

17 June 2024

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Tēnā koe ██████

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 20 May 2024, in which you asked for:

- *Current number of walkers on the TAC*
- *What reviews of the numbers on the TAC have been done and the outcome of any such reviews? (noting that the department committed to a review in 2012-3).*
- *Has the department recommended to the Minister a maximum number of daily walkers?*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

### **1. Current number of walkers on the TAC**

We estimate that up to 105,000 people walked some or all of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (TAC) between 1 October 2023 and 8 April 2024. Please note:

- This estimate has an error margin of +/- 10%.
- This estimate should not be compared to historical data because it was based on data from different measurement instruments in different locations along the track. DOC is currently trying to resolve a technical issue in retrieving data from activity counters installed prior to June 2022. When that work is complete, we will be able to share a comparison of the last season with longer term trends.

### **2. What reviews of the numbers on the TAC have been done and the outcome of any such reviews? (noting that the department committed to a review in 2012-3).**

The following reviews looked at the problems cause by the pressure of increasing visitor numbers and potential solutions. The reviews all agree that growth without changes in management would result in impacts on the environment and visitor experience, so some changes were made after each report. As a result, we now have a better understanding of those that have had a positive effect, which issues remain, and are continuing to address them with an adaptive management approach.

2007 – *Establishing integrative use limits on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Final Report.* August 2007. Blaschke and Rutherford & Boffa Miskell.

*Outcomes/responses:*

- Between 2007 and 2011 boardwalk was installed between Mangatepopo carpark and the bottom of the climb up to South Crater, to increase resilience of the track and protect the environment.

2014 – *The Tongariro Alpine Crossing (Tongariro National Park). A national and regional recreation and tourism analysis with potential growth scenarios for the Tongariro Alpine Crossing.* 21 January 2014. TRC Ltd (David Bamford and Ray Salter) with input from DOC (Harry Keys).

*Outcomes/responses:*

- More toilets were installed in 2016/17.

2017 – *Report for TAC Governance Group on current issues and challenges as well as future possibilities available for managing the Tongariro Alpine Crossing.* 19/20 April 2017. Dr Maurice Alford, with Amy Satterfield and Dave Bamford.

*Outcomes/responses:*

- Car park restrictions were put in place in 2017/18.
- Toilet pans were added to existing toilets in 2018/19.
- New weather advisory signs were erected; safety signs were erected at the entrance to and on the track; hazardous weather advisories were implemented 2019/20.
- A new car park was created at Ketetahi in 2020/21 by private owners.

2021 - *Visitor numbers on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing before and after the borders closed because of COVID-19.* 30 May 2021. Harry Keys (DOC).

*Outcomes/responses 2023/24:*

- A booking system was implemented including an email briefing on preparedness and cultural significance direct to those booking.
- Manaaki Rangers were in place December 2023 – April 2024.
- A one-day cultural wānanga for concessionaires in September 2023.
- Social media campaigns focussed on promoting booking and preparedness.
- New conditions and a community contribution charge were introduced for all new TAC concessions.
- e-DNA testing implemented (base line data captured).
- Toilet remote monitoring system installed.

*Further work planned for 2024/25 on includes:*

- Cultural wānanga for concessionaires and Manaaki Rangers from October to April (annually).
- Installation of a weather station on the TAC to improve weather forecasting and alert system.
- Development of a TAC climate change mitigation plan.
- Improvements to the functionality of the booking system.
- Investigating quick dry solutions for toilets.

**3. Has the department recommended to the Minister a maximum number of daily walkers?**

DOC has not recommended a maximum number of daily walkers to the Minister of Conservation at this stage. The TAC Sustainability Project is currently working with an independent consultant to understand the carrying capacity of the track. That work is expected to be complete by July 2024 and will be shared with stakeholders for feedback. We will then consider the implications of the recommendations of the report for any future cap on bookings for the TAC and discuss those with the Minister of Conservation. Bookings remain free and voluntary, but we estimate that 90% of walkers made a booking last year when the booking system was introduced.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

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Nāku noa, nā

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Catherine Wilson  
Director Heritage and Visitor  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*