

Environmental report makes valuable contribution to NZ tourism future

The primary goal of tourism is to benefit Aotearoa, so the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's new report is a valuable contribution to achieving the future New Zealanders want, Tourism Industry Aotearoa says.

The tourism industry is already strongly focused on protecting and enhancing the environment our visitors come to enjoy, TIA Chief Executive Chris Roberts says.

The Commissioner's report *Pristine, Popular...imperilled? The environmental consequences of projected tourism growth* acknowledges the tourism industry's efforts to address environmental, social and cultural issues.

"Nobody wants tourism at all costs. The industry creates business opportunities and jobs, attracts foreign exchange and investment, and adds vibrancy to communities around the country," Mr Roberts says. "But we want to work with our communities to shape the tourism future they want."

Importantly, the report notes that the majority of tourism activity in New Zealand is by New Zealanders and our growing resident population also brings pressures.

It is impossible to predict with any accuracy how many domestic and international visitors there may be in 2050, Mr Roberts says. The industry has no target for how many visitors there should be – rather, it has targets for economic contribution, environmental enhancement, visitor experience and community support.

"If we protect and enhance the environment, have thriving businesses that share the benefits with our communities and deliver outstanding visitor experiences, then we will have the right number of visitors for New Zealand."

TIA agrees with the Commissioner's finding that new approaches will be needed to manage the environmental impact of tourism.

Initiatives like the [Tiaki Promise](#) and the [New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment](#) have been enthusiastically adopted by the industry, with almost 1300 businesses now signed up to the latter.

The TSC has the vision of Leading the World in Sustainable Tourism. To deliver on this vision the tourism industry must contribute to restoring, protecting and enhancing our natural environment, while continuing to be a high quality destination for international and domestic travellers and creating economic success that is shared with supportive host communities.

Mr Roberts says the strength of the report is where it looks at possible tourism futures. It is less robust in its assessment of the current situation.

TOURISM INDUSTRY AOTEAROA

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The report notes that 'the impact of visitors is often inextricably tied up with the day-to-day life of New Zealanders... we have no systematic way of quantifying the environmental and cultural impacts of tourism' (page 55).

Given the lack of data, the Commissioner has relied on anecdotal evidence - primarily media coverage, which is a highly unreliable way of assessing impact, especially in a rapidly evolving media landscape often driven by 'click bait' and social media influencers, Mr Roberts says.

"The report is more useful where it focuses on future outcomes and options."

The Commissioner has asked TIA to formally respond to the report early in the new year.

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KEY FACTS

- Tourism in New Zealand is a \$112 million per day industry. Tourism delivers around \$47 million in foreign exchange to the New Zealand economy each day of the year. Domestic tourism contributes another \$65 million in economic activity every day.
- Tourism is New Zealand's biggest export earner, contributing \$17.2 billion or 20.4% of New Zealand's foreign exchange earnings (year ended March 2019).
- 14.4% of the total number of people employed in New Zealand work directly or indirectly in tourism. That means 393,279 people are working in the visitor economy.
- The [Tourism 2025 & Beyond](#) sustainable growth framework/Kaupapa Whakapakari Tāpoi has a vision of growing a sustainable tourism industry that benefits New Zealanders.

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