



**Tourism
Industry
Association
New Zealand**

Tourism Industry Association New Zealand

Policy on Freedom Camping in New Zealand

September 2004

About Our Association and Industry

The Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIANZ) represents the interests of over 3,500 businesses in the tourism industry.

Tourism is a \$16.5 billion industry and generates over 17.8% of New Zealand's exports. The tourism industry employs 1 in 10 New Zealanders in a diverse range of businesses – the majority of which are small and medium sized enterprises. Not only is tourism important because of its size. It is also:

- Highly employment intensive;
- Regionally dispersed;
- Has the flexibility to change its target markets quickly as conditions change;
- Can offer a good return on investment.

The tourism industry in New Zealand consists of more than 15,000 small and medium sized businesses. Of these businesses, most employ less than five people.

New Zealand welcomes almost two million overseas visitors to its shores every year. The domestic tourism industry is also important in helping to sustain a vibrant tourism industry. TIANZ estimates that over 75 million visitor nights are spent by New Zealanders every year.

These businesses are diverse in their activity and the sectors we represent include accommodation providers, surface and air transport, attractions, and adventure tourism. The Campervan rental industry is an important and valuable part of the surface transport sector.

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What is freedom camping?

Freedom camping is away from sites or places where camping facilities are provided such as: camping grounds, motor parks and at DOC sites. This can include camping in a caravan, bus, tent or campervan. The location of the camping can be in remote areas, in rest areas or reserves, at beaches, in car parks, in shopping mall precincts, or at the side of a road or street (urban or rural). Freedom camping can occur anywhere it is possible to safely pitch a tent, or park a vehicle overnight.

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Who are freedom campers?

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There are no precise figures available on the number of freedom campers and such an activity is difficult to measure. However, anecdotal evidence suggests freedom camping is popular with both Domestic and International travellers throughout the year. Freedom camping is also popular with retired people and 'empty nesters'.

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Why do people freedom camp?

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They do it for a number of reasons including:

- the freedom of being independent and being able to ‘get away from it all’
- to save money on accommodation, which enables people to spend money on other goods and services, or to travel for longer than they might otherwise be able to
- sometimes there are no camping grounds or holiday parks available in a chosen location, or they may be booked out (especially for events or at certain times of the year)
- people want to stay overnight in an isolated scenic area.

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What are the implications of freedom camping for local communities?

Freedom camping appeals to a reasonably high number of visitors in New Zealand. However, a stronger push towards using areas with facilities is required and freedom camping needs to be carefully managed. There are some problems that can be caused by unregulated freedom camping, including:

- environmental damage due to sewage discharges and rubbish disposal in places without adequate disposal facilities
- reduced opportunities for local communities to receive some economic gain from overnight stays in an area
- potential safety problems for campers, especially in areas that have high rates of crime
- potential crowding out of other users of parks and reserves
- limited or no opportunities for local communities to charge freedom campers for their use of their camping area. (Any cash or Koha received for camping brings the recipient under the Camping Ground Regulations 1985)
- Overnight stays are inappropriate in many urban and residential areas

These downsides should be balanced by the fact that freedom campers patronise local businesses to obtain supplies during the course of their travels, and will spend money on local attractions. In general, freedom campers are Free Independent Travellers who are a strong growth market for New Zealand.

TIANZ believes that local communities must carefully manage freedom camping so they derive the maximum benefit from this activity, while working to minimise the negative impacts. Good management is especially important given that the FIT market is expected to grow strongly based on Tourism Research Council projections.

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What can local communities do to maximise the benefits and minimise the downsides of freedom camping?

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TIANZ suggests that local communities:

- accept that freedom camping is popular amongst some segments of the visitor market, and that if it is carefully managed this is a way of bringing visitors into an area and adding value to a local industry
- assess the prevalence of freedom camping in their city/district and the positive and negative impacts of freedom camping
- undertake planning to enable camping to take place where facilities are in place to accommodate it, and restrict freedom camping to those areas. This could be done as part of a wider visitor strategy so that freedom camping policies are able to be placed in a positive context
- develop appropriate mechanisms to collect revenue from freedom campers that use these facilities, so that the community is able to raise revenues to provide appropriate facilities
- Enforce local regulations that are currently in existence. eg existing parking regulations
- Where there are no local by-laws or these are unsuitable, work with council and the community to put in place the appropriate by-laws
- Local regulations should be clearly explained to assist visitors who wish to freedom camp (visitor information boards and i-sites etc). This could be done through relevant industry organisations and rental vehicle companies.
- Appropriate signage in problem areas to assist authorities in policing the laws
- Lobby for more pay-for-use public toilets and grey water / sewerage disposal areas in your community
- Encourage visitors to use existing commercial facilities.
- Encourage councils to work with Local Government New Zealand to promote the development of nationally consistent guidelines for freedom camping policies.

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