

**13 November 2025**

**To Waikato District Council**

**Early engagement feedback about proposal to develop a Reserves and Beaches Bylaw 2026**

**Introduction**

Waikato District Council are undertaking early engagement on vehicles and horse access (specifically) to beaches and reserves as part of their bylaw review, and how and where those activities should be allowed.

“Activities like horse riding and vehicle access (including dirt bikes) are popular and often practical, but they can also cause damage, disturb wildlife, or create safety issues.”

The online engagement questions focus on:

- Should vehicles or horses be allowed on beaches and reserves.
- Would you support a permit system.
- Any other comments

**About Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission**

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission, is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, help to resolve access disputes, and negotiate new access.

The Walking Access Act 2008 is our governing legislation. One of the commission’s legislated duties is to develop and oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors: The Outdoor Access Code. This submission draws on the values outlined in that code.

**Access for a variety of modes**

The commission supports establishing, maintaining and enhancing a range of access opportunities, including walking, cycling and mountain biking, using motorised vehicles including bikes and scooters, on horseback, with firearms and accompanied by dogs.

**Commission observations**

The Commission notes there is limited public access along the coastal area within the Waikato district. Unformed legal roads (ULR), public conservation land (PCL) and

coastal reserves are limited in this area. Unjustified restrictions could further decrease the public's access to the coastline, and we would encourage careful consideration of who would benefit from additional restrictions. However, we acknowledge that restrictions may be important and appropriate at certain locations.

There is substantial unmet demand for access<sup>12</sup> to outdoor spaces for aged, disabled or mobility impaired persons. Research<sup>345</sup> and guidelines<sup>6</sup> have focused on physical access at a (beach) site such as access mats, parking and changing facilities. However, vehicular access may also be appropriate in some locations<sup>7</sup>. Access for tourism ventures, including for disabled tourists<sup>8</sup> also require consideration.

Research<sup>9</sup> about the restriction of beach access for horses and vehicles shows people frequently don't know about bylaws, or the bylaw conditions, and those that do often don't follow them. Bylaw enforcement is also an issue, i.e. compliance and enforcement with speed limits, access points and/or permits.

It appears dirt bikes are included with vehicles, which would also include pedal bikes and e-bikes. There is a growing recreational market for the use of e-bikes, often amongst the ageing population.

There is high demand for horse riding facilities in the Waikato region<sup>10</sup> which includes beaches.

Restricting vehicular and/or horse-riding access to beaches and reserves could compromise public access for fishing and horse-riding along long beach stretches and mana whenua<sup>11</sup> access for customary practices.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.waikato.ac.nz/news-events/news/we-need-beach-access-for-everyone-and-that-includes-people-with-a-disability/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.localmatters.co.nz/hibiscus-news/wheels-in-motion-for-beach-accessibility/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10178453/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/it-s-time-to-make-waves-in-beach-accessibility?in\\_c=articlelistingblock](https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/it-s-time-to-make-waves-in-beach-accessibility?in_c=articlelistingblock)

<sup>5</sup> [https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/4454381/Accessible-Beaches-Report-FINAL66.pdf](https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/4454381/Accessible-Beaches-Report-FINAL66.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/wy2e5psi/outdoors-accessibility-design-guidelines-recreation-aotearoa-17-2-2024-final-pdf-compressed-singleview.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/content/dam/uoc-main-site/documents/pdfs/d-other/geography-repository/GEOG309-20-The-Impact-of-Vehicles-on-Northern-Pegasus-Bay-beaches.pdf>, p11

<sup>8</sup> <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/2a814781-887c-4827-82f2-4daadb5367d3/content>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report_final.pdf) p8, p12, p14, 5.2.3 p17

<sup>10</sup> <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/zkshczth/national-equestrian-facilities-strategy.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report_final.pdf), p5

## Recommendations

The Commission recommends the Council carefully consider the potential impacts on public access, for people of all abilities, and for current and future users of beaches and reserves.

If Council decides to prohibit or restrict vehicle access, we would strongly encourage that the Council to tease out the 'vehicles' category so bicycles / e-bikes are not banned when the problem is motorised vehicles

Should restrictions be pursued the Council take care to provide an information hub for all current and potential users, including those with any form of mobility or other impairment<sup>12</sup>.

The Commission has relevant principles and advice available on our website:

- <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/types-of-access/rivers-lakes-and-coast/marine-and-coastal-area>
- <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/our-work/advocacy/balancing-outdoor-activities>
- <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/our-work/advocacy/horse-riders>
- <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/our-work/publications/advice/outdoor-access-code/being-responsible/horses>

## Conclusion

The Commission urges Waikato District Council to consider how public access might be affected by the Beaches and Reserves Bylaw review for all current and potential users.

Thank you for considering this feedback from Herenga ā Nuku, the Outdoor Access Commission.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2023-12/Vehicles%20on%20Beaches%20Accompanying%20Report_final.pdf), P7.