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Attn: Submission's analysis team

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SUBMISSION IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE FREEDOM CAMPING IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

1. Introduction and background.

The arrival of freedom campers in the Buller District was met with mixed reactions from the community, as public spaces that were traditionally used by locals were regularly occupied with campers and in some areas litter including human waste was left behind.

The West Coast soon became a popular destination for those wishing to take advantage of this form of tourism and the impacts were substantial across the Buller.



Figure 1: Freedom campers packed into a narrow carpark alongside the Punakaiki River and positioned within meters of permanent dwellings.



Figure 2: The natural beauty of the West Coast was not enough to deter campers from leaving their rubbish behind.

The Buller District Council's (BDC) approach was to adopt an educational approach, welcome visitors into our area but make our expectations clear. We did this by developing designated areas to camp and the provision of basic facilities to reduce adverse environmental issues and to increase visitor satisfaction.

Our expectations were based around the Tiaki principles.

Link to the BDC information pamphlet.

<https://bullerdc.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RCP-Brochure-2019v4.pdf>

The approach was largely successful and adverse environmental impacts reduced. When the borders re-open, we envisage the popularity of the West Coast will likely see a dramatic increase in visitors and freedom campers.

2. Government Proposals.

PROPOSAL 1: MAKE IT MANDATORY FOR FREEDOM CAMPING IN A VEHICLE TO BE DONE IN A CERTIFIED SELF-CONTAINED VEHICLE.

OR

PROPOSAL 2: MAKE IT MANDATORY FOR FREEDOM CAMPERS TO STAY IN A VEHICLE THAT IS CERTIFIED SELF-CONTAINED, UNLESS THEY ARE STAYING AT A SITE WITH TOILET FACILITIES.

The Buller District Council supports proposal 1.

The reason relates to the difficulty at an operational level when a regulation has an exemption. We understand that the wording could be tightened, *...unless they are staying*
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at a designated site with toilet facilities. However, we are still of the opinion it will encourage vehicles that cannot meet the standard, be used to freedom camp. It could also put extra pressure onto current facilities used by campers which could have the effect of forcing non-self contained campers to revert to old habits.

PROPOSAL 3: IMPROVE THE REGULATORY TOOLS FOR GOVERNMENT LAND MANAGERS.

The Buller District Council supports this proposal in principle.

We are in support of a national body to oversee the administrative functions of fines and would like to see them standardised nationally. The suggested improvements relating to the collection of fines are welcomed and essential. There is a perception and in fact a reality, particularly to overseas visitors that fines are not followed up and therefore no need to pay. A robust and effective fine collection system will positively alter some camper's behaviours. The message must be clear that if you are willing to breach our rules, there will be tangible consequences.

We are in support of councils being able to enforce rules on other government owned or administered land. Officers warranted under the Freedom Camping Act should have automatic jurisdiction to cover DOC land, local and central government land. We have one designated camping site in the Buller where the DOC/Council boundary runs through the middle making it very difficult for compliance staff and another that is entirely on DOC land.

BDC does not support higher fines and believe a \$200.00 fine is appropriate for offences related to freedom camping. The fine for driving whilst being distracted by a mobile phone has only recently increased from \$80.00 to \$150.00. Those who are most likely to attract a fine under the Freedom Camping Act would consider \$200.00 to be significant. There is no evidence to clearly support higher fines equals higher compliance and believe it will also have an impact on the safety of enforcement officers. The bigger the stick you carry then the more training and skill you require to wield it.

BDC does not support vehicle confiscation for the same safety concerns raised above, also from a logistical stand point. It would be difficult to arrange confiscation and then to find a suitable and willing service provider. It could also create problems when old vehicles are confiscated and owners do not apply to have them returned (overseas travellers near the end of their journey or when simple economics do not add up).

PROPOSAL 4: STRENGTHEN THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SELF-CONTAINED VEHICLES.

The Buller District Council supports this proposal and sees it as the key to ensuring the main concerns around freedom camping are addressed.

The requirements around self-contained must be strengthened as does the requirement for having them certified by a suitable authority.

We believe that purpose factory built vehicles such as motor homes and caravans of a certain size do not need further inspection after purchase and can easily be labelled as such at the point of sale.

This would leave only modified and homebuilt vehicles that would require certification.

There are a number of options listed as to type of toilet, secured or non secured. BDC would submit that any improvement to the current standards be based on one question, **“would the new standard make it likely, that a person needing to use the toilet would realistically do so”**? The current standard can be met in circumstances where it was clear the facility would never be used. To achieve this the vehicle must be of a size that allows the toilet system to be accessed with sufficient privacy.

The current rubbish, waste water and clean water holding capacity in the current standard are sufficient.

3. Further Submission.

- Introduce minimum distance rule for parking next to other campers to increase safety. Add a breach of this minimum distance to the list of infringements.
- Create a framework to enable and encourage regional plans. If rules constantly change from area to area then it is difficult to expect visitors to keep up with the changes.
- Council’s ability to provide an ambassadorial or enforcement service will come down to cost. BDC has been able to supply a suitable level of service due to the central government funding and has controlled the issue very well receiving frequent positive feedback. In the event we do not receive funding our programme will likely cease in its current form and the problems of old will creep back into our district. We suggest territorial authorities have access to a portion of the travel levy (or some form of external funding) to ensure we can cover the costs of the continued and likely increase in demand for this service.
- The development of a national responsible camping campaign including public messaging.