

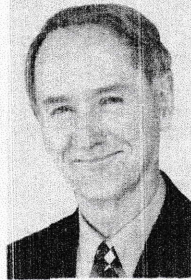
Communities shut out on freedom camping

Freedom Camping has become a nationwide problem exacerbated by the Freedom Camping Act passed in 2011. There are widespread complaints from mayors, councils and communities throughout New Zealand about the problems freedom camping brings to their areas.

The act was created for many thousands expected to come to watch the Rugby World Cup, who might afterwards tour New Zealand and boost the economy. Now all councils are required to provide for freedom campers by making space available in some of their reserves and to create bylaws to deal with them.

This is grossly unacceptable for many reasons. Our public reserves and parks were acquired primarily for public use by the local communities and maintained out of our rates. Until now the Reserves Act effectively banned camping on reserves. A previous Minister of Conservation, however, delegated to councils her responsibility under the Reserves Act to approve council parks bylaws, making them the judge and jury about what they can do. Auckland Council, for example, plans to put freedom camping areas in many of our parks.

To fulfil the requirements of the Freedom Camping Act, it is not necessary



Tony Holman
comment

to have a significant number of reserves affected, it is just that a council cannot refuse to have some areas available. Wellington, for example, has only two sites.

This ministerial delegation gravely undermines protections provided by the Reserves Act and goes against the whole intent of the act and the guardianship role of the Minister and DoC. The Reserves Act guaranteed that no camping was to take place in any local authority park without public approval for camping included in a Reserve Management Plan.

Virtually no communities requested camping, so it could not happen. With the proposed new bylaws that ban is now removed because local body officers (especially in Auckland) have the power to add camping to any reserve which they, for any reason, decide.

Until now, any new management plans or alterations to existing management plans have been required to go through a rigorous public process, including submissions, public hearings by elected members and decisions (not by officers) at the local level with those findings then being forwarded to the council for final scrutiny and adoption by elected councillors.

But a further assault on this protection

The proposed bylaws to accommodate more and more freedom campers are not only anti-environment but also anti-community.

is that officers of the Auckland Council are pushing hard to scrap all of the existing management plans, tailor-made by each community to fit the nature of the place and the community's needs and wants. It seems they want to wipe out each community's wishes and replace all management plans with a single "one size fits all" standard plan which will likely have little relevance to the uniqueness of each place or the wishes of communities.

This has to be a matter of concern for everyone. The people's parks and open space aspirations are under attack.

Other dimensions to this freedom camping problem show that it is not clean, green, or environmentally friendly. It brings with it uncontrolled pollution from campervans lacking waste disposal, more litter, fouling of community spaces, ignorance about kauri dieback, unacceptable noise levels, loss of privacy and visual degradation.

It also means the loss of vital space for local recreation for the community.

The proposed bylaws to accommodate more and more freedom campers are not only anti-environment but also anti-community, affecting the ratepayers and their parks throughout the country.

If the Government is to continue down this rocky road, then it should seriously consider using some of the visitor levy it has imposed. Part of that income stream should flow from the problem source, and be used to solve the problem of "free" facilities for the campers, with the Government setting up their own "freedom camping" sites.

This would remove the burden being placed on councils and ratepayers by providing funds for special freedom camping sites with adequate policing and enforcement, additional rubbish and cleaning requirements, without the need to invade local parks and reserves.

The Government needs to go into reverse in its approach to this problem and the public should tell it so.

Tony Holman was an elected member of the former North Shore City Council for 15 years, an officer of the Auckland Regional Authority and held senior management positions in statutory enterprises.

NEW ZEALAND HERALD

28 DECEMBER 2018