

Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Private Bag 18041
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

31 October 2023



Inquiry into climate adaption

Introduction

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission, is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. Our role is to advise on and advocate for free, certain, enduring, and practical access to the outdoors.

Herenga ā Nuku plays a key role in negotiating, establishing and improving outdoor access for New Zealanders. This includes making people and organisations aware of public access locations and ensuring that access endures over time. Our mandate includes all forms of public access, including by foot, bike, horse and vehicle.

Importance of public access

Public access to the outdoors provides people with opportunities to connect with te taiao. People can use good public access for recreation and active transport. Good public access to the outdoors supports improved mental and physical health. It connects us to the environment. It builds connections within and between communities. It supports low-emissions transport and sustainable regional economic development.

We support the Ministry for the Environment's position that New Zealand needs to be proactive in its approach to climate adaptation. We also agree that we need to work with nature and that we need to enable local solutions. Public access and the trails that are built on publicly accessible land play a key role in this response.

Enabling good public outdoor access is an important adaption in the face of climate change. It provides alternative routes of transport when roads close. In many instances, natural trails are more easily and quickly restored than built roads. They integrate into nature and support the environment. They are usually designed, built and maintained by volunteers in local communities.

Public outdoor access is also an important tenet of sponge cities.

Our submission focuses on Question 19 in the consultation document: What direction should central government provide on the local adaptation planning process?

Protecting access to the coast, rivers and lakes

The consultation paper notes that community-led retreat means moving homes, businesses, sites of cultural significance and taonga out of harm's way through a carefully planned process that involves the community at every step. We believe that public access is one of those taonga that needs to be moved.

There are two public outdoor access issues to consider:

1. New Zealanders believe access to water is an important part of our cultures. Most coasts and significant lakes and rivers have some public access. Climate change is moving water boundaries from where they were. Some legal public access, such as esplanade strips, will move as the water boundaries move. However some, such as esplanade reserves or unformed legal roads, will not and become impractical to use by the public. We need to ensure that we prioritise continuous legal access that is also practical access. Connections between this existing access is important to provide a continuous access strip along all waterbodies. Legislation has prioritised this for well over a hundred years. Adaption measures such as stop banks and sea walls can impact practical public access. Likewise, retreat from flood-prone areas can affect public access.
2. As well as protecting access alongside water, we need to consider access to waterways. We should ensure that we maintain and enhance access to the coast and rivers. If property boundaries are moved in response to climate change, we have an opportunity to enhance people's access to waterways.

Planning for outdoor access at the start of any new development or adaption measure

Herenga ā Nuku has a role to play in local adaption and community-led retreat plans. Our team of regional field advisors and operations staff have expertise in negotiating, establishing and improving outdoor access. They all have close working relationships with territorial authorities, private landowners, mana whenua rōpū and local trail-building groups.

Our GIS team has expertise in mapping and describing public access areas, which can support local spatial planning.

It is important that any direction from central government to territorial authorities states that those authorities should involve Herenga ā Nuku early in their planning processes. By ensuring our expertise is part of local adaption planning processes, we can maintain and enhance public access during any climate adaption measures.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We would like to make an oral submission to the committee about our submission. Please contact our kaiwhakahaere whakapā I communications manager Stephen Day at 027 815 8552 or stephen.day@herengaanhuku.govt.nz.



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