

Government proposal: Exploring charging for access to some public conservation land

Public consultation

November 2024 – February 2025



New Zealand Government



Third party revenue

One of the Minister of Conservation's key priorities is growing third party revenue for conservation, to improve conservation outcomes

- From third parties, DOC currently gets about \$85 million:
 - \$25 million a year from charging visitors for facilities such as huts and campsites.
 - \$27 million a year from charging concessionaires (\$17m from tourism e.g. shuttles, guides)
 - \$31 million a year from the International Visitor Levy (IVL), a \$100 border levy (Australians don't pay this)
- The Government contributes around \$650 million a year towards our biodiversity and visitor work.
- Despite this, the Government faces challenges in funding and managing the conservation system.
- \$2.3 billion required to fully protect our unique ecosystems.

Challenge 1: the current charging system is unfair and complicated



Heaphy Track, Kahurangi National Park

- Many visitors do not make a fair contribution towards the public conservation land they visit.
- Mueller Hut day walkers

Over three-quarters of summer visitors to Mueller Hut are day walkers who are not required to pay (despite using facilities). An adult visitor staying overnight is required to pay \$50 per night.
- Heaphy Track mountain bikers

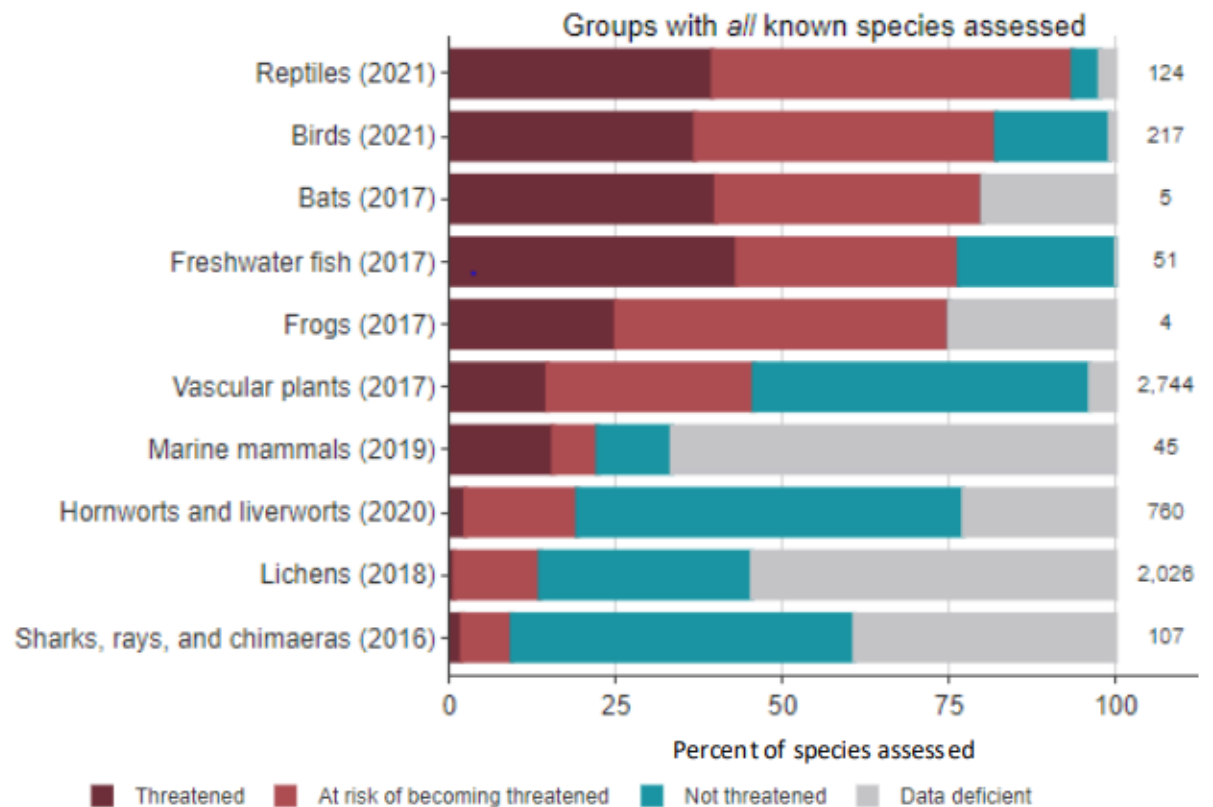
Nearly a fifth of visitors using the Heaphy are mountain bikers. A mountain biker pays up to \$44 in hut fees. A walker pays up to \$220 in hut fees.
- Australians (45% of international arrivals) do not pay the International Visitor Levy. 600,000 Australians do at least one short walk in New Zealand every year.
- How visitors are charged varies by region and across the three different Acts.

Challenge 2: costs are rising across the conservation system



Ruahine Forest Park

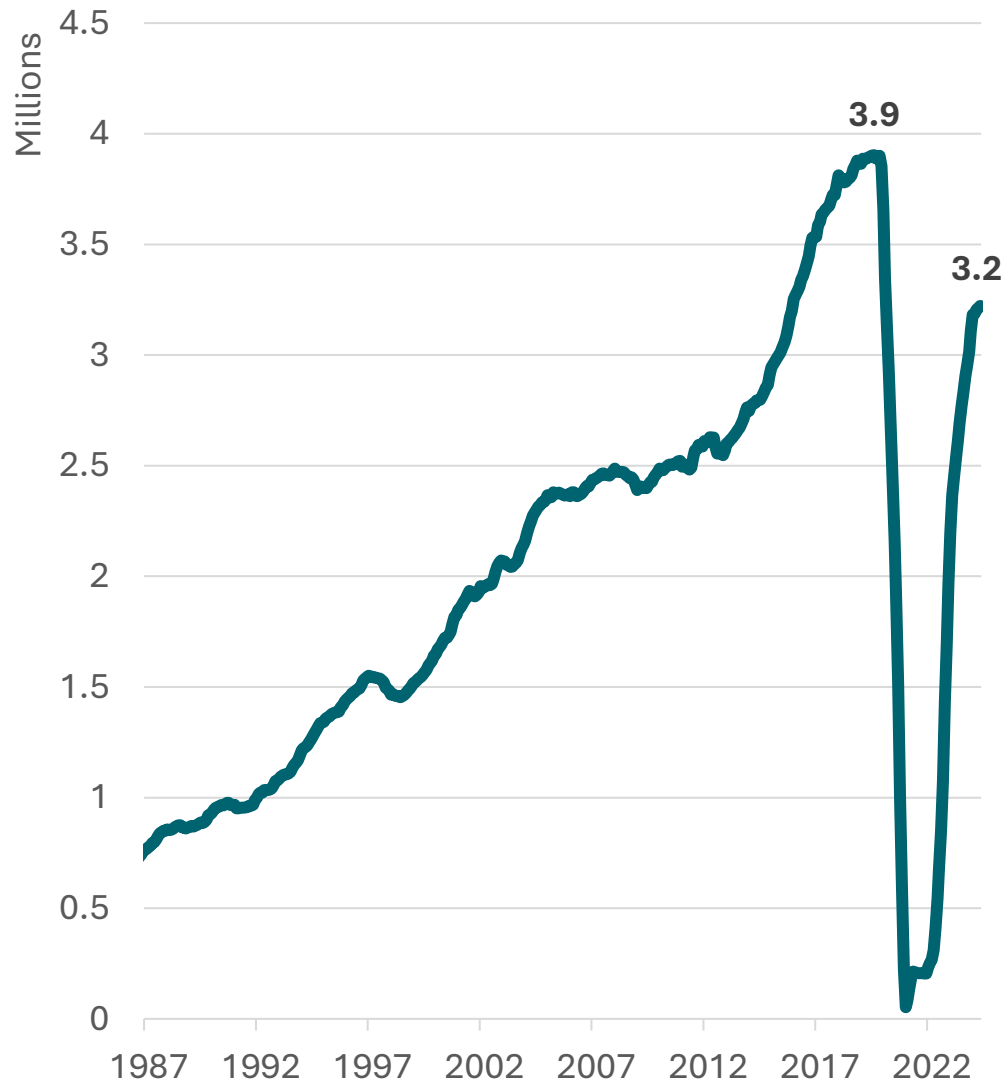
- Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather, leading to increased damage to infrastructure such as tracks, bridges and huts
- Ecosystems are declining and nearly 4,000 native species are either at risk or threatened with extinction. More investment is needed to stop the decline.



Challenge 3:

International visitor numbers are putting pressure on public conservation land

- At Piopiotahi and Aoraki, international travellers make up to 80% of visitors, but do not pay DOC for the experience



What are access charges?

- Access charges are charges to enter a specific area (e.g. Yosemite)
- Access charges are common internationally
- Access charges in protected natural areas (e.g. national parks) can take a variety of forms:
 - A per person fee to enter a park/area
 - A per vehicle fee to drive on a road
 - A per person fee to use a track
 - Day/annual passes to enter a park/area
- Conservation law does not clearly enable the use of access charges in Aotearoa in most places.



Why access charges?

Significant potential opportunities



- Significant opportunity to grow third-party funding for conservation
 - We estimate that if used in just 5 highly visited sites, access charging could raise up to \$70 million (gross) each year, assuming a \$20 charge on the 2.6 million visitors to Piopiotahi, Aoraki, Cathedral Cove, Franz Josef and the Tongariro Alpine Crossing
- Supporting a fairer user-pays system
- Improving visitor experiences
 - Reducing crowding, improving facilities and protecting nature.
- Increasing simplicity and transparency
 - Creating a clear visitor charging framework across conservation law, that is easy for visitors and businesses to understand.
- Charging for access could also bring challenges, such as the potential impact on Māori connecting with their whenua.

Who should pay?

Potential high-level options

- **A: Charge all visitors the same** - everyone could be charged an equal amount.
- **B: Charge everyone but charge New Zealanders less than international visitors** - everyone could be charged, with New Zealand citizens and people ordinarily resident in Aotearoa paying a lower charge.
- **C: Charge only international visitors** - only people who are not New Zealand citizens/ordinarily resident charge.
- Discounts could also be offered, e.g. for youth.
- Exemptions for workers/volunteers within the area/park.

Where could they be used?

Thinking about what features make a place suitable

- We don't think that access charging would be a practical or desirable tool for all public conservation land.
- The potential characteristics that could make a place suitable:
 - Places facing unsustainable pressure from visitors
 - Places popular with international visitors
 - Places with high biodiversity and scenic values
 - Places where user groups are defined
- As signalled in the document, engagement with tangata whenua would be important before any charges were set.

How could the new revenue be invested?

Access charging could raise up to \$70 million for conservation

- Money raised by access charges would be for conservation, including the visitor network, cultural story-telling and biodiversity.
- **A:** More of the money could be invested at the place it is collected in (i.e., within the park or local area).
- **B:** More of the money could be invested within the region it is collected in.
- **C:** Invest the money in priority projects across Aotearoa, regardless of where it is collected.
- We want your feedback on how money from access charges is invested back into conservation.
- What should iwi involvement in the allocation process look like?

Topics for today's discussion

We're keen to hear your views on whether access charges are a good idea, and what they could look like

- What are your views on access charges? Are they a good idea for Aotearoa?
- If they are used in Aotearoa...
 - Who should pay?
 - Where access charges should be used?
 - How the funding should be invested?
 - How do you think the Government can best meet its Tiriti obligations in designing and implementing them?