

Council Briefing Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 8 May, 2018
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Cr Greg Innes (Chairperson)
Cr Stu Bell
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Sue Glen
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Cherry Hermon
Cr Greg Martin
Cr Sharon Morgan
Cr Anna Murphy

Not in Attendance

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Crichton Christie

Scribe Jennie Thomas (Democracy Adviser)

Cr Innes convened the meeting and introduced Shireen Munday (Strategic Planner) and Rochelle Deane (Bylaw Enforcement Coordinator) who led the presentation and facilitated discussion.

1. Apologies

Her Worship the Mayor, Cr Benney.

2. Reports

2.1 Camping in Public Places 2017-2018 report

Recap

The Council began discussion on Freedom Camping in 2015. A statement of proposal that limited freedom camping to self-contained vehicles only was adopted for consultation. After the submissions and hearings, Council directed staff to

develop an option for non-self-contained vehicles. This new option was then opened for consultation and subsequently adopted in September 2017.

Under the Freedom Camping Act, Council is not able to fully ban freedom camping in the district. Areas can be prohibited or restricted if there are concerns to protect access to an area, public health and safety, or for environmental concerns.

2017/2018 Monitoring Programme

In October 2017 Council endorsed a monitoring and enforcement program that included a strong educational approach for the summer. Daily site visits were undertaken to 33 key sites during the peak season (20 Dec – 7 Feb) and once every 48 hours in the shoulder periods. A review in February reduced the number of sites monitored to 19. This reduced travel time and allowed enforcement agents to spend longer at problem sites and ensured early morning and late evening site visits.

One of the objectives was to provide information to develop a longer term plan.

Challenges

There were challenges. The officer's visits only provided a snapshot in time. There was a lack of definition of what overnight camping actually means. The community has a perception that associated behaviour can be enforced. The bylaw only allows enforcement on council owned or controlled land. DOC owned land within the district cannot be enforced. This will continue to be a challenge unless legislation changes.

Results

The monitoring data showed 87% of vehicles were compliant. The main reason, at 84%, for noncompliance was for parking outside the designated site. The results also showed a high percentage of self-contained vehicles using the designated sites for non-self-contained vehicles.

CRMs and other complaints

Most were for unlawful camping. Of the designated sites eight received one or two complaints. Six areas received four or more complaints. Of the 22 designated sites eight received no complaints at all.

Most of the complaints about signage were received early in the season. Vandalism and removal of signage were the main issues. Additional signage camping etiquette and locations for dump sites is recommended.

There was a significant decrease in complaints regarding rubbish and sanitary issues in comparison to the previous summer. The Waste and Drainage department have reported no significant issues.

Bylaw

Generally, the Bylaw is addressing the identified problems and is enforceable as is. There has been a significant reduction in the complaints about rubbish and sanitary issues.

Future enforcement programme

The recommended approach for the next summer monitoring program would be to retain daily visits to the 19 sites identified with significant emphasis on the seven focus sites:

- Tamaterau
- Ruakaka
- Matapouri
- Bascule carpark
- Sandy Bay
- Woolley's Bay
- Kowharewa Bay

The monitoring visits would be timed between 6pm and 10pm and 6am and 10am. The timing of these visits would ensure officers can take a more stringent and enforcement approach. Brochures and flyers will be still used for education.

There will be a lead up programme prior to the enforcement stage to ensure knowledge base and skill set for officers. Officers will be using mobile technology in the field which will provide data directly into spreadsheet for better reporting and officer communication. The budget for future monitoring and enforcement is included in the LTP.

Site improvements and approaches

Ruakaka beach reserve - lock gates from 10pm to 6am. Reduce or relocate designated site to opposite main entranceway.

Matapouri – move the designated site as part of planned upgrade to parking area.

Tamaterau – temporary relocation of designated site, pending planned site upgrades in future.

Whananaki North – reduce site size.

I-site Tarewa Road – move designated site to roadside.

Associated matters

Other issues and learnings from the previous summer that can be addressed under the bylaw include:

In relation to the Ruakaka Beach Reserve site, collaboration with Parks staff have come up with the solution of locking the gates from 10pm to 6am. Monitoring officers will be onsite at night between Labour weekend and Easter which should mitigate a lot of complaints relating to this site.

The Parks department is looking at improving the carpark at Matapouri which will allow three carparks to be clearly marked as the designated sites. This will make it easier to enforce and to provide information to campers.

An upgrade to the Tamaterau facility won't occur before this summer. The site will temporarily be relocated and bollards and better signage will be erected.

The reduction of the site at Whananaki North will stop the access way being blocked.

The feedback received from staff at the Tawera i-Site recommended moving the site to the opposite side of the carpark closest to the roadside. The flow on effect will mean less vehicles spending all day there.

In addition, over winter, signage will be reviewed and amended to specify expected camper etiquette in public toilets.

There have been incidences of campers from self-contained vehicles using public toilets rather than dump stations. The Waste and Drainage department is looking at adding to the number of dump stations in the district.

Dispersal of self-contained vehicles from areas designated to non-self-contained is also an issue. Staff have contacted the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association to discuss promotion of dispersal of self-contained vehicles throughout the district. Freedom Camping Apps will be amended to provide further information on all sites.

The Bylaw does provide for temporary closures. Over winter there will be collaboration with the Parks department to establish criteria.

There will be work undertaken with app providers regarding notification of issues e.g. flooding, to increase the ability to be both more reactive and proactive to any issues that may be experienced next summer.

Next Steps

An item will come back to Council for resolution on the amendments to parking spaces.

A National Working Party has been formed to look at issues that have been raised in relation to Freedom Camping nationally. Relevant ministries are reviewing how to address these issues. Hopefully there will be improvements at this level.

Recapping the presentation - there will be fine tuning as outlined with monitoring and enforcement next summer. On that basis if issues remain there will be consideration to changing the bylaw if needed. There will be reports back next summer on how these changes are working.

Discussion and comments

Ruakaka Beach Reserve site -

It was queried, that after the proposed reduction of park numbers at the designated site, whether there would still be camping in front of the Ruakaka Motel.

The Freedom Camping Act does not allow councils to consider commercial implications. Staff advised that the Ruakaka Reserve gate is directly beside those sites which will be locked at night. Parks staff stated the best option was not to relocate the site as suggested in Option 2 as this may impact on access to the boardwalk to the beach.

A suggestion was made to have no designated parking sites at all at this location as there were three camp grounds in the nearby vicinity and because of the difficulty with enforcement.

Staff advised that the programme being proposed for summer includes a strong enforcement presence at night.

Jill McPherson, General Manager Strategy and Democracy, advised that the Freedom Camping Act does not allow a ban on day time camping. Rules around behaviours only allows Council to regulate overnight occupancy and health and safety.

Dump Stations -

There was discussion on providing more dump stations for self-contained campers and possible locations for these. Part of the winter programme for staff, is to ensure information regarding dump station locations is easily assessable for campers and to improve signage at public toilets regarding the use of them.

Comment was made that new dump stations should only be set up at reticulated sites and that the Bland Bay camp ground should not be promoted as a dump station for campers.

Matapouri –

There was concern expressed on infrastructure being overloaded where carparks are designated for camping. Feedback received from residents at Matapouri was mainly concerning health and safety in relation to the use of the unreticulated toilets in the carpark. It was hoped that the proposed relocation of sites would improve issues. Staff advised that relocation of the site is subject to the final layout when the carpark is sealed. It was suggested that staff discuss with the property owner the possibility of repositioning of the designated parks closer to their dwelling.

i-Site –

There was discussion on the suitability of having hot showers available at the Tawera i-Site. Concerns were raised by elected members on the impact to the i-Site in general and to the café.

Other sites –

There were some concerns expressed regarding the Whananakai North and Woolley's Bay sites which are situated on grassed areas with no marking. It was requested to have these areas marked so it clearly defined the area available for campers.

There was a query regarding the small reserve on McAuslin Road at Sandy Bay. This reserve is owned by DOC, there has been some suggestion that Council take over the reserve. If this eventuates the bylaw will apply but at present Council cannot apply the Freedom Camping Bylaw to this reserve.

It was noted that the Onerahi site had become wet and boggy during the season.

Freedom camping working group -

There was comment made regarding the working party looking at the standards of self-contained vehicles and how they are classified.

There was discussion on whether planning had been undertaken with the Far North and Kaipara District Councils when formulating the bylaw and whether standard across boundary rules applied. Kaipara District Council do not have issues with freedom camping so were not considering a bylaw. If either Far North or Kaipara decide to proceed with a Freedom Camping bylaw, then staff would work with them to create some similarity and in line with our bylaw.

A request was made to receive a regular report on progress from the Freedom Camping Working group.

CRMs –

There were some concerns expressed regarding the recording of all complaints. It was noted that some CRMs regarding public toilets would have been lodged with the Waste and Drainage department. Part of the review will be to look at the information from CRMs and how robust and successful this system has been. It is recommended that monitoring and enforcement at sites will occur early in the morning and late at night.

Staff are looking to ensure lessons learnt from this season are considered and improvements made including real time data entry. Training will be undertaken to ensure the data collected is relevant and there will be better technology used in the

field. Photos could be another option used to provide clear times and dates but it will still only be a snap shot in time.

Staff work closely with the Waste and Drainage team and if there are any concerns regarding public toilet capacity the report authors will be advised so that necessary actions can be taken.

It was noted that Tourism Infrastructure Fund (TIF) funding applications close next week and whether this could be used to obtain Central Government funding to assist with upgrading facilities.

Further Discussion –

There was a suggestion that a permit system could be put in place for residents who choose to live in their vehicles e.g. house buses. Staff advised that these local campers in self-contained vehicles are able to camp for a maximum of three nights before relocating to another site outside the designated sites if they are self-contained. A permit system may incur high administrative costs. There is a clear distinction between these local campers and homeless people.

It was noted that Nelson has a system in place that monitoring officers alert the appropriate government agencies regarding homelessness at an early stage.

There was discussion on the ban Queenstown have on Freedom campers. Staff advised that there was not a complete ban in Queenstown. Freedom Campers are prohibited from camping in the urban centres of the District but not everywhere in the entire District. Christchurch is similar but there are some permitted sites.

Summary -

Jill summarised that all of the impacts freedom camping were difficult to manage through the Bylaw. The recommended changes to improve issues need to be planned carefully. Council would continue to influence campers and provide information using various means e.g. apps. A report will come back to Council with resolutions regarding changes to the sites.

Cr Cocurullo arrived at 1.14pm. Cr Martin left the meeting at 2.12 pm.

3. Closure of Meeting

The meeting concluded at 2.23pm