

Access charging for international visitors

The Government has introduced a Bill to enable an access charge for international visitors at some popular conservation sites.

Why changes are needed

Popular conservation sites are under increasing pressure

- Around 50% of all international visitors access public conservation land each year.
- Tourism on conservation land generates around \$5.3 billion annually for the wider economy.
- Currently the law prevents DOC from charging for access to conservation land.
- At some popular sites, high visitor numbers are causing negative impacts on the environment (e.g. through disrupting wildlife) and placing increased pressure on visitor infrastructure (such as toilets).

This Bill will enable the Government to charge international visitors for access at highly visited sites.

Focussing charges on high-pressure tourism sites ensures international visitors who enjoy our most visited areas contribute to the costs of maintaining them.

What the changes are

The Government is making a range of changes to modernise the Conservation Act. The Conservation Amendment Bill will speed up regulatory systems, streamline and clarify our processes, and provide for economic activity on conservation land where risks are manageable. Among these changes, the Bill will allow for new regulations that can specify access charges in particular places.

Where will access charges apply?

DOC is investigating access charges at four sites from the summer of 2027/28 - Mautohe / Cathedral Cove, the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, Aoraki / Mount Cook, and Piopiotahi / Milford Sound.

Charges would only be introduced where sites meet specific criteria set out in the Conservation Amendment Bill, such as when the benefits outweigh the costs, the site has many international visitors, or it is expensive to maintain visitor facilities. Access charges won't be suitable for all public conservation land.

No decisions have been made on how much the charge will be.

Who will have to pay?

The charges will only be for international visitors, or those who are not ordinarily resident – this means 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.

How will the access charge be implemented?

We're planning the details now. This includes collecting baseline data and engaging with visitors at the four sites that are being investigated for charging.

Looking at overseas examples, there are many ways that they are implemented, for example through payment at ticket booths at the entrances to national parks, online purchasing of tickets from park organisations, or purchasing of park passes.

Once the legislation is passed, regulations can be made outlining key details of access charges – such as where they apply, what the rates will be, and what discounts and exemptions there are.



How much revenue will be made?

Charging international visitors could generate significant funding for conservation. Early forecasting suggests that this could raise around \$60 million a year when used at four popular sites.



What will the revenue be spent on?

The Bill specifies the purpose of access charges as: 'to fund, or contribute to the funding of,

- (a) maintenance and enhancement of visitor experiences on public conservation land; and
- (b) the collection of the access charge.'

Money collected can only be spent for these purposes and it is ringfenced for conservation. This will include visitor infrastructure, biodiversity, culture and heritage work.