

Briefing Paper: Vehicles on Beaches under Road Use Bylaw 2022

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Ngā whāinga | Purpose

To provide an update on the Vehicles on Beaches prohibition schedule review under the Road Use Bylaw 2022.

Horopaki | Context

The Far North District contains a large number of beaches and a diverse population spread across many different communities. Our beaches are sites for a wide variety of commercial and recreational activities, and also contain important natural and historical features, vegetation and wildlife. The diversity of user groups means that the rights and wishes of different users can come into conflict, and therefore it is appropriate for the Council to consider how best to balance the needs and wishes of all beach users.

In February 2022, Council resolved to incorporate the Vehicles on Beaches Bylaw into the proposed Road Use Bylaw (Resolution 2022/5 refers).

Currently, under the Road Use Bylaw 2022, there is one scheduled safe zone where vehicles are prohibited, located at Coopers Beach. This safe zone was established to address several concerns raised by the Coopers Beach community. These concerns included safety of children and protection of the environment from vehicle damage.

A survey undertaken in 2021 as part of the review of the Vehicles on Beaches Bylaw received responses regarding 50 different beaches. The beaches mentioned most often were Te Oneroa-a-Tōhe/Ninety Mile Beach (120 responses) and Tokerau Beach (126 responses).

For the other identified beaches, community members responded with a variety of views, some in favour of vehicles on beaches and some against, citing many different reasons. It is clear that there is not a simple solution to these issues.

At a high level, most of the concerns were related to the protection of biodiversity, the protection of native birds such as the NZ Dotterel, dune protection, the protection and safety of beach users, particularly children, and the behaviour of motorists on the beach, particularly speeding vehicles.

Further investigation into a possible prohibition of vehicles on four beaches was identified: Tauranga Bay, Rangiputa, Tokerau Beach and Waimamaku. These beaches received either a high level of submissions, or a clear brief from the community to understand and address potential issues.

Ngā kōrerorero | Discussion

Te Oneroa-a-Tōhe

Management of vehicles on Te Oneroa-a-Tōhe (Ninety Mile Beach) will be in accordance with the approved Beach Management Plan, and it is outside the scope of this review.

Speed limits on beaches

Speed limits are currently regulated via the Regional Speed Limit Plan. Consultation regarding speed limits on beaches was due to begin in 2024. However, the Minister of Transport intends to develop a new Rule for setting of speed limits and the expectation is that further information on the scope and process for the new Rule will be available in early 2024. At this time all consultation on the proposed Regional Speed Management plan has been placed on hold pending further direction from the Road Controlling Authority.

Protecting sand dunes

For most beaches, sand dunes are located in reserve land. In February 2023, Council resolved to adopt the Parks and Reserves Bylaw 2023 (Resolution 2023/12 refers), made under Section 106 of the Reserves Act 1977 and Section 145 of the Local Government Act 2002. The Parks and Reserves Bylaw 2023 enables Council to regulate vehicles on sand dunes in Far North District Council parks and reserves only.

Protecting nesting birds

Central Government has introduced a new rule restricting vehicles on certain beaches for a number of areas around Te Taitokerau. The rules have been introduced to protect significant ecological areas and habitats of threatened species. They apply below mean high water springs (effectively, below high tide). Northland Regional Council is responsible for the implementation of the Vehicle Exclusion ones (VEZ) and are in the process of developing their approach to education, compliance, monitoring and enforcement activities.

Overview of engagement and actions to date for identified priority beaches

Tauranga Bay

A community meeting was held in August 2022. Many issues were identified at this public meeting held on the reserve. The concerns from the community were balanced, in terms of protection of nesting birds and safety of beach users. Particular beach contour means only one section of the beach can be used effectively for boat launching.

Concerns regarding nesting birds is regulated by NRC and will be included as part of the implementation of VEZ.

The community identified that it was only one family that was inappropriately driving along the beach and that a bylaw was not needed. A community response was identified as a better approach to this issue. However, the community requested more effective signage. Signage has been implemented.

Rangiputa and Tokerau Beach

Staff seized the opportunity to discuss Vehicles on Beaches at public meetings held in March 2023 regarding Te Hiku Community Board Placemaking Plans at both Tokerau and Rangiputa. Tokerau beach is a vast, 14km beach on the Karikari peninsula. Many people use this beach to ride motorbikes and quads, fish, launch boats, and to exercise themselves and/or their dogs. There are multiple accesses to the beach, one well-maintained access at the Northern End and one accessway that requires a more capable vehicle further down.

The community proposed and agreed that prohibiting vehicles along the northern 1km of the beach during the height of summer would alleviate most of the safety concerns for beach users. Hapū have recently requested further engagement regarding prohibiting vehicles on beaches on the Karikari Peninsula, which is planned to take place in April 2024.

Waimamaku

Residents were concerned with the protection of native flora and fauna at Waimamaku.

Increased signage has been provided for Waimamaku to increase public awareness of the dune environment as well as presence of native birds.

E whai ake nei | Next Steps

Further engagement with hapū and community members on the Karikari peninsula will occur in April 2024. The results from this engagement will inform a paper to Council proposing amendments to Schedule 5 of the Road Use Bylaw 2022

Ngā tāpiritanga | Attachments

NIL
