

# Cruise ship critics wary of their return to Waiheke

The first international cruise ships in two years are due to arrive in the Hauraki Gulf this October, but not everybody is keen on their return. Critics say the industry contributes to ferry delays, over tourism and negative environmental impacts on the island.

Before the pandemic shut down the cruise industry in 2020, Waiheke commuters, residents and the local board were complaining of a long-running issue with cruise ships causing delays to Fullers' ferry service. Fullers360 chief executive Mike Horne told *Gulf News* at the time the decision to cancel some sailings was

a safety issue - with cruise ships getting larger, with more powerful engines, and causing increasingly more dangerous and unpredictable turbulence in the waters around Princess Wharf.

Mayor Phil Goff set up a working group to resolve the issue, chaired by the Harbourmaster, and involving Fullers, Auckland Transport, Ports of Auckland and cruise ship industry representatives.

While the group fell off the public radar when the lockdowns hit, it continued working behind the scenes and ultimately resulted in an update to the "Harbourmaster's Direction," says Auckland Transport spokesman Blake Crayton-Brown.

The update sets a clear procedure for the testing and use of large vessels' engines within the downtown ferry terminal basin, and extended the times when vessels of 500 gross tonnage or larger, which includes cruise ships, aren't allowed to manoeuvre within the basin.

Previously, there were two exclusion windows between 7.30am and 9am, and 4.30pm to 6pm on weekdays. Most of the delays were to Fullers morning commuter services, so an extra hour was added to the morning window, which now begins at 6.30am. The exclusions now also include public holidays and weekends, during the same evening hours and between 8.30am and 12pm.

"Outside of these windows, there will be the possibility of minor service impact for ferry services and Auckland Transport will continue to work with all ferry operators to minimise any impact on customers," Blake says.

Community group Project Forever Waiheke also submitted a report, entitled *Waiheke is a community, not a commodity*, to Auckland Unlimited during initial consultations on a draft Waiheke Destination Management Plan last year - and its report showed residents perceived more harm than benefit from pre-pandemic levels of tourism.

The report included a joint research

survey the group did with the University of Auckland, which showed less than a third of Waiheke residents saw increased income from tourism over the previous five years. Even with residents directly involved with tourism-related businesses it was only five percent, and only eight percent of residents outside of the industry saw a financial benefit.

Nearly half of the general community said they saw no personal benefit from tourism at all.

On the flipside, 92 percent of Waiheke people directly experienced or witnessed the negatives of the usual level of tourism - road congestion, overcrowded ferries, pollution and damage to the environment and wildlife plus trouble accessing services.

Forever Waiheke's report also cited academic studies of "over tourism" in New Zealand, and its impact on small communities. For example Waiheke, with a permanent population of around 9,500 had

roughly 1.3 million visitors in the peak tourism season of 2016/2017.

The survey found widespread support for potential regulations such as limiting visitor numbers to a manageable level, capping and licensing Airbnb and holiday accommodation to help ease Waiheke's housing crisis, and levying or taxing some tourism activities

to fund infrastructure repairs and maintenance to balance the strain tourism put on the island's infrastructure.

Project Forever Waiheke spokeswoman Robin Kearns, a professor at University of Auckland's School of Environment, says internationally over the past two years tourism 'hotspot' islands, like Venice, Maui and Galapagos have responded to similar impacts by passing by-laws to limit tourist numbers or banning cruise ships over a certain size.

"Cruise ships are incompatible with contemporary sustainability imperatives, given their disruption of ecosystems through the scale of their emissions, fossil fuel usage and the on-shore impacts of high-volume passenger numbers."

Consultations on the destination management plan are currently on hold, after being interrupted by Covid. Tātaki Auckland Unlimited director of investment and industry Pam Ford says the Stafford Strategy Group, hired to develop the



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Waiheke destination management plan, is working on a timeline to restart public consultation with island residents and key groups such as local iwi, and the Department of Conservation.

“These high-level draft plans have been shared with the local board chair for initial feedback. Following all consultation being completed a final report will be presented via a workshop with the local board and community groups.”

New Zealand Cruise Association chief

executive Kevin O’Sullivan says the industry is having very amenable, ongoing discussions with local councils, including Auckland’s, and the government about steps towards making the industry more eco-friendly and sustainable for the local communities cruise passengers visit. That said, he doesn’t believe cruise ships are significantly contributing to Waiheke’s summer crowds. About nine cruise ships a year visited the Gulf each summer, pre-pandemic, and while there are no

hard numbers on how many passengers visit Waiheke they do know roughly half of all passengers spend their time in port in downtown Auckland - going no further than Parnell, he says.

O’Sullivan says for most passengers it’s their first visit to Auckland, and they have limited time to cram in as many ‘essential experiences’ as possible. “Waiheke is quite a big drawcard... but it’s a big chunk out of the day to get to the island.” • *Paul Mitchell*

## Brie-yond belief: Island Frenchie continues council fight

The Island Frenchie is back in the form of a food truck, and is operating six days a week from a Tahī Road location after consent problems closed the popular shipping container eatery in Oneroa.

Island Frenchie owner Nico Fini has just returned from a trip home to Europe and says “nothing further has happened” towards him getting his Oneroa premises consented and open again for businesses.

Nico says he is still paying “huge” rent on the unusable site in Oneroa and says he “has to go to plan B” to keep things afloat. “I took some pretty bad advice from some pretty average consultants”, says Nico. The local consultants advised the structure, although commercial, did not need consent due to the container’s 30-metre dimensions that were erroneously deemed as ‘low risk’ structures, and thus exempt as per a 2020 law change. “Then the council said the container was unlawful, and I had to get retrospective consent”, says Nico.

Getting this has proved extremely difficult, he says. Auckland Council did offer extensions, but as of late May, he was informed he would be fined if he continued to operate from Oneroa - necessitating the move to a food truck on a property he owns on Tahī Road. He expects his final bill for getting the Ocean View Spot signed off “will be upwards of \$80,000.”

He says the whole process has been extremely stressful and thinks the council’s actions are “not right”, and that they are “looking for reasons to stop you (from trading), instead of offering constructive solutions.”

Nico has contacted his local MP and councillor to see if they can help with greasing the wheels to get a quicker resolution, and get his popular eatery back up and running.

For the time being, he is trading from his food truck, which he says “still offers the same menu, but can’t do coffee.” The



truck has a 28-year history, and Nico, on occasion, transports it to events like the Takapuna Food Festival. He is also appreciative of the outpouring of support for his plight from residents who continue to visit and sample favourites like Fish Tacos, Bacon and Egg Ciabatta, and Loaded Pork Corn Chips.

The Island Frenchie’s plight draws parallels with the iconic CBD burger truck, The White Lady. The case is attracting current media attention after the 70-year-old late-night takeaway was threatened with closure by Auckland Council on the back of compliance complaints from a neighbouring business. It is now operating under a temporary licence while further assessments are completed to assess ongoing viability.

Nico says although he is “back in business in some capacity”, he is “willing to do whatever it takes” to find a way forward to re-establish some french flair on Waiheke’s Golden Mile. • *Jim Birchall*

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## New freedom camping bylaws come into effect this September

Auckland Council has adopted new freedom camping bylaws that will come into effect from 1 September.

Along with 13 new prohibited freedom camping areas, the bylaw also clarifies rules around the definition of “certified self-contained vehicle”, a no-return period of two weeks and maximum stay on Waiheke.

Under the bylaw the council will also be able to fine freedom campers \$200 for breaching the bylaws when previously it had to go through lengthy court proceedings to prosecute.

Regulatory committee chair Linda Cooper presented the Freedom Camping in Vehicles Bylaw 2022 at the Governing Body meeting on 23 June.

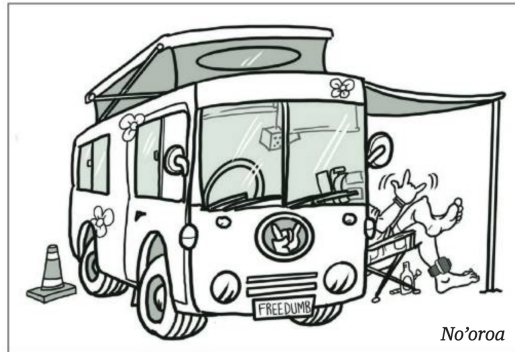
Cooper said work on freedom camping bylaws had been under way for the past six years.

“This will enable responsible freedom camping to take place in Auckland,” Cooper said.

Cooper said that the bylaws were not about the public disliking freedom campers on their street but providing clear rules to follow.

“As long as people are not breaking the rules but if they are causing an absolute nuisance we do rely on the public. We know our public; they will ring up.”

Independent Māori Statutory Board



member Glenn Wilcox has been involved with work on the bylaws for the past six years.

In the beginning, Wilcox said it was not a big issue for Auckland.

Since then issues like homelessness and fuel price rises have had strong impacts on the number of people living in cars, he said.

“This is a very dynamic issue and it might change in a couple years.”

Councillor Greg Sayers was concerned that freedom campers could circulate in one area.

“There is potential for someone to own a vehicle 365 days a year to freedom camp in one localised area,” Sayers said.

The bylaws allow for a two-night stay in a freedom camping site, but Sayers

said he preferred a one-night option instead.

On Waiheke, the bylaws require freedom campers to leave the island entirely on the third day to dump the waste from their self-contained vehicle.

Cr John Watson said freedom camping had been a big issue in the Albany ward.

“A number of these people turning up, they are not poor people. They are turning up with jetskis,” Watson said.

“People are becoming more brazen. Let us hope this will help to stop what is generally

anti-social behaviour.”

Mayor Phil Goff said it was a balancing act between the freedoms of campers and the needs of locals.

“Councils that have been overly restrictive have had their bylaws overturned,” he said.

“We also need to have access to infringement fines rather than prosecution. That will be a big step forward.”

While the adoption of the bylaw was carried, Cr John Watson, Greg Sayers, Wayne Walker and Sharon Stewart voted against a recommendation that said the bylaw was the most appropriate and proportionate way of addressing freedom camping problems. • *Laura Kvigstad, Auckland Council reporter funded by New Zealand on Air.*

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