

To the Climate Change Commission

Submission on the draft advice on climate action for Aotearoa

26 March 2021

Introduction

1. The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help to resolve access disputes and negotiate new access.
2. The Walking Access Act 2008 is our governing legislation. The Commission has an office in Wellington and a network of regional field advisors throughout New Zealand. An independent board governs our work.
3. He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission has called for submissions on its draft advice to government to help Aotearoa transition to a climate-resilient and low emissions future.
4. The advice in the draft report is relevant to the work of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission.
5. We are happy to discuss any aspect of our submission.
6. We do not object to our submission being published.
7. Our contact is Ric Cullinane, Chief Executive | Tumuaki.
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Support for active transport

8. The Commission supports establishing, maintaining and enhancing a range of access opportunities, including walking, cycling and mountain biking, using electric vehicles such as bikes and scooters, and on horseback.
9. The Climate Change Commission report calls for a dramatic increase in walking and cycling as forms of transport.
10. The Walking Access Commission could have a significant role to play in that. The report assumes that the share of this distance travelled by walking and cycling can increase by 25% and 95% respectively by 2030. It notes that for this to happen NZ must develop extensive, high-quality cycling and walking infrastructure. (See Necessary Action No 2 on page 106.)
11. A significant proportion of that cycling and walking infrastructure will sit alongside our formed road network. But there is also an important role for off-road tracks and trails. These pathways that do not follow built roads are both safer and more enjoyable for walkers and bikers.
12. Retrofitting off-road tracks and trails into urban environments is expensive and complicated. It

involves well considered planning and negotiation to secure access of the appropriate land.

13. For this reason, the Commission has invested energy in recent years to develop off-road pathways in peri-urban areas before they develop into urban areas. Two of our regional projects are protecting and enhancing trails to the north and south of Auckland. Our Pūhoi to Pākiri Trail project continues to progress well. We are collaborating with Ngāti Manuhiri, Auckland Transport, Auckland Council and the Matakana Coast Trails Trust.
14. To the south of Auckland, we produced our Connecting Franklin-North Waikato report. This called for a network of off-road tracks and trails connecting the North Waikato towns of Pokeno, Pukekohe, and Tuakau. The report focuses on access to and along the Waikato River which would support recreation, tourism and commuting - walking, cycling, running and horse-riding. We are now working on a plan to implement these key projects. This will involve council staff, central government, developers, local community volunteer groups and residents.
15. More projects like these will help plan and build the walking and cycling infrastructure we need to accommodate more active transport.
16. A successful strategy to increase the number of walking and cycling journeys will need to develop off-road as well as on-road walking and cycling pathways.
17. In rural and peri-urban areas this means creating public access to support people on the fringes of towns and cities access schools, shops, workplaces and community facilities. This public access also needs to link towns and communities to each other. And it needs to link people to outdoor recreation opportunities.
18. In urban areas we also need off-road walking and cycling pathways. This is harder to achieve when roads and buildings are already in place. But it is equally or more important because it benefits more walkers and cyclists. The Commission has expertise negotiating this public access.

New native forest

19. The report calls for 25,000 hectares of new native forest every year. That is a significant undertaking – it is nearly the size of urban Christchurch each year.
20. As well as being carbon sinks, native forests serve many other important roles. For the Walking Access Commission linking people to native forests are both a means to an end (conservation, health, fitness and therapy, regional development, pest control and carbon sequestration), and an end in themselves (contributing to regional economies, community wellbeing, social wellbeing, and understanding of conservation and biodiversity outcomes).
21. We believe that this massive investment in native forests also creates the potential for more outdoor recreation opportunities and access.
22. New Zealanders are more likely to support converting land to new native forests if they can access and enjoy that land. The forests will also need public access for trappers and community groups that protect the new ecology.
23. Free, secure, and practical public access is crucial to enable outdoor recreation. Without legally secured, free and practical access to the outdoors, it is impossible for people to recreate in it.
24. The report correctly assumes most native forest will replace unproductive farmland. However, we believe there is also an important opportunity to develop bush paths and reserves in towns and cities that also serve as active transport links. The health and environmental benefits of close connection to wild outdoor spaces are important for our communities. But not everyone has the resources or ability to travel to remote Fiordland, for instance. By providing more native forests in or near our towns and cities, we share those benefits more equitably with the whole population.

25. It also allows the entire country to take a greater ownership of the climate change mitigation we are working on together.

Conclusion

26. Thank you for considering this submission from the New Zealand Walking Access Commission.