



Northern Pegasus Bay Vehicle Access¹

Key issue(s)

Management of the physical impact of visitors in recreational vehicles and motor bikes on sand dunes and river mouth areas rich in ecological values, with high and diverse recreational use.

Management of user conflicts between vehicle operators and other recreational users.

Background

The Northern Pegasus Bay area stretches north of the Waimakariri River in Canterbury, along the coasts of the Waimakariri Districts and is characterised by wide sandy and pebbly beaches, river mouth and estuarine systems and extensive areas of sand dunes. Beach communities of permanent residents and holiday homes include Kairaki, Pines Beach, Woodend Beach, Waikuku, Leithfield Beach and Amberley Beach.

With easy accessibility at many points an increasing variety of vehicles use the beaches for access to fish, whitebait, launch craft such as jet skis, surf and surf life saving. Many simply drive the beaches and dunes for pleasure, viewing and picnics. Moto-cross and four-wheel bikes commonly use the dunes for riding. Recreationalists in vehicles are both local and from the wider Canterbury area.

The increase in use includes a displacement effect, with Christchurch City visitors using the northern beaches since the Christchurch City Council restricted all beach access on their beaches (other than some access to the South bank of the Waimakariri River mouth). Furthermore, Department of Conservation are working on limiting access to the beach along Kaitorete Spit (Lake Ellesmere) and there is increasingly restricted access to braided river beds in Canterbury for recreational vehicles and motorbikes.

Issues rose about increased pressure from recreational use of beach areas by vehicles and motorbikes, concerns about damage to dunes systems and beach habitats, disturbance of bird, fire risks and excessive pressure on shellfish resources. In particular the Ashley-Saltwater Creek area is recognised as a sensitive environment in the Regional Coastal Environment Plan, which as reported to be “twelve years” in the making! The issues of vehicular access to the river mouth through these areas comes to a head every whitebaiting season.

Sides in the debate have been strong and vocal, as shown by a series of letters to local papers over several years. On one side of the debate are those concerned about decreasing availability or “locking up” of beach access for vehicles, advocating little or no restriction of access for recreational vehicles such as 4WD vehicles and bikes and trail bikes. They see themselves as a “majority” compared to the “minority” greenies and “greenie bureaucrats”. On the other side, passive recreationists are affronted by “hoons” driving on the beaches (usually below the high water mark). Others are concerned about physical and ecological impacts. Coastal communities such as Leithfield and Waikuku are split on the issues.

There have been a number of *ad hoc* solutions used by councils, such as the locked gates Waimakariri DC put in at Waikuku, and various attempts at signage to control vehicles.

¹ This case study provides an example of the application of some individual tools to specific issues. The case studies are not of themselves examples of a fully integrated approach as they preceded the development of the kete. Links to the individual tools have been added to illustrate how agencies and groups facing similar issues might draw on available tools. Case study Prepared March 2003, updated December 2006.



Stakeholders

- Beach communities and Coast Care groups
- Department of Conservation, Canterbury Conservation Board
- Canterbury Regional Council or environment Canterbury, Waimakariri and Hurunui District Councils and Christchurch City Council
- Fish and Game, Forest and Bird
- Te Kohaka o Tuhaitara Trust and local hapu
- Recreational fishers and whitebaiters, 4WD groups and vehicle drivers, swimmers, surfers, walkers and other recreationists

Tools, models or approaches

Monitoring and research

In 1977 Environment Canterbury initiated a project to monitor ([monitoring](#)) coastal vehicle access, working under Chapter 11 of the Regional Policy Statement, Coastal Environment, Policy 3 ([Resource Management Act framework](#)). The policy requires local councils to identify areas where it is preferable to control access so as to protect certain areas, values and public safety, enhance recreation opportunities and kaitiakitanga, and limit coastal erosion. The monitoring process was seen as a consultative process ([participation models](#)) involving interested and affected parties, ([stakeholder analysis](#)).

Community strategy

After a two-year process of interagency/inter-council collaboration and development a draft Strategy was published in June 2002. There were over 560 public submissions ([submissions](#)), of which 40% said it went too far in curbing vehicle use, and 19% said it did not go far enough. Thirty eight percent of submissions supported the draft Strategy. A public hearing followed, with at least 50 people/organisations heard. The panel consisted of two representatives from each of the councils and two from the Conservation Board (representing the Department of Conservation, who also made a submission).

The hearings panel prepared a set of draft rules. Subsequently, the Hurunui District Council adopted the Strategy but the Waimakariri Council decided to undertake further analysis and established a working party, which later made further recommendations on restricting access to the beach, and requesting Environment Canterbury and the Department of Conservation to establish a more rigorous monitoring and enforcement regime.

Additional findings from NIWA research showed that 4WD vehicles could damage juvenile tuatua ([biophysical carrying capacity](#)) in beds below mean high water. However, these findings came too late to be taken account in the decision of the hearings panel. There seems to be inadequate information on the contribution of vehicles to recent beach erosion during a period of high tides. There is some evidence that bird populations have decreased. There is limited information on recreational uses of the beach and estuary areas. Therefore there is a continuing requirement to increase available research and monitor the effectiveness of the strategy.

Regional Coastal Environment Plan 2005

This plan, reputedly “twelve years” in the making, promotes the sustainable management of the natural and physical resources of the Coastal Marine Area and the coastal environment and its integrated management. The plan sets out the issues relating to protection and enhancement of the coast, water quality, controls on activities and structures and coastal hazards. The plan includes a map of areas prohibited for use by vehicles in the Ashley-Rakahuri/Saltwater Creek Estuary.



Coast care (community based) groups

The Pegasus Bay Coast Care Network concept and process ran parallel to development of the Strategy. This process led Environment Canterbury to coordinate with the three councils and Te Kohaka o Tuhaitara Trust to develop a coast care network for the area. The network is based in Amberley and aims to “unite Pegasus Bay Communities to protect and enhance the natural coastal environment for all to enjoy now and in the future”. Activities include restoration work, ecological protection, advocacy and the promotion of suitable recreational uses.

Commentary

The development of the strategy was an attempt to mediate between strongly competing user interests ([conflict resolution](#) 🌱). It was largely a community driven approach with only a limited “planning” perspective to start with. However, without the coordinated effort of the respective councils and the Department of Conservation, the strategy has only been partially successful in limiting and managing visitors with vehicles and motorbikes, through permits, licences, rules, publicity and interpretation, backed up with physical infrastructure such as gates and parking.

While use of a non-statutory panel provided some ways forward, the strategy required the respective councils to back the strategy to make it work through funding and bylaws. Backing though the regional coastal plan came well after the strategy was formulated. Waimakariri Council in particular has remained hesitant in the face of opposition from vehicle users. Overall, the strategy has taken several years of evolution and remains incomplete in its intent and application.

Much of the development of the strategy was based on anecdotal evidence. Key research was available too late in the process. Ongoing monitoring is required.

Towards an integrated Approach

While a range of tools provided in the kete have been applied to the issue, it is notable that the process appears to have mainly comprised a series of *ad hoc* responses to issues as they have arisen. There does not appear to be an appropriate mechanism for monitoring and review of the recommendations of the strategy itself. Use of the kete should assist Council managers and planners to explore a wider range of options than has currently been explored.

References

Northern Pegasus Bay Coast Draft Vehicle Access Strategy 2002. Environment Canterbury, Department of Conservation, Hurunui District Council, Waimakariri District Council.