

Minutes of a hearing of submissions on the Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025 held in Council Chambers, 10 Gorge Road on Wednesday 27 August 2025 at 12.30pm

Present:

Councillor Gavin Bartlett (Chairperson), Councillor Cody Tucker and Councillor Lisa Guy

In attendance:

Carrie Williams (Policy Manager), Luke Place (Principal Policy Advisor), Marie Day (Community Partnerships Manager), Amy Galloway (Responsible Camping Programme Manager), Georgia Pringle (Democracy Services Advisor) and members of the public as detailed below

Apologies

There were no apologies.

Hearing of Submissions

1. Lindsay Collins (Arthurs Point resident)

Mr Collins stated that if the Council allows freedom camping, it should also provide toilet and rubbish facilities within 300 metres of each freedom camping area. He noted that campers often avoid using their self-contained toilets and have been disposing of rubbish in residents' wheelie bins. Mr Collins advised that he and his wife live at the end of Moonlight Track, a single-lane road popular with walkers, parents with strollers, and dog owners, making it unsafe for large campervans.

He questioned why freedom camping is permitted on narrow Moonlight Road when it is prohibited on the wider Coronet Peak Road, which includes turning bays. Mr Collins, whose company has done extensive market branding for Queenstown and Arrowtown, expressed concern that freedom camping could harm the towns' image. In response to a Councillor's question, Mr Collins noted an increase in freedom camping due to the lack of affordable long- and short-term accommodation, resulting in more people sleeping in cars and self-contained vans.

2. Mike Hanff (Chairman of Friends of Lake Hayes)

Mr Hanff noted his concern for the health of Lake Hayes and the surrounding wetlands if freedom camping is allowed in the area. Mr Hanff also noted his concern about the vagueness of the bylaw, meaning it will be hard to monitor and will cause conflict for both campers and locals, particularly at Rutherford Road carpark which is frequently used by locals to access Lake Hayes. Mr Hanff commented that allowing freedom camping around Lake Hayes risk contamination of the lake and undermine ecological restoration efforts of the surrounding wetlands. Mr Hanff recommended creating clearly mapped areas for freedom camping, rather than a described set of rules and prohibiting freedom camping on Rutherford Road.

3. Dave Cassaidy (on behalf of Mt Aspiring College)

Mr Cassaidy raised concerns about the use of Camp Hill as a freedom camping site, which is regularly used by Mt Aspiring College for its Outdoor Pursuits Programme. He noted the potential for conflict, as school groups use the site with trailers and vans to launch kayaks and canoes, which could clash with freedom campers in large vehicles. He stated that the site is already high-risk due to its location on a state highway with a difficult intersection, and that campers may park in a narrow, hard-to-access thoroughfare, forcing students to walk on the road, posing a safety hazard. Mr Cassaidy also raised concerns about the lack of toilet facilities, environmental degradation, and suggested the Wānaka Recreation Centre as a more suitable location.

4. Anna Lisa White (on behalf Gibbston Community Association)

Ms White stated she is not against freedom camping but has reviewed the proposed rural road sites and believes few areas along Gibbston Road are suitable for restricted camping. She noted that freedom campers may not understand what "formed gravel" means and could end up parking in driveways or on private property.

She also mentioned that the Coalpit bus area has two car parks but also functions as a turning circle for the school bus. Ms White expressed concerns about misinterpretation of the rules, biodiversity protection, and lack of Council enforcement—leading to locals feeling obligated to police the area. A Councillor commended Ms White and the Association for their detailed and helpful submission.

5. Sophia Timmerman-Delves (on behalf Gibbston Community Association)

Continuing from Ms White's submission, Ms Timmerman-Delves highlighted specific roads that are unsuitable for restricted freedom camping under section 8.3 of the bylaw:

- Resta Road: Only two suitable areas, both with soil—not formed gravel.
- Rafters Road: Very narrow and has had past issues with campers using the DOC tent-only site. Campers frequently park near vineyards, requiring locals to intervene.
- Gibbston Back Road: Mostly single-track and borders active agricultural land, including use of machinery.

She also noted fire risk, and the lack of toilet and rubbish facilities. Areas around Chard Farm and Coalpit were similarly deemed unsuitable.

6. Craig Barr (on behalf of Liz & Richard Watson)

Mr Barr advised that the Watsons live on Cane Road, where restricted freedom camping is proposed. He acknowledged that Council's Principal Policy Advisor, Mr Place, had confirmed the Watsons' driveway would be removed from the camping map. Mr Place had also agreed to remove Lagoon Valley Road from the map following a previous request.

7. Phil Vautier

Mr Vautier opposed allowing freedom camping on rural roads, specifically Arrow Junction Road, Northern Fairly Road, and Reece Valley Road, recommending these be listed as prohibited.

He pointed out that rural roads must legally be 20 metres wide, making it difficult for 2–3 metre-wide campervans to meet the 5 metre buffer requirement. He recommended that only roads that meet criteria be included, with all others explicitly prohibited. He referenced the Tonkin and Taylor report on road safety. Mr Vautier called the proposal a waste of time and money, difficult to monitor, costly for ratepayers, and likely to lead to conflict between locals and campers.

8. Tony Ward-Holmes (on behalf of Danielle Humes)

Mr Ward-Holmes stated that Ms Humes supports allocating a few designated freedom camping locations, which would be easier to manage. He referenced a spreadsheet showing a steady increase in freedom camping since 2008 and warned that the district would be unable to cope with continued growth. He suggested the Campermate app could be used to direct campers to permitted or low-cost sites. He also referenced user feedback on the app, noting frequent reports of rubbish being left behind and the use of non-self-contained vehicles.

9. Grant McMaster (Closeburn Station)

Mr McMaster described the proposed bylaw as “ludicrous,” arguing that suitable campsites already exist at Moke Lake and Glenorchy. He stated that freedom camping should not be permitted on rural roads in the area due to fire risk—particularly in the red zone near Alpine Retreat and Fernhill. He also raised concerns about narrow roads being unsuitable for campervans, and the presence of litter and human waste degrading the natural landscape.

10. Heather & Don Wallace

Mr and Mrs Wallace, long-time members of the NZMCA, stated that responsible campers are being unfairly associated with bad behaviour. They shared positive examples, such as Alexandra Council’s success in designating a central camping area that boosted the local economy.

They recommended creating “small pods” for camping on reserve land and suggested developing an app where campers could check requirements. They also cited the NZMCA campsite in Te Anau (within a residential area) as a successful model.

11. Tony Strain (Dalefield resident)

Mr Strain lives on East Slope Hill Road, which is proposed as a freedom camping site. He argued that the road cannot meet the 5 metre buffer requirement without campers blocking driveways. He reported personal experiences of littering, privacy invasion, and even a fire caused by an overturned cooker. He also noted that Mace Town Road is unsuitable due to river crossings in the first two kilometres. Mr Strain believes that locals are being displaced from enjoying their own areas and that freedom campers should be paying to use such spaces—not ratepayers.

12. Nick Fifield (on behalf of Arrowtown Village Association)

Mr Fifield questioned the suitability of Flint Street carpark in Arrowtown for freedom camping. If it is to be included, he suggested limiting it to three campervan spots, aligned with other carparks, and conducting a trial period to assess feasibility. He raised concerns about:

- The carpark's proximity to a residential and historic area
 - Poor visibility and potential for illegal camping nearby
 - Poor road surfacing and potholes, which would worsen with campervans
- He also pointed to inconsistencies in time limits across the district, recommending further work to clearly and consistently allocate designated sites.

13. Nick Fifield on behalf of Jillian Hodgson (Arrowtown resident)

Mr Fifield advised that Ms Hodgson opposes allowing freedom camping on all rural roads—even with regulations—due to health and safety risks and potential harm to the district's image. She believes that designated, suitable spots should be clearly identified to aid compliance and ease of monitoring. Ms Hodgson identified Rutherford Road as unsuitable, with only 600 metres of road and 23 properties, raising concerns about excess traffic.

She also named Skippers Road, Mace Town Road, and White Chapel Road as unsuitable due to high use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and the presence of reforestation projects.

14. Kate Cocks (Mt Nicholas Station)

Ms Cocks, a resident of Mt Nicholas Station (next to Walter Peak), raised serious safety concerns about allowing freedom camping on nearby rural roads. She described rapid weather changes, flooding, washouts, and dangerous river crossings with no reception between crossings. She warned that tourists in campervans might wrongly assume the roads are safe, potentially putting local landowners in the position of rescuing stranded campers.

Other concerns included:

- Frequent use of the roads by cyclists and e-bikes
- Roads passing through active farming areas
- Risk of dogs attacking livestock
- Fire hazards, litter, and toilet waste

15. Colleen Carr (Hāwea resident)

Ms Carr, who lives on the foreshore adjacent to the lake reserve, has served as a freedom camping warden and contributed to the reserve's care. She noted that Hāwea lacks recreational areas and is growing quickly, raising concerns about locals being excluded from facilities due to overcrowding—already a problem. While happy to share the lake for recreation, she opposed its use for washing dishes and bathing. Other concerns included:

- Safety of local children due to unfamiliar visitors
- Use of bushes as toilets
- Inaccessibility of community spaces for events. She recommended that the Council work with Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) to reduce freedom camping on the foreshore.

16. Penny Hutchins (Branches Station Chairperson)

Ms Hutchins strongly urged that Skippers Road be prohibited. She argued it fails to meet bylaw requirements, features sheer drops, limited reversing points, and becomes impassable each year due to weather conditions. She cited high risks of car accidents,

camper injuries, fire hazards, and landscape damage. Ms Hutchins emphasised that bylaws must be enforceable and realistic.

17. Alison Brown (Hāwea resident)

Ms Brown, a long-term resident and member of the Guardians group campaigning against freedom camping in Hāwea since 2011, urged the Council to enter into an enforcement agreement with Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) to prohibit freedom camping.

She noted:

- The draft bylaw references a possible agreement with NZTA to declare land as local authority land for the purpose of prohibiting freedom camping.
- The Guardians are currently working with LINZ to restrict access to the lakefront and lakebed at Craig Burn.
- Through the Hāwea Community Association, the Guardians hold a licence to occupy from LINZ, allowing for native planting.

Ms Brown referenced a prior agreement between Council and LINZ to manage the foreshore for recreational use only, not camping.

18. Neal Brown (Hāwea resident)

Mr Brown stated that from his property in John Creek, he can observe up to 200–300 vehicles per day, with many campers staying overnight on the reserve. He noted social media posts encourage camping under the willow trees there. He has contacted Council regarding maintenance of the trees and stated that signage is too small to be effective in enforcing freedom camping rules.

19. Anna Marie Chin (Arrowtown resident)

Ms Chin, a resident of Morven Ferry Road for 25 years, believes that all rural roads should be prohibited for freedom camping particularly Morven Ferry Road, Arrow Junction Road and Reece Valley Road. She referenced QLDC maps provided in her submission, noting:

- Arrow Junction Road is not only residential but also part of the Queenstown Trail, with over 82,000 cyclists using the track in the last two months.
- All three roads exceed the 70 km/h speed limit allowed under the draft bylaw, as outlined in the Tonkin + Taylor report.
- None of the roads have sealed areas or meet the 5 metre buffer requirement for safe parking.

She stressed that these roads are heavily used by walkers, parents with strollers, children, and horses, and that camping would pose significant safety risks. She recommended that if not all rural roads can be prohibited, at a minimum the three roads mentioned above should be.

20. Erna Spijkerbosch

Ms Spijkerbosch acknowledged the difficult position the Council is in and highlighted the need to distinguish between free parking, free camping, and freedom camping. She has previously submitted on this topic and is a long-time NZMCA member.

She asked that no freedom camping sites be allowed in the Boundary Road public carpark, which is located next to a village green and children's playground. Referring to issues on Park Street last summer, she urged that such activities not be introduced into the CBD. She also called on the Council to review self-containment regulations to better protect the environment.

21. James Imlach (on behalf of NZ Motor Caravan Association)

Mr Imlach stated that while the NZMCA does not support a completely unrestricted approach to freedom camping, they oppose the overly prohibitive nature of the draft bylaw. He stated that:

- Excluding reserves from the camping map is unreasonable and inconsistent with Council's Responsible Camping Strategy and Regenerative Tourism Plan.
- The 10m buffer from bodies of water is too restrictive.
- Rural road options lack site-specific assessment and are often unsafe.
- The urban area camping ban lacks clarity around monitoring and enforcement of time limits, leading to confusion and non-compliance.

Mr Imlach referred to NZMCA's written submission, using Waitaki District Council as a positive example. He urged the Council to adopt a more inclusive, proportionate, and evidence-based approach.

22. Tony Ward-Holmes (on behalf of Otago Whitewater)**23. Tony Ward-Holmes (on behalf of Esther Water)**

Mr Ward-Holmes raised concerns about multiple proposed freedom camping locations:

- Rafters Road: Previously excluded due to health, safety, and access issues, and should remain so.
- Camp Hill Road carpark: Owned by Central Otago Whitewater and currently experiencing overcrowding due to campers. The landowner may revoke access entirely, which would leave no parking for locals or visitors. He recommended prohibiting camping at the true left carpark.

He provided photographs of the Hāwea Whitewater Park, noting it is a well-maintained community asset with local planting. He warned that poor camper behaviour could lead to the community losing access to this space. He also noted that Allenby Road is an urban area and therefore unsuitable. He concluded that allowing camping in random spots across the district is not practical or manageable.

24. Sue Bradley (Arthurs Point resident)

Ms Bradley described the proposed bylaw as too liberal, highlighting the following concerns:

- Ratepayer burden: Locals are funding monitoring and enforcement while campers stay for free and may not contribute to the economy.
- Loss of access: Freedom campers could take over rural roads and prevent locals from accessing recreational areas.
- Poor behaviour: Including littering, hanging washing, and occupying excessive space.
- Inadequate enforcement: Council will not be able to keep up with complaints.

- Time period: She proposed changing the permitted stay period from 6 pm–8 am to something shorter.
- Environmental impact: The bylaw could harm the district's natural beauty and damage community trust in Council.

25. Steve Sanderson

Mr Sanderson agreed with the allowance for urban freedom camping in the bylaw but disagreed with the inclusion of rural roads. He stated that:

- Council has not conducted a cost-benefit analysis.
- The bylaw appears focused on controlling freedom camping rather than offering practical solutions.
- \$477,000 per year is being spent on monitoring and enforcement.
- Allowing camping on rural roads misleads international tourists, placing them at risk due to unfamiliarity with local road conditions.
- Rutherford Road camping could harm nearby wetlands and limit local access to the lake.

26. Richard Tyler

Mr Tyler said he is not opposed to freedom camping in principle but believes allowing it on rural roads is too ambiguous. He cited difficulties in understanding and enforcing rules such as:

- The 5 metre buffer from the road
- Parking only on formed gravel
- Avoiding private property

He also raised concerns about impacts on farming activities, accessways, and rubbish truck turning areas. Mr Tyler recommended that Council carry out site assessments to identify which roads genuinely meet the requirements, simplifying both enforcement and public understanding.

27. Bette Cosgrove (Wellington resident)

Ms Cosgrove, a responsible camper and former contributor to Wellington's self-containment regulations, recognised the complex challenges facing the district, especially with a small ratepayer base and high tourist volume. She reflected on the 2024/2025 summer, when there was no freedom camping bylaw in place, and observed that many issues raised now were not evident during that time. She noted:

- Most infringements were for non-certified campervans, not for damaging the environment.
- The perception of campers as "messy freeloaders" is not supported by the data.
- Restrictive bylaws should reflect real issues.

Ms Cosgrove stated that rural roads are not viable, and Council should:

- Provide toilet and rubbish facilities if allocating sites.
- Consider solutions like New Plymouth Council's approach of creating wider parking spaces for campers.
- Acknowledge the cost to ratepayers for monitoring, enforcement, and education.

The hearing adjourned at 3.37pm