

# Waiheke not a place for freedom camping

Freedom camping here is not in the island's best interest, Waiheke Local Board chair Cath Handley told the board meeting last Thursday.

"Even disregarding the parking issues, the chemicals used in vehicle toilets are incompatible with septic tanks."

Currently developing a bylaw to manage the harm and impact freedom camping can have on communities, Auckland Council sought formal feedback from local boards.

After community workshops and site assessments of 12 different areas, the Waiheke Local Board's recommendation to council is unambiguous: the whole of Waiheke Island is unsuitable for freedom camping.

"We have issues for our own people, with people sleeping in cars and authorities working to ensure that those who are homeless are offered suitable assistance to change their circumstances," Handley said.

Adding an additional lot of people using the beach facilities would be wrong, she said, and it would be inappropriate to encourage people to get on a ferry and bring vehicles to Waiheke for such a purpose.

Prior to the recommendation, the local board assessed 12 areas. In the first assessments, Kennedy Point Wharf Carpark, Little Oneroa Reserve, Newton Reserve, Onetangi Cemetery, Palm Beach Reserve, Waiheke Island Artworks and Waiheke Island Sports Club were all recommended to be prohibited.

Reasonings were anything from limited

availability and popular beach location to limited parking and sensitive area with cultural significance.

Freedom campers will be actively discouraged. There is a camping ground here at Whakanewha, and people can book to camp there.

- Cath Handley  
Waiheke Local Board chair

Initial assessments recommended Surfdale Hall Reserve and foreshore, Wharf Road Esplanade Reserve, Blackpool Park, Onetangi Sports Park and Putiki Reserve be restricted with low or medium protection, but after receiving additional information, those areas were also recommended for prohibition.

In the board's recommendation to council, they argue the case that the

whole of Waiheke Island is unsuitable for freedom camping.

They say the island is struggling with fast-growing tourism that puts strain on infrastructure, and the island's lack of a dump station "increases the risk to the environment and improper use of public composting toilets".

They further argue that "if some freedom camping were allowed there would be nowhere for campers to go once sites were full", and that "issues associated with homelessness and freedom camping may overlap".

The decision to develop a bylaw under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 was made by the council's regulatory committee in August last year. It was made because of growing numbers of freedom campers and an increase in community issues and concern.

The bylaw will give council the right to restrict or prohibit areas, so they can enable proactive management and improved enforcement through infringement notices.

If the board's recommendations are adopted when reported next month, the draft bylaw will go out for full public consultation in September. The finished bylaw is then expected to be adopted in December this year. • Emma Haas



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