

Minutes of a hearing of submissions on the Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025 held in Council Chambers, 10 Gorge Road. Queenstown on Tuesday 26 August 2025 at 9.00am

Present:

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

In attendance:

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

Apologies

There were no apologies.

Commencement of Hearing

The Democracy Services Advisor called the meeting to order inviting the elected members to elect a chair.

Election of Chair

It was moved (Councillor Tucker/Councillor Guy):

That the hearing panel agree to appoint Councillor Bartlett to chair the hearing.

Motion carried unanimously.

Councillor Bartlett assumed the Chair.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

Confirmation of Agenda

It was moved (Councillor Tucker/Councillor White):

That the agenda be confirmed with the below addition:

- **Acceptance of late submissions for consideration.**

Motion carried unanimously.

Summary by Reporting Officer

Ms Williams, spoke to the officer report on the submissions, and it was noted that:

- Submissions in the hearing report were taken as read and agreed that questions from the panel would be provided in written form to the reporting officer after the two days of hearings, ahead of deliberations on Thursday.

Hearing of Submissions

1. Allan Brent (Wānaka resident)

Mr Brent acknowledged the technical difficulties the Council experienced with the previous bylaw and noted that any viable bylaw is likely to disappoint some members of the public. He suggested that a new bylaw may not be necessary and recommended relying on common law instead, which is more effectively enforced by police.

If a bylaw is introduced, Mr Brent advised against allowing freedom camping at Allenby Park (beneath Mt Iron), citing high fire risk due to campers cooking under large mānuka trees. He also opposed freedom camping at Camp Hill Road Reserve, referencing similar fire risks and potential obstruction to cyclists using the area.

2. Rosie Hill (on behalf of Orange Lakes NZ and Waterfall Park Developments)

Ms Hill expressed concern over a proposed freedom camping area on Meads Road, which runs through the owner's homestead. She argued that due to its remote nature, the area is unsuitable for freedom camping. She highlighted potential health and safety risks, fire hazards, disruption to farming activities, and the likelihood of campers inadvertently trespassing onto private land. She noted there are more appropriate alternative sites nearby.

Ms Hill raised concerns about the Council's ability to effectively enforce freedom camping regulations district-wide. She relayed landowners' fears about potential anti-social behaviour from freedom campers, particularly in the Ayrburn Domain, and the risk of conflict arising between campers and locals.

3. Malcolm Papworth (Wānaka resident)

Mr Papworth stated that the proposed bylaw is overly restrictive. He emphasised the benefits of freedom camping, including cultural exchange and support for local businesses. He recommended greater clarity around technical standards, suggesting specific reference to green self-containment stickers (similar to the Kaikōura District Council model). He proposed multilingual signage (in at least three languages) across all 158 proposed locations to help campers understand the rules.

Mr Papworth expressed concern that the Council lacks sufficient time to adequately consider the volume and complexity of submissions. He recommended extending the consultation period beyond the local elections to enable more informed decision-making.

4. Dr Jane Shearer (Gibbston resident)

Dr Shearer's main concern was the unenforceability of the bylaw, which she believes will lead to conflict and disappointed expectations. She specifically referenced the allowance of parking on yellow lines with a 5m buffer, stating that freedom campers will likely park all along the roadside without adhering to restrictions.

She commented that, given the Council's inability to enforce the bylaw on rural roads district-wide, local residents will bear the burden of managing freedom campers, which could create a negative tourist experience. Dr Shearer suggested directing freedom campers to park in the CBD where designated spots exist and where campers can contribute more to the local economy.

5. Tony McQuilken (Queenstown resident)

Mr McQuilken opposed allowing restricted freedom camping along Glencoe Road, describing it as a pristine area with historic stone walls popular among walkers and cyclists. He criticized the designation of rural roads in the bylaw as a desktop exercise lacking local knowledge.

He raised four main concerns:

- Freedom camping will concentrate on 'nodes' such as lookouts, laybys, and road maintenance areas.
- Corridors of freedom campers will develop along roadsides due to lack of monitoring capability.
- Freedom campers are a nuisance, polluting and degrading the environment to the detriment of other road users and landowners.
- Visitor and resident numbers in the Queenstown Lakes District are growing, so protecting the visual amenity of roads is crucial.

He requested that the Council remove the rural roads allowance entirely or, at minimum, prohibit freedom camping on the Crown Range Highway, Glencoe Road, and Tobin's Track. Mr McQuilken stated that freedom campers should be directed to campgrounds and pay for services.

6. Jo Knight (on behalf of Luggate Community Association)

Ms Knight presented an image depicting freedom camping activity at Red Bridge Reserve from the previous summer. As a local resident and regular user, she highlighted community concerns over unmanaged freedom camping at the reserve, noting that smaller campervans with questionable certifications were the main issue, not the NZ Motor Caravan Association members.

She reported that prior to the campground setup, the reserve was dirty and unhygienic; conditions had improved but were now deteriorating due to overcrowding and ineffective management by the Campground Supervisor.

Ms Knight recommended:

- Installing cameras to monitor campers.
- Enforcing a maximum stay of 1–3 nights.
- Improving signage.
- Adding another dump station and more toilets.
- Strictly prohibiting dumping rubbish or human waste in the Mata-Au (Clutha River).
- Designating a carpark at the top of the reserve for locals' recreational access, as current parking is overcrowded with campers.
- Creating specific parking spots for freedom campers with strict penalties for non-compliance.
- Fully fencing off the NZTA area adjacent to the reserve.
- Collaborating with Otago Regional Council (ORC) to manage the swimming hole.
- Having QLDC Responsible Camping Ambassadors attend monthly Luggate Community Association meetings to provide updates and build trust.

She concluded by urging the Council to adopt these suggestions to ensure safe and responsible camping in shared spaces, noting locals' right to enjoy their recreational areas.

7. Hannah Cochrane (on behalf of Hunter Valley Farming Company)

Ms Cochrane advised that Hunter Valley Farming Company operates on Meads Road near the top of Lake Hāwea and expressed concern that freedom camping along this road poses risks to essential farming activities. She highlighted that camping in laybys could lead to injuries and property damage.

Ms Cochrane recounted an incident two years ago when freedom campers held a party of about 200 people near the farm, leaving litter, faeces, and toilet paper in areas used for stock movement and boat launching. She expressed concern that such behaviour might recur.

She noted that Kidds Bush campsite was established to accommodate campers and alleviate freedom camping on rural roads, offering low-cost facilities. Ms Cochrane also mentioned awareness of some freedom campers trading self-containment certification stickers illicitly.

8. Mandy Bell (on behalf of Criffel Station)

Ms Bell stated that Criffel Station opposes the bylaw entirely. She noted that approximately 3 km along Mt Barker Road would be affected by the proposed rural roads allowance and that they already experience litter issues along the road and driveways most nights.

Ms Bell pointed out that many freedom campers do not adhere to the requirement to have onboard toilets, with some parking in front of letterboxes and farming gates, impeding stock movements. She also raised concerns about fire risk due to long grass near camping spots.

She warned that allowing parking on formed gravel parts of roads could lead campers to unknowingly park on private property and doubted the Council's ability to enforce these regulations effectively.

9. Ian Neale (member of New Zealand Motor Caravan Association (NZMCA))

Mr Neale identified himself as a member of NZMCA and expressed support for the previous freedom camping bylaw, disagreeing with NZMCA's lobbying against it. He questioned why the proposed bylaw allows freedom camping within town boundaries, noting that the 2011 Freedom Camping Act prohibits camping in town boundaries.

He raised concerns about campers not using their self-contained toilets, instead urinating and defecating outside, which is undesirable in urban residential areas.

Mr Neale predicted that Wānaka's Allenby Park and Beacon Point Road carparks would become overcrowded, making enforcement of the "leave by 7 am" rule impossible. He also noted that allowing camping in these areas could negatively impact house prices.

He agreed with concerns about Mt Iron being a high fire risk area due to flammable manuka trees. Mr Neale recommended reserving land near townships for freedom camping to avoid disturbing locals and suggested the bylaw does not adequately consider the local environment.

10. Brett Giddens (individual and on behalf of Sam Kealey)

Mr Giddens stated he is not opposed to freedom camping and understands that the Council is legislated to allow it but emphasized the need for clearer controls within the legislation. He expressed disappointment about the lack of attention to traffic safety, specifically recommending that Skippers Valley Road be prohibited from freedom camping due to safety concerns and policing difficulties.

Mr Giddens suggested the Council seek more expert advice on traffic controls and devote additional time to deliberations to improve the bylaw. He noted that accommodation on rural roads is not permitted without resource consent, highlighting this as a significant legal issue.

When asked by a member about deficiencies in the bylaw regarding traffic controls, Mr Giddens referenced the Tonkin+Taylor report, which states that freedom camping should not be allowed on roads with speed limits over 70 km/h, yet some roads designated for freedom camping have limits up to 100 km/h.

11. Grant Fyfe (on behalf of the Maungawera Catchment)

Mr Fyfe explained that the Maungawera Catchment is a valley off the state highway and expressed concern about allowing large campervans on this road. He noted that the Camp Hill carpark is already busy with walkers, kayakers, bikers, and swimmers, and that permitting freedom camping there would cause overcrowding unless the carpark is expanded.

He advised there are no suitable parking spots along Maungawera Valley that comply with rural roads regulations without blocking driveways or disrupting essential farming activities.

In response to a Councillor's question about recreational use of the road and carpark, Mr Fyfe said the road is a key commuter route between Hāwea and Albert Town, with the Clutha River being a popular local swimming spot. He added that kayak and Hāwea Wave competitions take place in the area. Mr Fyfe warned that overcrowding from freedom campers could force people to park on the state highway, creating a significant safety hazard.

12. Erin Vercoe (on behalf of Real NZ)

Ms Vercoe stated that Real NZ opposes allowing restricted freedom camping at Walter Peak, which the proposed bylaw permits. She cited safety concerns due to the narrow road and frequent passage of large trucks.

Ms Vercoe also highlighted risks to staff and guests, noting that 250 to 500 guests per day cross the road to access Real NZ facilities, and staff live in the area. She described Walter Peak as more similar to an urban area than a rural road.

Ms Vercoe added that enforcement would be difficult because Walter Peak is only accessible by water. When asked if freedom camping is currently an issue there, she said it is not but warned that allowing it under the bylaw could create problems. She also mentioned a nearby campsite as a suitable alternative for campers.

13. Kim Fogelberg (Hāwea resident)

Ms Fogelberg opposed freedom camping on rural roads, citing the burden it places on locals to monitor campers and the confusion it creates about permissible camping areas. She noted that Hāwea has a growing community of busy working families who use many of the areas where the bylaw proposes restricted freedom camping.

Ms Fogelberg identified Camp Hill Road, Watkins Road, and McCarthy Road as unsuitable for freedom camping due to busy farming activities and frequent milk truck traffic. She also pointed out that freedom camping in these areas would increase maintenance needs on farm roads.

After surveying the area, she found no locations where freedom campers could comply with the bylaw's regulations and recommended that site-specific location checks be conducted rather than relying solely on mapping exercises.

14. Kirsten Roy (Albert Town resident)

Ms Roy and her family spent the past two years freedom camping around New Zealand and observed that most freedom camping issues arise from people without certified campervans. She made several comments and recommendations:

- Freedom camping areas need to be clearly defined; allowing entire rural roads is unenforceable and causes local frustration and negative tourist experiences.
- Consider permitting campervans in front of the Wānaka Showgrounds.

- Reopen the Boundary Creek site near Makarora for freedom camping.
- Create a second parking area for locals at the Camp Hill carpark, separate from freedom campers.
- Implement clear signage with strict enforcement and fines.
- Enable the Council's Snap Send Solve system for reporting non-compliant freedom campers.
- Develop multiple low-cost camping spots across the district (e.g., \$5 membership fees). She noted that in other districts, landowners, scout dens, community centres, and sports fields allow freedom camping for a small fee, generating income while concentrating campers.
- Recommended installing Kiwi Cash toilets and shower facilities, similar to those in Southland, Waitaki, and South Waitaki.

15. Bruce Raubenheimer (Wānaka resident)

Mr Raubenheimer strongly opposed expanding freedom camping to benefit a small group of low-value tourists. He warned that allowing restricted freedom camping at Beacon Point Road carpark would lead to waste and litter problems, causing irreversible damage to nearby Lake Wānaka.

He expressed concern that increased freedom camping would erode locals' sense of ownership over their environment and amenities, fostering resentment as campers contribute little to the community while leaving waste behind.

Mr Raubenheimer highlighted the risk of losing high-value tourists who support the local economy, as freedom camping could damage the district's reputation for unspoiled nature. He emphasized that freedom camping must occur in appropriate locations and be strictly enforced.

He called for a focus on managed, responsible camping, noting that Beacon Point is a taonga (treasure) that requires protection.

16. Nicole Malpass (on behalf of Murray Frost)

Ms Malpass stated that Mr. Frost opposes the bylaw, particularly the allowance of freedom camping at Beacon Point. She noted that this area is heavily used by locals and visitors for swimming, walking, biking, boat launching, and parking.

Ms Malpass highlighted concerns about a small access area with a poorly formed dead-end road, which could cause congestion and conflicts between campers and locals. With only five designated spaces for freedom campers, potential conflicts may arise. She recommended using the Wānaka Recreation Centre as a more suitable freedom camping area.

Other concerns included the 6 pm start time for freedom camping at Beacon Point and the distance between camping spots and toilets. She stressed that monitoring must be proactive rather than reactive.

17. Nicole Malpass (on behalf of Medius Wānaka)

Ms Malpass noted that Medius Wānaka's primary concern is the allowance of restricted freedom camping on rural roads. She stated that the Council relied on generic mapping rather than conducting site-specific assessments.

She commented that the lack of compliant camping spaces along rural roads would lead to illegal camping and obstruct access for other road users. Referring to the Tonkin Taylor report, she pointed out that freedom camping should not be allowed on roads with speed limits over 70 km/h, yet Halliday Road, which has a 100 km/h speed limit, has been designated as a suitable camping area.

Ms Malpass recommended conducting site-specific assessments, making the results public, installing signage, and providing more amenities if budget allows.

18. Nicole Malpass (on behalf of Mata Au Investments)

Ms Malpass echoed concerns similar to those raised for Medius Wānaka regarding restricted freedom camping on rural roads. She emphasized the need for site-specific assessments rather than generic mapping and raised concerns about illegal camping and access constraints for other road users.

19. Nicole Malpass (on behalf of Venator Cardrona Terraces)

Ms Malpass advised that Venator Cardrona Terraces own land on Morris Road, which is designated as a suitable restricted freedom camping area. However, she believes it is unsuitable due to the 80 km/h speed limit (referencing the Tonkin Taylor report) and the road's challenging topography.

She noted that while Venator generally supports freedom camping along some rural roads, it is important to carry out site-specific assessments to ensure safety and suitability.

20. Silken Laumann (Wānaka resident)

21. Silken Laumann (on behalf of David Patchell-Evans)

Ms Laumann stated she lives directly opposite Beacon Point carpark, describing it as a local gem with beautiful surroundings, used year-round for walking and biking.

She expressed concerns about how freedom camping impacts the immediate and surrounding areas. The five designated camping spots are directly in front of her property, creating a feeling of intrusion. Concerns included noise and light pollution, safety issues for locals, campers dumping grey water and human waste, washing in the lake with soap/shampoo, using bushes to urinate and defecate, and public undressing.

Ms Laumann highlighted that Beacon Point adjoins a protected wetland at risk of damage by freedom campers. She noted freedom camping was never intended to be allowed near playgrounds and suggested alternative sites such as Glendhu Bay or local landowners offering their properties at minimal cost. She also commented on the impracticality of patrolling rural roads and cited examples of Canadian towns negatively affected by unplanned tourism growth.

22. Dennis Hunt & Christine Pawson

Mr Hunt and Mrs. Pawson strongly opposed the bylaw, specifically the inclusion of Halliday Road as a freedom camping area and the blanket approach taken for rural roads. They stated the bylaw is inconsistent with clause 11.2 of the Freedom Camping Act and emphasized the need for targeted, evidence-based restrictions. They noted Halliday Road's 100 km/h speed limit exceeds the 70 km/h limit recommended by the Tonkin Taylor report. There are no legal or safe parking spots on Halliday Road that meet bylaw requirements. The turning circle on Halliday Road is already used for rubbish collection, mail delivery, and recreational parking.

Mr Hunt noted the road lacks a 5-metre buffer, has no formed gravel, does not ensure safe vehicle stopping, obstructs access to public amenities, and compromises safety during essential farming activities. He also stated that compliance with self-containment regulations is not reliably enforced.

All 32 residents of Halliday Road signed a submission opposing the bylaw and respectfully asked Council to designate Halliday Road as a prohibited area. A Councillor noted that the panel wants to understand why Halliday Road was included in the proposed bylaw.

The hearing adjourned at 11.28am.