

1.

Nau mai, haere mai – welcome

We've been on a journey since the cyclones in summer 2023 damaged the access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove.

The first goal to reopen the track was achieved by summer 2024. We then actively monitored visitor movements and behaviours over the summer period to help inform our visitor management planning. We've also been testing whether we can make access to the site more resilient and what this might cost.

We want to update you on our progress and get your thoughts on some of the issues we're facing.

Photo: Department of Conservation (DOC)



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

2.

Visitor management planning

We're working to ensure that the:

- mauri of the reserve is being restored
- running of Mautohe Cathedral Cove is financially and operationally sustainable
- visitor pressures are well managed
- marine reserve is protected
- natural and cultural values of Ngāti Hei are respected
- visitor safety risks are effectively managed.

This is all a work in progress. We are trialling, testing and improving as we go. If something doesn't meet our objectives, we will reassess it.

A visitor management plan isn't just a document, it's a way of working.

Photo: RLS Photo – Adobe Stock



Progress update

We've had a lot of feedback over the last couple of years. Here is an update on the work we've progressed.

Feedback	Progress update
Mautohe Cathedral Cove is a significant and cherished destination that is important for the local and regional economy.	We heard this loud and clear. We've put a lot of resource into reopening the track and improving visitor management planning, and we are still going.
Walking access to the site is important for community wellbeing, recreation and identity.	The track has been reopened, and we are exploring options to improve its resilience in a way that is both environmentally and economically feasible
Access from Hahei Beach to Grange Road is important.	The existing track from Hahei Beach couldn't be reopened, but we found another solution. The realigned Hahei Beach Track is set to open this summer.
Access to the other bays is desirable.	We've completed the preliminary work with geotechnical experts and walkway specialists to find a solution. We'll let you know when we can share more.
The community wants to help generate funds for ongoing maintenance and rebuilds and for support with weed and pest control.	This is fantastic. We will come back to you on this.
It is important to have a range of parking and transport options available.	We did a lot of testing around parking and transport over the summer. The shuttle did a great job of reducing congestion, and we would like to continue this. Reopening the car park could bring back congestion and buses are too heavy for the car park, so we will keep the cars in Hahei village.
The idea of managing crowds and impacts in peak season is supported.	We agree with you. Summer is the problem time, and our solutions are targeting the peak season.
There are concerns around marine safety, as the water is shared by water vessels and swimmers.	This one's a bit trickier as it is outside our jurisdiction. We're keen to hear your thoughts on possible solutions.
Further investigations into the cost and sustainability of long-term access are supported.	Our investigations indicate that building highly resilient structures may be too costly and environmentally damaging and has no guarantee of success.
There are concerns around the equity of access.	Let's chat more about this. See poster 7.
The sharing of both the Māori and European history is supported.	This is in progress. The first step focused on sharing the 'care for this place' messaging from Ngāti Hei on the welcome panels at the entrance of the track. Our next step is to work out what infrastructure goes where and then telling the stories will follow. We haven't forgotten.

4.

Understanding the risks

Visitors want to experience the stunning landscape at Mautohe Cathedral Cove; however, it's important they understand that this is a dynamic and unstable landscape. We know that further landslides and rockfalls will occur, posing significant risks to visitors and infrastructure.

We also know that:

- landslides and rockfalls can occur at any time, especially if preceded by periods of heavy rain
- high tides, king tides and stormy weather can reduce the beach area, resulting in more people spending time in higher-risk areas against the cliffs
- people still visit Mautohe Cathedral Cove in extreme weather and high rainfall
- visitors seek shade in the cove and near the cliffs when it's hot, and this behaviour can increase significantly during busy times.



High numbers of visitors on the beach on 28 November 2024. Photo: DOC



Visitors sitting in rockfall areas to keep cool. Photo: DOC

5.

Visiting safely and respectfully

We can't eliminate risks in natural spaces like Mautohe Cathedral Cove, but we can help visitors make informed decisions to ensure that they visit safely and respectfully.

A range of measures have been implemented to help people understand the risks involved in visiting this place:

- We send out advisories in extreme weather conditions and close the site when cyclones are expected and the risk of landslides and rockfalls is increased.
- We run digital ads during the peak season to encourage safe visitor behaviour and preparation. In summer 2024/25, these adverts appeared over 38,000 times to people actively searching for more information about the cove.
- We send information packs to over 2,000 domestic and international sales outlets. The packs included Tiaki messaging, parking and shuttle information, important safety information, and tips on the best times to visit.

Discussion questions

How can we improve the way we communicate safety risks to visitors?

Would you be willing to help share safety tips with visitors?

6.

Managing peak numbers

Mautohe Cathedral Cove continues to be highly promoted. On 4 out of 13 peak days, there were 800 people on the beach at once. With more people on the beach, we're going to see more traffic, rubbish and graffiti, as well as higher safety risks to visitors.

We're working to improve visitor safety, but messaging, weather advisories and closures can only go so far.

We're exploring further techniques to manage the number of visitors on the beach at any one time during the high peak period:

- **Encouraging visits during off-peak times:** This helps smooth out business operations for everyone and enhances the visitor experience.
- **Introducing variable access charges:** If access charging becomes law, charging higher rates during peak times could make off-peak visits more attractive and may even lengthen the season.
- **Promoting other local experiences:** Encouraging visitors to explore the wider region supports regional development and ensures that the area remains vibrant and accessible, even if walking access becomes limited in the future.

Discussion questions

Do you feel the beach can be too crowded during peak summer (Dec-Feb)?

Would you support implementing visitor limits to preserve the beach environment?

Charging for access

The Government has set clear priorities for the Department of Conservation and one of these is to generate new revenue. To deliver on this priority, the Government has proposed targeted access charges for popular visitor areas on public conservation land, such as Mautohe Cathedral Cove.

A consultation document from November 2024 to February 2025 sought feedback on the proposal to introduce charges for access. There were three main considerations:

- **Who should be charged?** New Zealanders, international visitors or both? What discounts should apply?
- **Where should access charges be applied?** What types of places on public conservation land would be suitable for access charging?
- **How should the money be used?** Should a reasonable proportion of the access charge revenue be spent on the place where it was charged?

Photo: Alex Schwab



8.

What if we lose walking access again?

This is a reality check – it has happened before, and it will happen again.

A resilient and long-lasting solution will have cultural and environmental impacts and be costly. Our experience tells us that it doesn't make sense to over-engineer a structure when an adjacent piece of land could also slip. Over-engineering also poses risks to the mauri of this place, its wildness and its natural rhythms. We must be mindful of not just the access but also the integrity of the experience.

So, if we lose the last remaining land access, what next? We all need to consider this question and be prepared for the visitor experience of this area to be quite different.

**He taonga te whenua,
he koha mā ngā tupuna.**

The land is a treasure,
a gift from the ancestors.

Photo: DOC

