

Thursday, November 12, 2015

Community

Camping bylaw changes

TWEAKING the freedom camping bylaw was the aim of a submission hearing on Tuesday.

Held at the War Memorial Hall Wairoa district councillors welcomed the community to speak to their submissions and share their concerns about freedom camping in the area.

Out of a total of 92 submissions, only three supported freedom camping throughout the district, while the remaining 89 all had concerns surrounding the issue.

Council adopted the Freedom Camping Bylaw subject to a series of conditions based on the submissions lodged.

Litter, blocked public toilets and general disrespect from some campers were top issues raised.

A site of particular concern was Alexandra Park and councillors decided the park would no longer be a freedom camping site.

Local man Bill Dicken said he would be happy for the area to be prohibited as it was a recreational area which is enjoyed by families.

Signage was another issue with one local saying signs dictating whether an area was restricted or not were "pitiful".

One submitter said he had come across signs which he couldn't read. They needed to be in striking colours rather than green which he described as "camouflage".

Council agreed to take this into consideration.

Peter Nash of the Wairoa Vista Motor Lodge and Restaurant shared his concern

about the town's commercial survival in relation to freedom camping.

He said it did not encourage good business in the town, especially for the local camping grounds which were recognised for their location.

Health and safety was also discussed with local man Gary Mayo saying glass bottles and litter could potentially be dangerous for children when they were playing on the grass.

Oraka was another site of concern for locals with a number of submitters saying it was often overrun with freedom campers in the summer season.

Councillors discussed dividing the site space so both campers and day users could enjoy the popular spot.

A proposed area of around 1000 square metres was suggested to be allocated for campers.

The remaining area could be for day users and locals to catch kai and enjoy the site of historical significance.

The Oraka decision hinges upon an engineering report by council engineering manager Jamie Cox.

Mahanga resident of 15 years, Dave Fraser said something needed to be done to keep the freedom camping areas under control and it was not fair for council to put motorhomes before the locals.

"Motorhomes don't pay the rates —

new freedom camping areas are a cost to the ratepayer."

He said the issue was to monitor areas and check they were not overloaded.

Mr Fraser said a good result would be if council could prohibit parking by motorhomes camping, particularly at Mahanga, and give day users places to park up.

Other amendments included fire restrictions and maintaining a three-night maximum stay for freedom campers on sites throughout the district.

New Zealand Motor Caravan Association board member Derek Brownrigg said the result of the hearing was good and it should suit most submitters.

"We have to realise the council has an Act of Parliament they have to try and meet the intent of, and I think they have it as good as they can for now."

Mr Brownrigg said after a summer under the new bylaw council could see how it worked and could make minor changes if they discovered any trouble spots.

"They now need to monitor freedom camping and get on with for this to be a success," he said.

Council was required by the government to draft and adopt a bylaw to clearly outline where campers could and could not camp.

Submitters made points which council intends to incorporate in modifications.