

11 May 2021

Draft Waiheke Local Board feedback on the proposed changes to the Freedom Camping Act 2011

Background

1. Waiheke Local Board is concerned about freedom camping and the impact that it has on the environment, in particular the inappropriate disposal of waste.
2. The Waiheke Local Board has significant issues with an influx of high season freedom campers combined with peak season homelessness. There are daily complaints.
3. Freedom camping can have negative impacts on the community including loss of public parking, interruption of residents' rights to quiet enjoyment of life, inappropriate use of public space and some anti-social behaviour in residential and recreational areas.
4. There are no designated freedom camping sites on Waiheke. There are no public pump-out facilities (chemical toilets are not suitable for septic tank disposal) and Waiheke has an inadequate infrastructure (narrow urban/rural roading and ablutions) for camper vans.
5. Only Whakanewha Regional Park caters for paid camping for up to 7 days within the park at Pokaraka Flats Camping Ground and provides for self-contained vehicles in its carpark for a smaller fee.
6. Waiheke Local Board has funded a community survey of freedom campers to help better understand the situation of our local freedom campers and the reasons behind the choice of this option. This will inform appropriate responses to the issue.
7. Freedom campers on Waiheke include holiday makers, and seasonal workers. Alongside them, particularly in the peak holiday season, are people suffering temporary or semi-permanent homelessness.
8. The initial small-sample survey found that housing affordability and availability are significant reasons for people using vehicles for accommodation.
9. The same survey also found that people staying in vehicles were conscious of public concerns and took steps to ensure a minimal impact on the environment.

10. The Waiheke Local Board Plan 2020 states that:

Our visitor industry grows in alignment with our values of sustainability and the board will:

- *actively promote Waiheke's identity as an unspoilt natural destination*
- *support the development of an education strategy to ensure visitors understand how to care for and respect the island's delicate environment.*

Proposal One or Proposal Two?

11. The board supports **Proposal Two: to make it mandatory for freedom campers to stay in a vehicle that is certified self-contained, unless staying at a site with toilet facilities (excluding public conservation lands and regional parks).**

Note: This is with the proviso that those freedom campers not in self-contained vehicles only can only access "designated freedom camping sites".

12. Proposal One would disadvantage low-income campers, as self-contained vans are expensive. Freedom camping is often chosen due to its low cost, so allowing campers to use only "designated freedom camping sites" with public toilets would continue to enable this affordable option.

13. Making it mandatory for freedom campers staying at designated sites with no public toilets to use a vehicle which is certified self-contained, will limit inappropriate disposal and support a new norm for campers and the public about the use of certified self-contained vehicles.

Comments on Proposals 3 and 4

Proposal 3 - improve the regulatory controls for government land managers

14. The board supports an increase in penalties for breaches of bylaws, no camping notices, and the use of freedom camping sites for certified vehicles by non-certified vehicles, including vehicle confiscation.

15. Local authorities should be empowered to provide enforcement on government owned lands, since these lands are often used by freedom campers in council territories which are difficult to enforce consistently in different jurisdictions.

Proposal 4 - strengthen the requirements for self-contained vehicles

16. The government should introduce a system for the certification of self-contained vehicles including a streamlined low-cost national register which would aid enforcement.

17. Minimum requirements for self-contained vehicles should be strengthened including the installation of a permanent plumbed-in toilet with black-water holding tank and a sealable solid waste container for rubbish.

18. Those sleeping in vehicles due to homelessness should not be exempt from any new regulatory system but should be redirected to designated freedom camping areas with toilets. Local authorities, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations should be supported to work together on referral pathways for homeless people which needs to include supported housing options in one's own community.

19. In line with the Waiheke Local Board Plan, the board supports education strategies to ensure visitors understand how to care for and respect the environment. Examples include Auckland Council's freedom camping ambassadors, Waiheke's beach ambassador programme and the various existing publications distributed to educate campers about how to avoid damaging impacts on the environment and where to find designated freedom camping locations.

Ngā mihi

Privacy of natural
persons

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