

Wellington Public Meeting - 17 June 2019

NB: These meeting notes record the verbal comments of meeting attendees. The comments were not fact-checked before being recorded here. The comments do not represent the views of the review team or the Ministry for Primary Industries.

General questions – are the WAA and Commission needed and what’s working well?

- Online database. Excellent tool, especially when showing when there are issues with access on a particular track
- Advocacy, Ric [Cullinane – CE of NZ Walking Access Commission] did a great job with access in the Aorangi Forest Park(?) area. Tramping clubs/groups don’t have resources to be negotiating access
- On committee there’s a warm feeling towards the Commission. General feeling that what has been done in the past is positive and is valued by people on their committee.
- The Commission has given certainty for both sides – for farmers and access users. And what has achieved this is the attitude of the Commission. Most of their farmers have been really happy with the work of the Commission. Big success, given the tensions that have existed in negotiating these interests.
- Worked for Fish & Game for 20 years in the Nelson area & DOC. Having the Commission there has been very helpful and has resolved particular issues that have been long-standing. Some of that because of the combo of good info & having role in trying to find a solution, the Commission has been able to achieve this where others haven’t. Also access to the database has been excellent. Used to take hard copies of the cadastral map to landowners, now much easier. Practically, the Commission has done a really good job looking at practical solutions to access (i.e., legal access not necessarily practical or desirable, and negotiating and being creative to resolve this). Commission’s walkways/agreements have also been enduring, although wants to know whether there are examples of subsequent landowners not upholding these?
- Noted the static budget over the last 10 years, in this context it’s been amazing what the Commission has achieved. Also the contestable fund grants (small amounts) have been really valuable for communities to establish/finalise tracks and trails in their regions. Thinks that more can be done e.g. urban needs more input.

Improvements

- WAMS is fantastic but google maps is really a much wider used tool. Especially in Urban areas. Still issues across all tools in terms of comprehensive info on public access - gave example of a good walkway between Hill St and Bowen St (NZTA owned) in Wellington that doesn’t show on google maps whether it’s a road or path. Is there a way to push WAMS data to Google?
- Also thinks tool is fantastic, but some evolutions/improvements that need to be made. Especially in the context of tracks in forest areas. They’d like to work with the Commission to make these tracks visible to the public.
 - Hugh Logan (Review Panel Chair) highlighted the resourcing issues with maintaining and improving the database.
- Very often it’s public agencies whose information is not forthcoming. Which is not helping the WAMS system. Criticism not of the Commission but the public agencies that don’t make their records available or publish them at all. Important that the review looks at better integration of

this information (eg. from local authorities) in a way that is efficient/ possible for the Commission. E.g., should the Commission's database be the place where all this information is collated and recorded, given it's not recorded elsewhere?

- Government departments and local bodies make extensive use of open street maps, which provide a better range of facilities than anything available through the Commission's website. Google maps suggests going through Somes Island if walking from Lambton Quay to Petone.
- The database 100% comes down to lack of money. But used to be serious issues when topographical maps didn't line up with tracks and roads e.g. topographical maps sometimes show a road and it's actually a farmer's private road. This is the key thing that WAMS has achieved that Google maps and old hard copy records don't do.
- Question re how accurate is WAMS – Ric Cullinane clarified it is accurate in terms of its spatial alignment (boundaries) but not complete in terms of the totality of access across NZ. Can't represent things that aren't digitised. The database has Land on Line data. There is no GPS overlay on WAMS.
- Hugh Logan– in summary, the database is very highly valued and is a tool that people really want to continue to have, but it requires ongoing maintenance.

Equal access

- Have you sought disability perspectives? The open space access plan for Wellington is a previous piece of work done by DOC that might be worth looking at in this context.
 - Ric Cullinane – they'd been working with the Halberg Foundation to develop a disability access strategy/approach. But its complex, because it's not just about mobility issues, it needs to cover a vast range of needs. Open to someone else providing us with disability information, as there are only so many hours in a day.

Barriers to landowners

- While don't have any public access on our property, do have very large tract managed by QEII and get public interest in it periodically. Need additional wording in Act to ensure that access users abide by their responsibilities re visitor behaviours. Gave the example of users bringing dogs onto their property when hosting school cross-country – after communicating that dogs weren't allowed at the cross country. They don't understand I'm worried about a parasite issue – not dog worrying. Parasite issue (sheep measles) as animals can spread disease to livestock on the property. Need more to be done in the context of visitor behaviour and the risks around disease/other issues for farmers. Wants better material from the Commission re: sheep measles. This is an education problem. Hard to get people to understand about worming dogs. Firearms are also an issue – we back onto hunting territory. Christchurch has shone a light on the issues around this but the cross pollination of hunting areas and public access areas (for walking) raises concerns.
- Need to be dynamic when responding to access issues and biosecurity, this requires flexibility and responsiveness to be built into Act and work of the Commission.
- Dissemination of information needs to happen in both directions. Noted the generational change in knowledge about use of land and respect/responsibilities in terms of using and being on farm land. Can the Commission be a broker of this kind of information, to educate people on these intricacies of farming and biosecurity? People need to understand the full basis on which

people have access, including conditions and responsibilities. Thinks we'll need to do more and more of this – not just for increasing international visitors but also next generation and more urbanised communities (who are not aware of how to behave in the rural environment).

- Ric Cullinane - We have to start thinking about our interaction with our wider environment in terms of biosecurity more generally. It's a complex and changing space. The key is when access needs to be stopped (e.g. due to Kauri Dieback Disease), you should be able to offer alternate access. This is part and parcel of respecting the land – this includes cultural value of the land. This is integral in the Commission's work and their relationships with landowners and access users.
- One of the issues is funding. Advertising campaigns are not cheap. Would be valuable to have info at airports. Plus tourism levy could play a role in helping/resourcing this. 90% of hunters are great. Also noted that the majority of people who do Te Araroa Trail are international visitors and most carry so little they wouldn't make a mess anyway. But gave example of 2 huts: Mitre Flats (where pair of fishermen had been helicoptered in with stacks of beer) + Lake Waikaremoana's Marauti hut (which was full of fishers again, heavily drinking. Easy for boaties to access this one, and they couldn't be bothered taking away their empties). These weren't overseas visitors. Need to make sure the narrative in this context is balanced and focus visitor behaviour education on nationals as well as internationals.

Sandra Faulkner (Review Panel Member): With a tiny budget, you can't do everything. We need to think about the role of the Commission. Is there a need for the Act and for the Commission?

- Imperative that Commission stays independent and separate, and not put into a central government department. Currently it has an uncompromised and clear duty, this would be lost if amalgamated into government agencies. Couldn't have done what it has if it was part of a department. Its independence is vital in terms of focusing on and achieving its goal. Could even go further and have it report to Parliament like the PCE (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment).
- Hugh Logan – is MPI the right fit for administering?
 - Yes, MPI because it's the department that can consider the whole picture – it balances the access side of things through the consideration of farmers/owners. Huge amount of access still by good will. Which was the issue when the WAA started.
- Being a single issue organisation is a strength. In the community, it's quite invisible to the average person though. It also needs to work a lot more closely with regional/territorial authorities e.g. make submissions to councils on open space regional plans.

Integration of WAA into local government policy

- Ric Cullinane - Local government is probably the Commission's most important stakeholder. Work well with lots of them. Re contributing to planning documents, we're just not resourced to do this. Usually done by outstanding regional field advisors who are across the particular issues.
- Need to look instead at what more could others do – e.g. get other legislation to consider the WAA and the Commission, give some statutory consultation status to remove the onus on the Commission ('have regard to' 'give effect to').

Enduring nature of WAA agreements:

- Easy for things not to endure when properties change hands. A landowner doesn't necessarily want to encumber their title. Seems to rely very much on what is negotiated. He has seen it happen where properties at the end of a track are not on board, and then need to re-negotiate everything. How do we enable something that is just a good will agreement with landowners, to be enduring? Gave Wangapeka example of DOC and landowners falling out, which has rendered ? track (Karamea side) inaccessible. There's no security here. Same with OIA process where access is not delivered as agreed – Gave the example of Peppered? island. Another example is the [name of farming family's] situation where landowners have been very accommodating over a long time, with 100,000s visitors and it's gotten to a point that they can't run their business anymore, so what do we do to help them. This is the other side of the coin. Can the Walking Access Commission be part of conversations re: access at Matukituki?
- Localised urban issue – if you have development in Wellington, once all boundaries have been secured, you know there will be no more access unless easements are put in. Currently good connectivity between tracks but concerns about access between the road network and tracks in Wellington. Examples were given in the Ngaio area – concerning two types of connectivity – boundary connectivity (roads to tracks, where no easements), and transfers/transverse? connectivity (boundary of section goes well beyond fence line in many areas, so if want to run track around urban areas/ suburbs you run into all of these sections of land that are privately owned but no one has access to). The latter is big issue for tracks being established around the sides of cities.
 - Hugh Logan – clarified that the latter issue is an issue of access over private land, which is the Commission's bread and butter. The first issue is about future proofing access when housing developments are put in.
 - NZWAC's Strategic Communications and Partnerships Manager – gave example of the Auckland Council partnership work with housing developments to establish easements and secure access for the future. But for these projects (there's only one other), WAC needs to be invited in. Plus it also needs funding. These projects are being funded by compensation from NZTA because motorway built over a walkway.
- This is an issue that has been regarded in the past as one of national importance. This would be amenable to a national policy statement or a standard, which councils are obliged to give effect to. This could include considering free and enduring access when considering sub-divisions and approving property developments.
- Everyone noted that Wellington does walking access incredibly well.
- And we have good signage.
- A man had never heard of WAMS until that evening – and was going to check it out. However, having listened to the discussion, saw it as very necessary and gave example of landowners who just refuse to give access on DOC land.
- Need to get away from focus on maps. A lot of it is available through other channels e.g., cadastral maps and open street maps. Commission needs to refocus itself on what already exists out there and make sure all areas across NZ are covered in a balanced way. E.g., three tracks between some locations and none in others.
- Question asked of farmers in room about fencing along public access areas, how much paper roads or informal routes would work better if there was some funding for some temporary

fencing along these roads (gave example of bulls along the track for the Southland part of the Te Araroa Trail. Said she didn't mind walking with bulls, but some people don't like to do this).

- Range of issues – need to make sure we don't undo the good will that enable access to negotiated. But the emerging issue is the number of visitors. Would fencing off help the [name of farming family]? I don't know the land well enough. Situations where forming track and having a way to maintain the track needs to be properly funded. Can't go halfway.
- Should some charging be introduced to take the pressure off the maintenance of these tracks e.g., Milford track (this is controlled now, not free totally)? Also idea proposed of having certain times of restricted access e.g., of Hunter Valley station. Or consider allowing councils to shift un-usable paper roads and build new roads in more practical way i.e., letting councils sell off paper roads to fund new roads.
- Councils don't have good legislation to allow process to shift paper roads, or alter the use of paper roads.
- The inflexibility of these things should be addressed, provided that enduring public access is maintained. 64,000km of paper roads and in some cases they are of no use whatsoever, but in some cases could be the answer to a lot of the public access issues. Also opportunities re use of rail trails. But a lot have been sold off over the years.
- The other side of this discussion is the need to ensure that the landowner is left no better or worse off.

Environment and Biodiversity – especially in context of NZ's priority to reduce carbon footprint

- Just about to push for walking to schools policy. A lot of the time walking access is through reserves. Dealing with short journeys, 2km or less. But some opportunities could be lost for young people to get active and get daily dose of nature if they can't walk through reserves.

Priorities and purpose

- Commission should work a lot more with others, especially councils, being more joined up. Acknowledging the resourcing that this requires. Also, the Commission needs to be more noticeable in the community.
- Classic example was [Name] City Council's open space access – they were considering doing some work around paper roads that wasn't entirely legal. She contacted the Commission to notify them about it and they got involved. However, if she hadn't done this, the Commission may have remained unaware. Should shift the obligation onto councils to seek input/comment on documents from WAC when doing these things. But also stretched resources of councils.
 - This could be just an email from councils to the Commission as a stakeholder that requires compulsory consultation.
 - Also forums where councils get together on particular issues e.g., enviro, parks and forest management. Could use these opportunities.
 - We all have a responsibility to let councils know of our views
- Wants to see the Commission work in partnership with Te Araroa. At the moment about 14% of the track is on the road. Would be good to get it under 10%, with support from Commission. The Regional Field Advisors are fantastic. Need closer relationship between Te Araroa and WAC (Te Araroa not subsumed by WAC but stronger relationship). Also noted that WAC could be a

home for Nga Haerenga. Doesn't sit very well with NZTA. WAC would be a 'home-base' for these groups e.g., sharing HR, IT etc but not wholly subsumed in purpose by WAC.

- Ric Cullinane – thinks it could work but key issues re maintaining independence and resourcing.
- What about the Commission's national strategy? Is this something that gives legal/statutory heft eg. via RMA, Local Government Act? If yes, it could be a way to clarify responsibilities of local councils in this context. Same with DOC.
 - Hugh Logan – there are regional strategies (most recently Taranaki), which set important background. National strategy is much more difficult to put together, also doesn't have same gravitas as national policy statement.
 - But need to think about your objectives in developing a national strategy/statement and what we want to achieve. There is opportunity here.
- Hate the thought of going through the RMA. A regulator needs to make sure it doesn't destroy the good will of farmers. Money well spent more important than regulatory framework i.e., giving directed funding to Commission rather than creating regulations that oblige others to give effect to the Commission's objectives. A little generosity from the Crown may get a better outcome than forcing further work on councils, and be better use of money.
- General comment about gazetted walkways and controlling authorities' roles, and enforcement, are crucial roles and resourcing is an issue in this context to allow Commission to achieve these fully.

Closing of meeting:

We want to thank you for coming. Face to face helps shapes ideas well.