



# TOI TE ORA PUBLIC HEALTH

Bay of Plenty + Lakes Districts

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Ministry for Primary Industries  
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## **Submission to: Walking Access Act 2008 Review**

Tēnā koutou

Health begins where we live, learn, work and play. Many of the crucial underlying factors that affect the health of people and communities are directly influenced by government decisions and legislation. Toi Te Ora Public Health's (Toi Te Ora) purpose is to improve and protect the health of the population in the Lakes and Bay of Plenty District Health Board districts with a focus on achieving equity for Māori.

For these reasons, Toi Te Ora welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Walking Access Act review.

### ***Purpose, priorities, objective and functions in the Act***

*The purpose of the act:*

*(a) to provide the New Zealand public with free, certain, enduring, and practical walking access to the outdoors (including around the coast and lakes, along rivers, and to public resources) so that the public can enjoy the outdoors;*

The Act focusses on 'walking access' to the outdoors. Toi Te Ora acknowledges the importance of the Act in providing the public with access to our beautiful country to promote active lifestyles and wellness of our population. The Commission provides the mechanism for negotiation, establishment, maintenance and improvement of tracks and trails for the population. Toi Te Ora recommends the focus is on physical activity and extending walking access to 'active access' to include walking, running and mountain biking.

The Act states the purpose is for New Zealanders to enjoy the outdoors. The purpose of the Act does not mention that public access can also be for physical and mental health, social, and environmental benefits. Toi Te Ora recommends expanding the purpose to include these additional benefits to the community.

'Healthy Open Spaces: A summary of the Impact of Open Spaces on Health and Wellbeing' is an information paper produced in 2010 by Regional Public Health<sup>1</sup>, a unit of the Hutt Valley District Health Board. The definition of open spaces contained in this report includes green spaces such as regional and local parks and reserves, sports fields and other recreation areas. The paper notes connections between open spaces and health and wellbeing include:

- open spaces increase people's contact with nature and spaces of cultural significance (cultural or spiritual wellbeing/*te taha wairua*)
- open spaces promote social interaction and cohesion (social wellbeing/*te taha whanau*)
- open spaces promote physical activity (physical wellbeing/*te taha tinana*)
- open spaces reduce stress and promote relaxation (mental wellbeing/*te taha hinengaro*).

In addition access to the outdoors is in line with the Mental Health Foundation's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'<sup>2</sup>:

1. Connect, me whakawhanaunga
2. Give, tukua
3. Take notice, me aro tonu
4. Keep learning, me ako tonu
5. Be active, me kori tonu

#### ***Working towards equal access***

Toi Te Ora strongly supports equitable access to safe and attractive outdoor tracks and trails ensuring designs cater for a broad range of users, including Māori and people of all ages and ability. Along with considerations to ensure an effective connected network of trails and tracks is achieved to encourage physical activity and connection to nature for all.

Nāku noa, nā



**Dr Phil Shoemack**  
Medical Officer of Health

1. Regional Public Health (2010). *Healthy Open Spaces: A summary of the Impact of Open Spaces on Health and Wellbeing*. Accessed <http://www.rph.org.nz/content/d893f45e-9d35-4906-bde7-c4912036c97e.cmr>.
2. Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2015). *Five Ways to Wellbeing: A best practice guide*. Accessed <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Five-Ways-downloads/mentalhealth-5waysBP-web-single-2015.pdf>