

Access charging for international visitors

This document provides information to support engagement on access charging regulations, revenue allocation and implementation. Key questions for feedback and draft maps are provided at the end of this document.

The Government has introduced a Bill to Parliament

The Government is proposing changes to modernise the Conservation Act 1987 and introduced the Conservation Amendment Bill (the Bill) to Parliament on 7 May. The Bill enables international visitors to be charged to enter some parts of conservation land and allows for new regulations to specify key components of how these charges will work.

More information about the Bill can be found on the Department of Conservation's (DOC's) website here: [Modernising the conservation system](#).

Why changes are needed

Popular conservation sites are under increasing pressure

- Around 50 percent of all international visitors access conservation land each year, often for day walks which are free to access.
- Tourism on conservation land generates around \$5.3 billion annually for the wider economy.
- At some popular sites, high visitor numbers are causing negative impacts on the environment and placing increased pressure on visitor infrastructure.
- The law currently prevents DOC from charging for access to conservation land.

Introducing access charges at sites that experience high visitor numbers ensures international visitors contribute to the costs of maintaining and improving the experiences they visit.

Access charging regulations

The Bill enables regulation-making powers for access charges

Access charging regulations will be developed to:

- describe the area where access charges apply;
- set how much the charge will be at each site; and
- determine any groups that are exempt or discounted from paying the charge.

At this stage, we expect to establish access charging regulations in time for summer 2027/28. This timeframe may change depending on the progression of the Bill.

Where will access charges apply?

Four sites are being considered for access charges initially

DOC is investigating access charges at four sites:

- Mautohe / Cathedral Cove,
- Tongariro Alpine Crossing,
- Aoraki / Mount Cook, and
- Piopiotahi / Milford Sound.

Access charges will not be suitable for all conservation land. We are open to suggestions around other potential locations for access charging.

Options for defining areas where access charges will apply

We are seeking feedback on how we define areas where access charges could apply. The key considerations for the size of the area include impacts to revenue, costs to implement, simplicity for users and compliance. We are currently considering two possible approaches:

Broad approach: Large area (e.g. an entire national park)

- Includes existing borders and obvious boundaries.

Targeted approach: Areas include core infrastructure and highly visited sites

- Includes medium and small options.
- This means targeting an area of conservation land within existing boundaries that experiences high visitor numbers, includes important infrastructure, and natural and historic values that are at the core of the visitor experience.

We have included maps at the end of this document to demonstrate how these options could apply at different sites.

How do we set access charging rates? Should any discounts be considered?

Access charges will only apply to international visitors

Only international visitors, or those who are not ordinarily resident, will be required to pay an access charge. New Zealand citizens and anyone who has lived in New Zealand for at least six of the last twelve months will not have to pay. The Bill enables access charging prices for each location to be set in regulation. No decisions have been made on how much the charge will be.

Informing how the rate would be set

We are seeking input on indicative principles (set in regulations) that could guide how access charging rates are set. They will also be used to determine whether access charging rates achieve desired outcomes. Our draft principles include:

- **Effectiveness:** The rate generates stable revenue that exceeds costs of administering and collecting the levy and is sufficient to contribute to improving the visitor experience.
- **Reasonableness:** The rate should consider the cost of providing the experience, the ability and willingness of visitors to pay, and the impact on local businesses.
- **Transparency:** Treaty partners, stakeholders and the public are informed about access charging rates and have an opportunity to provide some input.

We are also seeking feedback on the range of inputs that DOC should consider when setting the access charging rates. These inputs will be used internally to calculate a price that meets the principles described above.

- **Costs to provide the experience:** The costs of providing an experience include the total resources required to design, deliver, sustain, and improve that experience.
- **Willingness to pay:** How much an individual or entity is prepared to pay for the experience, reflecting the value they assign to it.
- **Aligning with market values:** Setting prices in a manner that is proportionate to comparable market offerings available in New Zealand and overseas.
- **Demand:** How much people want something, and are able to pay for it, at a given price.

Considering pricing and discounts for access charges

DOC applies different pricing for groups for some campsites, huts and the Great Walks. We are considering using similar pricing structures for access charges.

We are seeking input on whether access charges could include: a standard day pass for adults, discounts for certain groups (e.g. children or families), seasonal rates, and park passes (e.g. one charge for both Aoraki / Mount Cook and Piopiotahi / Milford Sound). There may be other relevant discounts or passes to consider.

Should we include any exemptions and waivers?

Exemptions and waivers would remove the requirement to pay an access charge

We are seeking input on whether any exemptions and waivers for access charges should be considered and have included some examples below:

- **Exemptions** (*applies to groups specified in regulation*): For example, this could include international concession holders, internationals with Great Walk bookings at relevant sites, international delegations, and search and rescue teams.

- **Waivers** (*set by the Director-General of Conservation*): For example, these could be applied in response to natural disasters, operational failures, and events of national or international significance.

How will revenue be spent?

Revenue must be spent in line with the legislated purpose of the levy

The Bill sets out that the purpose of access charges is to ‘fund, or help fund, maintaining and enhancing the visitor experience on conservation land’. The detail on how revenue will be allocated has not yet been agreed by Cabinet.

We are seeking input on:

- priorities for investment;
- how Iwi/Hapū and local communities should be involved; and
- the scope of what access charging revenue should be spent on.

We think that meeting implementation costs and investing in the places where revenue was collected from should be prioritised first. Once investment needs are met at place to a ‘reasonable standard’, any extra revenue could be used to support other visitor experiences on conservation land in the surrounding area, then around the country.

During previous public consultation, many people said they would support this approach. This would require work to define the investment needs at place and in the surrounding area. We are interested in how Iwi/Hapū and local communities would like to be involved in the process to set investment priorities.

Regarding scope, our initial thinking is that maintaining and enhancing the ‘visitor experience’ should be interpreted broadly, enabling investments in visitor infrastructure and services, as well as biodiversity and heritage work that contributes to visitors’ experiences on conservation land. We see biodiversity and heritage as key parts of visitors’ overall experience.

How will access charging be implemented?

Developing a cohesive and adaptable approach

There are a range of ways an access levy for international visitors could be collected. Our aim is to develop an approach that:

- provides a high-quality visitor experience;
- is cost-effective to implement; and
- works for the specific characteristics of each site, while also supporting a cohesive system across locations.

Potential approaches to access levy collection

We are seeking input to help shape and refine a set of potential collection approaches. Five high-level options have been identified. Not all options will be appropriate at every location, and they may be applied differently depending on the context of the site.

In some cases, a combination of approaches may be needed to ensure broad coverage of international visitors to the sites.

The options include:

- **Hard gates:** Physical entry points such as barriers, gateways, or turnstiles.
- **Soft gates:** Online payment systems, supported by on-the-ground or automated compliance approaches.
- **Transport operators and tours:** Collection through shuttles or guided tours.
 - This would typically complement other approaches to ensure wider coverage.
- **On-site experience operators:** Collection through commercial activities at the site.
 - This may only capture a subset of visitors, depending on the location.
- **Parking** (where applicable): Collection through parking systems.
 - This would work alongside transport or tour-based approaches.

Have your say on access charging regulations for international visitors

Providing feedback on access charges for international visitors

Oral feedback from engagement and hui will be recorded and considered during future analysis.

If you want to provide additional written feedback, please send your feedback to:

accesschargingconsultation@doc.govt.nz.

Questions to inform the development of the work

We have outlined some questions below that we are keen to hear more on. We also welcome any additional feedback.

Levy area

- 1) Do you prefer the broad or specified approach to defining areas where access charges apply in regulation?
- 2) Do you have a strong preference for either of the options for each particular site?
- 3) Are there other areas where you would like to see access charges investigated?

Rate principles and inputs

- 4) Do you agree with the proposed rate principles? If not, how would you change the proposed rate principles?
- 5) Do you agree with the proposed rate inputs? If not, how would you change the proposed rate inputs?

Pricing and discounts

- 6) Do you have any thoughts on the types of prices that are offered or discounted?
- 7) What would a fair price be to access the locations we are investigating?
- 8) Who do you think exemptions and waivers could apply to?

Revenue allocation

- 9) What sorts of investments on conservation land should be prioritised in your area or region?
- 10) What do you think the scope of revenue allocation should be?
- 11) How should local communities and Iwi/Hapū be involved in setting investment priorities?

Revenue collection

- 12) How do you think revenue from access charges should be collected? Do you have a preferred implementation approach?



















