

Waikato District Council

Background Report: Reserves and Beaches Bylaw 2026

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Executive summary

Between 30 November 2019 and 31 December 2024, Council received 330 customer requests relating to incidents on beaches and reserves. Internal analysis reveals that vehicles and motor/dirt bikes are the most significant and recurring issues, accounting for 165 requests (50%).

Raglan recorded the highest number of complaints (105), followed by Huntly (62) and Port Waikato (50).

A notable increase in complaints occurred following the implementation of a bylaw prohibiting horses on beaches, particularly in 2020 when signage was installed.

A review of 14 external Council bylaws across New Zealand shows that:

- 78% regulate vehicles and motorbikes on beaches/reserves.
- 57% include rules for horse riding, though none impose a full ban.

This data supports the need for a revised and enforceable Reserves and Beaches Bylaw to address the most pressing issues, particularly vehicle use.

Customer request data

Internal data analysis

From 30 November 2019 to 31 December 2024, Council received 330 customer requests about incidents that occurred relating to beaches or reserves.

Most common customer request types

Table 1 shows that the most common customer requests relating to beaches and reserves related to motor / dirt bikes, vehicles, horses, removal of bollards or fencing, and dogs.

Issues relating to vehicles span several categories, including:

1. Motor / dirt bikes access reserve and ripping up grass
2. Vehicles accessing reserves and ripping up grass
3. Disturbing wildlife or nature (vehicles/bikes on reserves/beaches).

This suggests vehicles on beaches or reserves are the most significant issue, accounting for 165 of the 330 total complaints.

Note: Dogs are out of scope for this bylaw review as dogs are managed by the Dog Control Bylaw 2022.

Table 1: Customer requests received from most to least common type.

Customer request type	Total requests received	Percentage
Motor/dirt bikes accessing reserves and ripping up grass	110	33%
Vehicles accessing reserves and ripping up grass	49	15%
Horses on beaches	44	14%
Removal of bollards / fencing for vehicle/bike access to reserves	28	8.7%
Dogs off-leash on reserves/beaches	24	7.4%
Illegal dumping (fly-tipping) on reserve land	23	7.1%
Erosion on beaches	22	6.8%
Fire (including actual fire on beaches and growth hazards on reserves)	8	2.4%
Limited walkway access to beaches	6	1.8%
Disturbing wildlife (vehicles/bikes on reserves/beaches)	3	0.9%
Damaging nature (vehicles/bikes on reserves/beaches)	3	0.9%
Freedom camping in reserves	3	0.9%
General dog issues e.g. waste pick up, on-lead zones at dog parks.	3	0.9%
Beach closures due to events	2	0.6%
Kite surfing	1	0.3%
Land carts/yachts	1	0.3%
Total	330	100%

Customer requests by location

Table 2 shows that Raglan receives the most customer requests relating to reserves or beaches, with 105 requests. This is followed by Huntly (62), Port Waikato (50), Ngaaruawahia (37), and Tuakau (30).

These requests align with where Council has more beaches or reserves.

Table 2: Customer requests received by location (from most to least).

Customer request location/ward	Number received	Percentage
Raglan	105	33%
Huntly	62	18%
Port Waikato	50	15.4%
Ngaaruawaahia	37	11%
Tuakau	30	8.9%

Customer request location/ward	Number received	Percentage
Pukemiro	17	4.9%
Tamahere	11	3.4%
Te Kauwhata	6	1.8%
Pookeno	3	0.9%
Matangi	3	0.9%
Taupiri	2	0.6%
Meremere	1	0.3%
Horotiu	1	0.3%
Horsham Downs	1	0.3%
Whatawhata	1	0.3%
Total	330	100%

Customer requests by location

Table 3 shows the type of issues occurring in the following locations.

The main issue experienced in Raglan is horses on beaches (32), followed by vehicles accessing reserves and ripping up grass (19). This is followed by Huntly where the main customer request are motor / dirt bikes accessing reserves and ripping up grass.

Table 3: Key issues of the five (5) wards with the most customer requests received.

Customer request location/ward	Customer request type	Number received	Percentage of total received
Raglan	Horses on beaches	32	30%
	Vehicles accessing reserves and ripping up grass	19	18
Huntly	Motor / dirt bikes access reserve and ripping up grass	34	51%
Ngaaruawaahia	Motor / dirt bikes access reserve and ripping up grass	14	36%
Tuakau	Motor / dirt bikes access reserve and ripping up grass	11	37%
Port Waikato	Erosion on beaches	9	18%

Increase of customer requests when Reserves and Beaches Bylaw was quashed

Following the installation of signage in 2020 prohibiting horses on beaches, there was a noticeable rise in customer requests and complaints related to non-compliance.

The volume of complaints grew steadily in the period leading up to the bylaw being quashed, suggesting heightened community awareness and dissatisfaction with perceived non-enforcement.

Table 4: Customer requests related to horse ban on beaches before and after Bylaw quashing.

Year	Number of complaints relating to horses on beaches
2019	0
2020*	25
2021	8
2022**	6

* Signage installed by Council

** Bylaw quashed by the high court

Assumptions for data:

1. The data provided is for the period 30 November 2019 to 1 December 2024 and captures customer requests received relating to beaches and reserves within the Waikato district. This relies on correct 'tagging' of the complaint when received by Customer Service.
2. The data may not represent all beach and reserve-related issues, as some requests may have been misclassified or not 'tagged' accurately.
3. Each contact has been counted individually, including repeat calls about the same issue.
4. This data does not include the length of time it took to respond to complaints.
5. Customer requests were only processed when specific keywords were present within the request.
6. Data may underrepresent issues that were not clearly described or lacked keywords at the time of reporting.
7. Requests submitted through alternative channels (e.g., social media, in-person) may not be captured unless formally logged in the Property and Rating (P&R) system.

Review of external Council Bylaws

Staff have reviewed 14 bylaws from Councils in New Zealand, including city, district and regional territorial authorities.

Table 1 shows most reviewed Bylaws had rules for vehicles/motorbikes, events, and horses. Note: No Councils prohibit horse access from all beaches.

Table 1: Analysis of external Council's bylaws for Reserves and Beaches

Issue on beaches and reserves	Result
Horse riding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8/14 (57%) of Councils included rules for horse riding on beaches or reserves. • Of these eight Councils, rules included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Schedules outlining where horses could be ridden or were prohibited. ◦ Requiring horses to be ridden in a safe manner. • No Councils had a complete ban on horse riding on beaches or reserves.
Vehicles and Motor Bikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11/14 (78%) of Councils had rules for vehicles on beaches or reserves. • Rules included a complete ban on vehicles and motorbikes on beaches or reserves, except for uses such as launching or retrieving a vessel or within designated areas.
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6/14 (43%) of Councils had rules banning fires on beaches or reserves. • Of these six Councils, rules included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Fires are banned unless Council gives prior approval.
Illegal dumping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7/14 (50%) of Councils had rules addressing illegal dumping or disposal of litter.
Removal of bollards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5/14 (36%) of Councils had rules for removing or damaging bollards or signs.
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9/14 (64%) of Councils had rules for events or trading activities on reserves or beaches. • Of these nine Councils, rules included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ No person may sell goods or services without prior approval from Council. ◦ A permit must be obtained from Council before holding events.
Life jackets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7/10 Regional Councils had rules around wearing personal flotation devices and exemptions when on a vessel. Rules included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the personal flotation devices are in a readily accessible location. ◦ every person on board wears a properly secured personal flotation device of an appropriate size to securely fit that person.

Issue on beaches and reserves	Result
Prohibition of access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5/10 Councils had rules around restricting access to the public within their Coastal Plans. Rules included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public access may be restricted to protect public health or safety; ○ that some activities may need to restrict or exclude public access for safety or security reasons.