals with set conditions. As sites were approved, signs were installed and vehicle spaces marked out.

During the pilot, service levels were increased in areas expected to be popular and additional facilities were installed where limited facilities were available. In some areas this included the temporary installation of portable toilets, recycling facilities and waste bins.

Sites that were classified under the Reserves Act 1977 were then granted ministerial consent to allow overnight camping to occur in a lawful way. This consent was granted due to the short-term nature of the pilot and the management conditions put in place to avoid and mitigate conflict with other users.

### 3.3.5 Pilot research methods

In order to gather key insights, the council commissioned an independent research company, Gravitas Ltd, to conduct:

- a quantitative online survey
- in-field intercept interviews with freedom campers
- key informant interviews with stakeholders associated with the pilot sites.

To complement this research, council staff:

- completed field observations at the pilot sites
- collected compliance data



- analysed customer service and complaints data
- gathered feedback on the pilot from participating local boards.

Table 5 below provides further detail about each of these methods.

**Table 5 Research methods used to gather data through pilot**

Research method	
<b>Quantitative online survey and intercept survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Online survey</u>: link to questionnaire sent to Auckland-based NZMCA campers; posted on the <a href="http://www.rankers.com">www.rankers.com</a> website, and a shortened version was put on the CamperMate app</li> <li>• <u>Intercept survey</u>: face-to-face interviews taken 'on the field' at the Pilot sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ fieldwork conducted over early March to early April (four weeks)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Total sample size of survey: n=746 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Online survey responses n=554</li> <li>○ Intercept ('fieldwork') survey n=192.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Key informant interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key informant interviews were undertaken with approximately 20 key stakeholders who were located close to the pilot sites</li> </ul>
<b>Field observations and compliance data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance officers undertook approximately 300 site visits over February – April</li> <li>• Data was collected about the number of vehicles, self-containment status, and breaches of site conditions.</li> </ul>
<b>Customer service and complaints data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data relating to illegal dumping, litter, public safety and nuisance, property damage and general complaints about freed campers</li> </ul>
<b>Gathering Feedback</b>	<p>Workshops and other meetings were held to discuss the results and impacts from the pilot with :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local boards</li> <li>• New Zealand Motor Caravan Association</li> <li>• stakeholders within Auckland Council.</li> </ul>

Appendix 2 outlines how staff pulled together the research to gain insight into answering the key questions of the review.

### 3.3. Research limitations

This review does not consider fully the policies in neighbouring districts, nor does it consider the costs and benefits at a regional scale from increasing or decreasing regulatory control in the management of freedom camping. These issues were investigated, however the cost involved was not considered a prudent investment at this time.

In a similar way, this review has not undertaken an infrastructure gap analysis. This has been undertaken at a national level and the government is investigating ways to address these issues at a national level.

Finally, the findings in this report have focussed on assessing the status quo and opportunities for future improvement. If a new bylaw is to be investigated to bring a consistent approach to the region, the collection of findings in this report will support a thorough analysis at a local level on the opportunities and challenges of managing freedom camping.



## SECTION 4

# Current state, patterns, and behaviours

This section of the report presents information on the current state, patterns and trends relevant to freedom camping in Auckland with a focus on the first set of research questions

## 4. Current state, patterns and behaviours of freedom camping in Auckland

### In this section:

- Trends, pattern and behaviours of freedom campers
  - results from pilot research and national trends
  - what we have learned from the literature and from observations in the field
- Economic impacts from freedom camping
  - opportunities and challenges of managing freedom camping in Auckland
  - considerations for future policy development.

Through the review, staff sought to understand who is freedom camping in Auckland, where they are going and what influences their choices.

### Key questions:

- Who are Auckland's freedom campers?
- What influences freedom campers' behaviour and choices?
- What information would support the dispersal of freedom campers to other areas?

### 4.1 Freedom camper profiles

The pilot survey conducted by Gravitas Research Ltd ("Gravitas") showed that during the pilot 69 per cent of freedom campers were international tourists<sup>1</sup>. The remainder were visitors from elsewhere in New Zealand (21 per cent) or from Auckland (11 per cent).

From pilot surveying, there were two prominent age groups among campers: 49 per cent were less than 30 years old, whilst 35 per cent were aged over 50 years. There was a relatively even spread of workers (full time 38 per cent; part time 12 per cent), students (24 per cent) and retired people (23 per cent) among the campers.

The survey found that campers mostly travelled in pairs (77 per cent), though some travelled alone (10 per cent) or in groups of three (eight per cent).

Approximately 57 per cent of those surveyed reported they were travelling in a certified self-contained vehicle.

#### *Results show there are two main camper profiles*

Results from the survey found that there were two prominent segments of freedom campers: "young international travellers" who made up 64 per cent of those surveyed and "grey nomads" who made up 32 per cent of respondents.

The characteristics of these two groups are summarised in Table 6 below.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are consistent with national figures from surveying of the campervan hire industry in 2012 by the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment. From this survey, it was estimated that on an annual basis, approximately 76 per cent of freedom campers were international tourists.

**Table 6 Profile of freedom campers in Auckland**

	Young international travellers	Grey nomads
Average age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 20 – 29 years</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 50 – 65 years</li></ul>
Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predominantly from Germany, France, and Great Britain</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Domestic travellers: 11 per cent from Auckland; 21 per cent from elsewhere in New Zealand</li></ul>
Travel groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally travelled in pairs</li><li>• Some groups of friends</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Travelled in pairs</li></ul>
Vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Typically camped in non-self-contained vehicles</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Almost exclusively camped in self-contained vehicles</li></ul>
Occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mostly students, or workers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Typically employed full time or retired</li></ul>

### *Impact on homeless people*

During the pilot, the council received feedback from community stakeholders that homeless people were sleeping in cars at pilot sites. It is difficult for compliance staff to distinguish between a freedom camper in a non-self-contained vehicle and a homeless person sleeping in their vehicle.

Addressing issues of homelessness is outside the scope of this report, though the council is expected to consider improving policy in relation to rough sleeping and homelessness in line with the outcomes sought in the Auckland Plan.

If the council decides in its management approach to address problems associated with freedom camping through the development of a bylaw, the intent of the bylaw will not be to affect homeless people or transient workers.

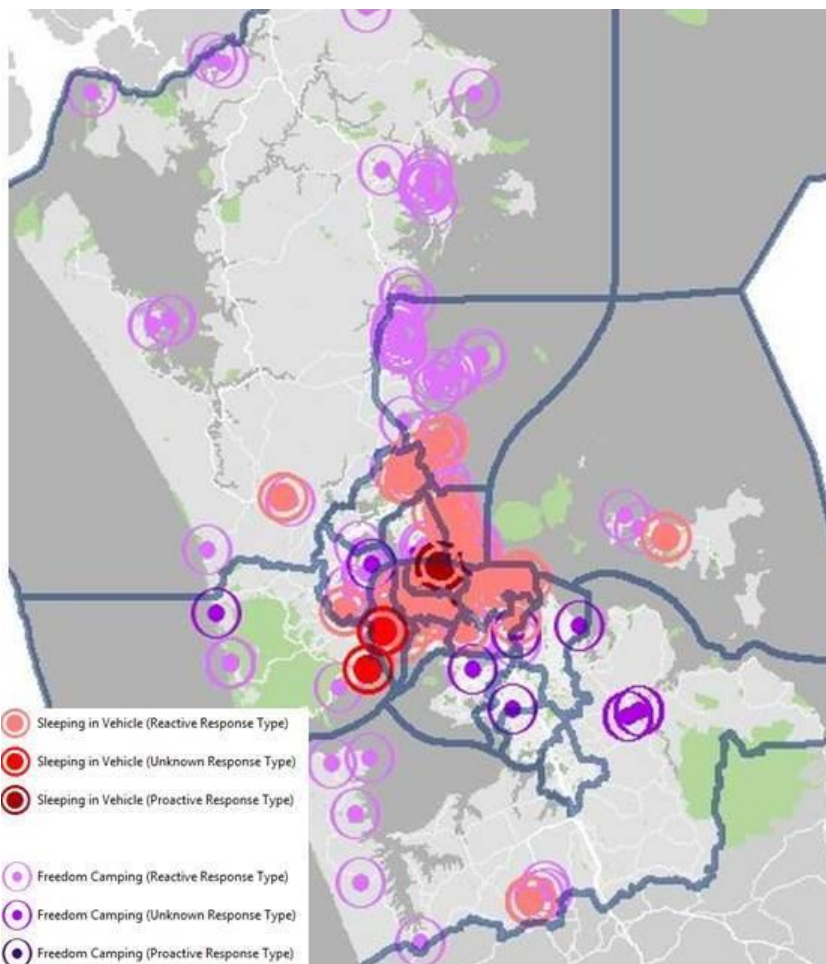
#### **4.1.1 Site selection and travel patterns**

Data collected by bylaw compliance officers for the two calendar years 2014 and 2015, showed freedom camping predominantly occurred in two location types:

- in coastal locations near beaches, with the greatest concentrations between Orewa and Mahurangi Harbour (Matheson Bay and Snell's Beach)
- in and around the City Centre, including significant problems in Herne Bay, Cox's Bay and Margaret Griffen Park in Lynfield.

During this time, there were only nine sites available for legitimate use, meaning there were fewer options available to campers and a high level of non-compliance with existing rules. Figure 2 shows where complaints are usually laid.





**Figure 2 Complaints laid about freedom camping in Auckland**

The Gravitas survey asked freedom campers to indicate which sites they had already stayed at, or were planning to stay at, during the pilot. The most and least popular sites are listed in Table 7 below, along with the proportion of respondents that mentioned the site. Multiple responses were allowed, so the sum does not equal 100%.

**Table 7 Most and least popular pilot sites**

Most popular sites		Least popular sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Margaret Griffen Memorial Park (Puketāpapa Local Board): 30%</li> <li>• Gulf Harbour (Hibiscus and Bays Local Board): 30%</li> <li>• Domain Reserve/Panmure Lagoon (Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board): 28%</li> <li>• Arundel Reserve (Hibiscus and Bays Local Board): 15%</li> <li>• Eastern Beach Caravan Park (Howick Local Board): 10%</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiuku Service Station (Franklin Local Board): 2%</li> <li>• Centennial Park (Rodney Local Board): 2%</li> <li>• Riverglade Lane Accessway and Esplanade Reserve (Rodney Local Board): 1%</li> <li>• Te Toro Recreation Reserve (Franklin Local Board): 1%</li> <li>• Howick Village Carpark; Moore St (Howick Local Board): 1%</li> </ul>



The most popular sites were:

- the urban sites where non self-contained campers were allowed to stay
- coastal sites where spaces were located next to, or in close proximity to a beach
- existing sites where freedom camping is permitted in the north east of Auckland.

The least popular sites were:

- a considerable distance from the motorways or tourist destinations
- with few landscape features or not common places chosen to freedom camp.

#### 4.1.2 Camper profile influenced site selection

Site popularity results by local board area show that the most popular local board area during the pilot was Hibiscus and Bays (43 per cent of respondents; five sites), followed by Puketāpapa (30 per cent of respondents; one site) and Maungakiekie-Tāmaki (28 per cent; one site).

The Hibiscus and Bays Local Board sites were particularly popular among the grey nomad campers; 78 per cent of campers aged 65 and above stayed or intended to stay at one of these sites.

The Puketāpapa and Maungakiekie-Tāmaki local board sites hosted two of the three sites where non self-contained vehicles were permitted, making them popular among the younger travellers. Ninety per cent of those under 30 years stayed or intended to stay at the sites within these local board areas.

#### 4.1.3 Site utility, proximity to services and coastal locations attracted campers

From existing literature on freedom camping, campers enjoy the flexibility of travelling when and where they want, at an affordable price, and usually without much planning<sup>2</sup>.

Results from the Gravitas survey show that motivations around site selection differ between the type of freedom camper. For instance, the motivations for campers in self-contained vehicles were different to motivations for campers in non-self-contained campers. These results are highlighted further in Table 8 below.

**Table 8 Motivations behind site selection from pilot**

Motivation for site selection	Self-contained	Non self-contained
Physical environment e.g. views, cleanliness	35%	10%
Proximity to tourist attractions/entertainment/dining etc.	27%	20%
Proximity to airport/to the next destination	23%	32%
Facilities e.g. toilets, dumping station, water	19%	20%
Accessible/easy to drive to	12%	7%
The only other freedom campsite I'm aware of	4%	31%
Free	4%	14%
Easy to find	4%	1%
It's the closest site to the one I'm intending to go to	3%	5%
Spacious/large parking space	3%	4%

Overall young international travellers, usually in non-self-contained vehicles, stayed at the suburban sites where they were permitted. This caused overcrowding as there was only a limited number of sites (three in total) where they could stay overnight. Sometimes the overcrowding of the sites caused conflict with other site users.

<sup>2</sup> This was evident through council's pilot survey. See also, Kearns, Collins and Bates, *"It's freedom": examining the motivations and experiences of coastal freedom campers in New Zealand*, (January 2016). Routledge: Taylor & Francis.

#### 4.1.4 Barriers associated with certain sites

A number of respondents to the pilot survey identified barriers to staying at certain sites. The most prominent barrier identified was that the site they had planned to stay at was full or over-crowded. Other reasons included:

- they had stumbled across another site on the way
- the site or surrounding area was perceived to be less pleasant than expected
- the site didn't have the facilities wanted/needed
- they had poor perceptions of safety
- dog access restrictions were in place
- they couldn't find the site.

#### 4.1.5 Planned versus spontaneous camping

The Gravitas survey found that a clear majority of campers stayed at sites they had planned in advance (74 per cent). For respondents staying at a site they had not originally planned, approximately half of these had no fixed plans. This pattern was significantly higher among campers with one or more of the following characteristics:

- domestic travellers (30 per cent)
- those with self-contained vehicles (23 per cent).

This indicates that young international freedom campers are more deliberate with their travel patterns, whereas grey nomads tend to be more spontaneous, possibly as they tend to be less reliant on access to facilities and services.

Understanding freedom campers' behaviours, as well as the factors that influence their choices provides useful insight on how best to communicate with different types of campers.

### 4.2 Influencing behaviour

#### 4.2.1 Methods for communicating with campers

Freedom campers use social media apps or publications from the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association to access information about freedom camping sites including<sup>3</sup>:

- site location and capacity (how many spaces available)
- site rules such as whether self-contained or non-self-contained vehicles are permitted and whether time restrictions apply
- the facilities available, including toilets, water, waste receptacles or dump station nearby.

The Gravitas survey indicated that social media apps were a useful channel for communicating with young international travellers. Sixty-nine per cent of young international travellers used the CamperMate app to find out about the site they stayed at.

Grey nomads tended to source their information by word of mouth, from friends or family, or via NZMCA publications (45 per cent reported this approach).

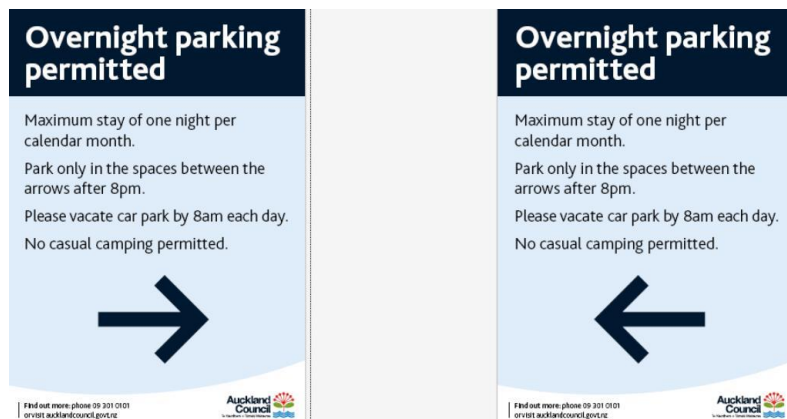
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<sup>3</sup> Including Rankers, CamperMate, WikiCamp apps.

## 4.2.2 On-site signage and visual cues

During the pilot, the council used temporary signs (see Figure 3) and visual cues, such as the painting of car park spaces to indicate where freedom campers could stay.

Field observations, key informant interviews, and feedback from local boards indicated that generally this approach (i.e. clearly delineating designated spaces and site conditions) encouraged compliance. Example comments are highlighted below.



**Figure 3 Typical signage used during the pilot to manage behaviour**

*“With [our park], money has been spent on marking spaces. The boat trailer spaces are clearly marked, the disabled space is marked clearly, the spaces where the campervans can go overnight are marked clearly. There has been increased activity there but it seems to be running reasonably well. Other sites that not marked are much less orderly.”<sup>4</sup>*

Other comments obtained through interviews stated that:

- residents’ views were no longer obstructed as designated sites have been thoughtfully located
- grass verges are less likely to be damaged as sites are located in car parks on sealed areas
- traffic issues are reduced as large vans are no longer parked on the sides of (narrow or rural) roads.

*“[Since the Pilot], most of the overnight campers leave by 10 o’clock in the morning, which is considerably more orderly than it was about a year ago. In the past it was shambles frankly.”*

## 4.3 Economic impacts of freedom camping

The review sought to identify freedom campers’ spending patterns within Auckland, and to understand the local and regional economic impacts of freedom camping.

### Key questions:

- What is the nature and scale of freedom campers’ spending within Auckland?
- What are the local and regional economic benefits of freedom camping? How can these be maximised?
- What are the costs of freedom camping to the council, ratepayers and stakeholders?

<sup>4</sup> Key informant from Snells Beach located in the Rodney Local Board area.

### 4.3.1 Freedom campers' spending patterns

The Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment recently published a report on visitor spending patterns nationally<sup>ii</sup>. The report analysed visitor credit card usage and surveyed visitors who reported freedom camping during their visit to New Zealand over the three year period from 2012 to 2015. The report found that international tourists who freedom camped spent about \$260 million a year, which accounted for about three per cent of the total annual spending by international visitors.

The report also found that freedom campers spent approximately \$4,880 per person on average. This is larger than the average spend of \$2,814 for visitors who used other forms of accommodation.

Nationally, freedom campers spent more on food, retail and transport (excluding air fares) than other types of tourists. The main reason for this difference is the longer length of stay of those who freedom camp whilst in New Zealand. When length of stay is factored in, freedom campers, backpackers and other campers, spend about \$100 per day on average compared with \$156 per day by other visitors<sup>iii</sup>

To understand freedom campers' spending patterns in Auckland, the Gravitass survey asked campers to indicate how much money they spent the previous day (respondents were asked to self-report), excluding the costs of their vehicle hire. The results are illustrated in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4. How much freedom campers spent in Auckland during the previous day**

The figure shows the average amount spent was \$159 (excluding vehicle hire costs). It also shows that the amount spent varied across the different local board areas and the origin of where the campers came from i.e. elsewhere in New Zealand or in Auckland.

During the pilot, spending was highest in the rural and coastal areas such as Franklin (\$284) and Hibiscus and Bays (\$253) local board areas. Franklin also had the highest share of respondents that spent more than \$500 (14 per cent). These local board areas were most popular among grey nomads during the pilot.

Spending was lowest in urban areas (e.g. \$80 in Maungakiekie-Tāmaki and \$61 in Puketāpapa local boards). These sites were more popular with young international travellers who tended to spend less by comparison.

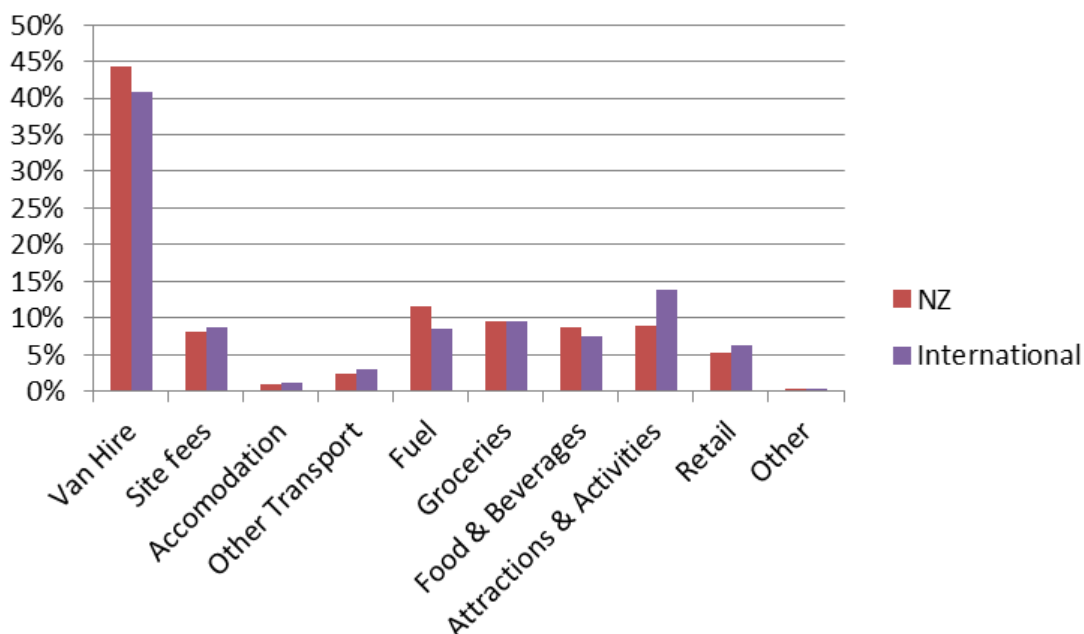
Those in self-contained vehicles spent an average of \$228, compared to an average of \$66 for freedom campers travelling in non-self-contained vehicles.

### 4.3.2 Local and regional economic benefits of freedom camping

Central government benefits from freedom camping through the taxation of goods and services purchased by campers. Local government benefits indirectly from a healthy economy that generates employment and wealth

amongst its residents, customers and rate payers. These benefits derive from the purchase of goods and services through Auckland businesses.

In 2012, the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment surveyed campers who had hired certified self-contained vehicles to understand what they were spending their money on (Coker, 2012). Figure 5 gives a break-down of their spending, based on whether the camper van hirer was from New Zealand or overseas. The figure shows that international tourists spent more on attractions, retail, accommodation, other transport and site fees; while domestic tourists spent more on van hire, fuel, food and beverages.



**Figure 5 Proportion of money spent by campers on different goods and services**

Auckland-specific data of this nature was not available, though spending on goods and services at Auckland businesses is likely to be fairly consistent with the national findings.

#### 4.3.3 Opportunities for Māori

There may be some economic opportunity for Māori when considering freedom camping in Auckland. The tourism gains that derive from freedom camping could entice Māori to become hosts for freedom campers.

A guiding principle in Te Ao Māori is the principle of manākitanga. In brief terms, a concept where mana whenua act as a responsible host to its visitors. This could also extend to matāwaka groups. Tourism opportunities relating to Auckland's Māori point of difference include:

- promote Māori culture and history at or near freedom camping sites
- increase tourism ventures where visitors are interested in cultural activities and experiences
- exercise manākitanga to international and domestic visitors.

Further engagement with Māori would help shape these opportunities, and also highlight how the activity of freedom camping could be managed more proactively. In particular, how mana whenua might restrict or prohibit freedom camping on cultural sites.

#### 4.3.4 Economic costs of freedom camping

The growth in freedom camping throughout New Zealand has put significant pressure on the country's tourism infrastructure. The National Situational Analysis report identifies this as an important issue in the management of freedom camping.



In 2012, councils across New Zealand invested \$8.4 billion in infrastructure, maintaining a total asset value of \$124.2 billion. Infrastructure such as pipes in the ground, furniture in parks, waste bins, toilet and changing facilities contribute greatly to site amenity. This is a significant burden on rate payers, meaning communities are sensitive about how the infrastructure is used, and about who pays for its maintenance. This can be seen in submissions to councils about freedom camping.

### 4.3.5 Costs to the council to host freedom campers

The economic cost to the council to host freedom campers includes:

- provision of facilities – including capital (construction) works, scheduled maintenance, servicing and monitoring; for Auckland Council, this is a local board budget item
- harm prevention – including proactive and responsive approaches to mitigate and manage harm; these activities are funded through regional budgets.

There is some frustration among Auckland communities who perceive freedom campers obtain the full benefits of council infrastructure and services without having to contribute financially. As part of the pilot project, staff sought to measure the extent of the impact of freedom campers on council facilities and services. This information may help to inform the council's approach to local and regional funding and address community concerns.

Table 9 shows the costs of delivering the pilot project using methods to prevent harm.

**Table 9 Costs to prevent harm at freedom camping sites using regional budgets**

Preventative measures	Cost to deliver pilot
Waste management (including additional waste and recycling bins and litter management)	\$2,800
Information provision (e.g. brochures and agreements with social media companies)	\$4,000
Signage and car park markings*	\$20,800
Temporary toilet facilities	\$2,200
Destination marketing	\$1,500
Total	\$31,300

\* Note that this high cost was a result of the installation of permanent sign post housing for temporary sign use. These facilities are reusable.

In summary, the approach taken by the council through the pilot to manage the activity of freedom camping and preventing harms highlighted that:

- the total cost of preventing harm came within the estimated budget
- staff adjusted service levels to reflect demand to ensure that resources followed risks consistent with best practice enforcement principles
- these costs at individual sites varied based on site location and demand at the site by both campers and other park users
- based on the number of inspections performed the cost of the pilot in terms of staff time was around \$37 per camper inspected.

If the council were to undertake a similar pilot next summer, the expected cost would be reduced further because:

- some sites were not deemed to be appropriate considering the high cost to prevent conflict with other users and to manage harm
- temporary toilet facilities were only well utilised at one of the five sites where they were placed

- any sites in the pilot made available to campers in the future would not require new signage to be installed.

### 4.3.6 Other impacts

#### Local board budget impacts

Across the 28 sites that stayed open throughout the pilot, there was no significant increase in costs relating to maintenance and regular servicing over the period of the pilot compared with the same time a year earlier. This shows that resource put towards preventing harm is an effective way to minimise costs to local board budgets.

#### Macroeconomic factors

One factor that needs to be considered is the impact on the accommodation sector in Auckland from freedom camping. Surveying by the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment notes that domestic travellers who rented caravans used paid locations for 75 per cent of their nights and international visitors used paid locations for 89 per cent of their nights. In a survey of New Zealand Motor Caravan Association members in 2011, members reported spending an average of 75 days a year travelling and 60 per cent reported freedom camping at some point during their travels.

This shows that commercial camping facilities are likely to be benefiting from the growth in freedom camping activity. During the pilot, four sites were located in close proximity to three holiday parks. Feedback received during the operation of the pilot included comments highlighted below:

*What I'm finding is that people are coming [to my business] now and using my Wi-Fi to find the free camping sites. They essentially drive in, use our free Wi-Fi and drive out and go and find the free campsites. I had a van come in the other day and actually say "oh no, we're not staying. We're looking for the free place." I'm sorry but that really stinks.*

At some point, providing additional freedom camping spaces will saturate the market and adversely impact the commercial camping sector. Holiday parks are already under pressure to invest in facilities to attract campers during a trend of increasing freedom camping activity. Imposing pressure on their revenue outside of peak times should be avoided. The council owns and operates three of 11 holiday parks in Auckland.

Staff analysed the occupancy rates for commercial camping sites suitable for campervans and tent-based campers. Between late December and the long weekend near early February these camping grounds are usually at or very near capacity and are often turning away campers – despite having a policy of reserving a number of non-bookable sites for such campers.

#### Other business sectors

From stakeholder interviews, some businesses (e.g. dairies, service stations and entertainment providers) located close to sites felt that they were benefitting financially in a small way from the pilot sites. They noted however that it was difficult to measure economic benefits accurately as it was difficult to distinguish between freedom campers and day trippers/other visitors. The short duration of the pilot also made quantifying the benefit challenging.

#### Influencing demand

Freedom campers in Auckland reported seclusion and tranquillity as a significant driver when choosing sites, yet campers continue to compete for space at popular coastal destinations (see Case Study 'Orewa Beach').

As part of the pilot, efforts were made to try and entice campers away from traditional freedom camping "hotspots" to new destinations in the south and south-east of Auckland. Campers were encouraged to travel through Panmure, Kawakawa Bay and Howick. This was achieved through the following methods:

- the handing out of brochures highlighting parks and local board features
- promoting local events e.g. the Howick Village Historical Tour
- working with local business associations on incentives and schemes
- face to face conversations between staff and campers about other sites available to campers
- social media advertising of commercial camping grounds

The pilot also trialled the use of social media to influence camper travel planning. Table 10 shows that this approach was effective at getting campers into the regional parks network, and a commercial camping ground.

**Table 10 Results of investment in advertising over freedom camping social media app**

Destination site	Profile Page Views	Visited site	Usage rate
Tapapakanga Regional Park	396	17	less than 1%
Orere Point TOP 10 Holiday Park	1018	107	2%
Omana CSC Parking Area	397	62	less than 1%
Atiu Creek Campground	860	4	less than 1%

The impact on these facilities was not able to be accurately measured due to adverse weather impacts during the pilot. The Tapapakanga Regional Park had to be closed down for the majority of the pilot as a result of this.

#### 4.3.7 Community and stakeholder views on the economic costs and benefits

Key informants views about the economic impacts of freedom campers were mixed. The key themes from the interviews are summarised as follows:

- some respondents (particularly those with a business focus) noted that although freedom campers are not paying for accommodation, they still make a valuable contribution to the economy with respect to the purchase of food, vehicle hireage, vehicle running costs and sightseeing. <sup>iv</sup>.

*We're not really a tourist hub so there are no hostels in this area. If we were in the CBD where there are a thousand hostels around us I'd be asking why we are doing this? But in a community like this where we don't really have anything like that, its added value. Having something like [the freedom camp site] means there is now something available for travellers, somewhere for them to stay – and then hopefully they partake of the businesses here. I've noticed more Germans come through recently, a few French couples*

- other respondents felt there were no economic gains. Some considered that freedom campers are not big spenders and that they tend to look for opportunities to do things as inexpensively as possible.

*I get the impression that, by doing this, these freedom campers are going to contribute towards our local economy and they're going to spend money in our local economy and then it's going to have a positive impact in that way. I guess my argument to that is, you don't get the name 'freedom camper' by spending a lot of money aye?*

- respondents also noted that the brief length of stay (one or two nights) and the conditions about entry and exit times for sites hindered the opportunities for campers to spend money in respective areas. These respondents highlighted the need for day parking to allow activities and spending in the area before and after camping.

### Key Insights:

- 69 per cent of freedom campers in Auckland are international tourists
- there are two prominent segments of freedom campers who often visit Auckland: “young international travellers” and “grey nomads”
- freedom campers tend to stay at sites they had planned to stay at in advance, clearly identifiable site characteristics will assist with this planning
- young international freedom campers are more deliberate with their travel patterns, whereas grey nomads tend to be more spontaneous, possibly as a result of their non-reliance on facilities
- there was high levels of general compliance to signage that clearly outlined the conditions of camping, well designed spaces can reduce the negative impacts of freedom camping
- the average amount spent by freedom campers is approximately \$160 per day (excluding any vehicle hire costs)
- the growth in freedom camping throughout New Zealand has put significant pressure on the country’s tourism infrastructure
- resource put towards preventing harm is an effective way to minimise costs to local board budgets
- providing freedom camping sites outside peak periods in close proximity to commercial camping grounds is likely to have an adverse impact on that sector
- the council can influence camper travel behaviours using different communication methods for different target audiences.



# Orewa Beach

## Site Summary

Orewa Beach adjoining the Orewa Town Centre is traditionally a highly popular area with campers.

Prior to the pilot, Arundel Reserve at the northern end of the beach was a freedom camping site under the legacy Rodney District Council public safety and nuisance bylaw. This site had a history of issues relating to overcrowding. At times, no parking was available for community use.

The conflict with community use of the area significantly impacted day visitors, particularly dog walkers and beach swimmers. The Hibiscus and Bays Local Board supported the use of the car park in the pilot having recently seen some improvement at Gulf Harbour from limiting numbers to a designated area.



## How it went

In preparation for the trial the number of bays was restricted two weeks prior to the trial commencing and regular monitoring returned the site to a better balance of activities. This action did however cause some displacement into the nearby site at Hatfields Bay (a five minute drive north) and caused an increase in illegal camping at the Orewa Surf Club that adjoins the Orewa Holiday Park. The local board decided to allow staff to control the overflow at the surf club and this site was added to the pilot, which proved effective at reducing the number of large bus-size camping vehicles at other sites.

This demonstrated that restricting camper parking within large parks, at popular locations was an effective way of managing conflicting use of a site. A similar experience occurred in Matheson Bay, near Leigh where numbers were reduced. At both these sites, the council runs holiday parks. Staff from these facilities felt that the freedom camping sites would alleviate pressure over January and February when occupancy is high, however post the Waitangi Day holiday these sites are likely impacting on revenues and increasing the risk of freedom campers trespassing at these sites to use facilities (such as laundry, shower, entertainment and food preparation).







## SECTION 5

# Problems associated with freedom camping

This section of the report presents information on the perceived and demonstrated problems and harms associated with freedom camping in Auckland. It distinguishes between primary and secondary harms and focuses on answering the second set of research questions.

## 5. Problems

### In this section:

- Managing the direct impacts of freedom camping (primary harms)
  - best practice in New Zealand mitigating the direct impacts of freedom camping
  - what we have learned from the literature and from observations in the field
- Preventing indirect impacts associated with freedom camping (secondary harms)
  - opportunities and challenges of managing community expectations
  - considerations for future policy development.

### 5.1 Primary harms

Primary harms are intrinsic to the activity of freedom camping (for example, emanations such as increased noise levels, cooking odours, or generator fumes) (Department of Internal Affairs, 2017). They are generally unavoidable, meaning they must be tolerated at some level if camping is permitted. However, they can be mitigated to reduce the impacts on the council, communities, Māori and stakeholders.

### Key questions:

- What are the perceptions of harm from freedom camping in Auckland?
- What is the evidence of primary harms in Auckland?
- What impacts do these problems have on the council, local communities, Māori and stakeholders?

#### 5.1.1 Community perceptions of primary harms

The key informant interviews conducted by Gravititas during the pilot provide a useful insight into the types of issues communities and stakeholders are concerned about in relation to freedom camping in Auckland. The key concerns in relation to primary harms are summarised as follows:

- campers often stay at sites throughout the day, which causes conflicts with other users, particularly in relation to car parking and access to park benches
- the privatisation of space and loss of visual amenity, often by temporary clothes lines being strung up between trees or being attached to facilities, clashes with hours of operation and times popular with locals, particularly dog walking before and after normal business hours
- community events increase demand on car parks, posing problems when campers are not abiding by time restrictions
- some sites were considered too small to cope with the competing demands of campers and other park users
- large camper vehicles (e.g. converted buses) are problematic at most sites.

Other comments received through key informant interviews are highlighted below:

*“Our area seems to be operating well. The people who have been staying have been pretty good. I walk down [to the site] all the time because I live here and I’ve never noticed any rubbish problems or noises. I don’t think there have been any noise complaints. I’ve seen stuff in the media, in the local papers and there doesn’t seem to be much about any good experiences [elsewhere], but it’s all been good out here.”*

*“People going to the [Lagoon] Pools can’t pull straight in because of the traffic lights so they use that turning bay [the current Lagoon Domain site]. But with the influx of campers, that turnaround is fully occupied so people are doing crazy stuff. I quite often hear the screeches of brakes. It’s caused a little bit of havoc there”*

### 5.1.2 Nature and scale of primary harms

Along with key informant interviews, officers identified themes from data collected through customer service channels (including calls for service, complaints data and customer queries). This evidence showed that Auckland experiences the following types of primary harms to varying degrees. These are summarised below:

- conflict of use between freedom campers and other site users
- displacement of local community as a result of freedom camping at a site
- a sense of loss of public space being privatised by campers i.e. where the presence of campers effectively excludes the public from an area
- emanations such as high noise levels, cooking odours and generator fumes
- impact on visual amenity, such as loss of privacy or obstructed views.

Alongside the perceptions and evidence about primary harms highlighted above gathered from community and key informant interviews, data was gathered from officers regarding the level of complaints received before and after the operation of the pilot. This is further discussed below.

## 5.2 Secondary harms

Secondary harms are incidental to freedom camping and are avoidable. They may be caused by freedom campers, day visitors and locals. For example, littering is a secondary harm - it is not intrinsic to camping, yet it is associated with freedom camping. At times it is difficult to distinguish between litter from campers or other users of a space.

#### Key questions:

- What are the perceptions of harm from freedom camping in Auckland?
- What is the evidence of secondary harms in Auckland?
- What impacts do these problems have on the council, local communities, Māori and stakeholders?

### 5.2.1 Community perceptions of secondary harms

As part of pilot planning, community stakeholders were engaged to help avoid some of the secondary harms associated with freedom camping. From key informant interviews conducted by

Gravitas during the pilot the following themes demonstrate that these risks were effectively managed:

- rubbish dumping was reduced as sites were located close to rubbish bins – or bins were installed
- residents' views were no longer obstructed as designated parking bays were thoughtfully located
- grass verges were less likely to be damaged as sites were located in car parks and on sealed areas
- traffic issues were reduced as large vans were not permitted at sites that did not have adequate turning areas and parking bays
- parking spaces were clearly marked, minimising the risk that freedom campers got in the way of other users of the site
- the instalment of wooden bollards to stop vehicles parking on grassed areas reduced overcrowding and protected grassed areas particularly in the winter.

Compliance staff investigate the occasional complaint about public health risks. There was no evidence of any risk to public health during the pilot. The risk of these types of coomplaints were more likely to occur when overcrowding was occurring.

### **5.2.2 Nature and scale of secondary harms**

During the pilot, officers identified litter and public health risks as the most important secondary harms to prevent. During site visits, compliance staff undertook inspections of sanitary facilities. Litter bin compacting was also done to minimise risks of overflowing bins before the scheduled emptying.

At the more popular sites, the utilisation of recycling bins on average was about 50 per cent and waste bin utilisation was around 67 per cent. On the odd occasion where litter bins and recycling bins were full, waste was usually separated and placed beside the bin for easy removal (e.g. in tied-up plastic bags or boxes).

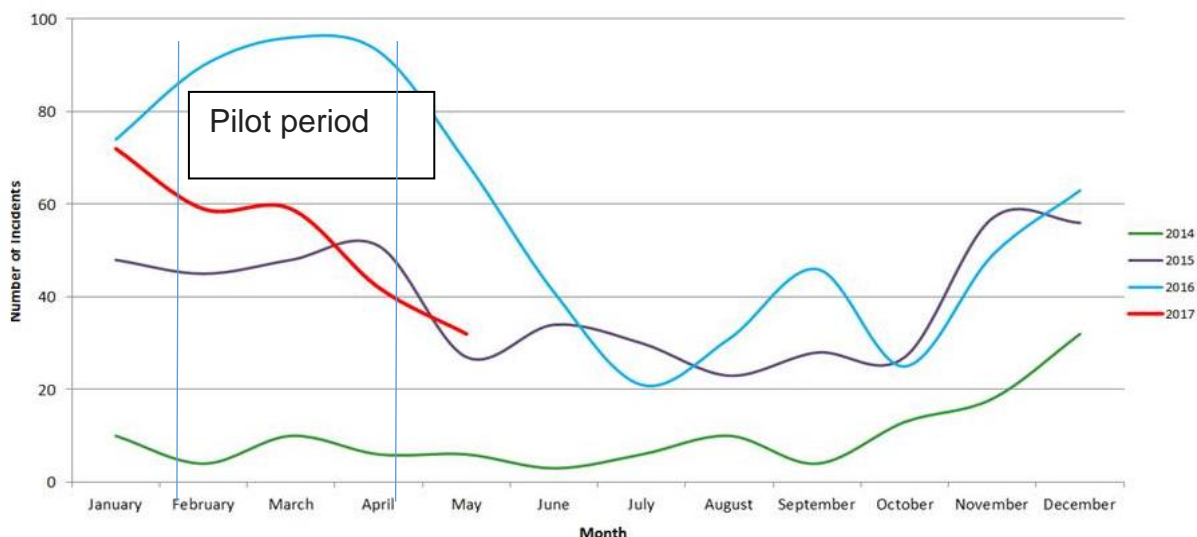
At inner city sites, officers received complaints from regular visitors to the park about increased levels of litter. At Panmure Lagoon for example, staff had to increase the frequency of litter bin emptying. Yet members of the public had phoned in saying that they had to pick up significant more amounts of litter since the pilot had commenced than they usually did. Conversely, when the Panmure Wharf site was shut down due to conflicts with other site users, the levels of litter increased after campers had stopped staying there.

## **5.3 Addressing harms and complaints by enhanced monitoring**

Council complaints data indicates that issues associated with freedom camping are experienced year-round. There is clear seasonal variation, with community concerns and complaints mostly received between December and April each year. January being the peak month.

The highest recorded incidents were in 2016 with just over 680 complaints over the 12 month period. The trend for January 2017 was comparable to the previous year. Figure 6 below summarises the number of complaints received by compliance officers between January 2014 and

May 2017. The majority of complaints relate to incidents of camping in areas where they are prohibited under council's current bylaws. Particularly in the central area where all freedom camping is prohibited under the legacy provisions.



**Figure 6 Complaints received over 2014 -2017 about freedom camping incidents**

### 5.3.1 Pilot project saw a reduction in complaints

Figure 6 also shows the 2017 trend over the months of January to May, which includes the complaints data for the pilot period.

The data shows a small increase in complaints following the launch of the pilot, likely as a result of the increased publicity and promotion of the council's customer channels. However, from March through to May, there was a significant decline in the volume of complaints compared with the previous year.

The number of complaints reduced by almost 35 per cent in February 2017 compared to the same month in 2016. Similar reductions in complaints were also experienced in March and April 2017 from previous years. This is a significant reduction in complaints for the council.

During the pilot period, the council also received positive feedback (via emails and the call centre) about the impacts of the pilot project managing freedom camping. These compliments came from communities who had noticed the increased compliance monitoring and could see the new rules had been effective at managing conflict with other site users compared with previous years.

### 5.3.2 Reported compliance levels

Compliance staff planned to undertake site visits throughout the pilot either daily or every second day depending on the maximum time allowed for each site. As a number of the sites became more popular than others (and therefore took longer to enforce the rules), a priority system was adopted that allocated more time to these sites.

Staff issued bylaw notices for breaches where necessary. For example, if campers were still asleep or not in their vehicle, officers applied warning stickers to the vehicle window to ensure compliance. There were two infringement categories that stood out:



- 136 breaches of site conditions requiring vehicles to be certified self-contained
- 391 breaches for parking outside the designated area.

Two inner city sites accounted for more than 60 per cent of all breaches reflecting the failure of the pilot to provide adequate space for campers in non-self-contained vehicles (see case study below on Margaret Griffen Park for more detail on this).

Compliance staff found campers to be generally cooperative on most occasions. Compliance activity over the term of the pilot differed markedly from that in the same period over 2016 where freedom camping was prohibited throughout the entire inner city area. Proactive compliance monitoring was undertaken across a much larger area to try to stop prohibited sites from flaring up based on trends in complaints received by the council. Table 11 outlines the nature and scale of harms experienced during the pilot.

**Table 11 Demonstrated harms from field observations**

	Perceived harm	Extent of local concerns	Evidence and mitigation effectiveness
Primary harms	Conflicts of use at freedom camping sites between freedom campers and other site users	Early morning and evening walkers are sensitive to sharing open space areas with campers	This was an issue across many sites in the pilot. Placing designated parking away from the most convenient or attractive locations appears to be an effective mitigation strategy but close to litter bins to avoid litter concerns. Hours of operation were not effective at mitigating harm at popular destinations as campers sometimes stayed beyond the time limits.
	Displacement of local communities from freedom camping sites	Sometimes locals could not find a car park during 'peak hours' of site popularity	This is an issue in smaller car parks and the risk is greater in coastal areas where demand for car parks is usually high even without campers. Large campervans are a particular issue to be avoided in small and popular car parks.
	A sense of public space being privatised by campers i.e. where the presence of campers effectively excludes the public from an area	Residents and local communities were concerned with seeing a public community space being "privatised" or "taken over" by campers	There were problems with sites that had camping areas located close to footpaths and near car park 'bottlenecks'. Clothes lines and camping furniture were common at sites and in the future designated camping areas should provide wider areas for campers to "privatise" space between vehicles, rather than in front of, or behind - as this causes conflict with other users.
	Emanations such as increased noise levels, cooking odours, generator fumes and humming	BBQs and cooking smells can be considered offensive and campervans running generators can be annoying	No significant issues were reported in this regard. Many community stakeholders commented that the campers reduced overall noise levels by deterring other site visitors who like to play amplified music late into the night.
	Amenity impacts, such as a loss	Campervans are large and	Locating campers away from prime spots and residential view shafts is an

	of privacy or obstructed views.	obtrusive and spoil the landscape	effective way of avoiding these problems.
	Litter management	Campers are untidy and do not care about the environment	Utilisation of waste and recycling facilities was high at pilot sites –two sites required an increase above what was budgeted (by increasing rubbish emptying schedules or installing larger bins at remote sites). When bins were full, waste was stacked tidily to the side of the bins for easy removal.
	Security	Freedom campers provide passive surveillance which deters late night (often alcohol-related) crime and disorder.	When freedom camping sites reach a certain scale (around 10 vehicles or more) the risk of campers affecting the perceived safety of a community or public space increases. Other site users feel outnumbered.
	Bad for business	Freedom campers often trespass on their grounds e.g. to use shower, kitchen, leisure and laundry facilities	Community businesses, including commercial campgrounds felt as though the council was “setting up competition” to them as a free site was being provided to campers. Other evidence has also found that freedom campers do use commercial campgrounds This is consistent the National Situational Analysis finding that freedom campers also spend a significant amount of time at commercial camping grounds during their campervan holidays.
	Public health risk	Freedom campers engage in unhygienic behaviours when they rough it	No evidence was found of public health risks. All the popular sites in the pilot had built facilities and as a result those facilities were well used, with no reports of abuse requiring maintenance.

### Key Insights

- The secondary harms associated with freedom camping are able to be effectively managed if the council focusses on avoiding primary harms
- primary harms can be avoided if the council provides reasonable opportunities to comply
- investing in prevention strategies to manage risks is effective
- introducing non-regulatory alongside regulatory tools to manage freedom camping are effective in areas



## Margaret Griffen Park

### Site Summary

This site was chosen by staff for the pilot because it had been popular with freedom campers in previous summers, albeit in contravention of the relevant bylaw. The local reputation had grown due to its proximity to the City Centre and the motorway network and the fact that the YMCA at the site provided showers for a low fee to campers and the homeless.

Staff had attempted to get approval for a number of sites for non-self-contained vehicles, however for a number of reasons the total capacity made available for non-self-contained campers fell short of aspirations.



### How it went

At it's peak during a heavy storm event, up to 38 vehicles were camping in the car park. Compliance staff were concerned that closing the site down was likely to result in shifting the problem elsewhere, such as the smaller Panmure Lagoon site or Western Springs which had limited facilities and was not an approved site for non-self-contained campers.

Despite the overcrowding at Margaret Griffen Park, campers were generally cooperative and their behaviour was respectful. The local community patrol and neighbourhood watch group undertook scheduled monitoring which likely contributed to this outcome.

From stakeholder interviews the hanging of washing, placement of camping furniture and large oversized camper vehicles made a significant impact to the loss of space for other users.

The on-going breach of the alcohol ban was the only criminal activity recorded, however a small number of secondary harm complaints were received about public health and safety and one incident of setting off a security alarm, likely as a result of trespassing to obtain potable water supplies at night.

Although complaints were received about the smell of human waste, staff found no evidence of unhygienic behaviour. Staff increased litter clearing and the public toilet cleaning schedule (at no impact to local budgets) to cope with the demand.

From the experiences across this and the other inner city sites, the lack of available space for non-self-contained campers meant that the council was unable to effectively manage primary harms and this resulted in a wide range of secondary harms.





## SECTION 6

# Responses to manage freedom camping in Auckland

This section presents information on the challenges and opportunities the Auckland Council may face in managing freedom camping through the region. It focuses on existing regulations and other regimes that may be used in its management approach, and answers the third set of research questions.

## 6. Responses

### In this section:

- the supply and demand of freedom camping sites in Auckland
- management regimes and governance considerations
- non-regulatory approaches that should be considered
- site selection and design for any future freedom camping areas.

### 6.1 Managing supply and demand

Consistent with national trends, visitor numbers to Auckland have increased. Managing demand and supply is key to effective management, especially during peak times and major events. Supply side interventions relate to the provision of capacity for camping activity, demand-side interventions attempt to influence the decisions of campers about where they will stay.

The pilot experience demonstrates that attempts to manage demand and supply can improve the cost effective management of harm and legitimise a valuable tourism activity. This can be good for local economic development in areas not well placed to benefit from tourism.

In 2015 the council undertook a People's Panel Survey where panel members were asked about the impacts of freedom camping in their respective areas.<sup>5</sup> These survey findings have informed the overall review on freedom camping management approaches. Responses indicated that:

- 68 per cent of panellists thought that that freedom camping should be allowed in areas that had adequate facilities like toilets and rubbish bins
- 33% in areas far away from residential properties
- 26% in areas far away from official camping grounds, an/or protected parks, reserves and ecological sites
- When asked whether there should be any other restrictions on freedom camping:
  - 76% thought there should be restrictions on the duration of stay,
  - 62% believed there should be restrictions on the number of freedom campers in any one location at any time
- 46% of panellists were supportive of freedom camping in some areas of Auckland, 26% were not supportive
- When asked about the benefits of allowing freedom camping in some areas of Auckland:
  - 34% said it would encourage tourism and be good for the economy.
  - 24% mentioned affordability
  - 18% enjoying nature away from crowds
  - 16% said that it gave access to everyone
  - 14% said there were no benefits of allowing it

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<sup>5</sup> See People's Panel Survey,



### 6.1.2 Challenges

Through the freedom camping review staff identified the following challenges for managing the demand and supply of freedom camping:

- a shortage of freedom camping areas and an increase in demand results in overcrowding, illegal camping and, subsequently, primary and secondary harms. This can have the effect of reinforcing negative perceptions of freedom camping
- where there are insufficient monitoring and enforcement resources, the risk of non-compliance increases. This can erode trust and lead to reputational impacts
- dispersing campers away from popular sites to less popular sites requires a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches
- not having sufficient 'camper friendly areas' may lead to unintended consequences. For instance, negative reputational impacts as campers may have had Auckland and New Zealand marketed to them as a freedom camper friendly
- site selection and associated community engagement can be time consuming and costly. Getting good community buy-in takes time and effort and there is always a chance that a site is not selected despite the effort
- the hosting of non-self-contained vehicles is perceived to be a low value enterprise by many communities.

The challenges identified above are consistent with the National Situational Analysis.

### 6.1.3 Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified to manage camper demand for sites and supply:

- increasing supply is a cost-effective approach to manage demand and prevent harms such as overcrowding, conflict of site use and nuisance
- engaging the community in the design of site-specific rules can lead to high quality camper experiences by engaging host communities and this can have significant flow-on effects to Auckland's international reputation
- social media can be a useful tool to disperse campers to a wider range of areas and to increase the availability of information to campers to improve compliance rates
- improved access to information about accommodation options and rules will improve the council's ability to manage demand for sites
- highlighting attractions to freedom campers can increase demand for nearby sites

### 6.1.4 Influencing demand

The following responses manage demand.

#### **Site design**

Designating parking areas for campers away from areas often used by other park users can have a dampening effect on demand. In Matheson Bay, for example, campers were moved further away from the toilet facilities and the shoreline to a grassed area about a two minute walk to the toilets and playground. This resulted in fewer complaints from the local community, improved access for other visitors and less campers staying at the site for a shorter period of time.

At Margaret Griffen park the designated car parks were placed in the open, in close proximity to toilet facilities, this resulted in the facilities being well used and reduced the risk of litter being dumped in the hedge on the other side of the car park where campers had traditionally parked. An unintended consequence of designing the parking areas out in the open was that pedestrian areas became privatised by campers, especially at meal times. A lesson from this site was that providing space between designated parking space for campers to undertake domestic activities would reduce impacts on pedestrian areas adjoining campers.

If well planned, site design can be effective at reducing demand at a site and lessen the risk of conflict with other park users. Other examples of using site design to manage demand include:

- locating campers in areas far from natural amenities and facilities
- financial obligations for day time parking
- vehicle size/type restrictions.

Self-contained campers, particularly converted busses and RVs take particular care with where they park their vehicles, often considering level sites and space for awning fixtures. Restrictions on these types of facilities in smaller parks will impact demand by campers in these types of vehicles.

### **Promoting and incentivising paid accommodation**

Providing incentives and promotional material to certain cohorts of campers to camp at commercial facilities may entice campers to go there. In the City Centre for example, Panuku Auckland Development and Auckland Transport could look at expanding the city's offering of low cost paid overnight parking in the City Centre. This occurs in areas such as at Pier Z at Westhaven Marina and at Wellington City Council inner city parking buildings. This could increase revenue for the city and surrounding businesses and offer tourists alternative methods of accommodation in the city centre.

Raising awareness of other accommodation options, such as at regional parks outside of peak times, may also reduce the demand for freedom camping sites, or increase the length of stay (and therefore spend) by campers in Auckland. This will increase revenue for the regional parks and commercial campgrounds who may like to promote their facilities to campers as well.

The challenges with finding communities willing to host non self-contained vehicles may necessitate a greater focus on these types of initiatives to reduce non-compliance in urban areas.

### **6.1.7 Controlling supply**

Supply-side interventions were trialled during the pilot and proved to be successful. This was achieved largely through the management of community expectations, the promise of only temporary sites, limiting the number of available spaces at sites, and putting the following controls in place:

- limiting the length of stay to one or two maximum nights in any calendar month
- vehicle size limits
- no tents
- limiting the hours of operation that campers could stay overnight.

Other conditions typically used in other jurisdictions include:

- restricting the total number of nights freedom campers could stay in the region
- restricting additional behaviours, that may not have been sufficiently addressed in other bylaws such as the use of clothes lines and the placement of furniture.

Experience with the range of conditions used at sites were positive, however, the hours of operation at the more popular sites proved problematic.

The hours of operation implemented at each site were designed to minimise impacts with other site users. This approach is principled, but may be unreasonable and result in unintended consequences. Campers like to arrive at sites early to secure their spot and make the most of their experience at the site by doing some exploring while the sun is still up.

Where conflict needs to be managed during the day, the Auckland Transport Traffic Bylaw is likely to be a more effective tool at managing this conflict (e.g. a four-hour parking limit after 10am). The Auckland Transport Parking Strategy currently focusses on managing parking demands in urban areas where demand is greatest.

### 6.2.8 Working with other agencies

There may also be benefits for the council to work with other authorities, central government agencies, such as the Department of Conservation, camper associations and industry.

Partnering with other organisations can improve:

- consistency - through aligned messaging and policy approaches
- effectiveness - through project collaborations
- camper experiences – through shared insights.

The council has been collaborating with the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association on a range of initiatives over many years. Initiatives include:

- local authority camping infrastructure funding (e.g. waste water dump stations, portable water sources)
- leasing land from the council for its members to use (Tui Glen reserve)
- policy development
- harm management (through communications to members).

In addition to partnerships, industry are well placed to support councils to improve their ability to manage freedom camping. This requires entering agreements and funding work, but can be cost-effective at managing demand.

## 6.2 Auckland Council governance

Auckland is a unique case with regards to how legislation is implemented and how regulations are imposed. Applying legislation and national policy guidance can be difficult due to the make-up of the city's governance structure. In brief, this is because the council:

- has local boards (not community boards) that are delegated decision-making responsibilities of local parks and facilities
- the governing body of the council is responsible for decisions on regional parks

- there are a number of co-governance arrangements with iwi and iwi collectives. An example of this is the Tupuna Maunga Authority that is the decision-making body over the Maunga included in the Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective Redress Act 2014
- it is a unitary authority, meaning that regional tourism promotion (undertaken by Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development) covers the entire district.
- has an independent council controlled authority, Auckland Transport charged with handling transport issues in Auckland.

### 6.2.1 Decision-making

The unique characteristics of Auckland's governance structure requires that the future approach to managing freedom camping in Auckland is developed with local boards, who manage the majority of areas that are attractive to freedom campers.

Achieving regional consistency and effectively utilising Auckland's scale to manage the costs and benefits of camping requires consideration of a number of factors, including:

- local board plans
- the diversity of views held by local communities on increased tourism activity
- existing issues managing high levels of demand in local areas (mostly in the North East and central areas)
- infrastructure constraints
- funding the provision of facilities at sites utilised by campers and investing in preventative measures to avoid negative impacts (such as increased litter monitoring).

### 6.2.2 Challenges

The governance structure of Auckland Council means that local boards have been delegated the authority to approve activities on parks and reserves in their respective areas. Currently this is managed through the council's land owner approval process.

Whilst many local boards recognise the benefits of hosting freedom campers and the opportunities this may provide for their local economies, others are less convinced. Some believe their local board areas are unsuitable for freedom camping and not capable of handling the increase in tourism.

When staff consulted with the Waitākere Ranges Local Board, for example, the board felt that tourism was already putting a strain on local infrastructure and this was impacting communities with traffic jams and reduced amenity. Further complicating matters for this local board is the fact that businesses in adjoining local board areas are likely to benefit from increased patronage of businesses.

When local boards have such divergent views about regulating freedom campers it makes choosing the right tool very important.

*Impacts of decision making*

A regionally consistent approach will be challenging with as many as 23 decision making authorities. Only the Governing Body of the Auckland Council can adopt a bylaw, but only local boards as land owners can approve works and certain activities on local parks and reserves.

The way each of the identified approaches is designed can impact on the council's ability to manage the social and economic impacts of freedom camping.

Matters to consider in relation to effective delegation of decision-making powers should be based on whether a decision requires:

- costs and benefits to be considered at a particular scale (e.g. maunga, local board, sub regional, regional)
- local variability in outcomes
- accountability and transparency
- relevant budget decisions to be aligned
- suitably capable people and processes for effective delivery<sup>6</sup>.

### 6.2.3 Opportunities

#### *Engaging with the public*

The National Situational Analysis (Department of Internal Affairs, 2017) highlighted the importance of focusing less on the use of bylaws to manage problems and harms, and instead switch to, or increase non-regulatory approaches. This includes improving conversations being held with communities to understand how harms may be managed more effectively. This should also involve considering the benefits that freedom campers bring to local communities.

## 6.3 Regulatory approaches to managing freedom camping in Auckland

There are different laws that the Auckland Council may use to manage freedom camping in the region. The preferred approach to manage the activity of freedom camping will be determined by the intent of the council and its desired outcome, that is, whether a permissive or restrictive management approach.

The following approaches outline how different laws may be used to manage freedom camping.

Regardless of the options described below the following factors apply across all approaches:

- freedom camping is permitted on all council land under the Freedom Camping Act 2011, unless it is controlled under another regulatory approach (e.g. the Reserves Act 1977 or a bylaw under the Local Government Act 2002)
- approximately 60-70 per cent of all reserves in Auckland are gazetted under the Reserves Act 1977. According to this Act, freedom camping is prohibited unless permitted under a reserve management plan.
- many of the existing popular sites for freedom camping in Auckland are on gazetted reserves.
- most gazetted reserves in Auckland do not have a reserve management plan that allows freedom camping

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<sup>6</sup> adapted from principles identified by the New Zealand Productivity Commission's report on Better Local Government Regulation



- for camping to be occurring on these reserves legally without a reserve management plan allowing the activity, consent from the Minister of Conservation is required<sup>7</sup>. There are legal risks using this process over the reserve management plan approach.

### 6.2.1 Revoking legacy bylaw provisions

The council can revoke the legacy bylaw provisions, but must engage with the public through the special consultative procedure to understand the impacts this decision may have on them. This would provide a regionally consistent approach to how the activity is managed as inconsistent provisions in areas of Auckland would no longer be in effect. This would result in the activity becoming permitted throughout Auckland, except on gazetted reserves where it is prohibited.

In summary, this option would be feasible if:

- done in a staged way before 2020 when the bylaws would lapse (e.g. transition legacy provisions until each local board is adequately prepared)
- a work programme of regulatory and non-regulatory changes could be developed with broad support across the organisation over a long period of time
- Auckland Transport review its Parking Strategy to include the transport impacts of freedom camping in urban areas.

By default freedom camping would be permitted everywhere under the Freedom Camping Act. However, an unintended consequence to this approach may be a shift and growth in costs responding to complaints about the behaviours associated with freedom camping. This risk is higher if primary harms are not managed using demand and supply management approaches.

Many communities would likely consider this approach unacceptable if council staff were not prioritising their complaints.

### 6.2.2 Use existing regulations with enhanced management

If the intent of the council is to be more restrictive towards managing freedom camping, then the current management approach would provide this outcome. This is due to existing legacy bylaw provisions generally prohibiting freedom camping in most areas of Auckland.

Through the pilot, the council found that the existing approach is reactive in terms of how it responds to complaints. The proactive management approach that was introduced during the pilot showed that enhancing the existing regulations was effective, by:

- setting up temporary freedom camping sites throughout the region
- assessing each site in terms of suitability and use by others
- enhanced monitoring of areas to ensure compliant behaviour
- issuing of warning stickers if there were breaches to site rules
- putting up signage and marking out spaces showing where campers could park.

Although the enhanced approach was resource intensive and costly to setup in some areas, it allowed the council to more effectively prioritise its response according to the level of harm.

Section 4.2 Influencing camper behaviour describes this in detail.

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<sup>7</sup> This ministerial consent power has been delegated to the council's chief executive.

This approach would also be inconsistent with central government policy and guidance on how to manage harms associated with freedom camping.

Though there is the ability to designate sites under existing rules, there has been a reluctance to do this. Under this approach, there is an opportunity to introduce an enhanced management approach, similar to the approach introduced through the pilot. Though there will be limitations with implementing such an approach, such as the temporary fixture of sites, and this potentially being inconsistent with other regulations.

### **6.2.3 Freedom Camping Act bylaw**

A bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 would involve a comprehensive site assessment of the entire region. As freedom camping is permitted by default, the establishment of restrictions and prohibitions would help prevent and manage harm.

Under section 11 of the Act, freedom camping can only be restricted or prohibited through a bylaw, if the council is satisfied a bylaw is necessary to either:

- protect an area
- protect the health and safety of people who may visit an area
- protect access to an area.

If the council determines that a bylaw is necessary and appropriate to manage perceived problems, a description and a map will need to be developed for each restricted or prohibited area in the bylaw.

The council will be more effective at managing harm as this option includes the ability to issue campers with a \$200 infringement. A stronger deterrent effect will reduce the time spent managing harm.

A joint enforcement approach could be introduced under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 whereby enforcement officers were employed by both agencies. This could increase the monitoring of freedom camping sites, and reduce the effects of primary and secondary harms. With an increase in monitored freedom camping sites, an increase in compliance is likely to occur.

Assessing where non-self-contained campers can stay would likely depend on the availability of suitable facilities and the capacity of the site to host campers and reduce conflict with other users.

This approach will require additional resourcing for:

- mapping requirements
- systems and resources to manage and administer infringement appeals and to recover outstanding debts.

Under this management approach, the council will also need to consider how other bylaws, including traffic controls, litter infringements and public safety and nuisance can manage some of the secondary harms.

The experience of many councils in New Zealand who have used this approach is that popular camping sites can change from one summer to the next due to the range of areas where freedom camping is permitted and adaptive nature of campers to find suitable sites outside of restricted and prohibited areas.

Amending, reviewing or revoking a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 to change the list of sites available to campers can be very expensive and time consuming, requiring extensive engagement with the public through submissions and hearings. Changes to signage, maps and facilities management will add further costs.

A comprehensive assessment of all parks and reserves will reduce this risk.

The ability of compliance staff to issue immediate infringement fines is only possible under this approach. There are factors that need to be considered when considering cost recovery and administration. This is discussed further below.

### **Collection of infringement**

Trials are taking place in Queenstown Lakes District and Thames-Coromandel District to work with vehicle hiring companies to encourage payment on the return of a vehicle. This may increase compliance but is non-binding and a hirer cannot be compelled by the hiring company to pay.

The issuing and collection of freedom camping infringements varies between districts and is generally only required after any supply and demand approaches haven't worked. The Department of Internal Affairs issued a survey to local authorities in mid-2016 to identify the current use of infringement for freedom camping.

Of the 17 districts that have adopted a freedom camping bylaw, seven reported issuing zero infringements, and five reported issuing fewer than 100. The Queenstown Lakes, Thames-Coromandel, and Grey District Councils issued around 97% of the fines captured in the survey. Of the 13 districts without a bylaw, seven were not intending to adopt one.

There is not yet research on how well infringements work as a deterrent, and the issuing of infringements may not change the habits of international visitors. The Responsible Camping Forum (a national working group made up of local council representatives and tourism industry representatives) is working through these issues, attempting to improve this situation.

#### **6.2.4 Local Government Act 2002 bylaw**

The council could decide that a new Auckland-wide bylaw under the Local Government Act 2002 is the most appropriate approach to manage freedom camping. The Local Government Act 2002 (under section 145) allows the council to make a bylaw to:

- protect the public from nuisance
- protect, promote, and maintain public health and safety
- minimise potential for offensive behaviour in public places.

This approach could also support restrictions and prohibitions that fit within the criteria of the Freedom Camping Act 2011. However, if the council chooses this regime as a new approach to manage freedom camping, it will need to consider how a bylaw made under the Local Government Act 2002 avoids conflict with the Freedom Camping Act 2011.

A bylaw under the Local Government Act could be implemented in two phases with an initial adoption of a framework bylaw that local boards could use to introduce local controls, i.e. areas where camping is permitted, prohibited or restricted. This approach would be flexible and responsive to camper trends and local board economic development aspirations.

Under this approach, the council's bylaw and compliance officers will not be able to issue infringements for bylaw breaches. The officers will be able to issue warnings and prosecute serious offenders, but determining who is responsible for a 'breach' has proved to be problematic in the past. The district court is not able to handle cases within a timeframe that aligns with the travel itinerary of most international campers (who make up the majority of campers in Auckland each summer).

## 6.4 Site selection and design

An enhanced status quo approach allows the council to meet the demand by campers for freedom camping sites. The nature of that demand is known from surveying of campers and camper trends.

The remaining approaches outlined above would follow a comprehensive analysis of all public places under the control of the council to identify which are suitable for prohibition or restriction. Those not restricted or prohibited would be permitted.

The approach to assessing public places for freedom camping should then largely be the same across the approaches. Before a site is deemed to be appropriate, community engagement is required to ensure that if a site is selected, compliance monitoring will be aligned to both policy outcomes and community aspirations for each site.

This section outlines what guidance is required to implement successful freedom camping sites that prevent or avoid harm.

Site design should be consistent with best practice design guidelines, including existing guidance, such as those based on international best practice. Elements in a specific guidance document would:

- provide design principles that work for a range of site types
- for gazetted reserves design should be consistent with the range of activities and outcomes identified for those reserves in reserve management plans
- manage cost for the council by considering asset management requirements
- manage impacts to the local community and other users
- focus on prevention.

For effective prevention, site selection would involve local community stakeholders where possible and may include the following:

- assessment of site activities to evaluate the risk of conflict freedom camping may have with other community uses.
- undertake site suitability assessment. This would involve an assessment of available facilities and amenities, access considerations and other site-specific matters
- identifying local issues, with a focus on the time and season elements of those issues e.g. football season would only cause conflict in winter.
- co-design appropriate controls and conditions to prevent harm with community stakeholders
- undertake legal analysis, including assessment of any reserve management plans and land-owner considerations
- engage with land-owners to seek approval or feedback.

A bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 would use the prescribed criteria described above for assessing these factors. Other approaches could vary and include other matters.

**Key Insights:**

- using regulatory and non-regulatory tools to manage freedom camping is proactive and effective in different ways
- managing demand and the supply of sites will continue to be problematic if a proactive approach to managing harms is not adopted
- there are multiple tools that the council can use to manage freedom camping
- the intent of the council with regards to how freedom camping should be managed, will influence what management approach is chosen
- Adopting a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 will improve enforcement efficiency however infringement fees do not guarantee a more cost-effective approach because of low recovery rates (46 per cent nationally in 2016)
- including communities in site selection and design is expensive but worthwhile in preventing or avoiding harms associated with freedom camping
- Auckland Council's governance structure presents challenges for regional consistency. The importance of effective consultation on the development of future policy will help to manage the disjoint between perceptions and reality in relation to the social and economic impacts of freedom camping for Auckland.



# Eastern Beach Caravan Park, Howick

## Site Summary

The Eastern Beach Caravan Park is part of McLeans Park and as the name suggests, was formerly a camping ground. The site was deemed suitable due to its attractive location, available space, excellent facilities with toilets and showers. Local community representatives could see benefits from enhanced surveillance by campers.

The Howick Local Board had engaged with the community on investigating the promotion of Howick to self-contained campers to boost local economic development during the development of the Howick Local Board Plan 2015-18. The pilot provided a cost-effective way to deliver this outcome.

## How it went

Although popularity was initially quite low, by the end of the pilot, the site had become highly popular. Compliance monitoring had to be increased to keep campers parking within the designated area. This created no nuisance as the car park is quite large and had only been marked out for four vehicles.

Compliance staff had no difficulty moving campers to other sites. No complaints were received about this site throughout the pilot.

The poor weather throughout the pilot may have dampened demand by domestic campers and other site visitors, reducing the risk of conflict between users.

## Lessons from the pilot

The site proved to be an effective draw card for campers to visit other sites in the Howick area. Many of the campers who were attracted to the site also visited the nearby site at Lloyd Elsmore Park. Many also travelled to the Kawakawa Bay site via Whitford.

The two all day car parks in the Howick Village were two of the least popular sites in the pilot. There were anecdotal reports of increased international tourist numbers in the village during the day, but campers were not attracted to the car park sites for overnight camping – even when a free lunch was offered by the local business association.

The pilot has allowed the local board to make more informed decisions about where to invest in new facilities and how to minimise impacts to their community in urban areas.



## 7. Findings and conclusions

The findings in this report have shown that the council can effectively manage freedom camping in a way that works for local boards, communities, and stakeholders. The conditions of effective management include:

- being proactive in the management of demand and supply to avoid primary harms and to mitigate the risk of secondary harms
- using regulatory and non-regulatory approaches in a way that recognises the value that freedom camping activity bring to the region and for local economies
- adopting an approach that allows for local variation
- undertaking site selection in a way that includes community stakeholders (e.g. co-design)
- adopting risk management approaches through prevention programmes that reduce impacts to local board budgets – including intensified compliance monitoring and service level management over the peak season and for major events.

Auckland has a unique role in the management of freedom camping nationally. As much as 90 per cent of international freedom campers arrive through Auckland International Airport. Further, there are as many as 10,000 motorhome owners in Auckland – many of whom also freedom camp in Auckland.

Freedom campers only represent a small proportion of total tourism income for the region (between one and three per cent). However, according to the Ministry for Business Innovation and employment, freedom campers, backpackers and other campers, spend about \$100 per day on average compared with \$156 per day by other visitors.

According to the National Situational Analysis undertaken by a national working group made up of local and central government representatives – local councils often do not do a good job of engaging with their communities on the economic and social impacts of freedom camping – both positive and negative. This is partly due to the media attention that occurs when serious harms occur – often when freedom camping is not being effectively managed by a local authority.

The council is restricted in what it can do in a by law. Freedom camping is permitted under the Freedom Camping Act 2011, unless controlled by other enactments. This situation creates some ambiguity for the council that needs to be managed if legal risks and excessive costs are to be avoided. Further, under any option, a proactive approach to managing supply and demand will require an extensive programme of public consultation to update reserve management plans to allow freedom camping on those reserves.

Table 12 presents the regulatory options available to the council to manage freedom camping using a scale of regulatory control.

**Table 12 Regulatory options for the management of freedom camping**

Regulatory approach	Impact
Revoke the legacy bylaw provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this will result in the council relying on reserve management planning and non-regulatory approaches to managing freedom camping.</li> <li>this approach will require a number of years to transition to an effective regulatory framework</li> <li>depends on complimentary regulations including parking and traffic, public safety and nuisance and reserve management plans.</li> </ul>
The status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this option can be cost effective if enhanced with additional resources to manage demand and supply in a similar way to the pilot that was run as part of this review</li> <li>This approach still requires extensive public engagement on the development of reserve management plans that allow the council to effectively manage supply.</li> </ul>
Bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this option enhances the council's effectiveness to manage harms by the introduction of a \$200 infringement</li> <li>would require a comprehensive review of all land under the control of the council</li> <li>campers may exploit the default permissive approach forcing the council to amend its bylaw – as has occurred in other jurisdictions that have adopted bylaws under this act.</li> </ul>
Bylaw under the Local Government Act 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this approach would also require a comprehensive review of all land under the control of the council</li> <li>the council could use local controls and other approaches to be responsive to the adaptive behaviours of campers</li> <li>enforcement under this approach will be more costly than under the Freedom Camping Act 2011</li> <li>The bylaw will have to be written in a way that minimises the risk of legal challenge if community stakeholders perceive the bylaw to be unlawful or an unacceptable impact on their rights.</li> </ul>

## 7.4 Implementation

Table 13 outlines the regulatory options against a range of criteria taken from insights obtained throughout the review. The criteria are based on managing policy implications and impacts in relation to the council's operational practices (process).

**Table 13 Assessing the different regulatory options to manage freedom camping**

	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Option 1</b> <i>Revoke legacy bylaw provisions</i>	<b>Option 2</b> <i>Maintain status quo</i>	<b>Option 3</b> <i>bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act</i>	<b>Option 4</b> <i>bylaw under the Local Government Act</i>
Policy	Consistency with central government freedom camping policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>likely to result in positive reputational impacts with freedom campers</li> <li>reduces ambiguity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will require additional resource to manage ambiguity in-line with government policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With appropriate planning this option is the most consistent with government policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will require additional resource to manage ambiguity in-line with government policy</li> </ul>
	Potential to manage primary harms and secondary harms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>harm management will be problematic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with enhanced resources this approach has proven to be effective in Auckland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If sites are restricted and prohibited according to criteria, there is likely a reduction in harms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if managed similar to the status quo would be effective</li> </ul>
	Ability to respond to community and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>most risk associated with transitioning in new rules under other approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>least costly to deliver in terms of public consultation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>amending restrictions could require higher levels of public engagement than other options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will require extensive public consultation</li> </ul>
Process	Ease of implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enhanced monitoring will likely be resource intensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will require review in 2020 when the bylaws lapse automatically</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consistent approach applied through controls in a regional bylaw.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consistent approach applied through a regional bylaw</li> </ul>
	Cost to deliver on implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may not provide the council with a proactive approach to manage harms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if an enhanced management approach introduced, additional operational resources will be required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will require significant change to bylaw administration</li> <li>some cost recovery of compliance monitoring possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may require additional resource where harms are prevalent</li> </ul>
	Longevity/futureproofing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not considered a good long-term approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only valid until 2020</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will require review in five years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will require review in five years</li> </ul>

## **Appendices**

1. Sites approved for 2017 Freedom Camping Pilot
2. How we pulled the research together to answer key questions of the review



## Appendix 1. List of sites used for the Freedom Camping Pilot

Site	Local Board	Conditions	Capacity
Western Springs Garden Community Hall	Albert-Eden	Self-contained only	10
Hamilton's Gap	Franklin	Self-contained only	10
Rosa Birch Park, Pukekohe	Franklin	Self-contained only	15
Te Toro Reserve	Franklin	Self-contained only	5
Waiuku Service Centre	Franklin	Self-contained only	3
Whitford Point Reserve	Franklin	Self-contained only	5
Arundel Reserve	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	6
Gulf Harbour	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	20
Hatfields Beach	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	5
Stanmore Bay Park	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	10
Orewa Reserve Car Park	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	10
Waiwera causeway road reserve	Hibiscus and Bays	Self-contained only	8
Eastern Beach Caravan Park	Howick	Self-contained only	4
Howick Village carpark (Moore St)	Howick	Self-contained only	15
Howick Village carpark (Wellington St)	Howick	Self-contained only	5
Lloyd Elsmore Park	Howick	Self-contained only	10
Domain Reserve (Panmure Lagoon)	Maungakiekie-Tamaki	Non-self-contained permitted	5
<del>Panmure Wharf Reserve<sup>8</sup></del>	<del>Maungakiekie-Tamaki</del>	<del>Non-self-contained permitted</del>	5
Margaret Griffen Park	Puketapapa	Non-self-contained permitted	10
Centennial Park, Wellsford	Rodney	Self-contained only	4
Dawsons Landing, Snells Beach	Rodney	Self-contained only	4
Matheson Bay Reserve	Rodney	Self-contained only	8
Parry Kauri Park, Warkworth	Rodney	Self-contained only	10
Port Albert Recreation Reserve	Rodney	Non-self-contained permitted	20
Riverglade Lane Accessway and Esplanade Reserve	Rodney	Self-contained only	3
Sunburst Reserve, Snells Beach	Rodney	Self-contained only	5
Sunrise Boulevard Reserve, Snells Beach	Rodney	Self-contained only	5
Rosedale Reserve	Upper Harbour	Self-contained only	10
<b>Total number of pilot sites = 28</b>			<b>Total = 230</b>

<sup>8</sup> This site was closed during the pilot as conflict between use increased as the site became more popular with freedom campers

## Appendix 2 How we pulled it all together

The following table summarises how the research and engagement has informed the review findings.

	Review objectives		
	To identify current freedom camping patterns and behaviours within the Auckland region	To understand and prioritise the issues associated with freedom camping in Auckland	To evaluate the different approaches available to the council to manage freedom camping
Literature and existing research	✓	✓	✓
Environmental scans	-	✓	✓
Regulatory analysis	✓	✓	✓
Pilot project: survey	✓	-	-
Pilot project: key informant interviews	✓	✓	✓
Operational data	✓	✓	✓
Local board feedback	-	✓	✓

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<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/AboutCouncil/HaveYourSay/Documents/useofpublicspaces/peoplespanelreport.pdf>

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> <https://corporate.aucklandairport.co.nz/news/publications/fast-facts>

<sup>ii</sup> Ministry for Business Innovation and employment tourism dashboard.

<sup>iv</sup> See Kearns, Collins and Bates (2016: 2)