

2 July 2019

## **Introduction**

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Review of the Walking Access Act 2008.

RWNZ supports continually updating the Act and is more than happy to share our Members' personal experiences with public and private land access. The ability to freely access the outdoors continues to be an important part of the New Zealand experience, both for locals and tourists. RWNZ celebrates the ability to access the land, but urges visitors to enter private farmland respectfully and mindfully. We have surveyed our Members asking how the legislation has affected their own private farmland to be used for public access and/or how they have used the legislation to access areas.

## **General Comments**

Access to the outdoors is a big part of the NZ way of life and is important for personal fitness, health, and wellbeing. RWNZ generally supports public access across private land and a number of our members allow access across their property and/or enjoy access to the outdoors across private land.

Key concerns about having people walking across private land are -

- unsuitable behaviour by some
- a lack of understanding about farming practices, eg. lambing
- biosecurity risks, for example, from increased tourist numbers in some areas
- people not asking permission to cross private land

## **Specific Comments**

1. 25% of respondents own private farmland that has been used partially for public access, while 55% have used public access on private property.
2. One respondent expressed their concerns stating, "Land owners' rights must be protected. Access to a particular beach or park must involve owners' permission and a sign posted." Many of RWNZ Members had similar opinions, urging for the rights of the land owner to be respected and considered in policy making.
3. Another respondent brought up the issue of education by stating "Public access is difficult because of the intensity of farming. Walkers are not always aware of their surroundings in rural areas." Visitors accessing private farmland can upset farming work, especially lambing and calving/fawning.

4. Multiple respondents commented on issues with landowners blocking public access through their farmland, and one urged, “I would like to see more enforcement by the NZ Walking Access Commission when private landowners (often foreigners) try and block Kiwis from using unformed legal roads.”
5. One respondent touched on the impact public access has on the environment, stating “Everyone needs to bear in mind that public access can also have negative consequences for the environment and sometimes for the local people also – with rights come responsibilities and bad behaviour by some visitors tarnishes it for everyone else.” Hands-on management should be required for areas with heavy visitor traffic for the overall maintenance and control of the impact on the environment.

### **Feedback**

1. RWNZ fully supports the continuation of the Walking Access Act and the opportunities it gives to people that enjoy the outdoors.
2. RWNZ would like to see visitors on private farmland show more respect for the landowners by making as little negative impact on the land and the stock thereon as possible. Proper signage that tells people that they are entering privately owned land would help urge visitors to act as guests. RWNZ would like to see resources given to farmers to display helpful signage.
3. RWNZ would also like to see more education regarding proper behaviour when crossing private farmland, specifically where and when they can walk through farming areas and how to act properly such as opening and closing gates. It is also important for walkers to follow the “tread lightly” concept by leaving only footsteps, taking only photos and keeping only memories. RWNZ requests that resources be applied to education campaigns to ensure walkers understand correct behaviour.
4. RWNZ asks that security issues continue to be a main focus when visiting private farmland. Safety for rural families remains a priority for RWNZ when visitors are allowed to cross through private land.

### **About Rural Women New Zealand**

1. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and has an authoritative voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues.
2. RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development.

3. RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World and as such upholds all United Nations, ILO and WHO conventions and outcome statements as they relate to women and rural women in particular.
4. RWNZ would like to draw particular attention to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15, Life on Land, which seeks to reduce the degradation of natural habitats and ensure overall conservation of land. With public access, people can continue to explore and learn about New Zealand land while respecting private land owners and the land itself.

If there is an opportunity to meet or do an oral submission, we would be more than happy to discuss our opinions and thoughts further.

Yours sincerely,



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