

## **Report 00.499**

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Report to the Landcare Committee

from Anne Manley, Landcare Planner - Policy, Parks and Forests (Strategy & Marketing)

### **Parks and Forests, Review of Concessions Policy and Charges**

#### **1. Purpose**

To seek approval to release the draft *Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation on Regional Council Land* and the associated draft *Information Booklet* (including proposed charges) for public consultation.

A table outlining the current and proposed charges for services in the Parks and Forests, and the rationale for maintaining or increasing the current charges, has also been completed for Councillors' consideration (attached as a separate document).

#### **2. Why Are We Reviewing the Concessions Policy and Charges?**

Last year, Councillor Werry presented a paper to the Landcare Committee recommending that Council Officers report back on ways to support the Environmental Education Initiative by better co-ordinating the use of Regional Parks and forests (possibly using concessions) and thereby enhance the Regional Council's profile in the Community (refer Report 99.481).

Officers followed that up with a report in November 1999, identifying a number of issues with the current concessions policy (approved in March 1993) and outlining a process for reviewing that policy (refer Report 99.663). It was also acknowledged that the *Charges for Services in Regional Parks* adopted in February 1997, were due for review and should be addressed at the same time.

Tourism Resource Consultants (TRC) have since been contracted to complete a review of the concessions policy and the charges for services in Parks and Forests. TRC's reports, a draft *Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation on Regional Council Land* and draft *Information Booklet*, are attached as a separate document for your consideration and approval, to be released for public consultation.

### **3. The Policy**

As mentioned, a number of difficulties were identified with administering the current policy. For example, the policy does not provide for the Council paying a commercial operator to undertake programmes on its behalf, (e.g., environmental education). Only a very small percentage of the administration and processing costs are being recovered, yet assessing applications can take a significant amount of staff time. Property consultant and legal costs can be incurred but currently are not passed on to the applicant. Coupled with this, the Council often receives concession applications for businesses that are simply not feasible in the longer term.

The new draft policy helps address some of these issues (e.g., by requiring a business plan to be submitted by commercial applicants) and includes administration fees and charges. Like the previous policy, the new draft also includes information on legislative mandates, types of concessions, (e.g., major, minor), safety requirements, termination of concessions, etc. In summary, the policy sets out the relevant background and rationale for the management of commercial and non-commercial recreation activities and services on Regional Council land.

It is envisaged that the Policy will be used mainly by Regional Council staff and Councillors but will be available to interested tour operators and the public on request.

### **4. The Information Booklet**

The draft information booklet has been designed with park/forest users in mind, i.e., visitors, recreation clubs/events and those running or intending to establish a recreation or tourism business on land managed by the Regional Council. The intention of this document is to give guidance on how commercial and non-commercial activities are managed in the Parks and Forests. It includes information on what a concession is, why we have them, how to go about getting one and the fees and charges (addressed in more detail below).

### **5. Fees and Charges**

A table outlining suggested changes to the fees and charges is attached as a separate document. The table outlines current and proposed charges and the rationale behind those charges.

Increases have been proposed for application and processing fees, and activity fees relating to mountain-biking and running events, camping, motorised recreation and reservations for picnic areas. The proposed new charges better reflect market rates and the effects of the activities on Council land.

The pricing regime (rather than just level) for several activities has been changed, (e.g., a variable scale depending on the type of programme being filmed has been introduced, and environmental education charges have been brought in line with other Council charges). Other charges remain largely unchanged.

In general, the charges have been set with regard to:

- relative effects of the activity
- market rates that apply to other similar opportunities in the Wellington Region (on public and some private land e.g. motorised recreation)
- an assessment of willingness and ability to pay
- cost recovery targets.

The Policy also includes a section on waivers and discounts which can be applied in some cases. Some charges have been clarified and/or brought into line with other Council policy, (e.g., no charge for environmental education for schools; realigning of motorised recreation pricing to take account of effects of the vehicles, rather than charging on a per person basis). The charging schedule does retain flexibility for the Council to negotiate flat rates with commercial operators if this is considered appropriate for the type of activity being offered.

The proposed increases in the charges are not expected to generate a significant increase in revenue for the Council. The proposed changes are largely aimed at recovering costs not currently being met, e.g., recovering the true cost of processing concession applications, and better reflecting costs associated with the effects of some activities (such as motorised recreation) on the environment.

## 6. **Where to Now?**

Following consideration and approval of the draft policy and information booklet by Councillors, the documents will be released for public consultation. Key stakeholders, (e.g., current concessionaires, iwi) who have already been involved in the process will be approached directly for their comments. We also see this as an opportunity to glean the comments of members of the public, other park users and potential concessionaires.

To do this we intend to place public notices in local newspapers inviting people to make submissions on the policy and information booklet, and to place the documents on the Council web site for people to view and comment on at their leisure. Once this consultation has been completed, officers will report back to the Landcare Committee making final recommendations on the policy, information booklet and charges (taking into account the feedback received during that public consultation) for formal approval by Council in November 2000.

## 7. **Communications**

Communication opportunities will be available once the draft Concessions Policy and draft Information Booklet have been approved for release for public consultation.

## 8. **Recommendations**

(1) *That the Committee receive the report and note its contents.*

- (2) *That the proposed charges for services in Parks and Forests be approved for inclusion in the draft Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation and Tourism Activities on Regional Council Land and draft Information Booklet;*
- (3) *That the draft Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation and Tourism Activities on Regional Council Land and the draft Information Booklet (including charges) be approved for release for public consultation;*
- (4) *That following public consultation, officers report back to the Landcare Committee making final recommendations on the Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation and Tourism Activities on Regional Council Land, the Information Booklet, and charges, (taking into account feedback received during public consultation), for the Committee's approval.*

Report prepared by:

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**Attached as a separate document:**

PROPOSED Changes to Existing Fees and Charges in WRC Parks and Forests

DRAFT Policy for Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation on Regional Council Lands

Commercial and Non-commercial Recreation on Regional Council Lands – DRAFT Information Booklet