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To Whom It May Concern

### **SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF THE WALKING ACCESS ACT 2008**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide initial input into the review of the Walking Access Act 2008.

There are already access issues to some of the Queenstown Lakes district's high country tracks and trails, and a significant amount of work is underway to create and expand our local trail networks. Queenstown Lakes District Council is therefore keen to see this review result in increased powers and resources for the Walking Access Commission to help ensure these iconic places can be enjoyed by the public into the future.

Please note that this submission reflects the position of officers and has not been ratified by full Council.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to seeing and commenting on the Review Panel's recommendations in due course.

Yours faithfully



Mike Theelen  
**Chief Executive**

## **SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF THE WALKING ACCESS ACT 2008**

### **1.0 Recent collaboration with the Walking Access Commission**

- 1.1 The Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) was one of the many partners who worked with the Walking Access Commission ('the Commission') on the Mahu Whenua QEII covenant. This exemplary project builds on and protects an extensive track network on private farm land between Coronet Peak and Glendhu Bay. The QLDC's role is to maintain the front country trails and hold the public easements that the Commission negotiated.
- 1.2 The QLDC, Commission and Upper Clutha Tracks Trust have worked together over the past two years to secure easements over private land for the Dublin Bay Mangaweka Trail.

### **2.0 Future collaboration with the Walking Access Commission**

- 2.1 The QLDC sees future opportunities to work closely with the Commission on new projects, such as establishing Head of the Lake Trust trails (Glenorchy), and expanding existing networks in Queenstown (Queenstown Trails Trust), Kingston (Round the Mountain), and Wanaka/Hawea/Luggate (Upper Clutha Tracks Trust), in addition to the possible establishment of a Remarkables National Park. We ask that the Review Panel explore whether the Commission is resourced appropriately to support these opportunities.

### **3.0 High Country Station Access**

- 3.1 The Queenstown Lakes district includes many high country stations, a number of which have been through tenure review in recent years, with mixed results for public access. The QLDC would like to see the Commission better resourced and given greater powers in future to secure and protect full public access to the district's significant recreation areas and trail networks.
- 3.2 Some recent issues include:
  - 3.2.1 The high profile Hunter Valley Station sale where better public access could have been secured;
  - 3.2.2 Mt Alfred Station recently closing public access to a popular walking track up Mt Alfred; and
  - 3.2.3 The QLDC having to intervene to negotiate public access along Mead Road to Kidds Bush Campsite, which is on Department of Conservation land that crosses Hunter Valley Station.

### **4.0 Key issues for the Walking Access Commission**

- 4.1 We believe that the Commission is restricted in its ability to operate to its full potential because of limited funding and resourcing. The Commission's funding has not increased since 2008 and this has resulted in its work being largely reactive, such as responding to tenure reviews.
- 4.2 The Commission's explicit priorities in the Act are to protect access to the coast, waterways, and public recreation land over *private land*, and not in urban areas.

We propose that protecting access to sites of cultural significance should also be explicit as there is currently no entity specifically responsible. (The New Zealand Historic Places Trust protects sites but not access).

- 4.3 Access to sites in urban areas and replacement access where former access has been lost are also excluded from the list of priorities. We propose that the Commission is given mandate under the legislation to provide for access to a wider range of sites of public importance than what the legislation currently allows.

## 5.0 Key roles for the Walking Access Commission

- 5.1 **National and regional leadership:** The Act proposes that the Commission provide national and regional leadership; currently it has neither the mandate nor the resources to fulfil this role. If properly resourced, it could also have a role coordinating agencies on similar projects (such as the role the QLDC played in freedom camping policy).
- 5.2 **Policy and advice:** We believe that it is useful to take a national view when negotiating public access. The Commission could provide consistent advice and information across the country, and have a role supporting local authorities and other organisations on projects where there is a lack of in-house expertise. The Commission could also perform a useful role in coordinating national projects such as Te Araroa – New Zealand’s Trail, and the New Zealand Cycle Trail.
- 5.3 **Securing formal agreements:** A significant number of access arrangements for cycle trails in some areas of New Zealand are based on handshake agreements. The risks of continuing this informal approach are high and we are concerned that access will be lost if these arrangements are not formalised. A key role for the Commission could be to secure formal agreements for access in places where there are not the resources to put the necessary agreements in place.
- 5.4 **Mapping public access:** The Commission currently provides a wide range of accurate and informative maps. This service needs to be maintained and the public informed that this resource is available.
- 5.5 **Horse trekking:** Horse trekking groups have been losing access due to large farms being subdivided into lifestyle blocks and forest tracks being used by mountain bikers. These groups understand they need to be better coordinated to maintain access. The QLDC would value support from the Commission on how to provide for horse trails, and how to minimise conflict between different groups.
- 5.6 **Technology/E-bikes:** A further role for the Commission could be to provide national leadership and consistent advice on the increasing use of e-bikes on tracks and trails, and to reduce conflict between users.

## 6.0 Tenure Review

- 6.1 While the tenure review process has its shortcomings, it does provide a mechanism for public access to be negotiated and protected. If or when the current process is removed or replaced, we propose that a new mechanism be enshrined in the Act to provide incentives to landowners to provide and protect public access.

## **7.0 Support and resources for landowners**

- 7.1 The increase in visitor numbers has put significant pressure on landowners who have public access on their land, for example the Roys Peak walking trail, which has resulted in significant pressures on car parking and the adjacent road. In addition to providing access, landowners need incentives and/or support to provide, maintain and service infrastructure.
- 7.2 Limits placed on the number of people who can use the tracks are frequently defined by inadequate infrastructure, such as carparks and toilet facilities. The Commission's and the Council's roles could include infrastructure and maintenance support for landowners.

## **8.0 Proposed name change**

- 8.1 Finally, we propose that the Walking Access Act and Walking Access Commission be renamed to Public Recreation Access, or similar. This name change would encapsulate the different groups and individuals, including walkers, mountain bikers, recreational cyclists, 4WDers, horse trekkers, hunters, and multisport participants.