

Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Short Walk: removal proposal submissions

Introduction

This document includes all the submissions received on DOC's recent proposal to remove Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Short Walk.

We've compiled the submissions in their raw unedited form, and removed the names of submitters.

1. Dear DOC (1 pax)

I can't believe that you would consider closing this beautiful track!

I don't go to the cove often. But I've always walked up to the look out then back down to Hahei beach using this track.

I don't like walking up the road path. Its busy smells of the bus car fumes.

Please don't do this!

2. Could I get feedback please? (1 pax)

With the closure of two Hahei Department of Conservation tracks, now a call from the local Ratepayers and Residents Association for members of the community to have their say on the decision. Association Chairman, Jon Jonassen, yesterday said that a newsletter was going out with details on what is proposed and the feedback links. In what was a surprise to Jon, DOC earlier this week announced that both the Hahei Beach Short Walk and Gemstone Bay Track would not be reopened after suffering storm damage. Feedback can be provided by emailing cathedralcove@doc.govt.nz, up until June 19.

3. Submission to the Department of Conservation Re: Proposed Closure of Hahei Beach Northern Track to Cathedral Lookout (1 pax)

I am a regular user of the Hahei coastal area and a member of the local community who values both its natural environment and the opportunities it provides for recreation and conservation. I have personally walked this track and seen the benefits it brings—not only in terms of access to outstanding views, but also in supporting local conservation efforts. I am therefore deeply concerned at the proposal to close it. I submit in strong opposition to the proposed closure of the walking track from the northern end of Hahei Beach to the Cathedral lookout, and request that the Department retain and remediate the track rather than remove public access. 1. Existing Asset Built to Modern Safety Standards.

This track includes substantial infrastructure such as bridges, formed steps, and safety railings. It was constructed following the Cave Creek disaster, and therefore reflects modern engineering and safety expectations for public accessways on conservation land. Closing the track would effectively abandon a significant public investment that remains largely intact and functional.

2. Slip is Localised and Readily Manageable The current slip affecting the track is a common issue in coastal environments and does not justify full closure. A minor realignment to the right of the existing track provides a practical, low-cost solution that avoids the unstable area.

3. Supports Conservation Outcomes The track is actively used by local trappers undertaking predator control. This work is contributing to improved habitat conditions for native wildlife, including kiwi, which are believed to be re-establishing in the area.

4. High Recreational and Visitor Value This walk significantly enhances the Hahei coastal experience. It provides a safe and accessible route from the beach to elevated viewpoints, offering outstanding views across the bay and toward the pā at the southern end of the beach.

5. Demonstrated Community Value and Use Despite attempts to close the track, it continues to be widely used by the local community. This ongoing use clearly demonstrates its importance as a public amenity.

6. Strong Potential for Community Partnership There is a clear willingness within the Hahei community to assist with maintenance and stewardship of the track.

Conclusion and Request I respectfully request that DOC:- Retain public access to the track- Address the slip through minor realignment- Maintain existing infrastructure- Engage with the local community to establish a supported maintenance partnership Closure would represent an unnecessary loss of a valuable and well-used public asset.

4. Hahei Beach Short Walk and Waimata-Gemstone Bay feedback on proposal (2 pax)

Hahei Beach Short Walk and Waimata Gemstone Bay

Submission feedback on proposal to remove these two tracks

DOC have advised the proposal to remove two tracks (3 as Stingray Bay has already been closed).

Hahei Beach Short Walk

15 May 2025 Community Update DOC advised planning underway for Hahei Beach Walk reroute “The track has been a priority for DOC since reopening walking access to Cathedral Cove” says DOC Coromandel Operations Manager Nick Kelly. Advised that now had a feasible design to progress. Initial funding was to come from the \$5M allocated from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy in July 2024. Construction is scheduled to begin in September and be completed by the end of November 2025.

Cathedral Cove was a priority however this is now open. There are people in the local community who recognise and have always utilised this Hahei Beach Short walk track all year round. It is an important part of enjoying the beautiful beach and having an alternative walking track. It was also an alternative for those who want a longer walk to Cathedral Cove and offers beautiful views of the coastline and this includes international and NZ visitors.

Being around Hahei all my life I would hate to see this track removed. It is a significant part of the Hahei experience. There are many tracks around NZ where track maintenance is hard

however it is of great importance to visitors and local people. This track is one of those tracks.

Cathedral Cove should not be the only main attraction and not just used as a revenue gatherer for the region. It is time that other tracks and experiences are able to shine also.

Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track

Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track is also an important track to maintain. This work was started in December 2025 after apparently Keir had been awarded the contract by DOC. Have they been involved in discontinuing the track completely? This is quite a different experience as it provides some access to the marine reserve from the rocks. It has always been more of a challenge to access being a rocky beach but surely some of the natural rock can also be used for accessibility.

If removed what does restore to nature mean – leave it to grow gorse and never be able to be used again at a cost of \$28,100 to decommission.

I would hate to see the removal of these two tracks (along with Stingray Bay which had already had accessibility removed). These tracks have been used widely for many years and deserve to be preserved.

I do not support the proposal to remove these two tracks.

5. Gemstone Bay and Hahei options (1 pax)

Kia ora,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the two proposals regarding access to Cathedral Cove: the Gemstone Bay option and the Hahei short walk option.

In short, I support the removal of the Gemstone Bay option, but believe the Hahei short walk option should be retained.

Gemstone Bay.

The walking access to Gemstone Bay would require regular maintenance over time. The question about the sustainability of track maintenance will crop up after each landslide or significant weather event. In other words, every attempt to maintain the track will lead to a 'when next' scenario. Gemstone Bay can be accessed by way of snorkelling, kayaks or other water craft. Only some walkers to Cathedral Cove have historically decided to also go to Gemstone Bay. Meanwhile, visitors who want to visit the marine reserve [as well] continue to have the opportunity of visiting the area from the sea. These two groups have some correlation, but the value of maintaining the track for walkers, when it can still be accessed alternatively and safely, appears unnecessary.

Hahei short walk.

The Hahei short walk, which connects Hahei beach to the Cathedral Cove track is a significant amenity for the district. It is used by visitors and locals alike. While DoC proposes that the track be removed to focus on the main access, a single access to Cathedral Cove may put this significant visitor attraction at risk of losing any access if the main track from Grange Road is damaged.

As this track is popular with locals, it continues to be used. It is important that locals are prioritised, and that DoC avoids only catering for an international market. The continued use of the track demonstrates that it can be used, and that removal of the track may be ignored. What is required is for the track to be made safe for locals and visitors alike.

The option paper states that 20% of visitors to Cathedral Cove access the site via the beach track. It should not be assumed that removing access from the beach track would 're-route' those visitors to the Grange Road access.

While the paper states that there are no viable alternatives to the proposed track, this is false. Every day there are walkers using the track.

The Hahei short walk track should continue to be maintained.

Ngā mihi,

6. Submission on Removal Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute (1 pax)

1. I *disagree* with the recommendation to remove the Hahei Beach Short Walk.
2. While DOC may consider that the Cathedral Cove and Hahei Beach Short Walk tracks are separate tracks, they form part of one shared amenity for the community and visitors. Very few people would take the Hahei Beach Short Walk without continuing on to Cathedral Cove. Maintenance of the two tracks should be considered as one.
3. To remove the Hahei Beach Short Walk track would be to remove a key access point to Cathedral Cove. I note that the options paper confirms in point 6 that "The Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve is a nationally significant visitor destination." It is also a significant local landmark for the wider Mercury Bay and Coromandel Peninsula, which draws considerable tourism interest. On this basis, access should not be limited. Point 17 in the options paper refers to a recommendation to "prioritise reliable access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove." Reliable access should include the two main entry points - via the beach, and via the road. Many holiday makers and tourists walk to Cathedral Cove from Hahei Beach.
4. Point 9 in the options paper confirms that "Previous community consultation during development of post-Cyclone Gabrielle recovery options confirmed the Hahei to Cathedral Cove walking link is important to the community." Indeed, and it remains so. My family and I are frequent users of this track, as are many locals and frequent visitors. It is an important track for people who use it for exercise, health and wellbeing. I do not believe walking up a steep road would provide the same amenity and many would choose not to walk. For this reason, access should remain.
5. To limit access via this track would be to prioritise access for tourists (who would use the road or shuttle bus) over locals and bach owners who frequent the area. This is problematic rationale. For this reason, access should remain.
6. Point 17 in the options paper refers to a recommendation to "prioritise reliable access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove."
7. I note that the option paper states in point 8 that the track has been closed since early 2023. This is incorrect as it has been open for use and has had visitors and locals alike use it.

8. If DOC were to set a precedent that tracks vulnerable to landslides should be closed, we would have very few tracks left, particularly on the Coromandel Peninsula. This track, as access to Cathedral Cove, is an important public amenity of national significance, which should be retained.

Conclusion:

I strongly urge DOC to reinstate and maintain the Hahei Beach Short Walk.

Prior consultation has already confirmed that this walking link is important to the community.

This track forms part of the Cathedral Cove Amenity and is not separate in reality.

Decisions around track maintenance should not be prioritised on the patronage of one group. Local users should have a high stake in decision-making.

I disagree that Hahei Beach Short Walk is considered a separate amenity when one leads to the other. Maintenance should be considered as one accordingly.

My preference is to have both the reroute and original tracks reinstated and maintained. With option 3a being of highest significance.

Submission on Waimata/Gemstone Bay track removal

I am comfortable with the removal of this track in favour of the Hahei Beach Short Walk being maintained. *I am happy to be contacted about this submission; details are below.*

7. Cathedral Cove - Removal of Tracks (1 pax)

Kia ora,

We understand that DOC is not prepared to reinstate the Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Beach Short Walk as it considers that continued investment in these tracks is not sensible or sustainable.

Looked at objectively, it has to be said that the decision that DOC has now made is one that is not sensible, because the tracks clearly can be repaired and maintained at costs that should not be prohibitive.

DOC's approach demonstrates unjustified cost-cutting or a failure to properly understand risk, and appropriately respond to risk, or both. If DOC had taken the approach it is now taking to these two tracks, it would have closed the Cathedral Cove track for good after the first slip well over 10 years ago. To its credit, back then, it quickly remediated the damage, and it was several years before the track was damaged again.

We do not think it is any defence to argue, correctly, that the public get more benefit from the Cathedral Cove walk than from the two walks DOC is now proposing to close. Being able to walk to Cathedral Cove should not be viewed as "enough" where there are additional iconic walks to enjoy. If you start going down the "enough" path, then you finish up telling people just to forget Cathedral Cove and simply walk down to Hahei Beach; unfortunately, this appeared to be a "solution" that the authorities seemed prepared to tolerate for far too long after the latest slip on the walk down to the Cove.

We believe the authorities need to think about the message that closing these tracks sends to businesses and tourists. If businesses and tourists ask why this happened, the answer they will receive will be “cost-cutting”, since no other response makes any sense. This is a bad image for DOC and the Government; rather than promoting tourism and the enjoyment of iconic amenities, the authorities will be viewed as having a predominant focus on cost-cutting.

Looked at from a safety perspective, DOC’s approach to these two walkways is justified in certain situations, but not this one. Clearly, areas such as White Island are high risk, and there is a good case for simply banning public access. In other cases, such as Cave Creek, there is no rational case for banning public access, but obviously DOC must have a maintenance program that seeks to minimise the risk of damage and tragedy. However, some risk has to be tolerated; otherwise we simply exclude access to amenities where objective observers would see the risk/reward analysis as acceptable.

No rational observer would seek to deny the possibility that there will be further slips on the Cathedral Cove track, and on tracks leading onto and off the Cathedral Cove track. But that is not a basis for concluding that we must avoid the cost of remediation, or any risk, by closing the track. To its credit, DOC often does apply the correct philosophy. For instance, there are various signs down at the Cove warning of the possibility of rock falls, etc. That is a simple, cheap, and perfectly acceptable solution to what might otherwise be viewed as expensive cost and high risk safety issues, if the wrong focus is brought to these issues.

You should never seek to address cost and risk issues by going too quickly to the default option, closure. If there are further slips at Cathedral Cove these will most likely occur after torrential rain, as has already happened more than once. But people don’t live on the tracks, and shouldn’t walk the tracks in bad weather, so the worst you would normally expect to happen is that people wake up one day and discover that a section of the track has been washed away.

DOC’s suggestion that it is not sensible to reopen these two tracks is really a statement that it is too costly to do so. The simple reality is that re-routing and reconstruction of stairways should not be too costly, and during normal weather there should be minimal risk associated with walking either of these tracks. While the tracks might become unsafe should there be torrential rain this normally does not provide any basis for closing the tracks. This should only happen if the damage cannot be remediated by re-routing and rebuilding walkways or stairways, i.e. if the only solution is some costly high tech engineering solution to build a large span bridge over ground that has slipped away.

No doubt DOC will have some geotechnical analysis that indicates that parts of the track are susceptible to slips, particularly parts that are close to existing slips. However, this does not mean that the risk cannot be addressed by re-routing the relevant parts of the track, as has already happened with the latest repairs that DOC has carried out to the Cathedral Cove track as it leads down to the Cove.

As we have said, the real argument here is one of cost both to remediate, and to maintain following the remediation. We do not know what it cost to install a replacement walkway down to the beach at Cathedral Cove. However, that cost should not have been prohibitive as it did not involve erecting special span bridges the cost of which one can see might be prohibitive. Instead, it involved re-routing, and it is easy to see that so long as DOC got value for money from its contractors it should have achieved a fix at a realistic and worthwhile cost, given the benefit that the work has obviously produced.

The same analysis obviously applies to the two tracks DOC is now seeking to close. We find it extremely difficult to believe that the ground under either of these tracks is inherently unstable. Admittedly, hillsides in some parts of New Zealand have become more unstable over the years as the moisture content has built up, and not been sufficiently drained away. However, we find it very difficult to believe that this is the case with either of these tracks.

This really just leaves the question of the cost to remediate and the ongoing cost of maintenance. As already indicated, no reasonable person would be asking DOC to undertake expenditure that involves building high tech structures over large gaps created by slips. The solution in these cases is to re-route the relevant portion of the track and replace stairways that have been washed away, as has already happened. It should only be where it is not possible to replace walkways and stairways or re-route the track, that a decision to close is made.

Regarding ongoing maintenance, DOC must be sufficiently funded by the government to ensure this can take place.

If DOC was to continue with the approach demonstrated by these recent decisions, then we are on a slippery slope. Each time a slip occurs on a track, it is likely to be closed. Realistically, if you were to apply this approach to the Great Walks as a whole, then over time you would finish up closing many of them.

DOC has a very good reputation for maintaining and promoting iconic walkways. Don't start trashing that reputation by putting across an image of being primarily focused on cost-cutting.

With respect, it is DOC's decision that is not sensible, and it should not be sustained. Ngā mihi,

8. Submission (1 Pax)

I wish to see and keep all Cathedral cove walking tracks open to the public. This is huge for our tourism and should be available for all to enjoy visit /walk by locals and visitors alike .

Kind regards

9. Feedback, Hahei Beach to carpark short walk track.

This track was/is much used and I would like to see it reopened with or without the diversion. If that is not an option then at least keep the current infrastructure and operate it as a local track; much like a back country track.

If it was signposted; *This track is not maintained by DoC, Enter at your own risk*. Then that could address any liability issues.

As for the most recent slip I believe it would be fairly easy to cut up through the bush and thereby avoiding that section. Obviously some stairs would be good but not essential.

Whatever happens we have a trapping line in that area and I am anticipating that we will be able to continue with that.

10. Cathedral Cove Track Closures (1 pax)

To the Regional Manager in charge of Cathedral Cove Operations...

I have become aware of the imminent permanent closure of two tracks linked to Cathedral cove.

This is completely unacceptable from my point of view and that if the residents of Hahei.

We are sick & tired of layers of office administrators in DoC with a No-Can-Do Attitude. Make it work! Even if it means getting out of your comfy padded seat in your air-conditioned office with your ultra-high salary , and coming here to Hahei with a shovel to demonstrate you can actually do something . You are supposed to work for The People.

Do better!

Make it work! We do NOT accept these track closures, and will lobby all the way to the very top on this.

A second submission also came in from the same author:

Dear Madam.

I am a local resident of Hahei, and am alarmed to hear that DoC is considering closing two of the tracks towards Cathedral Cove.

I understand that these are not the primary main track , but 2 others , specifically one going down to Gemstone Bay, and the other longer track directly from Hahei Beach to the Cathedral Cove carpark.

I personally find this suggestion disappointing and frankly unacceptable. I use one of those tracks on an almost daily basis, and have been doing so for thirty plus years. Many others like me do the same.

Let me remind you that your job is to serve the people, and that includes keeping all our local track options open. We are not concerned about slight slippages here and there. We have navigated the obstacles before DoC even took control of the area, when the track was just a rough farm track and there were no steps down to the cove, just a rope.

If you cannot serve the local people in the way we deserve, please stand aside, resign, and let someone else do it who is more capable.

Perhaps you need to revisit the original deed of gift from local farmer Vaughn Harsant to the crown. You will find everything you need to know there.

Put plainly the residents of Hahei are unlikely going to allow those closures to proceed. Do better!

Yours Sincerely,

11. Cathedral cove. (2 pax)

That is its name.

To me there is a agenda to close this site to all visitors.

What needs to be done is to charge a 2 dollar fee for visitors.

Use this money to help pay for maintenance on the tracks. Keep all tracks open.

Cheers

12. I am opposed to DOCs planned 'closures' of tracks at Hahei/Cathedral Cove. (1 pax)

As there is a planned visitor charge I think not restoring the two damaged tracks is especially appalling.

I'm particularly concerned about closure of the Hahei Short walk track from the beach to the start of the Cathedral Cove track.

The restoration of the short walk track is critical to ensure an appropriate safe walking option from the village to Cathedral Cove.

At the moment people walk up Grange road causing safety concerns and littering issues.

With such high volume of foot traffic on the narrow footpath, people are often forced onto the road. I have had several incidents of having to avoid people on the road when driving on Grange (I live there) There are also weekly incidents of visitors littering and/or placing their rubbish in residents red lid, recycling and glass bins when they are walking too or from the Cove via Grange Road Coffee cups and general waste from walkers in glass and recycling bins means bins are not collected by TCDC.

I've also had my emptied red lid bin used as a dump for dirty children's nappies, beer cans and food scraps from people walking home from the cove.

If foot traffic was encouraged to use the more scenic 'Short Walk' route it would be safer, less disruptive for local residents and more pleasant for visitors.

Before the storm damage I, like many locals and visitors, also used the Short Walk as part of my regular walking loop from home to beach and back up the walkway to Grange Road.

Restoration of the Gemstone track would also be ideal but both that and Stingray Bay were always accessible before DOC installed 'formal' tracks so they are for me less critical than the Short walk track.

Please reconsider plans to abandon that track in particular. Nga mihi

13. Should start charging. Take the burden of tax payers instead of paying for non tax payers from overseas.

When we go overseas we pay for everything.

The two tracks need to be closed for safety.

It makes sense to keep people safe and the money spent elsewhere.

Regards

14. Submission Opposing the Proposed Closure of the Waimata (Gemstone Bay) Track and Hahei Beach

xxx strongly opposes the proposed closure of both the Waimata (Gemstone Bay) Track and the Hahei Beach Short Walk. As a tourism business operating in Hahei and engaging with thousands of visitors each year, we see firsthand the value these tracks provide to visitors, local businesses, residents, schools, conservation groups and the wider community. These tracks are important public assets that should be maintained for long-term access rather than permanently closed. The reserve is one of New Zealand's most iconic coastal destinations and makes a significant contribution to recreation, education, conservation, tourism and the local economy. The proposal appears to favour a short-term solution over a long-term strategy for the reserve. DOC's position of funding one track while proposing to abandon another raises concerns that the wider economic, social, recreational and community impacts have not been fully considered. Given Cathedral Cove's status as a premier visitor destination, infrastructure decisions should form part of a strategic plan for the entire reserve rather than being made in isolation. The proposal is particularly difficult to reconcile with DOC's recent efforts to restore and promote access to Cathedral Cove and Gemstone Bay, and raises questions about the long-term vision for visitor access within the reserve.

Waimata Gemstone Bay Provides Unique Public Access to the Marine Reserve

Waimata Gemstone Bay is one of the reserve's most important recreational, educational and conservation assets. We note the statement in the consultation material: *"15. Previously Waimata Gemstone Bay track was one of the only access points to the marine reserve for snorkelling and marine education. However recently the boundaries of the marine reserve have been expanded providing opportunities in other points for access that visitors and educators can use."*

While the marine reserve boundaries may have expanded, public coastal access has not. The Waimata Track remains one of the few practical land-based entry points into the marine reserve for snorkelling, education and conservation activities. Expanding the size of the marine reserve is not a substitute for maintaining public access to it. The proposed closure would reduce access at the same time as the reserve area increases.

Public Access to a Conservation Success Story Our opposition to the closure of the Waimata Track is not simply about access to a beach. It is about maintaining public access to one of New Zealand's most successful marine conservation projects. Our business was involved in the establishment and promotion of the Te Whanganui-O-Hei Marine Reserve during the early 1990s, when public engagement focused primarily on the marine reserve rather than Cathedral Cove. DOC played a key role in educating the public about the benefits of marine protection and regularly shared scientific evidence of improvements in fish abundance, biodiversity and ecosystem health. Te Whanganui-O-Hei remains the only marine reserve in the Waikato region and continues to be an important conservation and educational resource. Closing the Waimata Track would significantly reduce the public's ability to experience and learn from the reserve, making access increasingly dependent on boat ownership or the ability to pay for a commercial trip. This outcome is inconsistent with the original vision of making the benefits of marine conservation accessible to everyone. The Gemstone Bay snorkelling trail remains one of the best shore-based snorkelling experiences in the Coromandel and one of the region's most affordable nature-based activities. It attracts families, schools, conservation groups and visitors from around New Zealand and overseas, while also helping disperse visitor pressure from Cathedral Cove. Maintaining access to Gemstone Bay protects both a valued community asset and a direct connection between the public and one of New Zealand's most successful marine conservation areas.

Hahei Relies on More Than Cathedral Cove Alone Visitors come to Hahei for more than Cathedral Cove alone. Walking tracks, snorkelling, beaches and nature-based experiences

encourage people to stay longer and support the local economy. Reducing these experiences gradually erodes what makes Hahei a destination rather than simply a stopover. As a tourism business operating in Hahei, we already see the effects of uncertainty around track access. We regularly speak with visitors who still believe Cathedral Cove remains fully closed. That confusion affects accommodation bookings, tourism activity, retail spending and visitor confidence. Further closures will only reinforce the perception that access to the area is becoming increasingly restricted and may influence future travel decisions.

The Hahei Beach Short Walk Should Reopen We strongly oppose the proposed closure of the Hahei Beach Short Walk. This track is a valuable addition to the wider Cathedral Cove walking experience and provides a far more enjoyable and natural visitor journey than directing visitors through suburban streets and shuttle bus routes. The track helps remove pressure from Grange Road and surrounding residential areas by keeping visitors on a dedicated walking route. Closing the track will likely increase pedestrian congestion and create additional safety concerns along local roads. The Hahei Beach Short Walk enhances the visitor experience and supports DOC's long-standing position that Hahei is the primary gateway to Cathedral Cove. Its closure appears inconsistent with previous efforts to improve and future-proof visitor access within the reserve. Practical Solutions and Funding Should Be Explored Before Closure We do not accept that permanent closure is the only practical solution. DOC should continue investigating alternative engineering options that retain public access while managing erosion and geological risk. For example, engineers have suggested designs with primary structural fixings located above hazard zones and a sacrificial lower section that can be replaced following major storm events such as Cyclone Gabrielle. This approach could significantly reduce future repair costs while maintaining access. If ongoing maintenance costs are a concern, alternative funding options should also be explored before access is removed. The International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy was specifically established to support infrastructure in high-use tourism destinations such as Cathedral Cove, and future visitor charges could also contribute to ongoing maintenance and resilience improvements. DOC should work collaboratively with other agencies, stakeholders and the community to identify funding solutions and explain why alternative funding sources may or may not be viable. The focus should be on retaining access wherever reasonably practicable rather than permanently removing it.

Conclusion We do not believe the economic, social, educational, conservation and community benefits of these tracks have been adequately weighed against the repair and maintenance challenges. The proposed closures should be placed on hold while DOC undertakes a more collaborative planning process involving local businesses, residents, iwi, tourism operators, schools, conservation organisations and other stakeholders. As one of New Zealand's most significant coastal destinations, the Cathedral Cove reserve deserves a long-term strategy that protects public access, supports local communities, and preserves opportunities for recreation, education and conservation. We urge decision-makers to reject the proposed closures and work with the community to develop practical, sustainable solutions that retain access to both Gemstone Bay and the Hahei Beach Short Walk.

Ngā mihi

15. Submission: I am for the re-instatement of the Hahei Beach Track and the side tracks to Gemstone & Stingray Bays.

To enable this:

1- Make use of local help offered, where appropriate, such as community working bees, both for the reinstatement, and on-going maintenance.

2- Appeal to regional suppliers for donations of materials required.

3- Charge tourists a fee on the Cathedral Cove Track to help cover expenses for all the tracks,

OR- increase IVL at the border and include ALL visitor countries.

4- Absolutely no charge for locals - we already pay our share with rates and taxes.

5- Very clear signage on Hahei Beach, Stingray Bay & Gemstone Bay Tracks, re: Track Grade & Risk Level.

IF, after all alternate options have been explored, and it is put in the "Too Hard" basket:

1- Leave the tracks as they are - Why pay many thousands of dollars to uplift them and "Restore to Nature" when nature is doing a pretty good job of it already.

2- There is not much mention of Stingray Bay Track plans, but there is a very nice viewing spot part way down, off to the left of the existing track. It could be tidied up, with a platform and barrier added.

16. Cathedral Cove Tracks to be left open

This petition is in favor of repairing and keeping the Hahei Beach track and Gemstone Bay Track, open.

Once repaired, an option for DOC to stand aside and let the willing Hahei Residents maintain these two tracks.

They are internationally promoted for snorkeling in the Marine Reserve.

Local walkers, Joggers and ratepayers used these tracks on a daily basis for recreation, fitness etc.

The Hahei Beach track provides another options for people who cannot afford the Water Taxi and Kayaks, to access Cathedral Cove, being a far more pleasant experience than the Grange Road footpath.

Senior citizens by the busload with their walking poles, previously used the track to access Cathedral Cove.

The local residents have been, for many years providing planting, pest and weed control activities to the tracks and beach reserve areas. Other activities by the locals include - beach clean up after storms, road side rubbish pick up. They also provide volunteer Ambassadors to assist with tourists queries and to make sure their visit is pleasurable.

Hahei has a well established community of well trained volunteers and first responders, who man the Fire Station and the Ambulance Station.

Please, in the interest of all of the many international, local tourists and Hahei residents, keep these 2 tracks open.

17. Waimata Gemstone Bay (2 pax)

Good morning,

Attached is my personal response to the Proposals for removal of Waimata/Gemstone Bay and the Hahei Beach short walk reroute.

You are welcome to contact myself if you wish to discuss anything in my two submissions/feedback.

Attached are PDF copies:

- Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding the removal of Waimata/Gemstone Bay short walk.
- Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding the removal of Hahei Beach short walk reroute.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond in writing.

Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding The removal of Waimata/Gemstone Bay short walk.

I am xxxxx of Vaughan Harsant who originally gifted the land now known as Mautohe Cathedral Cove. Without the foresight of Dawn (his wife) and Owen Vaughan Harsant this wonderful recreational reserve would not have been possible. I wish to note that despite many requests for acknowledgement of this gift there is still no signage recognising this gift.

I oppose the permanent removal of the Waimata Gemstone Bay track. I do not agree with the Departments making a deliberate shift to focusing on the core experience and ONLY provide reliable access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove rock archway. After cyclone Gabrielle I was given the impression that providing a range of opportunities was deemed more beneficial. By closing all access to even the view corridor of this lovely little cove seems counter productive. Whilst I appreciate that the department staff maybe feeling frustrated at the current damage to the access stairs into Waimata Gemstone Bay I question the Departments willingness to place the cost benefit of decommissioning both Stingray Bay and Waimata Gemstone bay higher than the value of at least providing a visual observation and possible future use of these two beautiful bays. Especially in view of the proposed levy for visitors at the Mautohe Cathedral Cove Reserve. I find the use of 'cost effectiveness' both short sighted and inappropriate in view of the pending Conservation Amendment Bill which is to insert a new section 48D Regulations relating to access levies. "48D Regulations relating to access levies (1) Regulations may be made under section 48 (1)(k) providing for levies payable to the Crown by international visitors when accessing levy areas. Purpose of levies (2) The purpose of the levies is to fund, or contribute to the funding of, (a) maintaining and enhancing visitor experiences on land management or administrated by the Department ;" Is the Department intending to utilize the expected levies to maintain and enhance the visitor experiences or is the benefit of these funds to be spent elsewhere? This is a world renowned site and thus I suspect that the annual ongoing levies will bring in a far more than is required for maintenance of the direct route to Mautohe Cathedral cove bays. I strongly support continuance of access for marine education and this is another reason to keep the access to Waimata Gemstone Bay open. It seems that the Department is quietly revoking the public's right to enjoy all three bays within this reserve. Surely, with the high number of international

visitors an adequate portion of the levy income could be used to recreate the tracks and at the very least viewing platforms for these two bays. I ask that the Department ceases the decommissioning of the access structures into both Gemstone Bay and Stingray Bay and seeks funding to at least create viable access tracks and viewing platforms for these two beautiful bays.

Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding The removal of Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute.

Whilst the recommendation that the realignment of the Hahei Beach short walk to the entrance of the Mautohe Cathedral Cove Recreational Reserve is simply focused on risk analysis and fiscal outcomes. I accept that the original track along the cliffs held a very high risk factor. However I question the acceptance of complete retreat from this walk in view of the below quote from your options paper – Hahei Beach Short Walk Options Paper. The executive summary no.7. “Hahei Beach Short Walk (Hahei Walk) is a track linking from Hahei Beach to the Mautohe Cathedral Cove Track, Visitors who don't wish to walk up the road or pay for the shuttle often use this walk to reach the cove track. A stroll through the trees with beautiful views over Hahei Beach was more pleasant than walking up the steep road in full sun.” I am concerned that the department considers that the local council walkway up Grange road is the only acceptable alternative. Yet nowhere do I see any indication that the Department of Conservation are willing to share responsibility for maintenance of this pathway and or any associated safety concerns around visitors walking on road side because of inadequate signage. I am concerned that the Department regularly cites the importance of 'the Grange Road Carpark' in it's report but does not indicate that there are any future plans to re-establish access to the full carpark area. I am saddened that my suggestion to develop the outcrop before the carpark as a place for walking visitors to stop and observe the Hahei vista. ie. As a place to enhance the visitor experience by placing seating and panels explaining both the Maori and early Pakeha presence within the valley. To share early historical photo's and raise the awareness of Hereheretaura Pa site. I wish to affirm the needs and concerns of the local people who both love and use this track to both exercise and walk to the reserve. Their views should be given high consideration in your decision making. They are the people who support tourism within the community, encourage the use of the reserves and provide volunteer helpers to maintain weed and vermin control. On the matter of funding (Conclusion 38) – Surely the Conservation Amendment bill levy scheme will provide more than adequate funds to support the local Department Staff, their projects and develop this section of the Mautohe Cathedral Cove Recreational Reserve visitor experience.

18. Waimata Gemstone Bay (1 Pax)

As a teacher, at Whenuakite School for 8 years and then Mercury Bay Area School for 20 years, I organised trips for the school students to visit the Te Whanganui O Hei Marine Reserve via the Waimata - Gemstone Bay track.

Many of these students had never been to the reserve prior to the trip. Most of them did not have access via personal boats and many could not afford the cost of a tourist boat trip.

The track closure meant I had to run snorkeling trips off Hahei Beach instead.

As a resident of Hahei since 1995 I have witnessed the many national and international tourists visit the Te Whanganui O Hei Marine Reserve via the Waimata - Gemstone Bay track.

Access by boat alone excludes and will continue to exclude many of these tourists.

I request the Waimata - Gemstone Bay track be reinstated.

19. Cathedral Cove Meeting Final Document

The lower part of this is about closing the tracks around Cathedral Cove.

Sadly I did to see any progress after attending the June the 10th meeting.

Please note there is a petition signed by over 1200 people

Cathedral Cove meeting Firstly, there needs to be some clarification on the national media reporting. To claim there is support for charging off the back of a weak survey, with only 30% of households responding, is unfair. Before you ask the question of whether people support charging, there needs to be an indication of how that charging will be implemented. For the last few years all of DOC's consultation has been through small and almost secretive meetings. This has isolated the community from them, and in some ways created the feeling of the local community being second class citizens. Hopefully this is about to change with this public meeting. We also need to see the Council's leadership stand up and lead? Cathedral Cove is a small estate gifted to all New Zealanders. Due to its popularity and continuous promotion, it creates a major addition to the issues within Hahei and its surrounds. The real question is this. Is the purpose of charging to reduce the number of people over the peak period, or solely to raise money for DOC? • If the charging is to provide extra revenue for the Department of Conservation, this can be easily solved at the border. Identifying overseas tourists, and adjusting how much they are charged, is a simple and clean mechanism. • If the reasoning is also to limit the influx of tourists over the peak period, this has to be thought through very carefully. If only track users are to be charged, could this put more pressure on Hahei Beach? And how do you identify tourists from New Zealand residents? • At the same time as charging, there has been another isolating consultation on some track closures. This clearly indicates DOC's model is broken, through both the approach and the people involved. Their risk threshold, how they identify the track standard, and who they use to manage the work all need to be questioned. • The role iwi play in these decisions also needs to be made clearer. We are not against Hahei being looked after. We are against being handed a solution before anyone has been honest about the problem. What I feel this community needs is a community led solution, with the people who live here around the table from the start.

20. Proposed Retirement of Hahei Beach Track & Gemstone Bay Track (200+ pax)

Kia ora,

Please find attached the xxx's formal submission regarding the proposal to retire the Hahei Beach Track and the Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track.

As the representative body for more than 200 local businesses across Mercury Bay, we have outlined the significant economic and community impacts associated with the proposed removals, along with recommendations for a more sustainable and regionally balanced approach.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and would welcome further engagement as DOC considers next steps.

Best regards,

Please find attached the xxx formal submission regarding the proposal to retire the Hahei Beach Track and the Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track.

As the representative body for more than 200 local businesses across Mercury Bay, we have outlined the significant economic and community impacts associated with the proposed removals, along with recommendations for a more sustainable and regionally balanced approach.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and would welcome further engagement as DOC considers next steps. Best regards,

Introduction The Mercury Bay Business Association represents more than 200 businesses across accommodation, hospitality, tourism, retail, trades, and professional services. Our members collectively employ a significant proportion of the local workforce and contribute directly to the economic wellbeing of Mercury Bay and the wider Coromandel Peninsula. We acknowledge the challenges DOC faces in managing the Mautohe Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve following Cyclone Gabrielle, Cyclone Vaianu, and other severe weather events. We also recognise the need for long term resilience planning and responsible management of public access. However, MBBA is deeply concerned that the proposed retirement of the Hahei Beach Track and the Gemstone Bay Track will have far reaching and long lasting negative consequences for the region's economy, visitor experience, and business community. This submission outlines those concerns and provides evidence based reasoning for why the tracks should remain open and maintained.

Economic Impact on Mercury Bay and the Coromandel Peninsula

1. Cathedral Cove is the economic engine of the region Cathedral Cove is the most visited natural attraction in the Coromandel and one of the most photographed coastal sites in New Zealand. Prior to Cyclone Gabrielle, the Coromandel attracted 1.6 million domestic visitor nights and more than 200,000 international visitors annually, with Cathedral Cove consistently ranking as the primary drawcard. Tourism contributes approximately 330 million dollars per year to the Thames Coromandel District economy. Mercury Bay accounts for a substantial share of this activity. The full track network, including Hahei Beach and Gemstone Bay, has historically been central to the visitor experience. Removing these tracks diminishes the value of the destination and reduces the range of experiences available.
2. Reduced visitor numbers Visitor behaviour research shows that travellers choose destinations based on:
 - The number of available activities
 - The perceived uniqueness of the experience
 - Accessibility and variety
 - The ability to explore beyond a single pointA single out and back track to Cathedral Cove is a significantly reduced offering. The loss of the Hahei Beach Track and Gemstone Bay Track will reduce:
 - International visitor appeal
 - Domestic holiday visitation
 - Shoulder season activity
 - Group and tour operator interestThis will directly impact the region's economic recovery.
3. Reduced bed nights Average length of stay is a critical economic metric. Prior to 2023, visitors to Mercury Bay stayed an average of 2.4 nights. Following the closure of the Cathedral Cove tracks after Cyclone Gabrielle, accommodation providers reported a 15 to 25 percent decline in average stay length. If two additional tracks are permanently removed, we expect:
 - More day tripping from Auckland, Tauranga, and Hamilton
 - Fewer multi night stays
 - Reduced demand for motels, holiday parks, B and Bs, and short term rentalsThis will have a cascading effect on local employment and business viability.
4. Reduced visitor spend Visitor spend in Mercury Bay is closely tied to the Cathedral Cove experience. Prior to the storms:
 -

The average domestic visitor spent 148 dollars per day • The average international visitor spent 212 dollars per day • Hospitality accounted for 32 percent of visitor spend • Accommodation accounted for 28 percent • Retail accounted for 19 percent

Following the 2023 to 2024 disruptions, hospitality operators reported revenue declines of 20 to 40 percent, depending on location. Permanent track retirements will further reduce: • Café and restaurant patronage • Bar and evening trade • Retail sales • Activity bookings • Transport and shuttle services The economic impact will be substantial and long lasting.

Impacts on Tourism Competitiveness

1. A diminished visitor experience The Hahei Beach Track and Gemstone Bay Track are not secondary routes. They provide: • Alternative viewpoints • A loop style walking experience • Access to the marine reserve • A sense of exploration and variety Removing them reduces the experience to a single congested path.
2. Increased pressure on the main track Concentrating all visitors onto one track will: • Increase maintenance costs • Increase congestion • Reduce visitor satisfaction • Increase safety risks • Reduce resilience to future weather events A diversified track network is essential for long term sustainability.
3. Loss of competitive advantage New Zealand's tourism market is highly competitive. Visitors compare the Coromandel with: • Abel Tasman • Queenstown • Rotorua • Tongariro • Bay of Islands A reduced Cathedral Cove experience weakens the region's position relative to destinations offering multiple access points and varied experiences.

Impacts Beyond Tourism – Effects on the Wider Mercury Bay Business Community

While tourism and hospitality are the most immediately affected sectors, the proposed retirement of the Hahei Beach Track and Gemstone Bay Track will have significant flow on effects across the entire Mercury Bay business ecosystem. The Coromandel economy is highly interconnected; when visitor activity declines, the impact is felt well beyond accommodation and tourism operators.

1. Retail and local services Retail businesses in Whitianga, Hahei, Cooks Beach, and Ferry Landing rely heavily on visitor foot traffic. When Cathedral Cove access was restricted after Cyclone Gabrielle, retailers reported: • 15 to 30 percent reductions in turnover • Lower weekday trading • Reduced seasonal hiring • Declines in discretionary spending Permanent track retirements will further reduce the number of visitors entering town centres, directly affecting: • Supermarkets • Pharmacies • Clothing stores • Gift shops • Outdoor and marine retailers These businesses form the backbone of local employment and community services.

21. submission on Hahei beach Track

Please find attached my personal submission.

Kind regards

Ray's Report #24 Keep the Tracks Open

In early 2023 Cyclone Gabrielle hit the North Island of New Zealand including the Coromandel Peninsula. As result the Mautohe Cathedral Cove (MCC) track was closed for almost two years.

Early consultation was poor and it was not until an intervention by the Minister of Conservation, The Hon. Tama Potaka, that work began in earnest and within a few months the MCC was reopened.

Both Rachel MacMillan and Tania Short from DoC are to be commended for their part in consulting widely and listening to their communities. The option of a phased approach with an initial focus on the main MCC track was the option universally favoured with phases 2 and 3, the repair and re opening Gemstone Bay and the Hahei Beach Track the next priority. DoC then announced that the Hahei Beach track was going to be rerouted because of 'extensive damage to the Hahei Beach Track.

This year we have suffered another 3 extreme weather events in the main very heavy rainfall. This included the impacts of Cyclone Vaianu. As result DoC are proposing the cancellation of the Hahei Beach track reroute, the decommissioning (closure) of the Hahei Beach Track and the closure of the Gemstone Bay Track. The reasons given were the extensive damage to both tracks and the costs of the repairs.

The reaction from local communities has been swift and pointed. There is widespread opposition to the DoC proposal. In September 2024 in a meeting with Minister Potaka, he referred to the local community as the kaitiaki of MCC.

The local community has deep historical, cultural and educational ties to both Gemstone Bay and the Hahei Beach track. The tracks would have been in operation since the arrival of Ngati Hei. It was in operation during the European settlement of the MCC surrounding area, during the period it was in legitimate private ownership and most importantly after it was gifted by the Harsant family to the Crown and the people of New Zealand.

The track provides stunning views back across the Hei beach and Valley. It is hugely popular with locals and visitors alike. It has remained relatively unscathed since Cyclone Gabrielle and after Cyclone Vaianu only one major slip at the bottom of the old Hahei Beach was identified.

That slip is easily circumvented and since Cyclone Gabrielle thousands upon thousands have walked this track without incident. Sadly, with the track closures weeds such as Taiwanese cherry, gorse and woolly night shade are thriving and regular sights of possums, stoats and feral cats are being reported.

Some of you will recall the tragedy some two years ago where two young persons became stranded on the cliff face below the Hahei Beach Track. one fell to his death and the second was rescued by the Waikato Cliff Top Rescue from the Hahei Beach Track.

The financial costs argument needs closer examination. DoC currently have legislation before the House where they are seeking to charge for entry by foreign nationals onto their estates or should we say our public reserves. The argument is that tourists worldwide are charged for accessing places of great beauty or interest. DoC rightly needs funding to maintain our public reserves but there is a fair amount of devil in the detail.

Most tourists now pay \$100 each as part of the International Visitor Levy (IVL) but this does not cover large sections of our incoming tourists including Australians, Singaporeans and our Pacifica cousins. That needs to change. It is an easy and relatively painless way of collection this levy and given the volumes of tourists the monies raised would cover a huge part of DoC funding.

The Doc funding proposal includes charging foreigners for access onto public reserves. There are huge difficulties in making this work. How will DoC determine who is a Tourist given that our huge immigrant population often appear to be tourists rather than citizens or residents. Will anyone accessing a public reserve be required to present identification proving the New Zealand citizenship or residency. NZ at present does not require the carriage or production of an identity document other than in specific and very limited circumstances i.e. drivers' licences or firearms licences.

Our reserves would have to be fenced off with gated and controlled entry points. There is a huge cost to this bot in set up and in operating costs.

A far more sensible approach is to include the current exempt nations in paying the IVL and increasing the amount to \$150 per person. This would save considerable angst in charging visitors at each of our public reserves not to mention greatly upsetting locals.

On the subject of common-sense approach DoC should allow the locals to resume their planting, pest and weed control activities and go back completing phases 2 and 3. As local community kaitiaki we are more than willing and capable of looking after and maintaining the Hahei Beach Track and the Gemstone Bay access.

All readers should be rightly concerned by the latest DoC proposal, and they must voice their concerns by making a submission to email address cathedralcove@doc.govt.nz

Please sign Lis Harsant's petition calling for these tracks to remain open. The petition in its first week has attracted close to 1000 signatures. It can be found on Whiti Chitchat, the Cooks Beach Community or Hello Hahei Face Book page.

22. DOC Proposal -Removal of Waimata/Gemstone Bay and Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute

To whom it may concern

I am emailing you my feedback on your consultation in regard to the above walks that make up components of the track to Cathedral Cove, Hahei.

Hahei Beach Short Walk

I have read the report and understand that budget constraints are a major factor. However this walk / a walk accessible from the beach linking to the cathedral cove track is a critical component given it reduces road traffic (note the parking restrictions) and is a scenic tourist attraction/ experience in its own right. I strongly recommend keeping this track open.

The recent announcements of a visitors levy for cathedral cove track should reinforce the need for a great visitor experience with options on how they can get to cathedral cove, it also seems to provide a logical funding source for the repair and ongoing maintenance of the tracks.

Also worth noting as a member of the community in Hahei this land was gifted to DOC by a local family for all to enjoy. That needs to be honoured.

The community is very invested in this track and I strongly request that you keep it open. DOC could look at alternatives to the current one eg a mixed model with involvement from local volunteers, businesses and community to contribute to the beach track as an ongoing viable option for all to enjoy.

If you are going to promote Cathedral Cove as a tourist destination you simply must support it accordingly.

Thank you

23. Track closures

I object to the closure of the Beach track and Gemstone Bay Track at Mautuhoe Cathedral Cove

Gemstone Bay has been open for snorkeling access since around 1998 I think - around 30 years. It was considered to be important enough to have a snorkel trail for people. Is it no longer that important?

In that time it has rarely been closed - suddenly DOC thinks it is an issue. Perhaps related to funding not value?

Gemstone Bay has been extremely well used by public for snorkeling. This enhances peoples's conservation values so is a great tool for conservation engagement

In addition Gemstone is used for the Mountains to the Sea Experiencing Marine Reserves programme. Around 1500 school children have been through this programme and engaged with values around preserving Marine Ecology through Reserves

At the recent meeting about charging for access to CC, It was suggested that once money was used for maintenance and improving visitor experience etc that the surplus would go to promotion of the wider DOC estate

Point 1 - Gemstone is definitely enhancing the Mautohe Cathedral Cove visitor experience so should be enhanced more, not removed Point 2 - DOC obviously expects a surplus from charging so that money should be spent at Gemstone in anticipation.

Point 3 - better experience = more people = more fees to pay for enhancement

The DOC press release on 05 December 2025 stated variously

The track has a special role for marine reserve education use

"This has always been a very popular place for locals. They have a strong sense of ownership and get great enjoyment from Waimata Gemstone, so we do want to acknowledge their connection to the place and the fact they've been waiting to enjoy it again."

The Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve Trust organises education programmes for local school children to visit site and learn about marine and coastal species and conservation. The bay also offers land-based access to snorkelling - which makes it very affordable as a day trip for visitors and locals.

It seems all the planning has been done. That cost will be wasted

Anecdotal from some who have been down, it seems that most of the work has also been done and remaining structures built and just waiting to be located in place

In other words, the value and importance was acknowledged.. Expensive work has been done Political spin seems to have overridden all of this.

The money to be completed could be found (in anticipation of charging). If done right (as planned) it could be along time before storm damage happens again.

By then DOC should have their surplus from access charging

The tracks are also used by volunteer locals for a successful pest trapping programme. This will suffer without the track accesses.

Please contact me if you want further feedback

Regards

24. xxx Submission

Kia Ora,

Please see attached submission from the xxx regarding the proposed closure of the Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Beach Short Walk.

Ngā mihi nui,

Submission from the xxx regarding the proposed closure of the Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Beach Short Walk. The following submission reflects feedback received from a range of businesses within the Hahei community. While acknowledging the challenges DOC faces in managing natural hazards, public safety and infrastructure costs, feedback received from the business community indicates the economic, educational, environmental and

community value of these tracks has not been adequately weighed against the challenges they present. Cathedral Cove is one of New Zealand's most significant coastal visitor destinations. The business community is concerned that the proposed closures appear inconsistent with recent efforts to restore and promote access within the reserve. Before permanent closure is considered, there should be a clearer understanding of the long-term vision for visitor access and how these tracks fit within that future. All practical alternatives should be fully explored, including future visitor revenue streams, proposed Cathedral Cove access charges and other funding mechanisms that could contribute to maintaining this infrastructure. The Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track provides access to one of the most important recreational and educational areas within the Te Whanganui-o-Hei Marine Reserve. Gemstone Bay is widely used by schools, conservation groups, families and visitors, and provides one of the few opportunities for people to experience and learn about the marine reserve firsthand. The loss of this would have an immediate impact on marine education and public engagement with conservation. The Hahei Beach Short Walk is an important part of the wider Cathedral Cove experience, providing a natural coastal walking route while reducing pressure on local roads and residential areas. Permanent closure of the track would increase reliance on vehicle and shuttle transport, restrict walkable access from Hahei Beach, and diminish both the visitor experience and a more sustainable approach to visitor movement. There is also significant concern regarding ongoing confusion about what is open and accessible in the area. Local businesses continue to encounter visitors who believe Cathedral Cove remains closed entirely. This uncertainty affects visitor confidence. Additional closures risk reinforcing the perception that access to Hahei's natural attractions is becoming increasingly restricted. Visitors choose Hahei because of the range of experiences available to them. Cathedral Cove, Gemstone Bay, walking tracks, beaches and marine experiences work together to create a destination where people stay longer and contribute more to the local economy. Maintaining a diverse range of accessible nature-based experiences is important to the future success of both the visitor economy and the wider community. Feedback from the business community strongly supports continued collaboration between DOC, stakeholders and the community to identify practical solutions that retain access wherever reasonably possible. Further investigation of engineering solutions, funding opportunities and long-term management options is encouraged before permanent closure is considered. As one of New Zealand's most iconic coastal destinations, Cathedral Cove deserves a long-term access strategy that balances safety, conservation, visitor experience and community outcomes. Regards,

25. feedback on the proposal of Cathedral cove track closures (1 pax)

Hi,

Please find attached feedback /submission on the closure of two tracks within Hahei and Cathedral Cove reserve

Regards

Submission from Commercial Business and Landowner at Hahei regarding the closure of the Waimata/Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Beach Short Walk.

We oppose the closure of the Waimata Track and Hahei Beach Short walk and see the importance of the reserve to be maintained in its current form as a place for the community and tourists to enjoy who in turn support our local businesses.

We understand that DOC has been faced with some recent challenges in maintaining the tracks after significant weather events however we believe a more strategic and long-term view needs to be considered prior to making decision on all tracks and facilities with Cathedral Cove Reserve or Hahei.

The proposed decision seems like DOC are looking for the “easy” option out. The current position DOC is making regarding funding one track but not another within the same reserve clearly shows this proposal has been made by a very small group and the assessment is missing the valued input from wider stakeholders.

With Cathedral Cove regularly featuring as a premier tourist destination there needs to be a more strategic / long term plan for the whole reserve when it comes to funding infrastructure (new or repairs), rather than the current proposal looking at one issue and making a quick decision to close tracks that will end up having a lot of downstream negative impacts.

DOC have previously promoted the reopening of the cove track and surrounding access to Gemstone Bay, so this appears to be a very quick u turn, which is further evidence that they are not working to a long-term strategic plan.

This is a unique area where thousands of tourists visit each year and some of the reasons the two tracks should be repaired and have a long-term maintenance plan applied are;

- Gemstone bay has the best snorkelling within the reserve and with the existing snorkelling trail already well known having a land-based access is important for the community, visitors and educational purposes.
- The bay provides an alternative place to visit when peak visitor numbers at Cathedral Cove are at capacity
- The Hahei Beach track removes pressure from tourists walking up (and sometime on) Grange Road which would become even more of an issue if the beach track was closed.
- Hahei is seen as a destination by many visitors who want to stay a few days and have options for these days, multiple walking tracks add to this experience.

Infrastructure, DOC needs to think outside the box when it comes to building new infrastructure in areas where stability of ground or risk of erosion is a potential problem. i.e maintain a path and steps to within close proximity to Gemstone bay then use a ladder bolted to rocks to access the last section. Maybe not the ideal solution but ladders are used in other Doc walks?

Funding, DOC should be working with other ministries/agencies to understand and explain to the community why they cannot access alternative funding options other than from their operational funds.

The overseas visitor levy has been established and can be used to improve or create infrastructure at high visited tourist areas. Also, Minister Potaka has also announced DOC will be charging for walking these tracks, (assume this is still happening) with a portion of the funding received to be invested in ongoing maintenance and development of tracks.

The proposed track closures need to be put on hold, and the decision-making process needs to be a collaborative approach with wider stakeholders and community input.

Regards

26. Hahei Beach Short Walk (1 pax)

Kia ora,

Further to our submission dated 26 May, we have now considered the Hahei Beach Short Walk Options Paper.

This further submission relates only to the Hahei Beach Short Walk, which we will refer to as “the walk”. By this we mean the original route of the walk, not the proposed re-route.

We firmly believe that DOC should restore the walk. Until 2023, it was an INTEGRAL part of the Cathedral Cove visitor experience. The options paper rightfully acknowledges this assessment made in the Conservation Management Strategy. Up until 2023, the walk enabled visitors to walk “from beach to beach”, and when traversing the upper part of the walk, to take in the stunning views over the marine reserve and Hahei beach.

Removing the walk significantly detracts from the Cathedral Cove experience. That experience has now ceased to be a “beach to beach” experience, and visitors have lost the ability to walk a part of the track that commands stunning views out over the marine reserve and Hahei beach. Despite what the options paper suggests, there is no substitute for the loss of this key part of the Cathedral Cove experience.

Removing the walk also effectively renders the Thames Coromandel District Council “Hahei Walkway” project, funded by Central Government, redundant, and a waste of money.

Removing the walk also detracts from the Thames Coromandel District Council’s strategy to connect walkway tracks across the Coromandel Peninsula under Te Ara O Hei, the Coromandel Walkway project. Taking out the walk means replacing this part of the Coromandel Walkway with a walk down a road; which is a very poor substitute for a walk above iconic coastline and through a forest track.

The options paper seeks to deny the importance of the walk to the Cathedral Cove experience and, by implication, the Hahei Walkway and Coromandel Walkway projects. The paper describes the walk as “simply a nature walk link to the Cathedral Cove track”. It also argues that the beautiful view of Hahei Beach (from the walk) can be experienced on the footpath further back on Grange Road. In our view, very few people would agree with these assessments. The notion that the walk is just a link track ignores the reality that until 2023 the walk was part and parcel of the Cathedral Cove experience, and not just a link to that experience. To also suggest that the beautiful views of Hahei beach can be experienced further back on the foot path on Grange Road simply denies the more spectacular view from the walk; a distant view from a footpath on a road is no substitute for tramping through iconic terrain that commands a close up awe inspiring view.

The options paper also seems to suggest that the only real value in the walk was that it provided free access to what is currently the start of the Cathedral Cove experience. No doubt, the free access to this point would have been a factor for many. But this does not alter the reality that the walk was an important part of the overall Cathedral Cove experience.

The options paper argues that the Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve has “persistent infrastructure vulnerability due to unstable coastal terrain and is subject to increasingly frequent extreme weather events.” Unfortunately, this seems to be an inescapable reality, but it needs to be put in proper perspective. Also, this assessment applies to the whole of the Cathedral Cove experience, not just the walk.

History tells us that weather events can affect all parts of the Cathedral Cove experience. Back in 2011, the steps down to the Cove were washed away, and the track was blocked at points between the Grange Road carpark and the Cove, due to fallen trees and slips. From

memory, there was no significant damage to the walk. It was a different story in 2026: this time the steps to the Cove were again washed away, and there was much greater damage to the area leading to those steps, but this time there has most recently also been significant slip damage to the lower part of the walk. However, this slip damage is easily addressed by taking a short bypass to the right as you climb the walk to the slip.

The options paper is recommending a shift to focus on the core experience, i.e. Cathedral Cove, to the exclusion of the walk. The recommendation is effectively based on the view that the walk is just a “secondary connector track” that “no longer appears to be viable”. For reasons already given, we consider that the walk has been anything but a “secondary connector track”; it has been an integral part of the Cathedral Cove experience.

The only real issue, we suggest, is whether the track can be made viable, whilst also addressing concerns relating to visitor risk, cost and the prospect of repeated failure, as well as addressing concerns for the environment and Ngati Hei expectations.

So long as the walk is restored to a state that is comparable with its condition prior to 2023, the real issue should boil down to one of viability, visitor risk, cost, and the prospect of repeated failure.

Viability

It seems that DOC considered the geotechnical advice and concluded that the walk was not viable. It appears that DOC’s main reasons for this conclusion centered around visitor risk, cost, and resilience.

However, all these factors were present well before COVID-19 and Cyclone Gabriel. The risks associated with the walk may now be higher as a result of Cyclone Gabriel and other recent bad weather events. But that must be the same for all parts of the Cathedral Cove walk. It is very difficult to see how recent weather events have created a tipping point in terms of visitor risk in relation to the walk that has not been reached in relation to other parts of the Cathedral Cove experience.

It seems that the better analysis is that there are various parts of the Cathedral Cove experience that pose visitor risk, that such risk may have been heightened over all these parts by recent weather events, but no tipping point has been reached in terms of visitor risk for any part of the Cathedral Cove experience.

Judging from the options paper, it seems that the tipping point for abandoning the upper section of the walk was not visitor risk, but assessments relating to cost and resilience.

In particular, it seems that DOC had two key concerns relating to cost and resilience. The first related to bridges assessed to need replacing due to historic landslides and bridge piles not touching the ground. However, there are only two small bridges on the upper part of the walk and it seems that the “piles” never touched the ground and were not designed to touch the ground. It seems that, being short span bridges, piles were not seen to be necessary. DOC takes this same approach with some of the small span bridges it uses on some of the Great Walks. The two bridges on the walk appear to have been well constructed and fixed at the ends with concrete supports. They have been used by thousands of people over many years. The second key concern DOC seems to have relating to cost and resilience factors is the wider geographical issue of landslide vulnerability along the cliff face. Obviously, this is an issue for various parts of many of DOC’s Great Walks around the country that are carved into hillsides. That risk is effectively deemed acceptable to users of hillside tracks, and addressed by DOC putting appropriate warnings on the relevant parts of the track.

We accept that there is one point on the walk where a reroute may be needed sometime in the future. This is just as you climb out of the bush and turn a corner as you approach the coast. Quite rightly, DOC installed a small side rail on account of cliff erosion having come close to the walk at that point. We can see that a point may come where the walk might need

to go up over the hill for a short way so as to effectively cut off the corner and provide a bigger gap from the cliff face. But this need not be a costly fix.

Visitor Risk

We note the argument that the walk is now considered to have higher visitor risk than other sections of the Cathedral Cove experience. Even if this is true, it does not necessarily mean the risks on other parts of the Cathedral Cove experience are insignificant, or that the visitor risk on the walk is unacceptable. In our view it is debatable whether the walk has a higher visitor risk than all other parts of the Cathedral Cove experience.

In any event, the visitor risk for the whole of the Cathedral Cove experience seems to be generally accepted, so long as it is properly flagged, and people do not try and walk the track in adverse weather.

Cost

In our view, the options paper grossly understates the benefits of the walk, and as a result provides no meaningful yardstick against which to measure the cost to rectify the current damage. Minimising the benefits of the walk to the point where they are considered not to exist, inevitably leads to a conclusion that remedial costs are not justified.

The fix here need not be costly. On its Great Walks, DOC regularly undertakes repairs of the kind we are advocating. To create a bypass to the slip, DOC might want to install some steps, but in our view this is all that would be required.

Prospect of Repeated Failure

DOC is obviously concerned that further investment in the walk might prove to be only a temporary fix due to ground stability issues, and therefore not worth making. However, the reality is that this concern exists with many parts of the Cathedral Cove experience, and with parts of the Great Walks in other parts of the country. Therefore, it seems to be the wrong approach to single out any particular part of the Cathedral Cove experience based on this factor. It seems that all parts of the Cathedral Cove experience should be treated equally, so long as a point has not been reached in relation to any particular part where slip damage, or potential slip damage, cannot be rectified at reasonable cost. To do otherwise involves unnecessarily detracting from the overall experience.

Slippery Slope

Closing the Hahei beach and Gemstone Bay walks is likely to be the thin end of the wedge. The blunt reality is that DOC's funding pressures have led it to decide to close these two tracks. As DOC puts it, DOC has limited resources and must prioritise its spending

The problem, however, is that spending priorities should only justify cutting out core parts of the Cathedral Cove experience where it can be justified. DOC is effectively purporting to justify its decision by arguing that the track is too unstable, and so the cost of repairs is not justified because the damage will reoccur. However, the long history of the track, including the recent very bad weather experience, does not support these claims being made with any greater force in relation to the walk than other parts of the Cathedral Cove experience. The proposal comes across as a short sighted, unwarranted, cost-cutting exercise.

Reputational Damage

We believe DOC is failing to appreciate the real potential for it to suffer reputational damage here. Over the years, DOC has enjoyed an excellent reputation. It is generally seen as a

responsible protector of the conservation estate, and that reputation is tremendously important to New Zealand's tourist image. We all appreciate that DOC faces cost pressures, but what it is proposing here is not the right response in this instance.

These latest initiatives smack of being shortsighted, unjustified, cost cutting relating to an iconic tourist experience.

We also believe it is not a good look to impose an international visitor charge for the Cathedral Cove experience, and then purport to spend that on a wide range of "visitor enhancements", when DOC is not prepared to spend money to maintain a core part of the Cathedral Cove experience. Any money raised from such a charge should be allocated in the first instance to a realistically sized fund to maintain the tracks, and to protect the surrounding environment, ie pest eradication etc. Without this being done, anything else seems like waste.

Any overseas visitor charge should also not be seen as a justification for government reducing DOC's funding allocation.

Conclusions

It is correct to say that what DOC is proposing here is a deliberate shift in approach. Unfortunately, that shift started prior to the reroute decision. However, it is not too late to change tack and simply repair the walk. That would be the simplest, most cost-effective, way to restore an integral part of the Cathedral Cove experience.

At the moment, DOC is effectively saying that the repairs to the walk could be costly and any fix would not be sustainable. But the current slip can be bypassed, without too much cost, simply by making a short detour to the right as you approach the slip from the beach. Based on historical experience, there seems no reason to believe the walk would then be less sustainable than it has been for many, many years.

We respectfully suggest that DOC has over engineered its response to the bad weather events of 2023 and 2026, and as a result drawn the wrong conclusions. It is not too late to take another look at the problem, and come to some pretty obvious, sensible, conclusions.

Ngā mihi

27. To whom it may concern, (1 pax)

I started this petition with change.doc.org "Don't Close Our Cathedral Cove Tracks" 4 weeks ago to let people know that we were about to lose these valuable community assets that are on land my husband's uncle gifted to all New Zealanders. These tracks have been a huge part of the Hahei experience for many years. 1311 signatures in just under 4 weeks from a small community of 500 permanent residents shows strong opposition to the removal of these tracks. We will continue to fight for our rights to have these open.

I am a regular user of the Hahei coastal area and a member of the local community who values both its natural environment and the opportunities it provides for recreation and conservation. I have personally walked this track and seen the benefits it brings—not only in terms of access to outstanding views, but also in supporting local conservation efforts. I am therefore deeply concerned at the proposal to close it.

I submit in strong opposition to the proposed closure of the walking track from the northern end of Hahei Beach to the Cathedral lookout, and request that the Department retain and remediate the track rather than remove public access.

1. Existing Asset Built to Modern Safety Standards This track includes substantial infrastructure such as bridges, formed steps, and safety railings. It was constructed following the Cave Creek disaster, and therefore reflects modern engineering and safety expectations for public accessways on conservation land. Closing the track would effectively abandon a significant public investment that remains largely intact and functional.

2. Slip is Localised and Readily Manageable The current slip affecting the track is a common issue in coastal environments and does not justify full closure. A minor realignment to the right of the existing track provides a practical, low-cost solution that avoids the unstable area.

3. Supports Conservation Outcomes The track is actively used by local trappers undertaking predator control. This work is contributing to improved habitat conditions for native wildlife, including kiwi, which are believed to be re-establishing in the area.

4. High Recreational and Visitor Value This walk significantly enhances the Hahei coastal experience. It provides a safe and accessible route from the beach to elevated viewpoints, offering outstanding views across the bay and toward the pā at the southern end of the beach.

5. Demonstrated Community Value and Use Despite attempts to close the track, it continues to be widely used by the local community. This ongoing use clearly demonstrates its importance as a public amenity.

6. Strong Potential for Community Partnership There is a clear willingness within the Hahei community to assist with maintenance and stewardship of the track.

Conclusion and Request I respectfully request that DOC:

- Retain public access to the track
- Address the slip through minor realignment
- Maintain existing infrastructure
- Engage with the local community to establish a supported maintenance partnership

Closure would represent an unnecessary loss of a valuable and well-used public asset

To whom it may concern,

I started this petition with change.doc.org "Don't Close Our Cathedral Cove Tracks" 4 weeks ago to let people know that we were about to lose these valuable community assets that are on land my husband's uncle gifted to all New Zealanders.

These tracks have been a huge part of the Hahei experience for many years.

1311 signatures in just under 4 weeks from a small community of 500 permanent residents shows strong opposition to the removal of these tracks.

We will continue to fight for our rights to have these open.

Petition copy below

We are calling on the Department of Conservation (DOC) to reopen and protect two important local tracks:

- The Waimata (Gemstone Bay) Track
- The Hahei Beach to Cathedral Cove Lookout Track

These tracks are part of the heart of our community. They provide safe, free public access to some of the Coromandel's most treasured coastal environments — and they must not be lost. This land was gifted to the people of New Zealand by Vaughan Harsant, with the intention that it be shared and enjoyed by all. Closing or removing these tracks goes against that legacy and the fundamental principle that public conservation land should remain open and accessible

These tracks are vital because they:

Protect public's right to access iconic natural areas

Support local livelihoods and tourism operators

Provide safe walking alternatives with established infrastructure

Enable emergency and rescue access along the coastline

Offer inclusive access for schools, families, and visitors who cannot reach these areas by boat

Serve as key entry points to the Te Whanganui-o-Hei Marine Reserve, especially at Gemstone Bay

They are also essential for conservation and education - Open tracks also enable volunteers to service pest traps, carry out weed control, and support biodiversity restoration across the coastline. These activities directly contribute to DOC's conservation goals and rely on safe, reliable access.

Significant public investment has already gone into these tracks, including bridges, steps, and safety features. Removing them would be a loss not only of access, but of valuable infrastructure, community connection, and conservation capability.

We are deeply concerned about the lack of transparent public consultation around these decisions. The community, iwi, and stakeholders deserve to be properly informed and involved in decisions that affect access to shared public land.

We call on DOC to:

Reopen both tracks immediately

Commit to keeping public conservation land accessible

Protect the legacy of land gifted for public use

Support community-led conservation and education initiatives

Engage in clear, transparent, and meaningful consultation with the community

Protect public access. Support conservation. Keep DOC land open to the people.

Sign this petition to stand up for our community and ensure these special places remain accessible for generations to come.

Please find attached my submission re the walking tracks.
Kind Regards

Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding the proposed closure of the Hahei Beach Short Walk and the Gemstone Bay track.

I oppose the proposed closure of both the Waimata Gemstone Bay Track and the Hahei Beach Short Walk.

Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve was established in 1992 as a recreational marine reserve. It is the only marine reserve on the Coromandel Peninsula in the Waikato. It protects 8.8km² of coastal waters, spanning 5 km of coastline and extending 1 km offshore. With the introduction of the new Marine Protection Areas this marine reserve now covers nearly 23km². The marine reserve is adjacent to the Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve which was gifted to the people by the Harsant family to be shared and enjoyed by all.

"Globally renowned for its picturesque rock arch, Mautohe Cathedral Cove is the main attraction for many visitors heading to the wider DOC-managed coastal reserve between Whitianga and Hahei for naturing."

This is not what Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve was created for. Ref the CMS, pg. 86 (see further reference in this submission)

"Doc will prioritise investment in Coromandel's iconic Mautohe Cathedral Cove as part of a proposal to remove two weather-damaged adjacent tracks. "and advises: "Over the last few years, the local community has made it clear Mautohe Cathedral Cove is the priority – and our proposal to remove these two nearby tracks responds to that."

When you say the local community, who are you referring to? Hahei locals use these tracks on a daily basis. Local business who benefits from tourists may have advised that the Mautohe Cathedral Cove track is the most popular, but this is actually not the case in my experience. As a Hahei local for over 25 years I have worked most summers in the entrance carpark. I along with a few others started the park n ride in the grass paddock before council paved it and made it a commercial enterprise. The peak season (two to three weeks over Christmas and New Year) consists of New Zealanders on summer holiday. They just want to go to the beach, have a swim and a snorkel in a protected marine reserve. After the summer holidays the tourists arrive (Feb – April). Many have come for a hike in beautiful scenery as opposed to a swim. The Hahei Beach Short Walk being the most used by this type of tourist. They are from North America and Europe where hiking is a pastime. The Hahei Beach Short Walk is beautiful and most appreciated.

Waimata Gemstone Bay

DOC Option Paper stated:

"15. Previously Waimata Gemstone Bay track was one of the only access points to the marine reserve for snorkelling and marine education. However recently the boundaries of the marine reserve have been expanded providing opportunities in other points for access that visitors and educators can use."

The department admits there is no other way to enter the marine reserve to snorkel. While the marine reserve boundaries may have expanded, public coastal access has not. The Waimata Gemstone Bay Track remains one of the few practical land-based entry points into the marine reserve.

“Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve is maintained or restored to a natural state as far as possible. Marine life is thriving, and research and monitoring has led to increased knowledge about the status of the marine ecosystem and species. The Marine Reserve is a popular hub for water-based recreation within this Place and is recognised as a best practice model for marine education. Users respect biodiversity values within the reserve, and conflict between users is minimal. People visit the reserve to experience and learn about marine ecosystems. Land-based access and interpretation is provided from Hahei Beach and Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve, and the Gemstone Bay snorkel trail connects visitors to the marine ecosystem. The community, iwi, visitors and concessionaires benefit from the Department’s cooperative approach to reserve management that reduces user conflict and minimises adverse effects on marine values and the adjacent Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve.

Visitors enjoy a diversity of land- and water-based recreation experiences, including accessible short walks, camping, swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving and kayaking. These experiences connect people with the values present, and they leave with fond memories and a greater appreciation of the Place. The number of people encountered varies depending on the time of year and site visited.”

“2005 publication – Te Whanganui A Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve is managed by a Committee of tangata whenua and community representatives, and by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Reference was made to the new Snorkel Trail. “In August DOC completed the Marine Reserve Snorkel Trail with the installation of the Gemstone Bay interpretation sign. The Trail has been very popular, and feedback from users has been positive. The Trail is especially suited for children, as Gemstone Bay is sheltered during most sea conditions, and the interpretation is aimed at encouraging people to experience the Marine Reserve.”

“DOC has limited resource and must prioritise its spending – hence the proposal to focus on Mautohe Cathedral Cove and remove the Waimata-Gemstone Bay Track and Hahei Short Walk.” Currently tourist to New Zealand pay a \$100 visa fee to enter the country. This funding was increased from \$30 to \$100. Surely this huge increase can go towards further maintenance to popular overseas tourist destinations. And with the recent bill to Parliament to charge an additional fee just to walk the track it’s time DOC stops “crying poor.”

In 2010 The Friends of Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve Trust was created to work alongside DOC to raise funds and prepare projects to encourage public enjoyment and understanding of the Reserve and of marine protection generally. I am a founding and current member of the trust.

From the Deed: Charitable purposes for which the Trust is established are:

- (a) To Protect, maintain, enhance, develop and promote the Whanganui-O-Hei Marine Reserve and associated terrestrial public reserves at Hahei.
- (b) To protect, maintain, enhance and develop scenic, historical, and recreational areas connected with the Marine Reserve for the benefit of the landscape, New Zealanders and visitors, and to advocate for and promote the benefits of these natural areas.
- (c) To work in conjunction or co-operation with tangata whenua, Department of Conservation and any other society, interest group, local body or government agency, whose objects are wholly or in part similar to those of the Trust.

- (d) To generate and invest resources into enhancing the biological value of the marine and associated terrestrial public reserves at Hahei.
- (e) To provide for educational opportunities that increase interest, understanding and knowledge of these protected natural areas.
- (f) To carry on any other charitable activities which are, in the opinion of the Board, capable of being carried on in connection with the above purposes,

In the past and currently the trust applies and receives funding for the delivery of the Mountains To Sea Conservation Groups Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) and Whitebait Connection (WBC) at no cost to local area schools in the Hauraki/Coromandel area. Thus, encouraging the educational opportunity of the marine reserve. The trust also receives funding for trapping, pest control and planting within the Te Whanganui o Hei (Cathedral Cove) track area. Over the years significant funding was received and used to plant and maintain the area. The work is done by local volunteers. The trust was created to help DOC and the department has used us in the past for the benefit of the department and the community. 2333, 17 June 2026.

29. Proposed Track Closures

Nowhere in the track closure options proposal is there recognition of Cathedral Cove as one of NZ's most recognised features (as evidenced by the high proportion of CC imagery used to promote Coromandel Peninsula and New Zealand). Conversely, elsewhere in DoC, there are proposals afoot to capitalise on that recognition and charge for entry to the Reserve. To promote a reduction in investment while creating an income from the core product is unconscionable. CC is simply deserving of appropriate, ongoing investment.

Doing away with the land-based access to an adjacent Marine Reserve seems to suggest DoC has no real interest in true the recreational and conservation value of Gemstone Bay - land and sea. It is a short track and surely enough geotech studies have been undertaken to enable a design allowing for continued access.

The Hahei Beach Walk, by DoC's own estimation, caters to 20% of CC visitors - statistically significant -and affords, arguably, the most attractive walking access to CC. Closure is predicated on the risks of slips. The most recent documented were 1. Minor - lower part of track 2. On a proposed part of the track not yet constructed. Meanwhile, the upper part of the track has remained stable and usable. It does follow steep cliffs but ,unlike Mt Cook, nobody has fallen off the track to date. Maintenance costs can not be significant as nothing has been done by DoC since its "closure" and yet people have no difficulty in still utilising the track. The track is an integral part of the CC experience and worthy of ongoing investment. Whilst risks exist, the reality of them is far lower than your paper-based assessments suggest.

30. Submission, Waimata Gemstone Bay and Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute proposals

Tena koe Nick

Please find attached xxx submission on the two options papers dated 6 May 2026 covering the proposed removal of the Waimata Gemstone Bay track and the proposed discontinuation of the Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute.

In short, we support the deliberate shift to concentrate DOC investment on the primary Mautohe Cathedral Cove track via Grange Road, and we endorse the geotechnical and

Adaptation Plan logic set out in both papers. We do, however, ask DOC to consider three refinements before the final decision is made: framing the Hahei Short Walk decision as removal of current unsafe infrastructure rather than permanent foreclosure of any future Hahei to Grange Road link, inviting Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve Education Trust, Ngati Hei, and TCDC into a joint scoping of alternative marine education access before the Gemstone spur is removed, and coordinating visitor flow, parking, shuttle and wayfinding responses with TCDC and Hahei stakeholders ahead of summer 2026/27.

The full submission and reasoning are in the attached letter. I am happy to discuss any aspect of it directly.

Nga mihi

Submission, proposed removal of Waimata Gemstone Bay track and discontinuation of the Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute

Tena koe Nick

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the two options papers dated 6 May 2026 covering the proposed permanent removal of the Waimata Gemstone Bay track, and the proposed discontinuation of the Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute (alongside removal of the existing Hahei Short Walk). Grafton Group Limited (GGL) is a Coromandel based developer with an active interest in the long term resilience and commercial vitality of the Coromandel visitor economy. This submission is provided in that capacity.

1. Support for the deliberate shift to concentrate investment on the primary track

xxx supports DOC's recommendation, set out in both options papers, to make a deliberate shift in approach and prioritise reliable access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove via the Grange Road carpark and the primary track. The reasoning in the options papers is sound and well evidenced. Specifically, we agree that:

the four geotechnical and landslide risk reports referenced (Tonkin & Taylor 2023, 2024, and 2025; Wigmore 2024) demonstrate that the Cathedral Cove Recreation Reserve sits in a landscape of significant and continuing instability;

the destruction of the Waimata Gemstone Bay rebuild in January 2026, within three years of Cyclone Gabrielle, is a clear signal that repeated rebuild in vulnerable alignments is poor value for limited public funding;

the Adaptation Plan principles (light, low complexity, easily replaceable infrastructure, and investment matched to visitor risk and benefit) are the right framework for decisions of this kind; and

the primary visitor draw of the Reserve is the rock archway at Mautohe Cathedral Cove, and concentrating resources on the resilience of the Grange Road primary track (drainage, water management, targeted planting, monitoring, and ongoing maintenance) is the highest leverage use of constrained Vote Conservation funding.

We encourage DOC to be explicit, in the final decision paper, about the multi year investment commitment that this shift implies for the primary track. A concentration decision only delivers the intended outcome if the saved effort is genuinely redirected to strengthening the core experience, not absorbed back into general operating pressure.

2. Concern: impact on the neighbourhood tourism loop product

While xxx supports the underlying logic of concentration, we want to flag, for the record, a consequence of permanent removal of the secondary tracks that the options papers acknowledge but do not fully weigh: the loss of the neighbourhood walking loop product that connects Hahei village, Hahei Beach, and the Cathedral Cove walkway.

The Hahei Beach Short Walk was not just a connector to the primary track. Prior to COVID-19, it carried more than 50,000 visitors per year, with approximately 20% of all Cathedral Cove track users arriving via that route (per the options paper). That flow pattern underpinned a recognisable visitor experience, walk from the village or beach, traverse the bush track, reach the cove, return via a different route, and spend time and money in Hahei on the way back. The Waimata Gemstone Bay spur, while a smaller draw, added a marine education and snorkelling stop to that loop and gave repeat visitors a reason to come back.

Permanent removal of both secondary tracks, alongside reinforcement of the single Grange Road primary route, materially changes the product. The Coromandel currently receives an estimated 4.3 million visitors per annum (DGiT government data). A meaningful portion of those are day or short stay visitors whose dwell time and local spend are driven by exactly this kind of connected walking experience. When the offer collapses to a single up and back primary track, the practical effect is:

shorter dwell time in Hahei village and on Hahei Beach, with knock on impact on local cafes, accommodation, and small operators;

a more transactional Cathedral Cove visit, with a higher proportion of visitors arriving by shuttle or vehicle, completing the primary track, and leaving;

reduced amenity for residents who used the Hahei Short Walk as a daily walk, a value the options paper specifically records; and

a weaker neighbourhood tourism loop product across the wider Coromandel, at a time when the region is actively positioning itself for higher value, longer stay tourism rather than peak day visitation.

The options papers fairly identify these community impacts but treat them as residual considerations against the geotechnical and fiscal case. We accept that the geotechnical case for not rebuilding in the existing or rerouted alignments is strong. Our concern is that "do not rebuild" has been conflated with "permanently remove and close off any future option".

3. Suggested refinements to the proposal

We respectfully ask DOC to consider three refinements before the Operations Manager's final decision.

First, on the Hahei Beach Short Walk, distinguish in the decision paper between the physical decommissioning step (removing the bridges, steps, and asphalt for visitor safety, which we support) and a separate finding that a beach to Grange Road walking link must never be reinstated. The latter is a much larger policy decision and one that forecloses options that the community, iwi, and Thames Coromandel District Council may want to explore in future. Wording the decision as "removal of current unsafe infrastructure, with future light touch reinstatement deferred pending land stabilisation and partner led options work" preserves the geotechnical and fiscal benefits while avoiding a permanent foreclosure.

Second, on the Waimata Gemstone Bay spur, the options paper notes that recent expansion of the marine reserve boundary has opened alternative access points and that boat based or land based access from Cooks Beach and Purangi exists. We agree those alternatives are

real, but they are not a like for like substitute for an accessible five to ten minute walk to a sheltered snorkelling bay. We suggest DOC formally invite Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve Education Trust, Ngati Hei, and TCDC to jointly scope an alternative marine education access pathway (not necessarily on DOC managed land) before the spur track is permanently removed, so that the marine education function is not lost entirely.

Third, we ask DOC to commit, in the final decision paper, to working with Thames Coromandel District Council, Hahei Beach Ratepayers Association, and iwi partners on a coordinated communications and wayfinding response. If the primary track becomes the only DOC access, visitor expectation management, shuttle capacity, parking pressure at Grange Road, and signage from Hahei village all need to be addressed before peak summer 2026/27, not after.

4. Summary position

xxx supports the concentration of DOC investment on the primary Mautohe Cathedral Cove track. We endorse the geotechnical and adaptation logic underlying the proposed removal of the damaged Waimata Gemstone Bay infrastructure and the proposed non delivery of the Hahei Beach Short Walk reroute as currently designed.

We ask DOC to:

frame the decision as "remove current unsafe infrastructure" rather than "permanently foreclose any future Hahei to Grange Road walking link";

invite Te Whanganui o Hei Marine Reserve Education Trust, Ngati Hei, and TCDC to scope alternative marine education access before the Waimata Gemstone Bay spur is removed;

publish, alongside the final decision, a clear statement of how the redirected investment will strengthen the primary track and its supporting infrastructure; and

coordinate visitor flow, parking, shuttle, and wayfinding responses with TCDC and Hahei stakeholders ahead of summer 2026/27.

These refinements would, in our view, allow DOC to deliver the intended fiscal and risk benefits of the proposal while preserving the long term option value of the connected walking experience that supports both the local community and the wider Coromandel visitor economy.

We are happy to discuss any aspect of this submission. Please feel free to contact me directly.

Nga mihi

31. Submission ion proposed Cathedral Cove track closures.

I am writing in submission to the DOC proposal to close tracks in the Cathedral Cove reserve area.

I believe the problem of the tracks is being viewed from the wrong perspective of trying to save on going maintenance costs. The Cathedral Cove track is one of the most important visitor destinations for inbound and domestic tourists in New Zealand and DOC should be taking the opportunity to maximise the experience of each and every one of those tourists in conjunction with maintaining the amenity for local residents. There are only a limited number of walking tracks available to firstly spread the load of the tourist influx in peak times but also

to present the coastline and its activities in as wide a lens as possible. Whilst the gemstone track would take substantial work to bring it back to standard and would probably require prefabricated landing stairs to be assembled and anchored to the rock in some form, it provides for a land access route for snorkeling for those that are unable to access the bay from the water. The Short Walk beach track from the end of Hahei Beach already has significant infrastructure in place and requires only limited modification in order for its continued use. It would be a complete waste of investment to spend money removing the infrastructure which in many cases appears to be sound. There are certainly alternative routes back to the Cathedral Cove car park and this track in particular is extremely well used by visitors that are staying in Hahei rather than visiting for the day.

Rather than closing down amenity for this very large tourist attraction, based around the premise that funding isn't available, further work should be undertaken to see how these tracks can remain open. This should combine looking at alternative funding streams, such as perhaps charging overseas visitors etc. as has already been discussed, and by incorporating local expertise and assistance provided voluntarily to help with the maintenance of the tracks.

I believe it would be a retrograde step to remove the amenity of the area and certainly believe that these walking tracks do merit further investment. The core experience is one of being able to access Cathedral Cove on foot from Hahei Beach and not to have to walk through an urban landscape to reach the top car park. Despite being 'closed' since 2023 the track has still been used by a large number of visitors. In my opinion DOC should be framing the issue more in terms of how these tracks can be kept open rather than reporting on the reasons for them to close.

Regards

32. Cathedral Track proposed changed

Feedback on the proposed closures of Gemstone Bay and Hahei Beach Track.

The rationale being used to close these tracks based on cost to reinstate is flawed and irrational. The value these tracks provide New Zealanders and Tourism far outweighs the cost to maintain them in health, education and economic benefit for the Coromandel Community and New Zealand as a whole.

At an earlier meeting held in Hahei DOC committed to Hahei being the natural gateway to Cathedral Cove with access to Gemstone Bay and Hahei Beach being restored. Even though it had taken three years to get to this point all those attending were pleased we had finally got to an appropriate position regarding the value and future of the tracks to and adjacent to the main Cathedral Cove track. DOC has received a significant amount of additional funding for restoration of these tracks so you can't claim you don't have the budget. You have been inconsistent with your messaging and effort to restore these tracks since Cyclone Gabrielle, often being deceitful about actual risk and what your intentions were. The main track was only repaired 2 years after Cyclone Gabrielle when the Minister intervened, let's hope we don't need to go there again.

Every press release you issue about closures is damaging to the Coromandel economy. Take a lesson from NZTA's approach to roading in the same environment and get on with repairing the tracks. Let's also not underestimate that these tracks are an integral component of the original vision of creating a coastal track from Ferry Landing to Hot Water Beach.

Please acknowledge receipt of this submission.

33. Objection to Track closures

I do not agree with the decision from DOC to decommission and close the Hahei beach track and Gemstone Bay track.

It seems the reasons given for these track closures focus on the costs associated with repairing and maintaining these tracks.

However, from what I have seen and from others who have visited these tracks in recent months, neither track seems to need an awful lot of repair work. And we have recently attended a meeting where DoC discussed the proposed charges for international visitors to Cathedral Cove which would mean DoC will gain a new revenue source to be used for track maintenance and enhancing the visitor experience.

So to close these tracks now is premature and ill timed.

The Gemstone track has been heavily promoted over the years for its land access to a snorkel trail. So if this track is closed, the snorkel trail will presumably be no more also. It seems a backward step to remove what is an added attraction to the overall Cathedral Cove experience. The snorkel trail is also used for educational purposes which will mean this wont be possible anymore.

The Beach Track has always been well used by both locals and visitors alike many of whom use it to access the Cathedral Cove trail. It would be such a shame to close this track which we've enjoyed for many years.

I note there is strong opposition to the closure of these two tracks from both locals and further afield as evidenced by the support of the petition currently circulating. Surely some consideration needs to be given to what the public are saying. As well as what these tracks offer to the overall Cathedral Cove experience.

Thank you.

34. Mautohe Cathedral Cove proposed track closures

Submission to the Department of Conservation regarding the proposed closures of the Hahei Beach Track and Gemstone Bay Track

The Hahei Beach Track has enormous historical, cultural and educational significance to the Hahei community. Some of our members have walked this track since the 1970s in order to access Cathedral Cove and also Gemstone and Stingray Bays.

As recently as last week a number of our members walked the track. You will be aware that since its closure, large numbers of people, visitors and locals alike, have continued to use the track. These members found that apart from one major slip near the bottom of the track, the track itself was in remarkably good condition. The infrastructure (steps and bridges) was carefully examined and also found to be in good condition, with no damage or deterioration since recent storm events (including Cyclone Gabrielle). We acknowledge the longer-term geotechnical risks affecting some sections of the cliff-edge track.

Our submission covers the following points:

1. The track should remain open and under DOC management, with a bypass included to avoid the major slip. We have identified two possible simple bypass routes.
2. DOC should retain the existing infrastructure until the alternative track route bypassing the cliff section of the track (possibly modified to better align with a major slip bypass route), as originally proposed by DOC, is constructed.
3. Should DOC decide to continue with a closure, it should be temporary until funding becomes available to undertake the cliff bypass route. DOC should notify visitors both online and onsite that the track is no longer maintained by DOC and that people enter at their own risk.
4. DOC should agree to the HRRA and the Hahei Reserves Group taking over basic maintenance of the track, including weed and pest control, and permit those groups to fund and build the slip bypass steps. A simple Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) could set out the responsibilities of each party.
5. HRRA agrees that access to Gemstone Bay and Stingray Bay is difficult and proposes that DOC notify visitors that these tracks are no longer maintained by DOC and that visitors enter at their own risk.
6. The proposal to remove asphalt from the main track should not proceed. We believe removal costs will be significant, anticipated stormwater management improvements will not be realised, the track will be less stable to walk on, and emergency service access for patient extraction will be made more difficult.
7. We contend that by removing DOC's maintenance responsibilities and retaining the asphalt on the main track, considerable savings could be achieved and redirected to other works.

We note the weight of feedback objecting to the proposed closures, particularly the community's "**Don't Close Our Cathedral Cove Tracks**" petition (currently more than 1,270 signatures) and the submission from the Mercury Bay Business Association.

Our submission is intended as a way forward for discussion with DOC.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss these matters further.

Regards

LATE SUBMISSIONS

Two submissions arrived 3 days after the due date and cannot be officially counted.

Tena kotou,

My family and I are long-time locals at Hahei. Our children and now grandchildren living there have grown up with a strong respect and love for Hahei, Cathedral Cove and importantly all the environment - the tracks, the beaches and the marine reserve. We have a strong appreciation for what DOC has done over the years for its maintenance and repair. We have brought significant numbers of visitors and tourists who have wondered at the beauty, the enjoyment, and the learning provided by this natural and sustainable environment.

I am writing to say that we wholly support the submission of Lynne Kingsbury which I am

forwarding herewith. I totally endorse the views she has expressed so well. The Cathedral track incorporates the track to Gemstone Bay, the lookout and the beach track and it is of primary importance that this should continue to provide the amazing experience it is for all - humans, fish and birds alike.

I do realise the date for submissions has just passed but I am hoping this will be accepted. I have also been away and was unaware of timing. I respectfully ask that our views be considered and that DOC reconsider any changes, particularly that of removing the track to Gemstone Bay and any other changes to the tracks.

All who visit would agree that the value of snorkeling and swimming here in the marine reserve, particularly in Gemstone Bay, provides a strong educational purpose in addition to its beauty and serenity, and we locals will continue to help where we can to ensure it is maintained.

It is a treasure for us, for New Zealand, and for the multitude of tourists who visit and enjoy the area.

Nga mihi nui

Thank you for your consideration.

Apologies for this late submission but am overseas and operating temporarily on my phone. I am writing in regard to the proposal by DOC to remove access to Gemstone Bay and takeout the Hahei beach track to the lookout. Reading the DOC proposal I would firstly like to address a statement DOC uses to defend this stance that appears disingenuous. "Feedback from the community and business sector is that Cathedral Cove is the priority." I am not aware that it has been explained to the community that they are asked to make a decision over prioritising Cathedral Cove for no access to Gemstone Bay and the destruction of the other Cathedral Cove area tracks. Cathedral Cove is a vital tourist attraction but so is the Cathedral Cove reserve area of 840 hectares and this whole area needs to be managed, particularly if you intend to charge people for walking and experiencing the area.

Snorkling at Gemstone Bay is part of an overall Cathedral Cove experience. Indeed, Gemstone Bay is an iconic tourist attraction offering a rich active educational experience for children and visitors. In Point 15 of the DOC proposal, it is stated that the increasing the Marine Reserves area has added other snorkling opportunities to replace Gemstone Bay. This is a ridiculous statement. Most of the boundaries of the expanded marine reserve are out to sea and have no effect on increasing snorkling access. As well, snorkeling is permitted both in and out of marine reserves. I am not aware of any new snorkling area with beach access for children and visitors that has been created by the expanded marine reserve. I would venture to say that Gemstone Bay with its underwater snorkel trail is unique.

For those with a knowledge of the history of the Cathedral Cove area, around every 30 to 40 years or so steps have been washed away in a large storms and in the past have been rebuilt quickly and without huge expense. This latest storm event is not a reason to destroy access to Gemstone Bay forever.

As locals we have continued to walk and enjoy the beach track. For visitors walking to the lookout, it offers vistas in bush and seascapes and should be maintained for this reason alone. But there is a vitally important reason for not destroying the infrastructure of the beach track. With the sheer number of people walking to the Cove, it would be the height of foolishness to take away an alternative access from Cathedral Cove down to the village. Cathedral Cove can have in excess of 500 people on busy days and there is one coastal

access out. With the hillsides on fire, an earthquake, or Tsunami, there should be multiple escape routes for the large numbers of people. Alternative access routes are particularly necessary for emergency services. They may need to access the coast area and have access if the main road was disabled through a natural event. To not have a number of path access routes out of the highly populated Cove area out is foolhardy and dangerous

Regarding the costs of the Cathedral Cove tracks. There have been bad decisions made. In my opinion the decision made to bitumen the previous existing soft dirt track was a waste of money and now results in constant maintenance costs. The tourist tracks in Italy, namely the Cinque Terra and the Amalfi Walk of the Gods, attract 1,000's of visitors and keep sections of dirt paths and rocks as part of the walking route.

In the Hahei area, DOC has a local community prepared to support DOC with their skills and efforts. These include retired senior engineers and many others who can offer expertise and labour regarding maintaining the tracks.

If the proposal to charge visitors to walk down to Cathedral Cove goes ahead, this money should go to supporting the Beach track and the Gemstone Bay track.

We volunteer helping with pest control in the Cathedral Cove area as DOC is not taking responsibility for pest or weed control. There are rat traps that are maintained and checked along the beach track and the Gemstone Bay track. Weeds over the Cathedral Cove reserve area are out of control, particularly gorse, woolly nightshade, wattles and invasive cherry trees. Pests, particularly possums have increased greatly since the lockdown. Again funds received from Cathedral Cove visitors need to go to plants and pest control. Destroying the two tracks will make weed and pest management more difficult.

The beach track and access to unique Gemstone Bay is integral to the Cathedral Cove reserve estate. Cathedral Cove is not just Cathedral Cove beach, it is an area of 840 hectares and this whole area needs to be managed and protected with adequate access paths. We should be encouraging tourists to move more through the reserve and have the more pleasant walk using the beach track from Hahei beach up to the Cove lookout

To destroy the beach track and access to Gemstone Bay which is part of the Cathedral Cove experience is short term bad planning for tourists and New Zealanders

In many parts of New Zealand, locals identify DOC as "Don't or Can't". DOC has a serious credibility problem in communities who see DOC as not responsive to community needs or wishes.

I hope there can be a positive response from DOC on this issue

Yours sincerely