



STAFF REPORT

TO: Environment & Planning Committee

FROM: Jean Hodson, Regulatory Manager

REFERENCE: E402

SUBJECT: **FREEDOM CAMPING - ISSUES AND OPTIONS - REPORT REP10-07-02** - Report prepared for meeting of 1 July 2010

1. PURPOSE

In July 2009, the Environment & Planning Committee received a report on the issue of “freedom camping” and the Committee requested that the matter be monitored and updates provided. This report provides an update, including a summary of inter-agency discussions, and some ideas for a possible programme to more actively manage “freedom camping” in Tasman.

2. RECENT DISCUSSION AT TOURISM INDUSTRY FORUM

Representatives of rental vehicle operators, local government, tourism organisations, and central government met in Auckland on 21 April 2010, to discuss growing concerns about the impact of freedom camping. It has been reported that there was agreement among participants that action had to be taken to better manage the effects and to protect the image of NZ. Some 30 action points were agreed upon including:

- People hiring non-self contained vehicles will be instructed not to freedom camp by the hire companies.
- Local government representatives will advocate for legislation establishing a national instant fine system that Councils will be able to use to better enforce freedom camping rules in their areas
- Local government has agreed to draft a model bylaw and share best-practice.

3. RECENT DISCUSSIONS AT ZONE 5 MEETING

The issue was also discussed at the recent LGNZ Zone 5 meeting where a number of South Island councils expressed support for a greater level of national consistency in controlling the adverse effects of freedom camping. The forthcoming Rugby World Cup would suggest the need for an urgent government response.

A remit seeking appropriate legislation will now be considered at the LGNZ National Conference to be held in July.

4. LOCAL UPDATE

The 2009/2010 summer season is over now, so it is useful to reflect. The media have covered the “freedom camping” issue both locally and nationally, and this has perhaps been the trigger for further discussion and airing of views about the problems of littering, human waste and “general taking advantage” of the minority of people who “freedom camp.” Although there are no exact figures regarding the visitor numbers or nights spent, it seems probable that the amount of freedom camping was much the same as last year, but over time, it is also true to say that the trend towards the use of non-self contained vehicles is increasing, and clearly that is the source of the problems the community is concerned about.

Our Service Request data shows that over the summer (December to March inclusive) Council received 88 calls regarding “illegal camping”, compared to 37 over the previous summer period. This is a significant increase in the amount of calls, which could reflect both a lack of tolerance towards “freedom campers” and an increase in numbers.

Motueka High School students conducted a research project on freedom camping and using a prepared questionnaire surveyed 383 people locally. A summary of the results indicate:

- 49% believe freedom camping is a problem, with 84% identifying human waste as a significant health risk,
- 52% believe it was too expensive for Tasman District Council to collect fees at local reserves,
- 76% believe illegal freedom campers should be fined, but 65% would not report freedom campers to Tasman District Council.
- 55% supported the use of ratepayers fund to provide improved facilities such as toilets and clean water at reserves, this was seen as the most supported means of dealing with freedom camping, followed closely by collecting fees, and only 15% wanted a total ban.
- 70% supported a requirement for all rental campervans to have three days minimum capacity for toilet and greywater.

The complete summary is available upon request. The student’s survey work and initiative was excellent and the results are an interesting reflection of the community concern.

Control Services (Nelson) Ltd report that for the vast majority of visitors travelling in motorhomes etc are no problem and that our current policy is working well, but the lack of “enforceability” is the frustration, with the game of cat and mouse being played by those who are determined to not do the right thing, and especially those who wish to take advantage of the limitations of current legislation.

Department of Conservation staff report that it has been a significant call on their resources to deal with waste and litter (and potentially fires) caused by irresponsible freedom campers and have expressed a willingness to be part of any possible joint management ideas.

5. POSSIBLE CHANGES

The Tasman District Council's current policy only allows for freedom camping when the campers are "self contained". Freedom camping in public places without facilities is banned and such campers are expected to use camping grounds with facilities. No change is suggested for the policy.

The problem is enforcement. To date Council has relied on education and the expectation that the large majority of campers will "do the right thing". Unfortunately, the trend to non-contained vehicles has now created a situation that will require stronger enforcement. It is likely that this will lead to some form of permit, coupled with instant fines, powers of confiscation and the ability to wheel clamp vehicles. While councils could earn fees from the permits, these are unlikely to offset all the costs of operating a system that encourages responsible freedom camping, while dealing with those who abuse the environment and create a risk to public health.

6. CONCLUSION

This Council should support measures to find a national solution to the "freedom camping" issue. In the meantime we will continue to promote and enforce our current policy doing our best to minimise disturbance and upset in the community.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received.
2. That the Environment and Planning Committee signal its support to local Government New Zealand for a national solution to concerns over the behaviour of some freedom campers.



Jean Hodson
Regulatory Manager