



'Access to beaches, rivers and lakes in Taranaki is one of the key factors influencing recreational habits.'

Public access

Taranaki's coastal waters, rivers, streams and lakes are used for a wide range of recreation, with research showing the level of public access to coastal and freshwater resources in the region is "about right".

Under the *Resource Management Act 1991*, maintaining and enhancing public access to the region's rivers, streams and lakes is a matter of national importance. Formal public access to the region's coastal and fresh waters is largely provided through the *Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki*, the district plans of each of the three councils in the region, and the *Regional Coastal Plan for Taranaki*. However, much of the access to beaches, rivers and lakes in the region is informal and occurs by arrangement with neighbouring landowners. Public access to the most popular spots in the region is already provided for by district council or DOC parks and reserves, and esplanade strips.

Access to the coast

The Taranaki coast is important for a range of recreation including fishing and diving, boating and swimming, board sports such as surfing and kitesurfing, and walking. Access to beaches, rivers and lakes in Taranaki is one of the key factors influencing recreational habits.

Formal access

Public roads offer the greatest degree of public access to the coast and, along with the creation of reserves and strips, are formal access options. The New Plymouth and South Taranaki district councils both have policies and methods in place to set aside land for public access purposes or to negotiate public access arrangements with developers or coastal land occupiers. In most circumstances, district councils consider the creation of esplanade reserves and esplanade strips to ensure continued public access to the coast at the time of subdivision. Public access through the provision of esplanade reserves or esplanade strips is believed to have increased over time.

The single most significant factor constraining public access to coastal areas of local or regional significance in Taranaki is that few formal public access routes have signs or formed roads, making it difficult to distinguish public from private access. While some of the larger reserves are signposted, smaller reserves, such as esplanade strips giving access to the coast, are often unmarked and their existence not well known.

Unformed roads or 'paper roads' (land set aside and owned by the relevant district council for roading purposes but not maintained by the council) have the potential to provide public access to the coast. However, paper roads are usually only identified on survey maps and their existence is often not well known. The actual pathway can be difficult to identify.

In some cases, even if public access is provided or known, access may be difficult because of the rugged coastline or topography.

Informal access to the coast

Informal public access over privately-owned land is also an important part of providing access to the coast in Taranaki, although access is reliant upon the goodwill of adjacent landowners. Generally, most private landowners are happy to allow people to cross their land. However, changing social conventions, increased responsibilities on landholders in relation to occupational health and safety, as well as changes in land use and recreational patterns, often mean that informal public access to previously accessible beaches, surfing or fishing spots is becoming increasingly restricted.



What's the story?

The Regional Council survey, *Recreational Use of Coast, Rivers and Lakes in Taranaki 2007–2008*, found that of 69 identified coastal sites in the region, 29 sites (or 42%) were evaluated as having excellent public access, including most of the main recreational beaches in New Plymouth and other coastal settlements (such as Oākura and Opunake).

A further 11 (16%) coastal areas were identified as having good public access. These sites were only a short walk from a formed public road, along a clearly defined and traversable track (this is important as access is sometimes constrained by tides), and connected by reserves or clear public access points.

The remaining 29 coastal areas (or 42%) were rated as having poor public access. Access to these sites usually involved a long walk from the nearest formed road, with unclear pathways, rough or difficult topography, or required permission to cross privately-owned land. However, the survey also found that relatively few respondents (10%) had not been able to gain access to parts of the coast in Taranaki that they wanted to. The main reasons people could not gain access was because the access or entrance was closed, too difficult or too dangerous. Only 1% had been denied access by the landowner or occupier. In 2014, the New Plymouth District Council commissioned an NRB Communitrak community survey, which showed that 95% of New Plymouth district residents are either very or fairly satisfied with public access to the natural environment, including the coast.

The *Recreational Use Survey* found that most swimming in the region occurs at major recreational beaches where surf lifesaving patrols are operating. There is good public access to these major recreational beaches. At other beaches access requires the permission of a private landowner.



Ngāmotu beach is easily accessible for recreation such as sailing.



Opunake beach, a popular and patrolled swimming beach in South Taranaki, has excellent public access.



Walking and cycling are increasingly popular activities along New Plymouth's Coastal Walkway.

Boating, fishing and surfing occur at a number of locations on the coast. There are a number of public boat ramps in the region and three boat ramps where permits are required to occupy the coastal marine area—Middleton Bay, Bayly Road and Warea. An increase in the number of surfers in the region has resulted in increased pressure for infrastructure at popular breaks. In many cases, access to these areas requires landowner permission.

Walking and cycling are increasingly popular activities along Taranaki's coastline, especially with the development of the Coastal Walkway in New Plymouth. As previously mentioned, the Coastal Walkway currently extends 12.7 kilometres, with further development planned. Counters set to record people movements on the walkway showed an average of 65,000 movements in September 2014, an increase of 22% in the number of people movements recorded in September 2008. Although the counters record people movements rather than numbers, it is likely the increase in numbers is the result of increased walkway use.

'There is good public access to major recreational beaches.'

Development activity can adversely affect other recreational experiences on the coast. For example, development in remote areas can affect walkers seeking solitude or the 'wilderness' effect. In some cases, development may lead to a gradual loss of the scenic and natural character of that part of the coast, reducing its amenity value.

Constraints to public access

Access along the coast can be physically constrained by natural features. In such areas, the provision of public access may not be practicable or appropriate and the relevant agencies may wish to discourage public access because of public health and safety considerations. In areas that are ecologically or culturally sensitive (such as marine protected areas or heritage sites) public access needs to be managed and, in some cases, restricted.



Relaxing, picnicking and swimming are popular at the Audrey Gale Reserve.

Access to fresh water

People in the Taranaki region enjoy a range of freshwater recreation including swimming, fishing and boating. They also enjoy traditional activities such as walking, sitting or having picnics alongside waterways. The Council has limited power to provide public access to and along streams, rivers and lakebeds where the adjoining land and riverbeds are privately owned. However, the *Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki* and the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki* both contain objectives, policies and methods that encourage district councils to provide for public access in district plans. The district plans of the region's three district councils provide for the creation of esplanade reserves and strips to ensure public access to and along the region's most important streams, rivers and lakes.

Formal access

Public access to and along rivers and lakes is often provided by public roads, esplanade strips, esplanade reserves and access strips. The three district councils in the region are responsible for a number of walkways within their districts, 20 of which are adjacent to rivers, streams and lakes in the region. Key walkways in the region that encourage people to access fresh water include the Stony River walkway, the Huatoki walkway, the Te Hēnui walkway, and the Carrington walkway along the Pātea River in Stratford.

In the Taranaki area, the Department of Conservation is responsible for 300 kilometres of actively managed tracks, a large number of which provide access to waterways. The tracks cater predominantly for short-stop travellers, day visitors and backcountry adventurers.

Of the 10 major lakes (more than eight hectares in size) in the Taranaki region, four are either within reserves or have esplanade reserves along their shores. The region's largest lake, Lake Rotorangi, formed by the damming of the Pātea River for hydroelectric power generation, has 200 hectares of esplanade reserve around its edge. In 2014, 95% of New Plymouth district residents surveyed said they were very/fairly satisfied with public access to the natural environment, including rivers and lakes.

Informal access

Approximately half of the beds of rivers, streams and lakes in Taranaki are in private ownership. This means that access to many rivers and lakes in the region is largely through the goodwill and cooperation of landowners and often via the creation of esplanade strips and reserves. Generally most private landowners are happy to allow people to cross their land as long as property rights are respected and permission is sought first.



Whitebaiters try their luck at the Kaūpokonui River mouth.

There are very few situations where public access to and along streams, rivers and lakes is restricted because of existing structures or operations that present a potential risk to public safety. In these cases alternative access can be provided.

What's the story?

The Council's *2008 Recreational Use Survey* found that 90% of respondents thought public access to such rivers and lakes was "about right". Only 10% of respondents had not been able to gain access to rivers, lakes or parts of the coast in Taranaki that they wanted to in the last year. The main reasons people could not gain access was because the access or entrance was closed, too difficult or too dangerous. Only 1% of respondents had been denied access by the landowner or occupier.

The survey found walking, swimming and relaxing to be the most popular activities at beaches and rivers. Scenic appreciation and picnicking are also popular. At rivers, fishing and whitebaiting are also popular activities, but more people in the region go to lakes to boat and water ski rather than fish, jog or kayak. Figures supplied by Fish and Game Taranaki show that in the 2007/2008 fishing season Taranaki licence holders fished for an estimated 11,690 angler days, spending approximately 3,470 angler days (22%) fishing outside of the region. A local survey conducted in 2012/2013 estimated that 15% of Taranaki fish licence holders fished in other regions, but not Taranaki.


'90% of respondents thought public access to such rivers and lakes was "about right".'

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National comparisons

New Zealanders have traditionally enjoyed good access to and along rivers and lakes throughout the country. The concept of the Queen's Chain (introduced to New Zealand in 1841) was designed to protect in perpetuity, a 100-foot-wide strip of public land alongside waterways. However, the Queen's Chain does not exist beside all water bodies because since the 1840s an increasing amount of land has become privately owned. While it is often assumed that there is a right of public access to such areas for recreation and for cultural and spiritual purposes, this is not always the case.

Find out more

 [NPDC community survey tinyurl.com/TRC7g](http://tinyurl.com/TRC7g)

[Recreational Use of Coast, Rivers and Lakes in Taranaki 2007–2008 \(TRC\) tinyurl.com/TRC7u](http://tinyurl.com/TRC7u)



The Te Hēnui bridge at East End connects the Coastal and Te Hēnui walkways.

Our responses

Regional plans

The Regional Council has limited power to provide public access to and along streams, rivers and lakebeds where the adjoining land and riverbed are privately owned. However, the *Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki* and the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki* (under review) contain policies encouraging district councils to provide for public access in district plans, including the creation of esplanade reserves and strips.

The plans contain objectives, policies and methods to maintain and enhance public access to streams, rivers and lakes. *The Regional Fresh Water Plan* also contains a list of rivers and streams (Appendix IA) for which access arrangements are desirable and appropriate because of their natural, ecological and amenity values.

The *Regional Coastal Plan for Taranaki* recognises that the maintenance and enhancement of public access within the coastal marine area is an important issue. The Plan therefore contains objectives, policies and methods to ensure that public access to the coastal environment is maintained. Methods include rules which give effect to the policies for each of the four coastal management areas (as outlined earlier in this chapter), and general rules that apply to all coastal management areas. Such methods may include:

- ▷ restrictions to be applied on coastal permits to maintain existing access
- ▷ conditions on coastal permits to provide for alternative access where appropriate
- ▷ advocacy to improve public access to the coast (including advocacy to district councils for the continued implementation of esplanade strips and reserves)
- ▷ provision of information on the location of public access points.

Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy

The Council's *Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki* was developed to promote walking and cycling activities in the region, including access to fresh water and the coast. This strategy lists current and potential routes that together would make up a network offering pedestrian and cycle access to the region's natural attractions, as well as population centres. The strategy aims to recognise and promote the leisure, recreational, commuter and tourism opportunities provided by walking and cycling. Some of the new routes foreseen in the strategy include:

- ▷ extensions to the New Plymouth Coastal Walkway
- ▷ Oākura/Wairau River to Mount Taranaki
- ▷ Waiwhakaiho River to Lake Mangamāhoe
- ▷ Stratford to Egmont National Park
- ▷ a coastal pathway and cycling route in South Taranaki
- ▷ an 'Around the mountain' route
- ▷ links to Te Araroa, the walkway being developed spanning the length of the country.

District plans

All district plans in Taranaki provide for the creation of esplanade reserves and strips to ensure that public access to and along the region's most important streams, rivers and lakes can be maintained and enhanced. Councils do have the discretion to waive a requirement. Esplanade strips may be required by a rule in a district plan when land is subdivided or developed. Under the RMA, all subdivisions of allotments under four hectares are required to have esplanade reserves of 20 metres width created along the edge of any river and lake, or the coast. This requirement may be waived or modified by either a rule in district plan, or by resource consent. There is no default requirement for an esplanade reserve when allotments over four hectares are subdivided. However, requirements may result from a rule in a plan.

- ▷ The *New Plymouth District Plan* identifies 'preferred esplanade reserves and strips' and 'priority waterbodies'. These are areas of land that would link existing public access and where enhanced public access is desirable. These areas require an esplanade reserve or strip to be set aside at the time of subdivision and development.
- ▷ The *Stratford District Plan* provides for esplanade reserves (upon subdivision) and esplanade strips (as a condition of any land use consent) on land adjoining priority ringplain river catchments. These are in areas of more intensive land use.
- ▷ The *South Taranaki District Plan* has a schedule of priority rivers for protection via esplanade reserves and strips at the time of subdivision and development.

Both the *New Plymouth District Plan* and the *South Taranaki District Plan* contain objectives, policies and methods to safeguard public access to the coast. Policies relate to esplanade reserves or strips set aside at the time of subdivision, or by other means.



An 'Around the mountain' cycleway is one of a number of potential routes proposed for the future.



The Carrington Walkway in Stratford provides public access along the Pātea River.



A number of tramps and walks provide access to the region's natural environment.

In addition, the district councils maintain roads, tracks, paths, reserves and walkways that provide public access to and along waterways—for example, the Carrington Walkway in Stratford, and the Huatoki and Te Hēnui walkways in New Plymouth—and to and along the coast. Most conduct ongoing upgrade and maintenance of walkways and other facilities.

The *New Plymouth District Council Coastal Strategy 2006* has a strong focus on coastal access issues—also reinforced in the recently released draft *Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy*. The South Taranaki District Council has accepted in principle a proposal to explore options for enhancing public access and walking opportunities around the South Taranaki coastline.

Navigation safety bylaws

The Taranaki Regional Council has prepared navigation bylaws for Port Taranaki and its approaches. These bylaws apply to Port Taranaki only and are for the purpose of regulating navigation and safety in this area. It is important that both recreational and commercial users receive clear guidelines on appropriate speed and access at the port.

Walking Access Commission

Central Government established the New Zealand Walking Access Commission in 2009 to provide leadership on walking access issues and administer a national strategy on walking access, including walkways. It also undertakes mapping of walking access, provides information to the public, oversees a code of responsible conduct, assists with dispute resolution, and negotiates new walking access information, education and advice.

Regional and district councils provide information and technical advice relating to the provision of public access when requested.

Find out more

-  [NPDC Coastal Strategy *tinyurl.com/TRC7x*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-coastal-strategy-2006.pdf)
- [NPDC District Plan *tinyurl.com/TRC7a*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-district-plan-2013-2018.pdf)
- [Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki *tinyurl.com/TRC7k*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-regional-policy-statement-2013-2018.pdf)
- [Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki *tinyurl.com/TRC7v*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-regional-fresh-water-plan-2013-2018.pdf)
- [Regional Walking and Cycling Strategy for Taranaki *tinyurl.com/TRC7w*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-regional-walking-and-cycling-strategy-2013-2018.pdf)
- [SDC District Plan *tinyurl.com/TRC7b*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-sdc-district-plan-2013-2018.pdf)
- [STDC District Plan *tinyurl.com/TRC7c*](https://www.taranaki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/npdc-stdc-district-plan-2013-2018.pdf)