

All hands on deck for summer camping education

Steve Hanrahan, TIA Advocacy Manager

Inside Tourism

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As the summer months loom, our industry and government have been working hard to continue improving the management of responsible camping.

The Government's recent funding boost of \$8 million for 27 councils around the country to better manage freedom camping this summer includes improved infrastructure plus support for more monitoring of campers' behaviour and compliance with the rules. To create a better over-all system for managing freedom camping, Government is also undertaking reviews of relevant legislation including the Freedom Camping Act, the self-containment standards for vehicles and the Camping Ground Regulations.

The Minister of Tourism called for the Responsible Camping Working Group in April this year to identify short and long term solutions to the issues. Tourism operators were represented on the Group by TIA Chief Executive Chris Roberts and Grant Webster from *thl*, alongside representatives from the NZ Motor Caravan Association, local and central government. The Group provided advice to the Government on improving the way responsible camping is managed in New Zealand. The final Report assesses the place of camping in New Zealand, and provides recommendations for creating a successful management system.

The Working Group identified that technology is a strong tool in engaging with visitors about how to camp responsibly. In time to inform our summer influx of campers, one of the Report's recommendations have led to Tourism New Zealand planning an educational social media campaign to run over summer targeting campers, building on the social media campaign that TIA has successfully run the last two years.

In addition Geozone, a network of gps-enabled travel apps, has been given the go ahead for a pilot to enable better use of technology in managing freedom camping by identifying when camping sites are full or have capacity. They are in the research and development phase which includes doing site assessments/reviews around the country.

TIA has also recently re-launched the freedom camping website (camping.org.nz). It's designed to be a one-stop shop for travellers around New Zealand, explaining the rules, regulations and good practice around freedom camping, where you can camp depending on your mode of travel, and guidance on rubbish, waste and water usage.

The website helps educate visitors about camping responsibly so they continue to have positive experiences across New Zealand.

The website is an initiative of the Responsible Camping Forum, consisting of about 30 representatives from the tourism industry as well as local and central government, and was produced in partnership with the Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust.

TIA has spearheaded the Responsible Camping Forum since 2007. Set up to help manage community, social and environmental issues around freedom camping, it has achieved alignment on the best approaches.

The Responsible Camping Forum will be meeting on 1 November to discuss both the short-term and long-term recommendations of the Government's Responsible Camping Working Group report.

Managing responsible camping in New Zealand requires cooperation from many different governmental and industry groups, and it's encouraging to see from the work

undertaken during the off-season, supported by strong, united leadership that we are better-placed to manage freedom coming over the upcoming summer.