

12<sup>th</sup> April 2019, 7pm. Waipu Cove Surf Life Saving Club.

### **Special meeting for ASH and concerned local residents with DoC and WCRB**

Maureen Bell thanked Louisa for coming out and encouraged everyone to show her Waipu Cove's hospitality. She said that it was great to see such good turnout. It shows the feeling for the great community of Camp Waipu Cove. Maureen explained that this was not a Board meeting and that the next Board meeting would be on 29<sup>th</sup> April. She encouraged people to address concerns relating to separate topics in writing to the Board so they could be addressed at the Board meeting.

John Henderson (WCRB chairman) introduced the Board members (Rowan Pullan, Roger King, Peter Baker) the camp managers Anton and Lucy Trist and Belinda Hopkins, the minutes secretary. He asked people to give their name before speaking and speak clearly. He then introduced Louisa Gritt, Operations manager for DoC Whangarei and Fiona Watson, Senior Ranger for DoC. John asked that people have their cell phones off, speak one at a time at time and for a maximum of 2-3 mins. He encouraged people to try not to repeat previous comments as time is tight.

Marie Ackland explained that the meeting had been called on behalf of ASH site holders. John asked everyone to focus on the recent policy decision made by the Department, not on the two managers who are here to explain, answer questions and receive feedback.

Louisa thanked everyone for coming and apologised that there was only 1 hour available. Because time is tight, she explained that she would provide facts on why the decision has been made. A number have written to the Minister over last few weeks, many have written to local MP-and there have been several emails directly to Louisa. There were many common themes among this correspondence that Louisa would try to address quickly, leaving time for questions. She assured everyone that she would answer what she could but that if she didn't have answers to any questions that Fiona would take notes and respond at a later date.

### **Below are the key concerns that were raised and Louisa's response to the concerns:**

- **Why now? What led to the decision?** A provisional decision was made on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2018 in a meeting with the Board. There was no deliberate secrecy around this decision. In 2017 the Board's 5 Year Management Plan came up for renewal and draft management plan was submitted. Many in the community made submissions but unfortunately the Department did not make a submission, but it should have done. Louisa cannot answer the question as to why not as she was not with DoC at that time. That would have been the first indication that natural attrition for reducing ASH was not acceptable. In April 2018 the Board submitted the management plan to the department for approval as is standard practice. A review was then undertaken by the Land Management Advisor with the Department, who made several recommendations that were presented to the Board in October to address some of those concerns and to align the management plan with Best Practice. One item raised in discussion was lack of details around reduction of ASH numbers. There were also concerns that a number of the submissions weren't dealt with within management plan itself. It was a good time for the staff in the department at the time to take a good look at what had happened over the years at the camp ground. In July and September 2018 there were a number of letters written to the Minister. As is usual practice, the District Office drafted the replies and interacted with the Minister to ensure the replies were as she would like. At the same time as these ministerials were going through, Louisa, as the Ministers delegate, received a submission from the Statutory Land Management Planning team regarding the consent for ASH to stay on the camp for more than 4 weeks over the busy period (Section 44 (2) of the Reserves Act).

*“Except with the consent of the Minister, the owner of any vehicle, caravan, tent, or removable structure shall not permit it to remain on a reserve for a total period of more than 4 weeks during the period commencing on 1 November in any year and ending with 31 March.”*

This prompted a full review of what had happened over a long period as the numbers of ASH had been decreasing more and more slowly. Following the review of the management plan and the submission there were 2 key concerns for the Department:

1. There was no plan to further reduce the numbers of ASH as there had been in the previous management plan.
2. The rates of reduction were slowing down and there was no time frame in place for ASH to be phased out completely as was always the plan.

It was another failing of the Department that they had at no point ever given a timeframe or clear direction to the Board about what that should look like. There has been a lot of uncertainty as to how long the ASH situation could continue.

The Department made the decision to meet with the Board to come up with a time frame and provide some certainty to everyone about when those sites would be made available to everyone on an equitable basis.

Referring back to the 2 Ministerials previously mentioned, the Minister became very interested in why there were permanent structures on a public reserve. She wrote to the Director to ask what was being done about it and what time frames were involved to have the structures removed. This was after Louisa met with Board and Managers so she was able to go back to the Minister with a provisional plan and timeframe in place. The Minister is still being updated.

On 11<sup>th</sup> October Louisa met with most of Board and explained that a time frame was needed to make those sites available to the general public on an equitable basis. There was negotiation on both sides as per John Henderson’s letter to ASH on 19<sup>th</sup> March. At the time it was provisionally settled that Ministerial waivers would continue for a further 5 years, not including current year. It was also agreed that all Board members must agree to this time frame so members of the Board who were unable to attend were then consulted.

The Department then went away to see what else could be done to try and alleviate the situation, knowing that ASH needed to be phased out. They asked what they could be done to make it easier or what alternatives were available? They also considered whether there were other camp sites in the District that need to be dealt with first before making the decision to inform those that would be affected. It felt insensitive to write to everyone regarding the decision prior to Christmas/summer holiday and key people away in early in 2019 (so would have been unavailable to answer questions). The Board were aware of and had approved the provisional decision but did not receive official confirmation until they were written to on 26<sup>th</sup> February by Louisa.

- **Why were the community were not engaged in this decision?** Although not legally required to consult with community, that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t have happened. It is not required to by policy but again, that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t have happened. The Department decided not to as the decision is around camp management rather than the community but in hindsight (looking at the meeting turnout), not consulting the community was a mistake. However, had this meeting been held prior to a decision the discussion would still be about phasing out ASH and the conversation

would be around the time frame. Everyone knew it was on cards to make the sites available to the general public on a fair and equitable basis. That is why this meeting was agreed to.

- **ASH as part of the community** – As shown by the turnout, the Department accept that the ASH are part of the community and they can continue to be. The only thing the Department is changing is that they will no longer grant consent for any vehicle, caravan, tent, or removable structure to remain on the reserve for a total period of more than 4 weeks during the period commencing on 1 November and ending with 31 March. This is so others have fair and equitable chance to be on those sites.
- **Many have referred to a 2006 review of camping opportunities in NZ. Concerns actions are not aligned with that review.** This review was carried out by DoC but it was never taken into policy. Many comments made to support the continuation of ASH also support equitable public use of the sites. This is a public reserve. Whole idea of having a camp ground on a public reserve is that sites are available to everyone on an equitable basis, particularly over the summer season. Structures (non-permanent) can be there for the other 7 months of the year – those months won't change. This means being part of the community, supporting local businesses etc doesn't change. Only consentable structures such as the camp cabins are allowed to be there permanently.
- **Concerns Louisa has only been with DoC 15 months**

### Comments/Questions

**Why do tourists have more right to stay here than people been here for years?** They have no more right. They have equitable right to stay. Tourists, or any other New Zealanders currently have no ability to use those sites. This is a public reserve, a public space.

**Maureen Bell provided some background** – Many years ago some campers had previously been located on the southern beach-side. They were moved from 'A-block' to 'B-block' to what was then known as the 'wasteland' at other end of the camp. It had no sea views and was not the beautiful area you see today. They then approached DoC for money to develop area. As there was no money available they were asked to come up with a solution, which they did. The ASH camper category was proposed and accepted by DoC as a way to fund improvements and to get the Camp onto solid financial ground. like to know what had suddenly changed that? Numbers of ASH are still reducing but by varying amounts each year. Maureen referenced a comment she made in her letter questioning whether 'our old people aren't dying quickly enough'. DoC agreed to natural attrition so by putting a finite term of 5 years that is breaking the agreement.

Does this mean camp cabins should be moved off?

Louisa reiterated comments about Camp cabins being consented, so the decision does not affect them. ASH should all be removable structures.

**Maureen** explained that she was on the Board and that at the time there were also 4 great campers and 4 excellent locals on board. They managed very well through that period of asking campers to give up facilities to move to the other end. 20 years on we have created a beautiful, world-class camp ground. Maureen feels they have upheld their end of the bargain with increased visitors welcome to use facilities generated from camp fees. Maureen questioned, when the mix of ASH, casual campers and cabins has proved so successful, why is DoC not using this as an example of what can be done? It should be held up as an example of what can be done with good

management, community involvement etc. She asked whether the Department were inundated with hundreds of complaints?

**Louisa** responded that there were not hundreds of complaints. Regarding natural attrition, the department has been through all of their documentation and found no formal agreement about agreeing to natural attritions. The 2011 management plan showed plan for reducing ASH. The challenge now is that that the 2017 plan didn't. The department should have made a submission indicating the Board needed to be more proactive in reducing ASH numbers as it has slowed. Again, this is partly the Department's fault. Louisa commented that she felt it was distasteful to suggest that they were waiting for people to pass away and it wasn't happening quickly enough. The AGM minutes from last year indicated that DoC was comfortable with the current rate of reduction but that was an assumption and wasn't correct.

**Marie** pointed out that Camp prices have steadily gone up in recent years so it is not actually a case of waiting for people to die but waiting for them to be priced out. She feels the camp would need to reduce fees to make the sites available to everyone as most people can't afford the current casual camp fees.

**Louisa** explained that DoC don't set camp pricing. DoC approve the Management Plan which does not include camp fees. She reminded everyone that it is a public reserve, a public space and there are many people out there that are not getting the opportunity to use those sites.

**Maureen** explained that there are limits on ASH nights (without having to pay extra fees), no one can stay here permanently. She feels that the fee therefore works out very expensive for the nights ASH are allowed to stay. Occupancy rates show, excluding the few weeks over summer, there are 6 nights where the camp is at full occupancy.

#### **Request for clarification over dates:**

**Louisa** – The time period where there is a 4-week max. is 1<sup>st</sup> November – 31<sup>st</sup> March.

**Yvonne Mattson** questioned whether they could all come back for 4 weeks over Christmas (they can). She said that if they all came back over that period, that's great, but it is outside of those dates that the camp is not full. This is the time when ASH fees would be guaranteed income. She felt that the ASH would not be coming back for odd weekends and supporting community without the current ASH agreement to leave caravans etc on site. Yvonne also queried the letter that triggered things.

**Louisa** reiterated that the triggers were the review of the draft management plan and a submission from the Statutory Land Manager within the Department. No letters have been received direct to the Whangarei office. The Minister received letters but they will not be discussed.

**Maureen** stated that copies of all letters have been asked for and would be released to the public when available.

**Louisa** explained that one of the advantages of being new to DoC is that she was unaware of the individual(s) that have been mentioned. She only had factual background, nothing else. She will not to discuss individuals.

**Yvonne** asked whether this ruling will be happening to all other camps with ASH?

**Louisa** said that it would but she is not aware of any other DoC (not council run), Board administered lands that have ASH, as advised by the Statutory Land Management. She will check this.

At the Ruakaka camp there is currently only 1 ASH and working with the camp to remove them as the same ruling will apply there.

**Marie** explained that she is a local bach owner and this decision influences her and many others. She pointed out that though legally DoC weren't required to speak to the community, morally they should have as this will change the dynamic of the community. She would challenge the Department to find, apart from few agitators, anyone who isn't happy with the current situation, for the sake of saying there are 6 days over summer that sites aren't available to affluent people (as the current ASH will have the right to re-book their sites for up to 4 weeks). She feels it is the community that will be left with DoC's decision after ASH go. The community will be left with casual site holders, as in past – people who have no care for the community. Marie urges all ASH to rebook for the 4 weeks. She feels the camp will be losing \$400,000 of valuable income that is put back into the camp and community. She is glad DoC are owning up to things but asks whether, morally, they feel they should have come to the community that this decision is affecting?

**Louisa** repeated that in hindsight, yes they should have and that it is what she is doing now.

The use of the work 'public' was questioned regarding use of this is public space. ASH feel that they are the public so question what is the difference?

**Louisa** reminded everyone that in accordance with the Reserves Act, all sites should be available on equitable basis, no one should have priority access to the sites as current ASH do.

**Yvonne** pointed out that casual campers have the right to re-book sites for the following year which blocks the general public.

**Louisa** explained that again, that is for a maximum of 4 weeks, the same as would be applicable to ASH.

It was queried whether the idea of natural attrition was a written agreement. Maureen has offered to go back through her notes/Board minutes to check as the Department have no record of this being a written agreement.

**When questions were raised, Louisa** reiterated that the review paper in 2006 was not taken into policy and that the comment minuted at last year's AGM regarding DoC being happy with the decline in ASH numbers was incorrect.

It was raised that quite a few ASH let out their caravans to people who then pay full casual rates for the nights they stay. ASH pay for the power and their guests do not get a reduction.

**Louisa** explained that the Department weren't aware of that and in response to a question about this being a consultation she stated that the phasing out of ASH is not a consultation. The Reserves Act and the Minister have given instruction that no permanent structures on reserve are allowed and they are to be removed. Louisa was asked to review having them removed immediately but did not want to do that.

It was pointed out that all ASH accommodations are towable, as per the yearly ASH contract. Louisa was unaware of this as many of them appear to be permanent.

**Maureen** explained that the review carried out in 2006 was started in response to a document titled 'The negative and environmental factors caused by privatisation of crown and council camping ground', which was a one-man band-wagon published in 2005. The author was not speaking for the

general public of NZ. He was the founder of NZ Camp Watch Incorporated Society. Maureen enquired about joining the society but was not allowed to join as her views did not align with his. He was the only person in the camp at the time who had permanent unit in camp until 2007. Every other accommodation was, and is, removable. He would not do what Board at the time wanted him to do. They had his permanent cabin removed. All others here have conformed with what was required.

**Yvonne** mentioned the private groups (Facebook groups etc) that have been set up to keep everyone aware of what is happening. She mentioned that there is a rumour that a person apposed to ASH has a high link to somewhere in DoC. She asked whether this could that be explored by DoC.

**Louisa** is unaware of who is being referred to and of any such links but can investigate.

**ASH from site 80** used to manage Papamoa Beach Resort. They developed permanent site holders for an income after the Rena shipwreck. What a blessing. They were able to support the community with the income. It became a vibrant place and drew more people to stay during the off-season. She asked what would be done without the \$400,000 income from ASH? How will the high standards be maintained? Is there an income forecast? She suggested that Louisa read the ASH agreement as it states that all ASH structures must be moveable.

**Louisa** clarified that the camp income does not go to DoC. The Board manage the income. She has read the agreement and she accepts that they are all moveable. Therefore they can be moved on/off site for the allowed 4 weeks over the summer.

**Marie** asked whether that dispelled the previous assumptions. She pointed out that there are 6 nights when camp is 100%. She feels DoC is effectively disrupting the whole community for 6 nights.

**Louisa** explained that this is not just about camp being full. This is a public space and all sites should be available on equitable basis over the busy period and unfortunately at the moment they are not.

It was questioned how casual campers having a right of renewal for the following year, fits in with the sites being available to all the public.

**Louisa** pointed out that ASH will have the same right to re-book for the following year. The key is not having site for more than 4 weeks over that period.

**Zara Jackson** asked how it was communicated that it had always been the plan to phase out as she wasn't aware of this. It is not in the ASH agreement.

**Louisa** explained that the Annual Agreement is with the Board, not the Department. At the very beginning when the Reserve became managed by a volunteer Reserve Board, it was agreed that a waiver would be granted for ASH to raise funds to get the camp up to a good standard and to be able to take out/pay off loans. It was agreed that when the loans were paid off, ASH would be phased out. No official or written agreement was put in place though as to how this would happen or what time frame.

**Zara** asked how many people knew that was going to happen and expressed the frustration of this suddenly being brought to their attention.

**Louisa** stated that the Board had always been aware, and she had assumed it was always communicated to ASH.

**Ross Melville** questioned what will happen when funds from ASH fees are no longer available. Will the camp end up in its previous, poor condition? He feels that the people here today are the ones that want to protect it, that they stop people doing things they shouldn't. He questioned where continued support will come from. He thinks that to date ASH fees have been spent very wisely by Board to create a beautiful camp.

**Yvonne** feels that without the income from ASH, management won't survive with its current staffing levels etc.

**Louisa** stated that that is not her understanding.

**Richard Murray** feels that casual campers pay the equivalent of what ASH effectively pay for their sites over that peak period (approx. \$7000 a week across all ASH sites).

**Graham Williams** runs a business in Auckland and uses his site as a base for Northland business, as well as using it for personal recreation, so he is here throughout the year. He has been at the camp through the winters when there has been flooding etc. The ASH fees have contributed to improving drainage among other things. He says that he has seen how dead the camp is during winter. He questioned how DoC will keep the place alive after 2025? He suspects it will become run down as there won't be the funds to keep it in beautiful way it is now.

It was asked why more sites cannot be created.

**Louisa** explained that there is no more space for sites at this camp. All camps are full over summer and there is no other suitable land at the moment.

**Yvonne** pointed out that the over-sized ASH caravans cannot be towed in and out of the camp, they must be transported, so once they are gone, they're gone for good.

**Lloyd Rooney** is the local café owner. He is very concerned. ASH are their bread and butter during the quiet winter months. He thinks the whole area will die if ASH are no longer here. He feels that ASH fees have developed the area and paid for the rest of us to be here. Feels ASH are being kicked out for people that haven't paid a penny. He asks how that is equitable.

**Louisa** pointed out that there are lots of other members of public who don't have access to those sites.

**Maureen** talked about how popular the mix of casual campers, ASH and cabins is. She feels that casual campers love having ASH and it enables them to feel the sense of community and safeness. She believes many casual campers would rather park between ASH sites for that feeling of security and that they are made to feel welcome.

**Greg Shanaghan** came here in '62 when you couldn't get in to the camp because it was full. It has been that way ever since. With there currently being 77 ASH sites, that means 77 people might get in for 6 days. Once you remove the caravans that can be moved in and out, it cuts that number down to around 40. He asks how that translates into the general public?

**Louisa** explained that she is not just talking about those 6 days but the whole summer period. There are currently 77 sites that are not available to the general public. In spirit of reserves act, the whole idea of a public reserve is to have it available to the public on an equitable basis.

**Rick Stolwerk** explained that he is neutral on this subject. He is keen for surf club to survive tonight! He reminded everyone that Louisa is just the messenger. He suggested that everyone get their

questions through to Maureen Bell so she can get written questions through. He suggested a follow up meeting.

**Louisa** said that she appreciate how well she had been respected and treated this evening. She reminded everyone that this is not a consultation and the need for ASH to be phased out won't change. What would it look like if time-frame was changed? If the group can collectively come up with a more acceptable timeframe she may be able to take the proposal to the Minister to see if she finds it acceptable. Louisa was also really encourage to hear that some ASH rent out their caravans. With that in mind, those sites could be considered to be available to the general public. The Department may need to talk to the Board about this. She suggested the group come up with a proposal for the Department to consider, that meets the following requirements: All sites are equitable and open to people over that busy period. Louisa explained that she cannot give any guarantees that the current decision can be reversed of that anything put forward will be accepted. She will, however, give her personal guarantee that they will be considered. DoC will answer all questions as best they can but please make sure those questions are working towards a solution.

-Round of applause for Louisa-

**Louisa** left the meeting.

**Marie** proposed a meeting at Easter for those supportive of ASH.