



Compiled Date	16/12/2023
File Number	22.23.27

## LGOIMA

When releasing responses to previous LGOIMA requests, names and contact details of individual requestors will be withheld to protect their privacy.

Information requested by the media, lobby groups, public sector organisations and MPs will always be published, while information specific to an individual or their property will not generally be published.

<b>Request from:</b>	Halie Carmont – MBIE
<b>Information requested:</b>	WDC application to the Freedom Camping Transition Fund
<b>Response by:</b>	Simon Bastion, Chief Executive

16 December 2022

Halie Carmont  
MBIE

Via Email: [halie.carmont@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:halie.carmont@mbie.govt.nz)

Dear Halie

**Official information request for a copy of the Westland District Council application to the Freedom Camping Transition Fund**

I refer to your official information request dated 14 December 2022 for a copy of the Westland District Council application to the Freedom Camping Transition Fund.

The information you have requested is enclosed.

Some information has been redacted under section 7(2)(a) of LGOIMA – protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

There is no charge in supplying this information to you.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

**Council has adopted a Proactive Release Policy and accordingly may publish LGOIMA responses on the Council Website at <https://www.westlanddc.govt.nz/lgoima-responses>.**

The collection and use of personal information by the Westland District Council is regulated by the Privacy Act 2020. Westland District Council's Privacy Statement is available on our website [here](#)

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact Mary-anne Bell, Senior Administration Officer at [LGOIMA@westlanddc.govt.nz](mailto:LGOIMA@westlanddc.govt.nz), 03 756 9091.

Sincerely,



**Simon Bastion** | Chief Executive

SB/MB

Enclosed: 22.23.27 Freedom Camping Transition Fund Application



# Freedom Camping Transition Fund

## Application Form

September 2022

### Section 1: Applicant key details

1.1 Applicants' key details		
Applicant details	Applicant name	Westland District Council
	Applicant address, including postcode	36 Weld Street, Hokitika 7810 Private Bag 704, Hokitika 7842
	Applicant address, including postcode	
1.2 Contact person details		
This will be the only person who receives the correspondence relating to the proposal. Fill out all fields unless otherwise indicated.		
Contact person details	Full name	Scott Baxendale
	Job title or Role	Group Manager- District Assets
	Contact phone	027 362 0355
	Contact email address	Scott.baxendale@westlanddc.govt.nz
	Contact postal address (if different to lead applicant), including postcode	As above.



## Section 2: Need for Funding

### 2.1 Describe how your area/community is impacted by Freedom Camping?

#### Introduction

The West Coast is seen by many as being the jewel in the crown, the untouched, untamed paradise, having spectacular views of the Southern Alps, Mt Aoraki, Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers along with an abundance of pristine lakes to visit and camp. The majority of the land is covered in ancient podocarp forest drawing large numbers of both local and international visitors whom on average stay longer due to the low cost of camping and natural beauty of the area. Geographically the West Coast extends some 650km from Kahurangi Point in the north to Big Bay in the south, approximately 2.3 million hectares of land being administered by three District Councils. Westland makes up the majority of the area with its rate base of around 8,600 people spread throughout the district in small provincial towns and farming areas. Tourism is a major contributor to the West Coast economy (67% of the districts GDP) having drawn up to 17, 000 campers per night (Fig1) in the peak of last season.

Covid impacted heavily on some parts of the Coast with many businesses who traditionally relied on international tourism for example, Franz Josef and Fox Glacier saw a significant downturn, while other areas remaining buoyant throughout the pandemic due to domestic travel. In both cases freedom camping remained popular and without additional funding Westland struggled to meet the demands related to both compliance and advocacy. With the return of International visitors it is expected that Westland will return to pre Covid conditions.



Figure one Overnight stay location for freedom campers (Source- Camper mate)

#### Compliance and prevention.

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The below table provides a breakdown of visitor type, both international and domestic that have used Westland freedom camping sites. Also the seasonality showing that overnight visitor stays in Westland remains consistent at 2 nights on average throughout the year.



This last season (2021-22) freedom camping throughout the Westland region maintained on average 1416 overnight stays per month despite Covid. 57.5% of those visitors recorded travelling with more than one person in the vehicle. The above graph also illustrates that Westland attracts both domestic and international visitors not just for the tourist season but for the full year. The current funding model does not recognise compliance cost that fall outside of the freedom camping season with any short fall burdening the rate payer.

**Westland District Council initiatives.**

Working alongside private businesses, a number of private sites were set up providing free overnight camping for non-complying vehicles, those vehicles that did not meet the accepted NZ standard for self-containment. Previously the only land available for camping were roadside areas set up on Council and NZTA road reserve land. This proved to be problematic whereby Council received a ground swell of complaints which ultimately lead to the forced closure of several sites.



Acre creek (NZTA road side rest area) functioning as a freedom camping area.



Now closed due to public complaint



*Kakapotahi, freedom camping site now closed due to public intervention,*

**Example; letter to the current Mayor Bruce Smith.**

*Hello Mr Smith*

*It's great to be out of lockdown but unfortunately South Westland is yet again crawling with freedom campers. They just appeared from out of nowhere and stay for several days before moving on and leaving their mess.*

*The photos attached has been taken at Bruce Bay on Saturday and Sunday night. This is happening daily. It's just simply not on.*





*Not after what our entire nation has been through with the Ministry of Health pushing hygiene and social distancing with utmost importance.*

*The freedom camping site at the salmon farm is closed, the compliance officers contracts have finished, and here we go, straight back to square one. The majority down this way do not want and never did want freedom campers here. Our Nation has made an unprecedented sacrifice, many of us have zero income right now and this is fully taking the piss.*

*We need to move forwards, not backwards, What can we do please?*

In response Westland District Council trialled a new initiative where non-compliant vehicles could camp, free of charge on private land. These campsites adjoined local business being strategically spread throughout the district to ensure compliance with the responsible camping Initiatives and bylaw. These sites were supported by Council both in terms of waste management and compliance with ambassadors referring non-compliant vehicles to these sites in favour of infringement. These sites had proven popular both in terms of support for local business, but also solved the wider issue of unsightly campers who traditionally draw complaint for camping by the roadside and access ways. Previously MBIE funding was used to fully fund facilities on these sites covering waste management as well as providing online information.

One of the example of a private site “West Coast Treetop Walkway” shown below.



This initiative saw a clear reduction in enforcement with infringement notices dropping significantly year on year as freedom camping was supported and welcomed. This enabled a clear shift from enforcement to an ambassadorial role with visitors reporting via social media that they felt safe and welcomed on the West Coast.





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**Below is a supportive letter.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Treetop Walkway and Café is a tourist attraction about 15km south of Hokitika of state Highway 73. The business owns a steel elevated walking structure allowing easy access for patrons to view the large podocarp forest while walking amongst the top branches about 20m above the ground. Included on site is a café offering coffee and food which have proven popular for those using the freedom camping site.

The business has been operating for nearly ten years. The main focus was the tourist market, both international and domestic with the hope that the area would become more of a destination than a night stay on the way to the Glaciers.

It was a common problem that historically Hokitika was seen as an overnight stay somewhere to buy a piece of Greenstone, purchase a meal and a bed were the only benefit gained. Very few people really went off the beaten track as they were not aware of the other attractions in the area, of which there are plenty.

In early 2019 I was approached by Westland District Council staff about the possibility to have a freedom camping site on our land. After some discussion with the business owners it was decided to agree with the installation of a site. We were concerned that there would be some negative feedback from local people but decided to go ahead. We felt that the freedom campers would still come and camp in the bush, so we saw the sense in the Councils proposal to have toilets and an area for them to stop.

The site was cleared and the toilets installed. When opened we noticed an immediate use of the site. There were obvious benefits directly from the freedom camping site as regularly campers would come into the café for meals and some would walk the track.

The other benefit was it became clear that campers used camping apps on their phones. More and more visitors were coming to the area using the information from the various apps. This continued through the COVID pandemic.

During the pandemic New Zealanders began to travel their own country due to international travel restrictions. These people were often in larger campers they had purchased and they would use the camping apps which showed our business as a destination not to be missed.

As a result the Treetop Walkway attractions are now seen as one of the best known attractions in Hokitika area and I believe the Hokitika area has become a destination rather than a stopover on the way south.

**The benefits to our business are clear:**

Visitor numbers have increased 40%

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Turnover has increased over 20%

We are confident in the future of the business and the owners are currently investing about \$1million in a flying fox from the walkway to the restaurant.

The freedom camping site was put in by council with all costs of cleaning, sewage and rubbish disposal all covered. I ask that the campsite remain in place, we are accepting of the changes forced on Council due to a lack of funding from central government. If the site continues as it is, we are prepared to fund the cleaning as long as it continues to be supported through Council compliance staff as we believe the site is a benefit to our business as well as the uses.

*Kind regards*

*Vonnie Cherry*

*Manager*



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e: [sitemanager@treetopsnz.com](mailto:sitemanager@treetopsnz.com)

[www.treetopsnz.com](http://www.treetopsnz.com)

Section 7(2)(a) of LGOIMA

**Summary.**

The West Coast is a tourist destination and geographically extends the distance from Auckland to Wellington. Freedom Camping is enshrined in legislation and protected by the Bill of Rights. This affords any person the right to access all parts of Coast. The West Coast draws millions of international and local visitors with a large percentage taking advantage of the ability to camp by pristine waterway, lakes and mountains. With this brings the known issues around waste management and environmental impact. Also the misconception of budget camping as seen along the road sides and access tracks.

The "MBIE Responsible Camping Initiatives 2020-21" saw a reduction in funding which essentially limited our ability to provide additional private sites, those that would further mitigate the issues associated with non-compliant campers. At the time five private partnership, freedom camping sites were operating. Geographically up to nine sites would have been ideal. This amount would have allowed suitable travel times and numbers to enter and exit each site.

The following year all funding ceased leaving local government struggling to meet their obligations. This led to a large number of complaints as Council were unable to provide

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the staffing and resource to fulfil their legal obligations under the Freedom Camping Act. By resolution of Council all public sites were closed so as not to further burden the ratepayer. Only local Council Staff warranted to enforce the Act were deployed, with any effect being limited to the Hokitika area.

To date with financial assistance, Westland has managed to strike the right balance, this being the right of an individual to freedom camp and the protection of the environment. Without suitable funding concern has been raised that we will default to the issues of the past. This application seeks to obtain suitable funding to support our current initiatives and partnerships within the current funding criteria. By continued funding we can provide the necessary capable guardian through our ambassador/ enforcement practices including supporting a welcoming message through our online information system.

**2.2 If you are applying for funding for the development of your bylaw, please describe why you are:**

- wanting/needing to develop a bylaw or renew an existing one?
- why you need support in addition to your current resources?

**Introduction**

Having a low rate base, the West Coast is susceptible to changing costs. With any policy change, there is financial impact that is imposed on the ratepayer. This year there have been a number of national policies such as Three Water reform, Combined District Plan that have significantly impacted the West Coast ratepayer. The proposed changes to the Freedom Camping Act and regulations will trigger both the required consultation process and amendment to the current Bylaw. The cost of which is unsupported by Council and is not included in the approved Long Term Plan.

**Background**

The current bylaw was enacted in 2018 after a legal challenge from the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association forced Westland District Council to accept and adopt the Self-Containment Standard which was previously excluded. The current Bylaw only restricts freedom camping for non-compliant vehicles, those vehicles that don't display a current NZS 5465:2001 certification. The only other restriction of full access to all parts of Westland are certain locations that need to be protected or pose a safety risk as defined under section 11(2) of the Act.

In 2020 Westland District Council provided a written submission to central Government outlining the inconsistencies in the current self- containment standard along with a number of issues in law around the use of statutory declarations by rental agencies. This prompted further legal debate in which Westland District Council was directly involved.



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With the proposed changes in legislation it will be mandatory for Westland District Council to have the current bylaw reviewed in which a full public consultation will be required. This will include full public engagement with all local communities throughout Westland including Iwi. This process will require the preparation of consultation documents, public meetings and hearings, review committee documentation, redraft of the bylaw and submissions of papers for adoption by council. It will also be necessary to have a dedicated community spokesperson employed for the duration of the process. The Westland District Council Freedom Camping Control Bylaw expires within this funding round.

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2.1 Short Description of proposed project/s for which funding is required.	
Project 1:	<p><b>Consultation and redrafting of the current bylaw:</b></p> <p><u>Redraft of bylaw.</u> This process requires preparation of consultation documents, legal peer review, and draft report to council, approval for public submission. Preparation of Statement of proposal and public hearings.</p> <p><u>Management and Consultation.</u> Management and oversight of Council submission. Engagement with interested parties and Iwi. Media release, public submissions review, community meetings and feedback report.</p> <p><i>Total 65k</i></p>
Project 2:	<p><b>Ambassadors/Compliance</b></p> <p>Employment of sufficient staff to effectively cover the Westland area from Taramakau River to Jackson Bay (371km) for the purpose of Compliance/Ambassador roles for the season.</p> <p><i>2x .5 FTE position Hokitika Area – 32k each</i> <i>2x .5 FTE positions Glacier Area- 32k each</i> <i>2x .5 FTE position South Westland based Haast -32k each</i></p> <p><i>1x .5 FTE Compliance Manager role for training, Compliance Monitoring/Enforcement and Reporting. - 45k</i></p> <p><i>Uniforms, Safety PPE including body camera - 8K</i></p> <p>Vehicle operating and running costs- maintenance, fuel mileage for ambassadors and enforcement/compliance staff to carry out functions across the Westland District</p> <p>50k</p> <p><i>Total \$295 000 (no increase from previous funding)</i></p>

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<p><b>Project 3:</b></p>	<p><b>Freedom Camping public information and signage.</b> Public information using social media, app based and physical signage.</p> <p><u>Funding request- costs;</u> <i>Information, brochures, printed material, Infingement material and notices, site signage and replcement and installation. - 5K</i></p> <p><i>Council mapping, public information and metrics. mobile phone and internet technology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Notification of visitors ente into the district providing essential information.</i></li> <li>• <i>Links to private sites which currently cater for non- compliant vehicles.</i></li> <li>• <i>Links to restricted and prohibited areas.</i></li> <li>• <i>Metrics for accurate recording of visitor location and reporting.</i></li> <li>• <i>Key Information for Ambassadorial /compliance response.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide 360 review of visitor experience.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide direct messaging.</i></li> </ul> <p>Cost to provide freedom camping app and interactive communication (Annual Cost) 11k</p> <p>Total Cost 16k</p>
<p><b>Estimated total cost of project</b></p>	<p>\$376,000 ( Previous funding application \$565 000)</p>
<p><b>Amount of co-funding</b></p>	<p>The Westland District is a low rate base district. The Council has committed 150k to cover the cost for out of season compliance and public service requests.</p>
<p><b>Amount of funding sought</b></p>	<p>\$376,000</p>

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## Section 4: Project Details

3.1 Provide a breakdown of the tasks and associated costs required. All costs should exclude GST. Use the insert row function if you wish to add more projects.

PLEASE NOTE: MBIE MAY MODERATE THE AMOUNT OF PROPOSED COSTS IF THEY ARE NOT CONSIDERED REASONABLE

Proposed Project/s	Location	Estimated Start Date	Estimated Completion Date	Estimated Total Cost	Description of Proposed Project
<b>'Project 1'</b>					<b>Bylaw and approval</b>
• Project task one	West Coast	01/12/22	01/02/23	\$15 000	Redraft of Bylaw
• Project task two	West Coast	02/02/23	30/04/23	\$25 000	Peer review and consultation
• Project task three	West Coast	01/05/23	01/06/23	\$25 000	Public submission and approval
<b>Total</b>				\$65 000	One off cost
<b>'Project 2'</b>					<b>Compliance</b>
• Project task one	West Coast	01/10/22	01/11/22		Employment of Compliance Officers
• Project task two	West Coast	01/11/22	17/11/23		Training/ Council Warrant approval.
• Project task three	West Coast	14/11/22	31/04/23		Undertake Compliance functions
<b>Total</b>				\$295 000	No increase from previous funding
<b>Project 3</b>					<b>Communication and Signage</b>
• Project task one	West Coast	01/10/22	14/11/22	\$5 000	Signage and stationary
•				\$7 000	Freedom Camping App development
• Project task two	West Coast	01/11/22	01/04/23	\$4 000	Freedom Camping App/information Management
<b>Total</b>				\$11 000	
<b>Total (Must add up to 100 per cent of cost set out in Section 2.1)</b>				<b>\$376 000</b>	

## Section 4: Declaration by applicant


I declare on behalf of the applicant(s), that:

- This application form outlines the basis on which this application is made;
- I confirm that I have read the principles relating to funding for Freedom Camping Transition Fund on the MBIE website;
- I confirm that appropriate public consultation and resource consent processes will be undertaken;
- the statements in this application are true and the information provided is complete and correct and there have been no misleading statements or omission of any relevant facts nor any misrepresentation made;
- I understand MBIE and its advisers may disclose to or obtain from any government department or agency, private person or organisation, any information about the applicant(s) or project for the purposes of gaining or providing information related to the processing and assessment of this application;
- the applicant(s) will, if requested by MBIE or its advisers in connection with this funding process, provide any additional information sought and provide access to its records and suitable personnel;
- I understand MBIE may undertake due diligence checks as needed to meet government requirements, and I consent to checks required being carried for those purposes;
- I consent to the public release, including publishing on the Internet, of the name of the applicant(s), the amount of grant sought, and a general statement of the nature of the activity/project, and undertake to cooperate with MBIE on communications relating to this application;
- I understand MBIE's obligations under the Official Information Act 1982 and that, notwithstanding any relationship of confidence created as a result of this application, the provisions of this Act apply to all of the information provided in this application;
- the application involves an activity/project that is a lawful activity that will be carried out lawfully;
- the applicant(s) is not in receivership or liquidation nor will the project be managed by an undischarged bankrupt or someone prohibited from managing a business;
- where external providers are being employed as part of the project/activity, the relevant providers will not be employees or directors of the applicant, and nor do they have any other direct or indirect interest in the applicant, whether financial or personal unless specifically stated in the application;
- I am authorised to make this application on behalf of the applicants identified in section 1;
- I understand that MBIE may withdraw its offer of funding should the proposed project fail to be completed within the agreed timeline (detailed in Section 3.2.4).



**Signature of applicant**

This acknowledgment must be signed by a person with the legal authority to commit your organisation to a transaction (e.g. Chief Executive or Mayor)

<b>Name</b>	Simon Bastion
<b>Title</b>	Chief Executive Office
<b>Organisation</b>	Westland District Council
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	30/09/2022

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