Common Questions

Department for Internal Affairs Freedom Camping Work Programme 2016/17

The following are common questions relating to the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) freedom camping work programme. These common questions will be updated as the work programme progresses.

Why is a freedom camping work programme needed?

In the summer visitor season of 2015/16 there was a significant level of concern expressed in public submissions and through the media about the harmful impact of freedom campers. The Minister of Local Government commissioned a Working Group, led by DIA with council officers from across New Zealand, to look into the management of harms from freedom camping and council implementation of the Freedom Camping Act 2011.

A Reference Group comprising Local Government New Zealand, private sector representatives and central government departments provided feedback on working documents and specific issues.

The Working Group’s report can be downloaded from the DIA website – Local Government Policy.

The Working Group identified that significant growth in international and domestic visitors was putting increasing pressure on communities and facilities. Councils were responding by putting in place stricter regulations which have had the effect of concentrating freedom campers in fewer areas. This in effect increases both actual and the perception of harm from freedom camping as an activity that occurs in our public places.

The freedom camping work programme seeks to support councils to manage freedom camping as an activity that occurs in public places and the New Zealand outdoor culture.
What is the work programme?

A summary of the work programme can be downloaded from the DIA website – Local Government Policy.

Freedom camping work streams:

1. Guidance document for councils on freedom camping management
   - The guidance material is hosted in a wiki format on the Freedom Camping Hub (the Hub).

2. National freedom camping regulation geospatial dataset
   - Pilot is underway with Thames-Coromandel and Queenstown councils to develop data flows from local to a national aggregated dataset. We will expand the pilot, if successful, in early 2017.

3. Communication messages targeted at visitors
   - The Responsible Camping Forum (the Forum) works with the camping industry and other information providers to support consistent messaging. From mid-December 2016 the Forum will undertake a targeted social media campaign. DIA will support the Forum in this work.

How do you contact DIA about the work programme?

E-mail any queries to freedomcampingsws@dia.govt.nz.

Why is guidance needed for local authorities on freedom camping?

Freedom camping is in effect a national network of places that are used by New Zealanders and international visitors to experience our country. For many visitors planning a camping holiday freedom camping forms part of their trip. For example they may choose to stay at a mixture of commercial and Department of Conservation sites and may also freedom camp along the way.

Because freedom camping is a network, the restrictions of one local authority can have an impact on another. Guidance helps to coordinate the way central and local government thinks about managing freedom camping as well as expanding the regulation, education and enforcement tools available.

How do I access the guidance (the Freedom Camping Hub)?

The Hub is available to all council officers. It requires a RealMe login to access the material. To get a login e-mail your request to – freedomcampingsws@dia.govt.nz with your name and position. E-mails must come from a recognised council address.
How do councils participate?

Participation in the Work Programme is coordinated through the Freedom camping Hub. Information on joining the shared workspace is available on the DIA website – Local Government Policy (See How do I access the guidance?).

Why is a national dataset of freedom camping regulations needed?

The regulation of freedom camping is complex. That complexity comes from different land owners applying different rules. Within a region of New Zealand, there will be public land administered by Department of Conservation, territorial authorities, a regional council, Land Information New Zealand, New Zealand Transport Agency and others, each may apply different rules and can use a mixture of legislation and property law to control the activity.

To overcome this complexity we need to provide a standard view of what the rules are and where they apply. The result will be a single source of truth providing a national view of regulations for camping in public places.

How will the information be collected and shared?

DIA is working with the Thames-Coromandel and Queenstown Lakes district councils, Local Government Geospatial Alliance, Land Information New Zealand and Department of Conservation to develop and run a pilot. That pilot will be supported by a select group of councils and run from mid-December 2016 to March 2017.

Who will use the national dataset?

The dataset will be an open dataset, available to everyone. It is specifically intended to be reused by route planning and camping information services. These services assist in managing the flow of freedom campers.

How will we improve the information available on freedom camping demand?

The Working Group identified a significant gap in the information available on freedom camping demand. Freedom campers are a largely untracked group compared with other accommodation types. The guidance material will provide for standardized data collection methods that can be used by local authorities. The collection of this data could be mapped to the regulations shown in the national dataset to identify the effectiveness of different approaches.

How will we improve freedom camper behaviour?

Most freedom campers are well behaved and respect the New Zealand environment. The Responsible Camping Forum is developing a social media campaign that will be targeted at
high risk camping groups and promote route planning tools. This will be supported by consistent messages from central government coordinated by DIA.

**What is being done to improve the infringement collection rate?**

The Working Group identified that infringements can easily be avoided by some international visitors. Addressing these issues will require further work by DIA, which will begin in early 2017. The initial focus is on improving compliance to reduce reliance on infringements.