

## Written Entry – South Taranaki District Council

### **Project: An innovative approach to the development and monitoring of a Freedom Camping Bylaw**

#### **Project Summary**

Due to legislative changes freedom camping was permitted throughout South Taranaki. In response to community concerns Council developed a bylaw. This entry highlights regulatory innovation through a foundation of evidence-based policy by developing a scoring system (Significant Site Assessment - SSA) to assess possible freedom camping sites by applying three aspects of the Freedom Camping Act (protect the area, protect health and safety of those visiting, and protect access to the area). Further innovation includes development of a brochure, and monitoring the Bylaw through Kaitiaki/Ambassadors rather than Enforcement Officers.

#### Project key learnings:

- Research and development of a Freedom Camping Bylaw takes one year minimum.
- Review the Bylaw one year post adoption.
- SSA provides fairness and consistency.
- Elected Members buy-in is crucial.
- Start working with Iwi and key stakeholders early (e.g New Zealand Motor Caravan Association)
- Brochure and Campermate App work hand-in-hand.
- Kaitiaki/Ambassadors are the friendly face - not Enforcement Officers.

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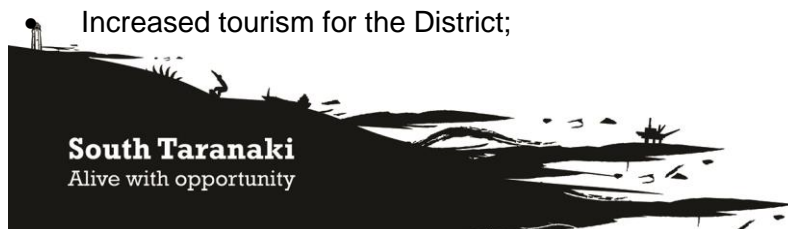
#### **Strategic Context**

In 2011 the Government adopted new legislation to make freedom camping throughout NZ permitted, in response to the projected influx of tourists for the Rugby World Cup (previously freedom camping was prohibited unless councils indicated otherwise).

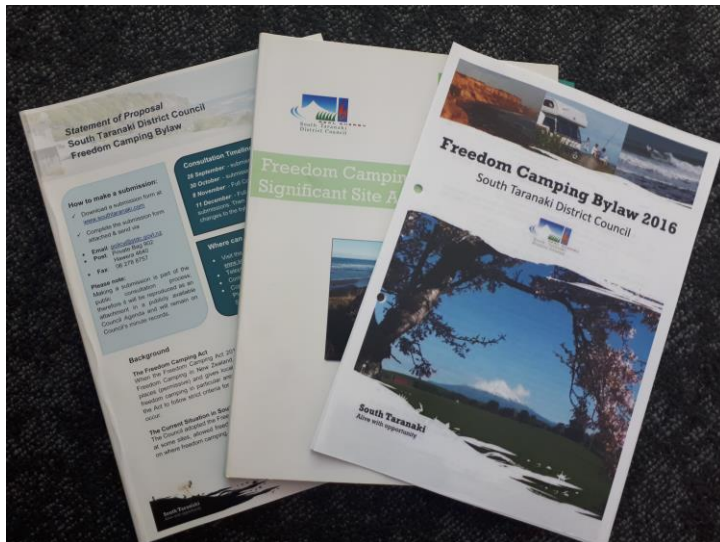
The Council received complaints about freedom camping within the District. Freedom camping was permitted (as a result of the change in legislation) and the Council could not prohibit camping unless it adopted a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011. The Council agreed that there was a need to address freedom camping in South Taranaki and resolved to develop a Freedom Camping Bylaw. Once the Bylaw was adopted, the rules for freedom camping in the District needed to be monitored.

It was hypothesised that the anticipated outcomes from the project would result in:

Increased tourism for the District;



- A measureable structure for the freedom camping rules throughout the District (clearly defined areas that were either prohibited or permitted, as well as monitoring/enforcement of the Bylaw);
- Concentration of non-self-contained freedom campers to appropriate areas (where facilities were available); and
- Protection of sensitive sites for future generations to enjoy.



The Council indicated that the Bylaw should align with Council's strategic vision to be the "Most liveable district in NZ". The Council wanted to strike a balance between enabling responsible freedom camping within the District and ensuring that the natural surroundings were protected for future generations to enjoy.

During the adoption of the Bylaw in 2017, the title from Lonely Planet of "2<sup>nd</sup> Best Region to Visit" was awarded to Taranaki and coincided with the Kaikoura earthquake which saw significant increase in freedom camping visitors to the District.

The major risks for the project included:

- Legal challenge to the Bylaw (mitigated by the development of the SSA); and
- Negative publicity (minimised through good communication).

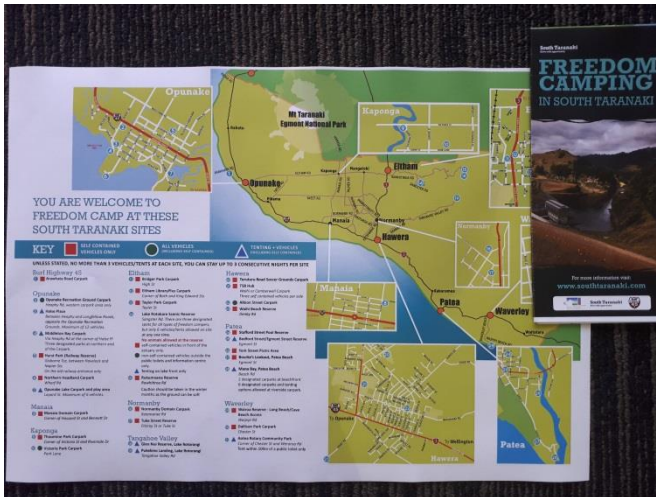
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## Project Management

The Freedom Camping project was undertaken in two phases. Firstly the Bylaw was developed. Secondly the Bylaw rules had to be enforced.

The first phase of the project was overseen by one Project Manager, which provided consistency for the Bylaw development and review phase. A timeline was developed and agreed to by the Senior Leadership Team, to ensure the project met expected deadlines and legislative obligations.





The scope of the project was to develop and implement a Freedom Camping Bylaw following the legislative requirements under the Act, whilst meeting the expectations of the South Taranaki Community and visitors. The initial time frame was to adopt a bylaw within two years.

The research and development of the SSA was absorbed into existing budgets. Workshops were held with Elected Members at key points in the

development of the SSA and Bylaw, which provided a clear and consistent policy direction from the early stages right through to adoption.

One Supervisor/Contract Manager was appointed to oversee the management of the Kaitiaki/Ambassador project on an annual basis. This provided a centralised process, reporting to the one Manager on a weekly basis to provide feedback on specifics occurring at each site. An induction day is held for all Kaitiaki/Ambassadors at the start of the season, and a debrief session is held at the close of the season (what went well, what can be improved?).

The quality assurance systems that were used, to provide continuous improvement, included CRMs (customer requests/complaints), community meetings, Campermate App comments (made by freedom campers), ambassador's comments (on-site inspections) and feedback from the public through informal and formal submission processes. Councillors and Community Board Members also provided feedback and knowledge of their areas areas and passed on feedback from their constituents. Identified 'hot spots' were assessed against the SSA scoring system during the first year review.

## Relationship Management

The initial phase of the project consisted of research and development of the SSA, the circulation of the SSA to Iwi and key stakeholders, public consultation, and post adoption in 2017, community group meetings, further public consultation on the reviewed content of the Bylaw, and post adoption evaluation and improvement.

During the different types of consultation, a wide range of communication tools were used to engage the public. This included personalised letters or emails to key stakeholders, media releases and articles in the local newspaper, direct contact through phone conversations, public meetings, and meetings with key groups.

The different audiences the project engaged with are listed as follows:

- New Zealand Motor Caravan Association (NZMCA)
- Four Iwi of South Taranaki



- Department of Conservation
- Taranaki Regional Council
- New Zealand Transport Agency
- Four Community Boards and Iwi Liaison Committee
- South Taranaki i-SITE Visitor Centre
- Puniho Marae, and Paora Aneti Trustees
- Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust
- Kaponga Progressive Society
- Kaponga Rugby and Soccer Clubs
- Ōpūnake Clifftop Group
- Board Riders Club
- Land owners

During the review of the Bylaw, the hard to reach groups “came out of the woodwork” and we were able to engage with those groups through community meetings. This was because those residents and rate payers were either directly affected by the negative impact of freedom camping, or were representing their community and wanted a fair solution for both residents and visitors.

The second phase of the project was the implementation of the management of the Bylaw rules through the Kaitiaki/Ambassador programme. Local people were hired as Kaitiaki/Ambassadors to be the friendly face of freedom camping management. The Kaitiaki/Ambassadors are an important facet to educate freedom campers, as well as locals, about the new rules, whilst also giving helpful information on amenities in the area, or places to visit.

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### **Continuous improvement**



The Bylaw phase of the project is sustainable, as the scoring system within the SSA can be used to re-evaluate each freedom camping site when the Bylaw is reviewed. This provides consistency in the way each site is evaluated, whilst taking into account new information over time.

Since the initial three month trial, the Kaitiaki/Ambassador phase of the project proved to be a sustainable system. It is now in its second season which operates over five months during the summer. The Council advertises for fixed term employees - preferably locals with a friendly manner and good communication skills.





Key learnings from the project:

- Implementation of a Freedom Camping Bylaw should be done slowly (over a year minimum).
- Be prepared to review the Bylaw one year after the adoption – this is not a failure, but allows you to tweak the Bylaw to address any hot spots.
- The SSA provided fairness and consistency (and confidence for Elected Members - EMs), whilst also addressing the three criteria under the Act.
- Workshop the issues with EMs and give them consistent advice on what can and cannot be addressed through the prohibitions contained within the Act.
- Start working with key stakeholders (e.g. NZMCA) and Iwi early.
- The brochure and Campermate App work hand-in-hand.
- Kaitiaki/Ambassadors are the friendly face – we don't need Enforcement Officers.

The spectrum of enforcement and monitoring under a legislatively driven framework (infringements) can include positive messages and education. It doesn't have to be a heavy handed approach to enforce the rules.

Once a Bylaw is adopted it may require a review within the first year. Gathering data, looking at evidence and working with the community by understanding their concerns, means that the Council can make changes to reflect that feedback and find a local solution to a local issue.

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### **Project success**

The project met its objectives of having a fully operational Bylaw which can be monitored and enforced. There is now a clear set of rules on where non-self-contained freedom camping can occur throughout the District at specific sites, and the number of CRM's have considerably decreased. This project is successful because it is highly transferrable to other councils, is endorsed by the NZMCA, and provides a robust foundation of information to shape policy development.

Prior to the implementation of the Bylaw and the summer Kaitiaki/Ambassador programme, visitors were unclear on the rules regarding freedom camping. The new Act resulted in freedom campers being able to camp anywhere unless the Council deemed otherwise. Frustration was conveyed from the community, as the Council was unable to move freedom campers along or prohibit them from particular areas. Popular beach front sites, located off Surf Highway 45, were becoming popular with tourists. Local board riders, surfers and residents were complaining of the fouling of the environment (as no toilet facilities were available), dumping of rubbish, setting of fires and an increased number of visitors to



*Stephen Kay, one of our friendly Freedom Camping Kaitiaki / Ambassadors*

particular sites (limiting access and causing damage to the environment).

After the implementation of the Bylaw and the first review, the 2018/2019 summer is proving to be successful. Areas which were highlighted as 'hot spots,' that had resulted in breaches of the Bylaw, have been modified as to the level of freedom camping permitted at the sites. Freedom camping is concentrated to specific sites with conditions, which is reinforced through signage, the Campermate app, and by Kaitiaki/Ambassadors.

Successful applications to the Tourism Infrastructure Fund have enabled the Council to purchase moveable pods (toilets, showers and self-compacting rubbish bins). The pods are being strategically located at four spots throughout the District during 2019, where current facilities are needed or the existing facilities are not meeting the needs and expectations of the freedom camping visitors.

Improvements to the Kaitiaki/Ambassador programme have included setting the hours in which monitoring takes place at each site. Previously, Kaitiaki/Ambassadors would inspect at any time during the day or night, however it was amended to times when freedom campers have arrived at site in the early evening from 5.30 pm onwards and until the following morning before 8 am.

Feedback from freedom campers was used to improve the look and feel of signage, which will be replaced over time. This includes arrows (indicating where freedom campers can park ie between the arrows), larger format, site specific signs (giving more information e.g. where toilets are located) and including reflectorized elements within the design.

The Freedom Camping Bylaw project was innovative from the start, as we wanted to apply the three criteria under the Act in a fair and consistent way. The SSA was developed to allow the Property and Facilities Manager and the Policy Advisor to score each site in a fair and consistent manner. This removed bias and limited the effect of external factors (outside of the Act) which had the potential to side-track the main issues and what the Bylaw could legally address. This gave the Elected Members a level of reassurance that each site was assessed under the same criteria.

Another way, in which the project was innovative, was the approach the Council wanted to take in relation to enforcement of the freedom camping rules for the District. The Elected Members felt that South Taranaki was welcoming to freedom campers. Feedback from the community was that we should be welcoming our visitors, but also giving them a good experience when they arrive here.



The South Taranaki District Council has been contacted by several other Councils after the adoption of the Bylaw, as the SSA was innovative and endorsed by the NZMCA for providing a solid foundation for policy development. The SSA was later adopted and adapted by Nelson City Council and was featured within the Freedom Camping Good Practice Guide as the “gold standard of the evidence basis needed for eventual bylaws.” The Brochure developed and adopted by South Taranaki District Council was also highlighted in the guide for presenting information in a clear format. The brochure showed the types of freedom camping sites in the District by colour icons on an A3 size folded map.

The scoring system within the SSA is transferrable to other Councils; however, caution needs to be taken so that matters outside of the Act (e.g. economic reasons) are not incorporated into the scoring method, which would result in an unfair bias for particular sites.

South Taranaki District Council has been contacted by several other councils asking for information on the Freedom Camping Kaitiaki/Ambassador programme. This summer the Whangarei District Council is trialling the appointment of Ambassadors alongside Enforcement Officers. The Freedom Camping Kaitiaki/Ambassadors provide a friendly face of the South Taranaki District to visitors. They assist freedom campers to be compliant within the current Freedom Camping Bylaw rules, whilst also providing to visitors their expert local knowledge about points of interest, facilities and amenities.

Officers at South Taranaki District Council have shared their learnings from this project and helped guide others on their development of a freedom camping bylaw, or adopting a friendly Kaitiaki/Ambassador approach to monitoring and enforcement. If we had the chance to do this project again, we would do it again in the same way, as we believe that it was successful and connected us further with our community.

