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Media Release

Unity on freedom camping approach

The tourism industry, local government and other stakeholders have agreed a united approach to managing freedom camping this summer.

At a meeting of the New Zealand Responsible Camping Forum, convened by Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA), attendees agreed to continue with a range of measures to tackle issues associated with freedom camping.

“As the tourism industry has grown, we have seen an increase in the number of freedom campers. Most campers – both New Zealanders and international visitors – obey the rules and act responsibly. The Forum does not tolerate the minority of travellers who cause problems,” TIA Chief Executive Chris Roberts says.

“There is no single fix to the management of freedom camping. A strong regional focus, providing good information and adequate infrastructure, backed by enforcement measures, remains the best approach.”

Local Government New Zealand President Lawrence Yule agrees tourism infrastructure is a key piece of the puzzle but how it is funded is an issue for councils in tourist destinations, many of which are funded by a small ratepayer base.

“The Government’s \$12m Regional Mid-sized Tourism Facilities Grant Fund for small tourism facilities is a good step in the right direction but we need to think about other ways of funding infrastructure,” Mr Yule says. “It is important that communities are not disproportionately burdened with the costs of building toilets and carparks.

“For both the industry and communities, tourism needs to be well funded and managed, and a concerted approach through the groups like the Forum to tackle these issues is necessary.”

The New Zealand Responsible Camping Forum was established in 2007 and brings together representatives from the tourism industry, rental vehicle operators, and central and local government.

At its latest meeting, Forum members agreed to commission research to better understand the extent of freedom camping. This follows government estimates that around 12,000 international visitors a year (0.4% of all international arrivals) use freedom camping as their main form of accommodation.

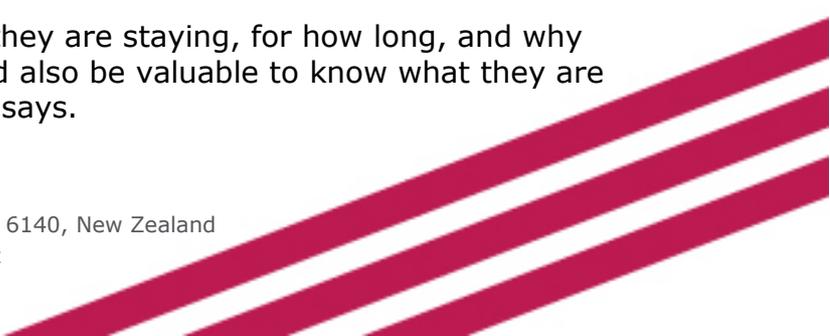
“We need to know more about where they are staying, for how long, and why they choose to freedom camp. It would also be valuable to know what they are spending their money on,” Mr Roberts says.

TOURISM INDUSTRY AOTEAROA

Level 4, 79 Boulcott Street, PO Box 1697, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

P +64 4 499 0104 www.tia.org.nz E info@tia.org.nz

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“With better information, we can better understand their motivations and manage how campers behave.”

A particular target group this summer will be people travelling in privately-owned vehicles. While the major rental vehicle operators provide freedom camping information to their clients, the Forum wants to find ways of educating private vehicle owners in the behaviour expected of them.

Social media is likely to be key in reaching this group, and the Forum is keen to implement a social media campaign over the summer, Mr Roberts says.

“The central message to freedom campers continues to be ‘Assume nothing – always ask’ before deciding to freedom camp. Two apps – Camping NZ or Campermate – offer excellent information, while i-SITE Visitor Information Centres and Department of Conservation Visitor Centres can also help.”

Meanwhile, two campervan rental companies, thl and Jucy, are working with the Thames-Coromandel and Queenstown-Lakes District Councils to improve collection of freedom camping fines. Under the three-month trial, the councils notify the campervan companies of fines within 24 hours. The companies can then remind their customers of the fine when they return the vehicles, and encourage them to pay promptly to avoid a possible administration fee. LGNZ says the scheme is running well and has potential to be rolled out further.

For further information, please contact:

Ann-Marie Johnson
Communications Manager
Tourism Industry Aotearoa
DDI: 04 496 5001
Mobile: 027 600 4565
Email: ann-marie.johnson@tia.org.nz
www.tia.org.nz
www.tourism2025.org.nz

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KEY FACTS

- Tourism in New Zealand is an \$81.6 million per day industry. Tourism delivers around \$32 million in foreign exchange to the New Zealand economy each day of the year. Domestic tourism contributes another \$49 million in economic activity every day
- Tourism is one of New Zealand's biggest export industries, earning \$11.8 billion or 17.4% of New Zealand's foreign exchange earnings (year ended March 2015)
- 12.1% of the total number of people employed in New Zealand work directly or indirectly in tourism. That means 295,908 people are working in the visitor economy
- The [Tourism 2025](#) growth framework has a goal of growing total tourism revenue to \$41 billion a year by 2025.

Visit www.tia.org.nz for more information

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