

Responsible Camping

Summer debrief and discussion of next steps
16 April 2026 Council workshop

Purpose and agenda for workshop

Purpose of this workshop: Provide information and analysis from the first summer of the 2025 bylaw in operation, and outline Council considerations to inform future work

Agenda:

- Context
- Summer overview 2025/26
- Budget
- Future work programme
- Balancing community and legal considerations
- Allenby Place
- Beacon Point
- Next steps



Context



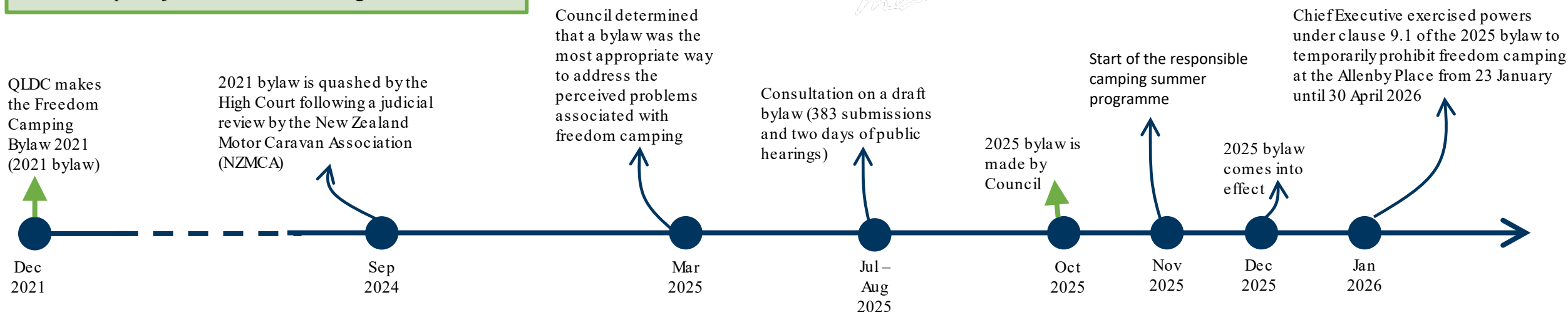
The Freedom Camping Act 2011

- The default presumption in the Freedom Camping Act 2011 (FC Act) is that freedom camping is permitted on most Council land.
- A bylaw can only be made to protect:
 - the area,
 - the health and safety of people who may visit the area,
 - access to the area (s.11(2) of the FC Act).
- As an outcome of the 2024 High Court decision that quashed QLDC's 2021 freedom camping bylaw, Council has closely applied the [High Court's findings](#) of what may or may not be considered in the development of the 2025 bylaw, to mitigate the risks of a subsequent judicial review challenge.



QLDC's Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025

- QLDC's [Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025](#) (2025 bylaw) provides that freedom camping is:
 - prohibited in urban areas
 - allowed in certified self-contained vehicles in 15 designated car parks across the district (141 spaces)
 - allowed in certified self-contained vehicles on rural roads such as off-road laybys
- The bylaw does not include reserve land; enforcement of freedom camping of reserves is managed under the Reserves Act 1977.
- Having the 2025 bylaw in place provides Council with significantly more ability to regulate freedom camping than having no bylaw at all.
- Other mechanisms (i.e. traffic and parking tools) and advocacy are our main tools for issues outside of what the Freedom Camping Act 2011 and a bylaw allows councils to regulate.



Summer Overview 2025-2026

The Numbers | 1 December 2025 – 31 March 2026

Request for Service (RFS)	932
Freedom Camping Infringements	1,953
Reserves Act Infringements	136
Summer Ambassador Site Visits	1,824
Campers 'Checked In'	9,168
Surveys With Campers	337
Litres of rubbish and recycling collected	1,620 (approx.)
Media Enquiries	13
LGOIMA requests	5

See supplementary information for detailed analysis on each of the 15 designated areas in the bylaw.



Budget - Responsible Camping Programme

2021 Bylaw judicial review	
External Legal Costs (NZMCA Judicial Review)	\$ 135,475
	\$ 135,475
2025 Bylaw development	
Tonkin + Taylor - Site Assessments + Technical Report	\$ 248,500
	\$ 248,500
2025 Bylaw implementation works	
Blue Paint	\$ 2,910
Wheel stops + Installation	\$ 4,121
Purchase and installation of signs	\$ 26,975
Project Support	\$ 12,075
	\$ 46,081
2025-2026 Responsible Camping Programme*	
Summer Ambassadors - Wages + resources	\$ 165,642
Fleet vehicles	\$ 29,316
CamperMate Annual Data	\$ 3,000
Twilight Patrols - Cougar Security	\$ 11,395
Communications, resources and additional signs	\$ 8,226
	\$ 217,578
2025-2026 Bylaw support	
External Legal Advice (Ongoing)	\$ 6,119
Bylaw Policy Support (Estimate)	\$ 40,000
	\$ 46,119
2025-2026 Enforcement patrols*	
Enforcement Officers	\$ 95,893
	\$ 95,893
Total	\$ 763,777

Infringements issued	
Infringement Issued \$	\$ 800,800
Estimate Return \$ **	\$ 560,560

* Expenditure until March 2026

**Infringements can take up to six months to progress through the enforcement cycle and reach court, and payments may then continue for several years. The Enforcement Team report on this annually, approximately six months after year end. Historically, a recovery rate of approximately 70% is achieved for freedom camping infringements. This percentage has been applied to the infringement amount issued so far.

Council staff costs attributed to the Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025 have exceeded 200k since October 2024.



Future Work Programmes



'Check-in' System

The check-in system relies on voluntary compliance and does not prevent campers from occupying spaces without registering. A less than 50% compliance rate has been achieved on average across all sites.

Potential improvements include exploring options that better align with camper arrival times to reflect real-time site use.



Technology Solutions

Continue to explore technology solutions that could be trialed such as boom gates with number-plate recognition linked to an online booking system. This would help manage capacity, improve compliance, and provide real-time visibility of site users. Trial at the Red Bridge site to monitor efficiency.



Pay-per-use facilities

Introducing pay-per-use facilities, such as toilets or showers in high-demand locations, could help ensure visitors contribute directly to the cost of essential infrastructure, improving community and environmental impacts.



Other Camping Options

Investigation of the suitability of Council land (including reserve land) for freedom camping and low-cost camping.



Kiwi Camping

There is a strong demand for affordable, back-to-basics camping. Campgrounds on QLDC owned land should continue to provide a range of low-cost, simple camping opportunities and retain "kiwi camping" character to ensure camping remains accessible to local families and future generations.



Responsible Camping Strategy 2022-2027


Update the Responsible Camping Strategy to ensure it reflects learnings from previous summer seasons, aligns with current operational tools, and sets out priorities and the next steps for balancing visitor demand with community and environmental outcomes.

Balancing community and legal considerations

Would like a
more
permissive
freedom
camping
regime



Would like a
more
restrictive
freedom
camping
regime

- 
- QLDC has closely applied the [High Court's findings](#) of what may or may not be considered in a bylaw, to mitigate the risks of a judicial review challenge to the 2025 bylaw.
 - Varying from this approach means that ratepayers bear the costs of defending a judicial review application from either end of this spectrum.
 - If such a challenge were to be successful, it introduces the risk of having the 2025 bylaw quashed, and leaving the district without a bylaw for a period of time.

RFS data often indicates community views and perceptions of problems, rather than being about a matter that may be regulated under the FC Act or a bylaw.



Temporary prohibition context

- On 15 January 2026, the QLDC Chief Executive exercised powers under clause 9.1 of the 2025 bylaw to approve a temporary prohibition on freedom camping at Allenby Place from Friday 23 January 2026 through to Thursday 30 April 2026. This was in response to issues with:
 - access to the area via the narrow laneway, that is part of the area (approx. 4.2m wide)
 - access due to increased vehicle use, and specifically camping vehicles that are generally larger than the vehicles that generally used this carpark previously
 - shared use of the access road by three resident properties, pedestrians and freedom camping vehicles
 - related to the above, health and safety concerns caused by freedom camping vehicle movements on the area.
- Three additional carparking spots were added temporarily to the Wānaka Recreation Centre to mitigate this.



Direction to investigate

Initial investigations indicate that the circumstances at Allenby Place are sufficiently different to the 14 other restricted freedom camping areas to warrant further research and analysis to determine the feasibility of Council considering a bylaw amendment process to permanently remove Allenby Place from the bylaw as a restricted freedom camping area. Staff are seeking feedback today that the next step is a formal report presenting the findings of this investigation so that Council can make a decision on how it would like to proceed.

What is a bylaw amendment process?

- The FC Act allows councils to amend bylaws by following the special consultative procedure.
- Bylaw amendments are confined to a particular, specific provision. Consideration of the bylaw as a whole is a 'review'.
- Council would need to satisfy the FC Act s.11(2) considerations (a bylaw can only be made to protect the area, the health and safety of people who may visit the area, access to the area)
- To satisfy s.11(2) would require evidence that was not available when the bylaw was made.
- An amendment in this case would be confined to the specific circumstances of Allenby Place (and consider adding spaces to Wānaka Recreation Centre (WRC)).
- The scope of consultation would be limited to seeking feedback on Allenby Place and the WRC.

Beacon Point - and other FC areas

- The Beacon Point Road restricted freedom camping area has received more RFS than any other area, at 122 compared to 76 at Camp Hill Road, noting:
 - 63 of these RFS are about freedom camping outside the marked spaces (an enforceable offence)
 - 67% of these RFS were provided by 3 people.
- The themes of the majority of RFS and investigated/enforced non-compliance at Beacon Point are comparable to the other restricted freedom camping areas in the District. They do not mean that freedom camping in accordance with the restrictions of the bylaw is not suitable under the conditions set out in the FC Act and caselaw.
- The 2024 High Court decision was clear that a council's ability to protect the area is isolated to the effects on the area; effects outside the area may not be regulated via a freedom camping bylaw, other tools need to be considered.
- For Beacon Point, this means that concerns about the road leading to, and the land around the Beacon Point freedom camping area (land outside the yellow in map at right) are not part of the "area" that QLDC may control via the 2025 bylaw.
- This can be contrasted to Allenby Place, where the issues that are being investigated relate to access, health and safety within the area.



Why isn't prohibition of freedom camping being explored for Beacon Point, or other areas?

- Initial investigations for Beacon Point Road, as well as the other restricted freedom camping areas, do not show the range of issues identified at Allenby Place.
- These investigations have also confirmed that the circumstance and range of RFS and infringements for Beacon Point do not distinctly differ from the other sites and therefore there is no indication that any factors under s.11(2) may now potentially apply to Beacon Point Road or any of the other sites.
- Accordingly, amending the 2025 bylaw to remove Beacon Point Road would appreciably increase the risk of judicial review by either those that support a more permissive freedom camping bylaw and/or those that wish to see freedom camping prohibited at any of the other existing areas.
- To avoid this risk, the assessment and rationale for every site in the 2025 Bylaw (effectively a full review) would need to be redone to ensure a consistent analysis and approach across all sites.
- Established practice is to have a bylaw in place for a reasonable period of time to be able to refine and improve implementation and enforcement activities and to assess its overall effectiveness; reviewing a bylaw without allowing time for these elements is not considered best practice.
- It could be interpreted as somewhat disingenuous for Council to have gone through a bylaw process in 2025 and involved the community, and then proceed with a review of it within a year of it being operational.

Councillor feedback and next steps

Proposed next steps include:

- 16 April – Council workshop - operation of the bylaw over summer, options for Allenby Place and other work streams
- 25 June – Council meeting – options report on a bylaw amendment
- 23 July – Council meeting – depending on decision at June meeting, adoption of statement of proposal and draft bylaw for consultation
- August – consultation
- October - hearings
- 17 December – Council decision on a bylaw amendment

