

Submission on the Freedom Camping Discussion Document:

17 May 2021

Submission on the Review of Freedom Camping

BYATA welcomes the opportunity to support the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on its review of freedom camping and to comment on the Discussion Document – Supporting Sustainable Freedom Camping in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. Who are BYATA:

The Backpacker Youth Adventure Travel Association is a collective (120+) of tourism businesses, which rely heavily on 18-35yo youth travelers visiting New Zealand. Our group's pou's are to Advocate, Collaborate, and Communicate on behalf of members to ensure a healthy youth tourism sector. Our members include those from the vehicle and facility provider camping industry.

Our timu is to lead the next generation of traveler and our tirohanga is to be the independent voice for the youth travel industry. We are on a mission to define and advocate the true value of the sector, demonstrating that our customers for life are the poster child of the four capitals model.

Please contact Chris Sperring, BYATA Chair for further information with regards this submission on 021 1413757 or info@byata.org.nz

2. BYATA on behalf of its membership strongly advocates for:

- **Proposal 2:** Making it mandatory for freedom campers to stay in a vehicle that is certified self-contained unless they are staying at a site with toilets.
- **Proposal 3:** Improve the regulatory tools for government land managers by developing a regulatory system for self-contained vehicles and a stronger infringement scheme with higher fines and penalties.
- **Proposal 4:** Limiting the types of vehicles which can be self-contained will stifle innovation in the industry and should not be required if the certification is regulated as per Proposal 3.

The market is best placed to make judgments on the appropriateness of which vehicles should have self-contained facilities.

3. Freedom camping is a complex issue. It is an industry that is given public consideration by the actions of the few while the many behave in a more than acceptable manner. There is no doubt more can be done by both government and the tourism business sector to improve the standard of the industry, such as better education, improvement of facilities, and more rigid enforcement.

4. Most rental companies are the ethical operators who have been advocating and educating in this space for over 15 years for change in regulatory services and for Certified Self-Contained Vehicles. These are the operators with a large number of “sliders” as part of their fleet. They instruct their customers and promote the use commercial and campground style accommodation. These operators contribute to and are represented on the TIA’s Responsible Camping forum.
5. There is a distinct difference between freedom campers and responsible campers. Freedom camping adheres to a more nomadic lifestyle, people using their vehicle as their permanent home, often a private vehicle, with little plan for where they head week to week. Responsible campers are more planned in their itinerary ensuring they are using the available network of commercial campsites and Hostels or suitable freedom camp areas.
6. BYATA supports its members who have come under undue criticism in media with regards the contentious and complex issue of Freedom Camping when in fact they have been promoting and advocating for responsible camping all along.
7. BYATA supports the introduction of a regulatory body (Waka Kotahi NZTA) to monitor and set standards within the sector with the long-term goal that aligns with our Climate Change Goals 2025, including EV campervans and smart technology to monitor and reduce carbon emissions or offset with a viable scheme. Ultimately, this would enable TNZ to position Responsible Camping in NZ as the World Leader in sustainable and responsible travel and further support brand Aotearoa. To achieve this, Responsible Camping must feature in destination management plans encouraging unilateral support by community and tourism providers.
8. Reports show that most international visitors who are responsible campers do not exclusively freedom camp but also stay in a variety of commercial and campground accommodation during their trip. These visitors frequent our local communities, they stay for long periods, spend more time in the regions, spread their stay into the shoulder and off seasons, and engage with rural NZ and its communities. These travelers support cafes and bars the length and breadth of NZ.
9. There are two immediate knowledge gaps that need further analysis to understand the scale of the issue that present as an immediate threat to brand Aotearoa.
 - a. A registration system for the currently unmonitored private vehicle fleet that freedom camps in Aotearoa.
 - b. Local councils gain access to good quality data, which can highlight the difference in the number of nights that responsible campers and freedom campers spends in one location. This may signal that homelessness might be the chief cause of use.
10. Successful initiatives put forward by Government such as the Tourism Infrastructure Fund must remain. This fund has invested \$60M into developing better roadside amenities such as toilets, showers, car parks and bus shelters. The responsible camping fund has invested \$25m into education, enforcement, and technology schemes like the ambassador app. But more funding is required.

- I 1. A regulatory system for the Self-Contained Vehicle Standard (SCVS) is required. One that can track where SCVS registered vehicles camp. It is our view that every commercial, and private vehicle which applies for a self-contained approval, needs to be part of a regulatory service, and be tracked using smart technology such as Campermate or the ambassador app. Only then will the system be able to empower local councils to act and arm them with executable data to understand the needs of responsible campers.
- I 2. Tracking will enable enforcement and fines to be administered and collected. Fines can be issued to vehicles freedom camping in areas that they should not be in, or a location where their vehicle is not allowed for overnight stays.
- I 3. BYATA supports Responsible Camping where and when responsible campers support Aotearoa. The industry has been presented with an opportunity to position Aotearoa as the most regenerative self-drive destination on the planet by taking regulatory steps to enable and fast track us towards our climate change commitments of 2025.
- I 4. In time the industry must build a connected, safe and CarbonZero rated trip around Aotearoa staying at sustainably produced and enhanced facilities in an EV fleet of self-contained campervans, using smart technology such as Ambassador or Campermate to plan and book your trip with.
- I 5. BYATA does not support a system whereby ultimately the liability of fines or infringements would rest with the rental companies, this is unfair and presents as a difficult precedent once set.
- I 6. Ultimately, education and changing behaviors is BYATA's strategy to improve the industry. Responsible campers who share and embrace our love of local communities should be encouraged to visit the regions widely to spread the tourism spend into small local communities while having a minimal impact on the environment.



Chris Sperring

BYATA Chair