



**Herenga
ā Nuku**

AOTEAROA

**Connecting people
Connecting places**

Committee Staff
Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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HERENGA Ā NUKU AOTEAROA SUBMISSION

TO

THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

THE SPATIAL PLANNING BILL

Part 1: Introduction

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission (formerly the New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hikoī Aotearoa), is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. Our governing piece of legislation is the Walking Access Act 2008. The primary purpose of the Walking Access Act 2008 is 'to provide the New Zealand public with free, certain, enduring, and practical walking access to the outdoors'. A particular focus of our work is on access to and along water bodies and public conservation land.

Our role is to advise on and advocate for free, certain, enduring, and practical access to the outdoors. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. Herenga ā Nuku plays a key role in negotiating, establishing and improving outdoor access for New Zealanders. This includes facilitating greater awareness of public access and ensuring that access endures over time. Our mandate includes all forms of public access, including by foot, bike, horse and vehicle.

We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help to resolve access issues and negotiate new access. Herenga ā Nuku has a team in Wellington and a network of regional field advisors. An independent board governs our work.

General comments on spatial planning and public outdoor access

The Spatial Planning Bill (SPA) provides for developing and implementing long-term, strategic spatial planning across New Zealand through the development of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). These strategies assist in achieving the purpose and system outcomes set out in the Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBEB).

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The SPA specifies matters to which the Regional Planning Committee must have particular regard when creating an RSS. These matters include, but are not limited to, –

- *areas that are appropriate for urban development and change and areas suitable for rural use: ...*
- *indicative locations of planned or potential business and residential activities.*

Future and improved public access to the outdoors and all that entails – community connectivity, well-being, and reduced vehicle use in particular – relies upon the planning process to set international best practice standards for urban design and residential development.

Planning for outdoor public access at all scales – from local neighbourhood connectivity to landscape scale tracks and trails – appears haphazard and *ad hoc*. Much of Herenga ā Nuku's efforts are directed towards preventing loss of public access provision. Pressures on public access include a growing population, tourism pressure on ageing infrastructure, urban growth expanding into rural areas, increasingly unstable weather impacts on vulnerable infrastructure, and sea-level rise putting pressure on coastal access.

Public outdoor access provision needs to expand in proportion to population growth. However, it is not expanding fast enough, and in some key areas, access provision is reducing.

At the same time, our collective contribution to climate change means the value of public outdoor access and the need to provide opportunities for active transport are even greater.

Without a specific requirement to consider public access throughout planning processes, there is a risk that it will continue to be forgotten altogether, treated as an afterthought or only considered by well-resourced territorial authorities. The spectrum of planning processes across councils at present varies from those leading the way¹, to one-line policies buried in District Plans that support public access to and along waterways and coastlines, or council transport policies that focus on roads and vehicles with little or no investment in active transport infrastructure.

It is, therefore, imperative that we consider public access from the outset at all levels of the new planning framework and process.

One means to achieve this is by creating and including a policy statement on outdoor access to be led by or with the guidance of Herenga ā Nuku. The intention to include such a policy statement could be signalled under Schedule 3, Government policy statements. An existing function of Herenga ā Nuku is preparing and administering a national strategy on public access (Walking Access Act 2008 s10(1)(a)(i)).

Alternatively, consideration could be given to developing an overarching National Spatial Strategy. The SPA could provide a national spatial strategy that would provide a coherent and consistent approach across the motu, including public access to the outdoors.

Another means to ensure that public access is considered from the outset would be to specify it as a 'key matter' for the content of an RSS. Key steps for preparing RSS are defined in Schedule 4 of the SPA. Section 1 of that Schedule defines interested parties, who, under Section 2, must be provided with an opportunity to participate in determining the matters to be included in a draft RSS and their relative importance.

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission, as a Crown entity with a statutory interest in public access and as a provider of support to private infrastructure providers and operators, will be an interested party. Through our submission on the Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBEB), we recommend that Regional Planning Committees consult Herenga ā Nuku during the preparation of regional NBE Plans and that Herenga ā Nuku be

¹ For example, *The Auckland Plan 2050* with a 'Transport and Access' outcome of "A low-carbon, safe transport system that delivers social, economic and health benefits for all"

added to the list of parties to be consulted under section 22 (1) of Schedule 7 of the NBEB. To avoid doubt, Herenga ā Nuku, should be referenced specifically in Schedule 4 (1) of the SPA.

Part 2: Recommendations

1. Schedule 3, Government policy statements. We propose this should also include:

Government policy statement on public access to the outdoors

2. Section 17, Contents of regional spatial strategies: key matters. We propose the addition of a new sub-section (3):

Enhanced public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes, and rivers; forests, maunga, cultural and heritage sites; and any other access to or along areas of recreational or other interest.

3. Schedule 4, section 1, Meaning of interested parties. We proposed that Herenga ā Nuku be added to section (1) (a):

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission

Nāku noa, nā



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