

Kauri Dieback management in the Waitākere Ranges: Feedback from public consultation



Prepared for



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Executive summary

This report outlines community feedback on the proposed closure of the Waitākere Ranges to help limit the spread of Kauri Dieback disease. Input was received through feedback forms (777 online and two hard copy forms), letters and correspondence from 20 groups and individuals, a drop-in session attended by around 30 people and a public information sharing session that around 45 people attended. The main themes were:

- All submitters have a close relationship with the Waitākere Ranges - most are frequent visitors, two thirds live locally, and some are involved in a business that operates in the area. Consequently, there is a great deal of interest in this sensitive matter, and many people expressed deep concern and passionately held views about the future of the ranges and its Kauri.
- Seven in ten submitters indicated the proposed closure plan would impact them personally, and the main concern is around the inability to continue enjoying walking/hiking in the Waitākere Ranges.
- There were a number of submissions from business and organisations who use the tracks as part of their operations, and they discussed the impact the proposal would have on them: 41% of businesses using the feedback form said the proposal would have a major effect on their business (i.e. having to close) or a significant effect (significant loss of income and/or have to let staff go). In the detailed letter submissions, some businesses said the Waitākere Ranges was the only viable place they could run their operation, and the proposed closure would put them out of business permanently.
- On balance people feel there are too many track closures proposed (43% of responses to the feedback form), with a quarter (24%) saying the balance is about right, and a quarter (25%) saying not enough closures are proposed.
- Submitters living in the Waitākere Ranges Local Board area were significantly more likely to say there are not enough closures proposed, while submitters living outside of the area were more likely to feel there are too many closures.
- The prevailing view among those who feel more tracks should be closed is that they support the principle of the rāhui – they feel that closing tracks is the right thing to do. Some felt that all areas must be protected, and the tracks closed indefinitely.
- Conversely, the main themes among those who think too many closures are proposed are that the effect on the community is too severe – people love the Waitākere Ranges, love having

them on our doorstep, and love being able to use them as a beautiful area to walk, run, tramp etc and feel that closing all the proposed tracks would have a huge impact. Many mentioned specific tracks they would like to stay open to enable tramping and running (as below). People also wanted to see the council invest in research / science about Kauri dieback, educate the public about its effects and work to improve the tracks and cleaning stations (as opposed to closing them and policing the closure). There is also scepticism about the effectiveness of the proposal and a perceived lack of evidence that people are the main cause of spreading disease – with submitters talking about other methods of spreading the disease that would still exist even if the tracks were closed, such as surface flooding, animals/ pests etc.

- Submitters mentioned a long list of tracks that they would prefer to stay open. In particular, people talked about tracks with few Kauri (including coastal tracks), loop tracks or tracks that could be used as a multi-day or long tramps, and/or tracks with good surfaces – the most frequently mentioned tracks were Comans Track, Ahu Ahu Track, the Hillary Trail, Piha Valley Track, Gibbons Track, Fairy Falls Track and Zion Hill Track. Cutty Grass Track was also mentioned as a major east-west link.

Overall, the general theme emerging from virtually all submissions was a deep love for the Waitākere Ranges as a precious taonga for Auckland and its people, and a despair over the potential impact of the disease on Kauri and the ranges. While some felt the council should close the whole park to protect Kauri, a larger proportion of submitters were concerned about the impact of the proposed closures on their life, recreation and/or business. These people expressed a fervent desire for balance – they want the council to instigate a range of measures to limit the spread of the disease whilst still allowing access to certain parts of the ranges for Aucklanders to use and enjoy.

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Consultation process

Auckland Council's Environment and Community Committee has proposed to close the forested areas of the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park, with some exceptions, by 1 May 2018. This significant decision was made to provide the highest level of protection against kauri dieback disease. The proposed closure is subject to an engagement process with those who use and benefit from the regional park, concessionaires, businesses, recreational groups, and people who live within the Waitākere Ranges.

Auckland Council consulted with these groups between 8 and 19 March 2018, using the following processes:

- an advertisement was placed in the Western Leader
- an online feedback form was established and hosted on Auckland Council's Have your Say website
- the survey link was emailed to a stakeholder list comprising concessionaires, groups/societies and recreational users (313 contacts) and Local Board contacts that had an email address (34 contacts)
- Waitākere Local Board staff shared the survey link with Local Board members, Local Board stakeholder list and Local Board Social Media
- the survey link was shared by email with Te Kawerau a Maki, councillors Hulse and Cooper, and the Environment and Community Committee,
- the survey link was shared on Regional Parks Social Media, WR tourism group, Friends of Arataki
- a Peoples Panel questionnaire was sent to 1,100 people who live in the Waitākere Ranges Local Board area
- a flyer was shared on social media
- 51 concessionaires were contacted by phone regarding a drop-in session on Friday 16 March. They also received an email afterwards. An email was also sent to the Local Board contacts (34) regarding the drop-in session. Around 30 people visited the drop-in session.
- a public meeting and information sharing session was held on Monday 19 March at the Arataki Visitor Centre. This was attended by approximately 45 people, including local residents, businesses, and those who walk, run and tramp in the ranges
- Arataki Visitor Centre had posters and handouts for both events, and staff answered many phone calls

- some queries were received through to the 'kauri' inbox - from the Mayor's Office, Biosecurity inbox and online enquiries - these people were directed to the online survey or advised to write a more detailed submission by email if appropriate.

Across these sources, 803 'pieces' of feedback were received, including 777 online and two hard copy feedback forms, letters and correspondence from 20s groups and individuals, plus notes, questions and feedback from the drop-in session and the public meeting.

Buzz Channel has collated and analysed this feedback and presented it in this report.

Feedback from consultation:

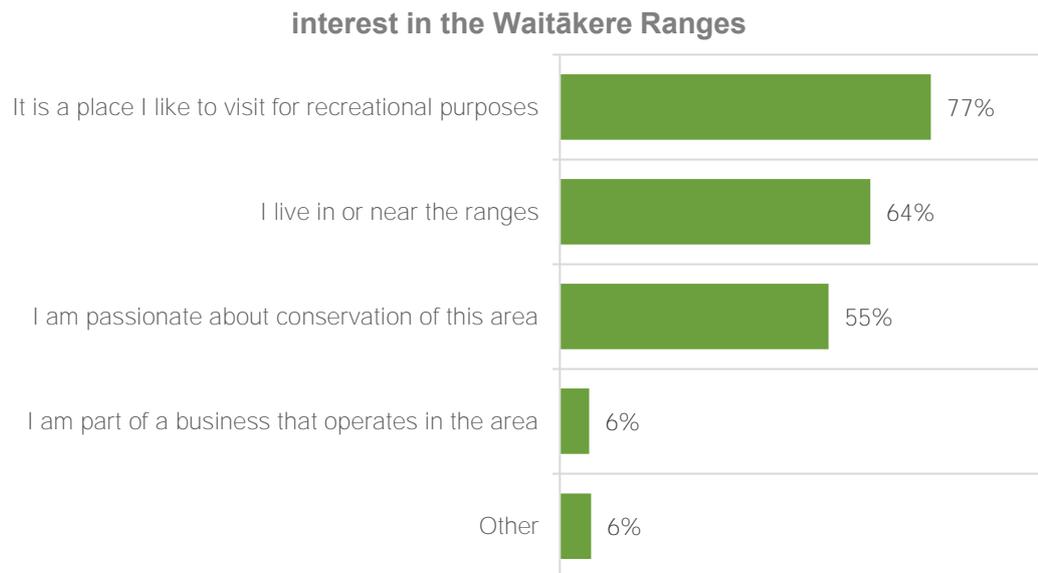
1. Using the Waitākere Ranges

Interest in and use of the Waitākere Ranges

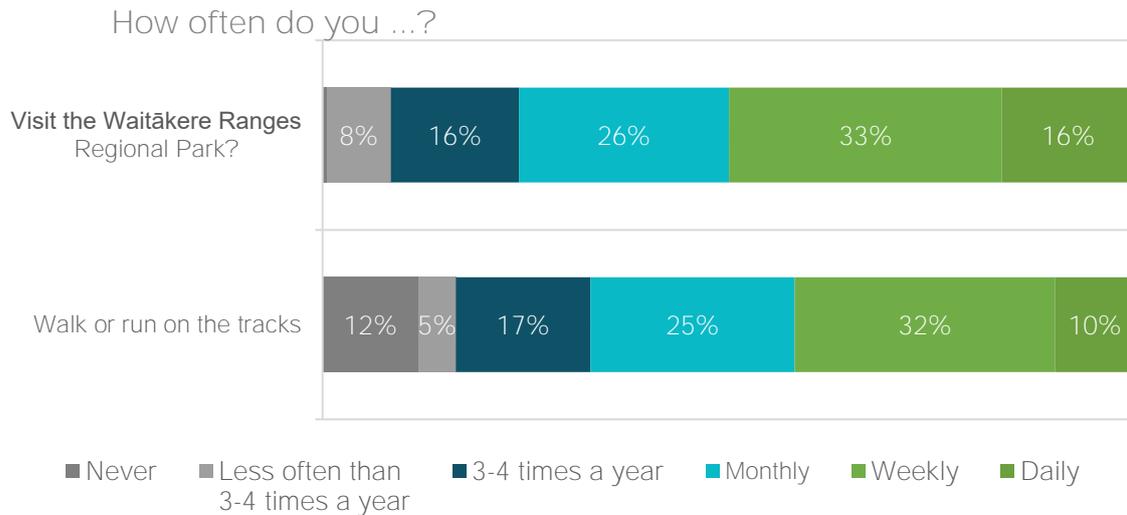
Participants were asked about their interest in the Waitākere Ranges, how often they visit, and how they use the regional park.

Three quarters of submitters using the feedback form indicated they like to visit the ranges for recreation, and 6% are involved in a business that operates in the area.

Two thirds of submitters live locally, either in the Waitākere Ranges or in the nearby suburbs (64%), and over half indicated they feel strongly about conservation in the area (55%).



Base: 779 responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

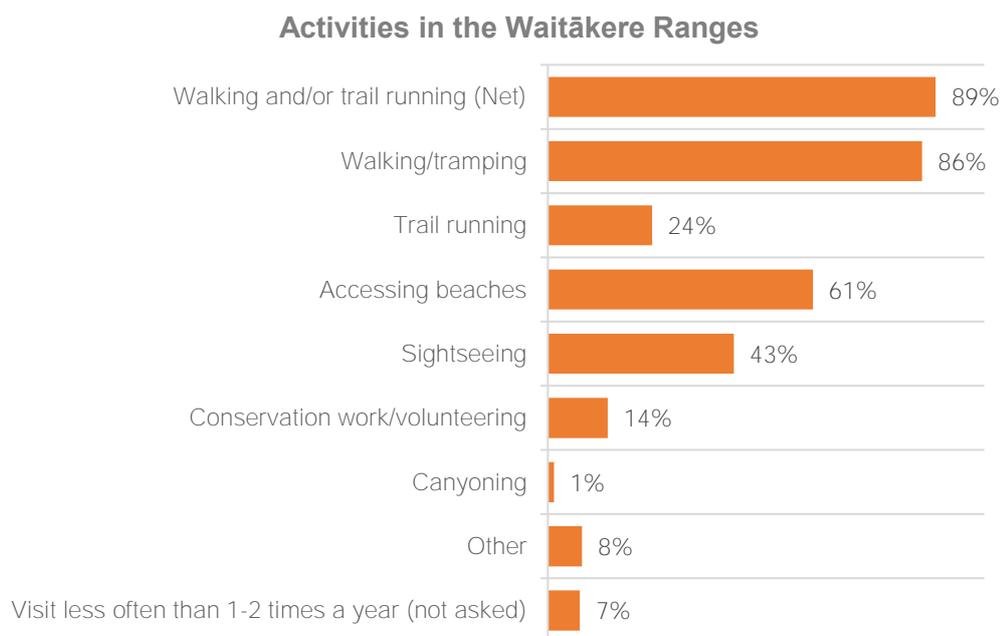


Base: 779 responses.

Many submitters using the feedback form are frequent visitors to the regional park, with half visiting at least once a week, and three quarters monthly or more often (75%).

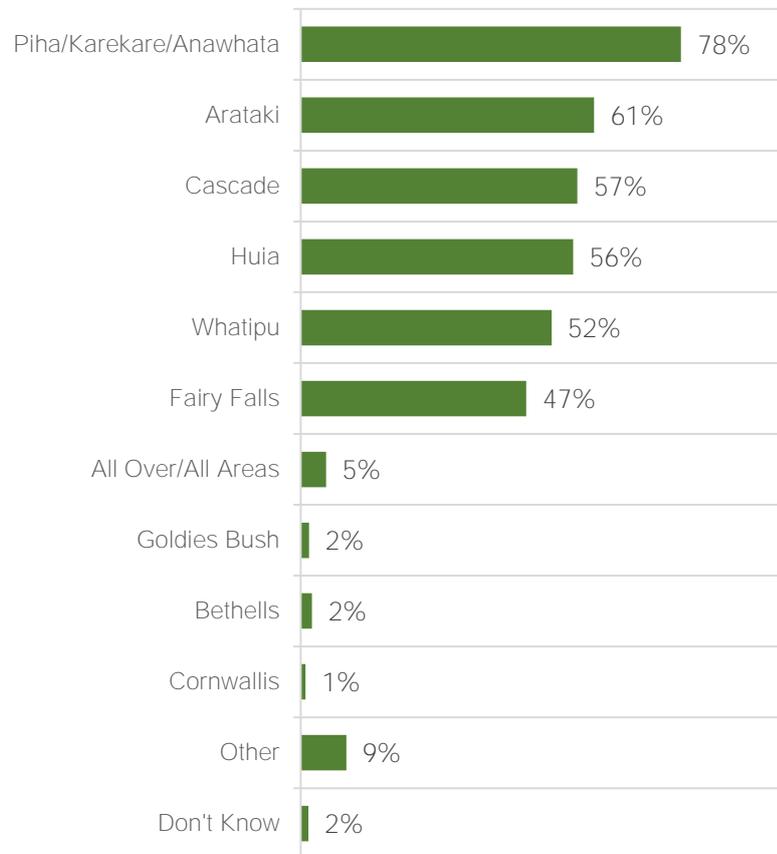
Walking and/or running on the tracks is popular with one in ten submitters saying they walk or run on the tracks daily, and just over four in ten are hiking or running on the tracks at least weekly.

The below chart summarises activities the submitters participate in when they visit the regional park.



Base: 779 responses.

Tracks currently walk and/or run in the Waitākere Ranges



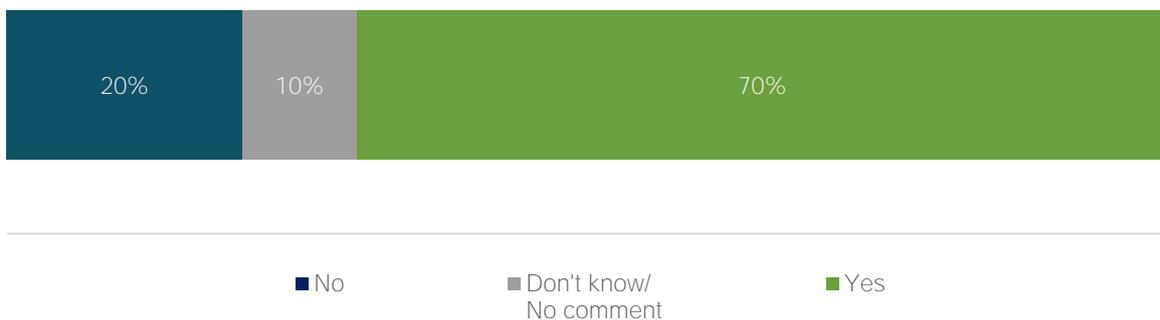
Base: 692 submitters who walk and/or run in the Waitākere Ranges regional park. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

2. Impact of the proposed closures on people and businesses

Personal impacts

Participants were asked if the proposed closure plan for the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park would have any personal impact on them.

Does the proposed closure plan have any personal impact on you?

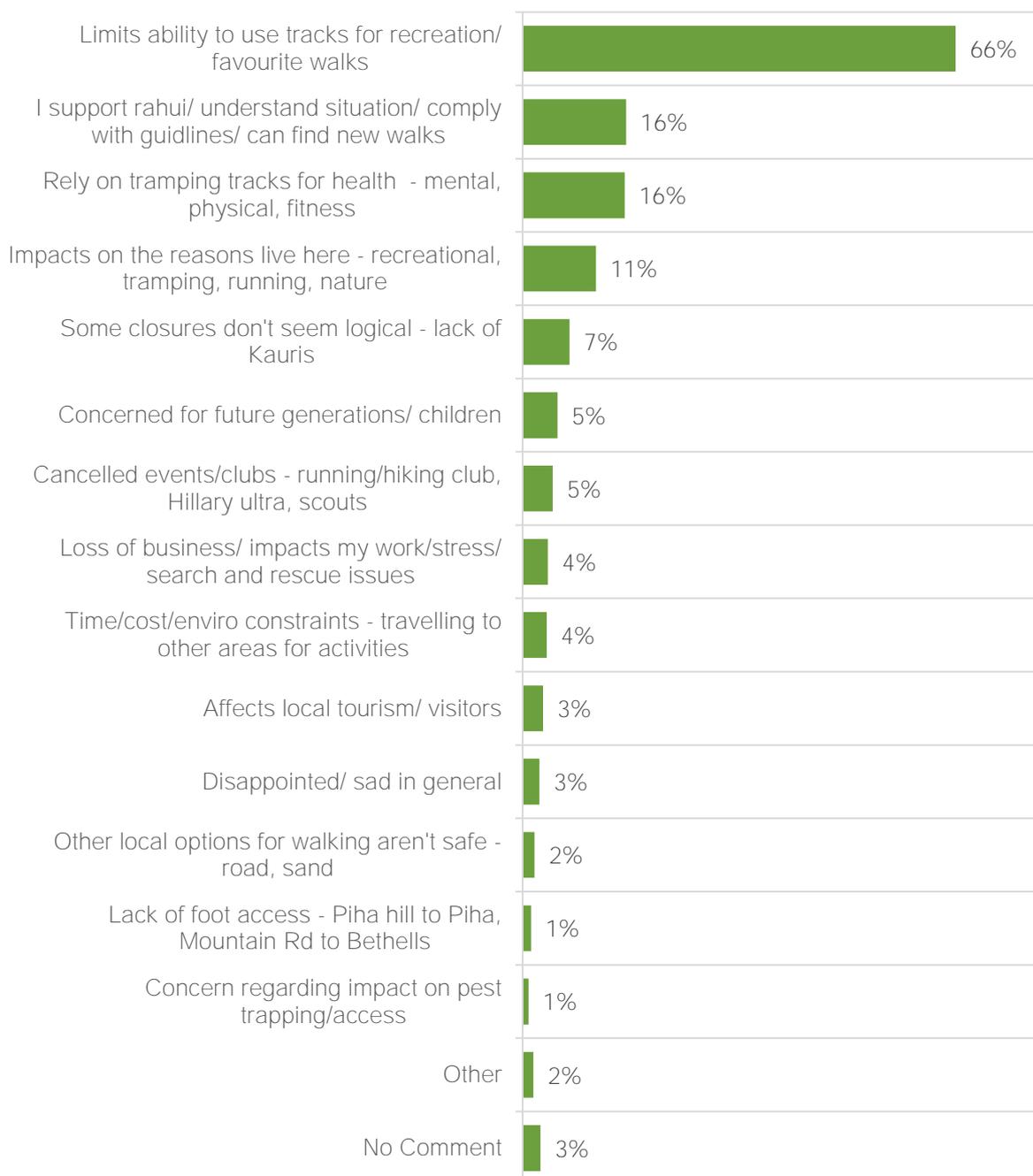


Base: 779 responses.

Seven in ten submitters indicated the proposed closure plan would impact them personally. This is not surprising given that a high proportion of submitters live in or visit the area, and a majority enjoy walking/hiking when they visit the regional park (86%).

Males were significantly more likely to say the proposed closures would impact them (77%) than females (63%).

Personal impact of the proposed closure plan



Base: 544 responses who considered the proposed closures would have a personal impact. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

The main impact is concern about the inability to continue enjoying walking/hiking in the Waitākere Ranges on their favourite tracks for recreation. This is not surprising, given that 42% of participants indicated they walk or run on the tracks weekly or more often, and 67% at least once a month.

"I currently hike in the Waitākeres almost every weekend, so I wouldn't be able to do that."

"I enjoy running through the ranges on a routine basis. Although there are some other beautiful parks around, nothing is quite as awesome as these ones."

"I love tramping in Waitākere and with closures my enjoyment will be restricted."

"I frequent these walking tracks. They are local to me, so I will either need to find new tracks to work or take up a different hobby."

"I run and walk the tracks at least three times a week, pretty much all the areas I am currently allowed to walk my dogs and also exercise myself will be closed. I will have to drive quite some distance to find somewhere to run /walk."

"I regularly walk in various parts of the Ranges. I prefer this rather than street walking as this provides a healthier option i.e. not breathing in exhaust fumes. Also, there is little noise. I will not continue walking if the Ranges are closed."

"I will not be able to enjoy the recreational opportunities that the ranges have to offer. I will not be able to go hiking or camping with my family."

"Reduces my recreational opportunities and enjoyment of the superb environment."

"Substantial reduction in opportunities for Outdoor recreation (around Hiking) particularly in the weekends."

"I usually would walk in the ranges several times a week. Tramping the ranges with a group of women for between 3 - 12 hours at the weekend has been a big part of my recreation, fitness and social connection for a number of years. Introducing my kids to trail walking has also been a pleasure which is now more difficult to access."

"I am a recreational trail runner and each weekend I spend 2 to 3 running in various different areas in the Waitākeres. My family also comes out and uses the park, and so for us it's a loss of somewhere that provides a training ground unlike anywhere else in the region, and provides mental, spiritual and physical respite."

“I love to do tramping regularly in Waitākere. The near total closure of it will do a lot of harm to the people having the same kind of healthy lifestyle.”

“My family and I use the track every day that our road is situated on. I have been respectfully running on this track for at least 18 years.”

Even though there is a sense of disappointment about the closure of the tracks, there is also a sense of understanding of the situation among some, with participants making supportive comments about the closure and the importance of protecting the Kauri and forest (16%):

“I enjoy walking in the park as a volunteer and for leisure as well. While closing the park will take some of my walking areas away and restrict the areas I can walk in, I am not only interested in the birds but nature as well, so I am looking forward to the closure.”

“The closure will help maintain the continued existence of the Kauri tree in the Waitākere Ranges. The kauri is an essential part of the ranges ecosystem and a taonga in its own right.”

“Personally, I feel upset that the rāhui is not being taken seriously, as it is another let-down from the perspective of upholding the Treaty of Waitangi. More practically, I have had to find other places to get my tramping in, but that is part of respecting our land.”

“As a resident I have enjoyed walking in the ranges for as long as I've lived in Piha - the closure means that I won't be walking in the ranges anymore. I support it, even though it affects me, because I believe the Kauri must be protected.”

“We stopped (hiking in the ranges) when the rāhui was put in place, because we could see the Kauri getting worse and the disease spreading.”

“I would like to walk all the tracks but can understand there is the need for protection.”

“I'm a nature photographer and a tramper. I will have to go to other parks. I am very happy to do so. Save the kauri, protect the forest, respect the rāhui.”

“It means I can't walk where I would like; but I prefer that to endangering kauri.”

“Only sadness that I can't visit any more but understand the need to protect the ranges.”

However, one detailed submission felt that while the kauri are important, so is access to the Waitākere Ranges:

“I appreciate the importance of preserving the Kauri that remain in the Park. They are especially important trees, culturally and spiritually to Maori and more broadly to all New Zealanders. However, the Park as a whole is an important area for the public of Auckland. Auckland without the Park is not quite Auckland.”

16% of participants mentioned they rely on being able to walk in the ranges for their health and wellbeing – both physical, mental, and spiritual:

“I hike one day a week for health and wellbeing. Taking this away would compromise my wellbeing.”

“I enjoy the benefits of walking in the Waitākere Park both for physical fitness and for general well-being, connecting with a non-urban environment, another world beyond.”

“Visiting this beautiful park enriches my life spiritual, physical and emotional life immensely and in today's busy world we need, more than ever, to have the Waitākeres to visit to be able to re-connect with nature.”

“I use them every day for fitness, sport, recreation and wellbeing.”

“I've had surgery on both knees, and I could no longer run on roads, sidewalks, asphalt, anything hard. Even gravel roads and hard-packed dirt are no longer doable for me. I'd had to accept the painful truth that I was never going to run again. And then I found the trails in the Waitaks. It was such a joy to rediscover running on the trails, which were gentle enough (and the pace slow enough), that I could run again without pain, without the trails, I will never be able to run again.”

“It is spiritual, it is an uplifting experience to be in the middle of a living forest.”

“It restricts my recreational activities which are necessary to remain fit and healthy both physically & mentally.”

“The ranges are my garden of Eden. Not being able to walk in the ranges would impact on my spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing.”

This view was also mentioned in a submission from a tramping club, who felt the closures would impact upon people’s health and enjoyment:

“Council information is that on an annual basis, prior to the December rāhui, there were over 1,000,000 visits to the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park (WRRP) annually.....All of these users....don't use the Park just because it is there - they understand that accessible recreation in our more challenging regional parks is part of their health and enjoyment of life, and a way to unwind from their more frenetic daily lives. The Council owes it to all of these users to seriously catch up on the WRRP maintenance backlog from many years past to ensure that recreation for Aucklanders and people from outside the region is still something that is accessible and part of the region’s attraction.”

Around one in ten participants talked about how important it is for them to be able to use the walking tracks and enjoy the outdoors and nature ‘on their doorstep’ as it’s a reason they chose to live in the area (11%):

“I have grown up living in the ranges and those tracks have been my back yard for my entire life. I spend my weekends adventuring through the parks and if I wasn't able to use these then I have no idea what I would do.”

“It’s a place where myself and family exercise and enjoy the outdoors in a natural environment. This was a major reason why I moved into this area 17 years ago.”

“We live in Titirangi to have the Waitākere ranges on our doorstep to enjoy and keep fit and show to all our overseas guests.”

“Being able to walk in the bush is the only reason that I moved and stay in West Auckland.”

“Residing in the Waitākere ranges, most of our weekends are spent in family visiting the sites, camping, tramping or running the trails.”

“I love doing bush walks, which is part of why I moved to Titirangi, so obviously the closure of the tracks is unfortunate.”

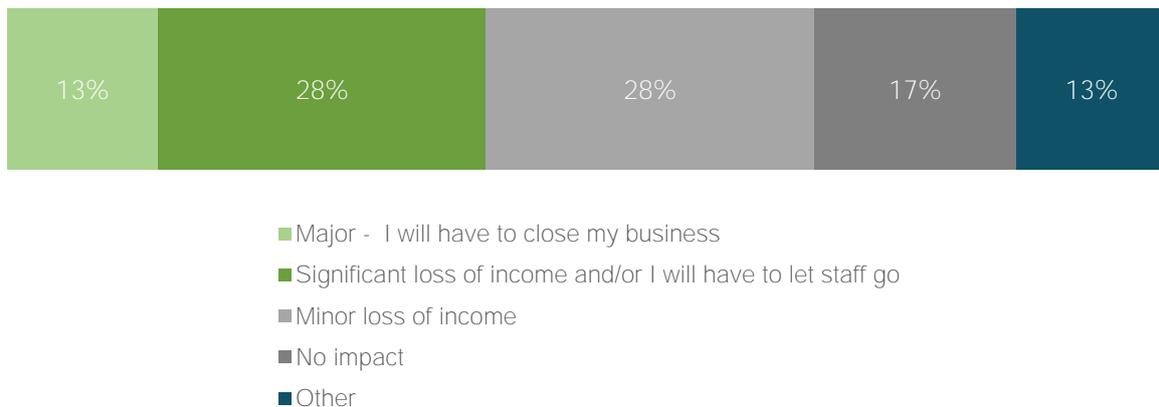
“Regularly use these tracks for recreation and exercise - one of main reason we own property on this coast.”

“For all my life I have lived in West Auckland and regard the Waitākere Ranges as our backyard. Sometimes I don't visit as often as I would like but it is where a huge part of my own childhood and also our children's. We brought them here to tramp and camp and swim and surf. Now they have grown and moved away they always spend time in the Waitākere Ranges when they visit.”

Business impacts

There were 46 submissions from business and organisations who use the tracks as part of their operations, and they discussed the impact the proposal would have on them.

What do you think of the proposed plan for track closures?



Base: 46 business or organisation responses.

Overall, 69% of businesses using the feedback form indicated the closure plan would have an impact on their business.

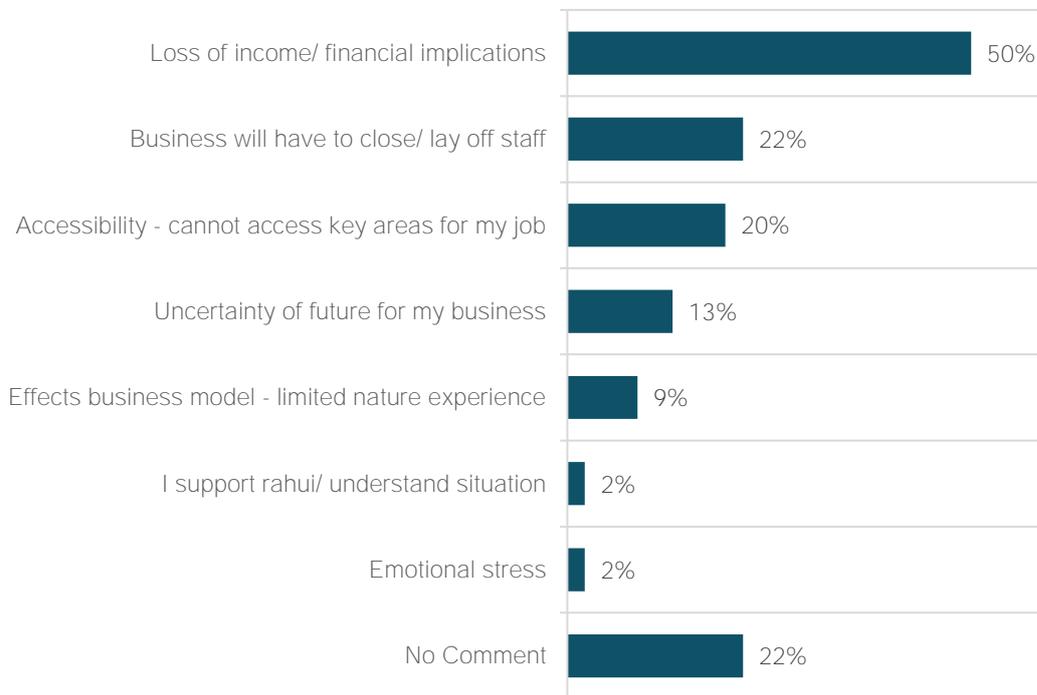
41% of businesses said the proposal would have a major effect on their business (i.e. having to close) or a significant effect (significant loss of income and/or have to let staff go).

In the detailed letter submissions, some businesses felt the Waitākere Ranges was the only viable place they could run their operation, and the closure would send them out of business permanently:

“We are facing the forced closure of our business through Council’s actions and nothing to do with the way we operate. Now, as owners, we face a grim future financial prospect with no secure source of income, substantial debt repayments and continual mounting expenses. The AW model relies on several options being available, from 2-day to 5-day itineraries with choices in each category. At present, AW has over 8 itinerary choices available and cannot operate with only short walks or one or two longer, unconnected walks available on the exception list of tracks. This renders the business model of planning and facilitating multi-day tramps irrelevant.... With the uncertainty that exists, pre-existing 2018/2019 bookings have already been cancelled and we are unable to take new bookings which has already made continuation of a financially viable AW business impossible....AW had a great financial future and was on course to meet all growth expectations and financial forecasts. It is unthinkable that a responsible, environmentally reliable Concessionaire is collateral damage in this extraordinary and unexpected decision.”

“50% of our business is undertaken in the Waitākere Ranges with our bush, or forest, walk being one of the highlights....It is now reported that even areas such as predominantly Pohutukawa forests will be closed, leaving only beach and grasslands available. This will leave us little in the way of alternative choices and will have an enormous financial impact on our business.....We have invested a large amount of time, energy and money promoting our nature tours over the last four years; closure will put us in a very precarious situation financially.”

Business impact of the proposed closure plan



Base: 46 business or organisation responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

The biggest concern for businesses is the financial impact in terms of loss of income, mentioned by half of business submitters:

“Currently a 50% downturn in business due to the confusion of the park being open or not. Closure of the business would mean a complete loss of income for our small family run business and our employees. A complete loss of equity built up over 20 years of operating - equipment, contracts, gear sheds, goodwill, staff expertise.”

“I operate on the Kitekite Falls trail, it is one of the highlights of our trip. I predict a 40% reduction in revenue if Kitekite remains closed.”

“I run a b and b so will expect visitor numbers to reduce especially during spring and summer.”

“One of our major events The Hillary has had to be cancelled and this create financial loss.”

"I have been working in tourism for 10 years and if I can't walk in the Waitākeres for business and pleasure it will really be detrimental to a) my income b) my lifestyle."

"If the Hillary trail closes than the New Zealanders and tourists that walk the trail will no longer stay at the Muriwai campground at the end of their tramp."

"I am a canyoning guide who works in the Waitākere Ranges. Closure would mean no canyoning and no work."

One in five business submitters mentioned concern over having to reduce their staff numbers due to the financial impact on their operation, and possibly close down (22%):

"The canyoning company I work for will be forced to close. I will lose employment with a company I have worked for 10 years in an area I love to share."

"Full closure of the park would result in staff losses as walking certain tracks in the park is a significant proportion of the business for the company I work for."

"I run a successful tour guide business. Due to uncertainty over how long the park will be closed for I have decided not to run the planned tours next season. I am also considering relocating to other areas due to the lack of decisions over timeframes."

One in five business submitters mentioned concerns about the lack of accessibility to key areas required for their business operation (20%):

We also have a product that has been shelved due to the Rāhui that operates down the route down Pararaha Valley that we planned to grow over this winter. Not launching this product would reduce our FTE by 1 guide."

"Since the Rāhui our visitor numbers have significantly decreased. I am obliged to let people know as they book that we are requesting that nobody goes in to the forest. Many people at this stage do not want to come, particularly New Zealand families. A walk to the Kitekite Falls makes up a significant part of their stay in Piha."

"Some of our staff walk to work via the paths."

"I'm working for Bush & Beach who operate guided bush walks for visitors."

“Our business provides small boutique tours to the Waitākere Ranges and Western beaches of Auckland. This is our core business. Closing the tracks will have a mean we would be unable to provide half our tours hence would have to scale down our business.”

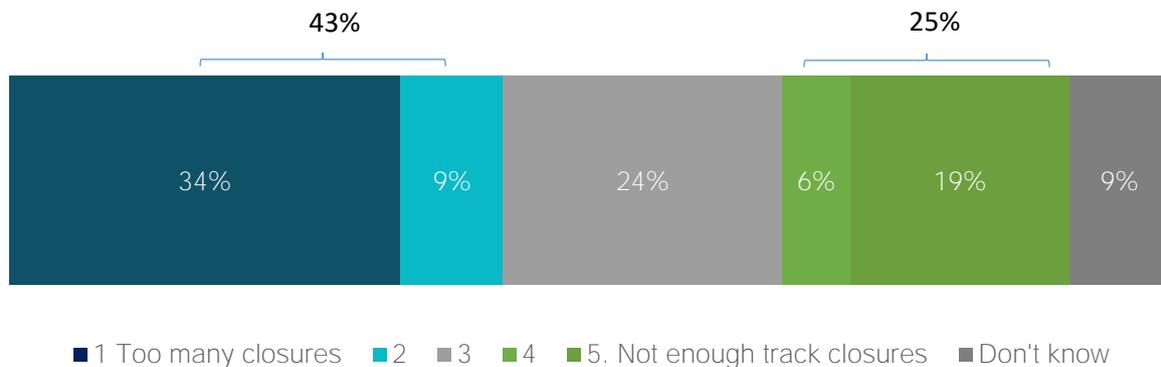
3. Feedback on the proposed closure

Thoughts on the proposal

On balance, participants feel there are too many track closures being proposed (43% of responses to the feedback form rated 1 or 2), with a quarter (24%) saying the balance is about right, and a quarter (25%) saying not enough closures are proposed (rated 4 or 5). A small proportion of people offered no opinion (9%).

Submitters living in the Waitākere Ranges Local Board area were significantly more likely to say there are not enough closures (30% vs 25% of all submitters). And submitters living outside of the area were more likely to feel there are too many closures (55% vs 43% of all submitters).

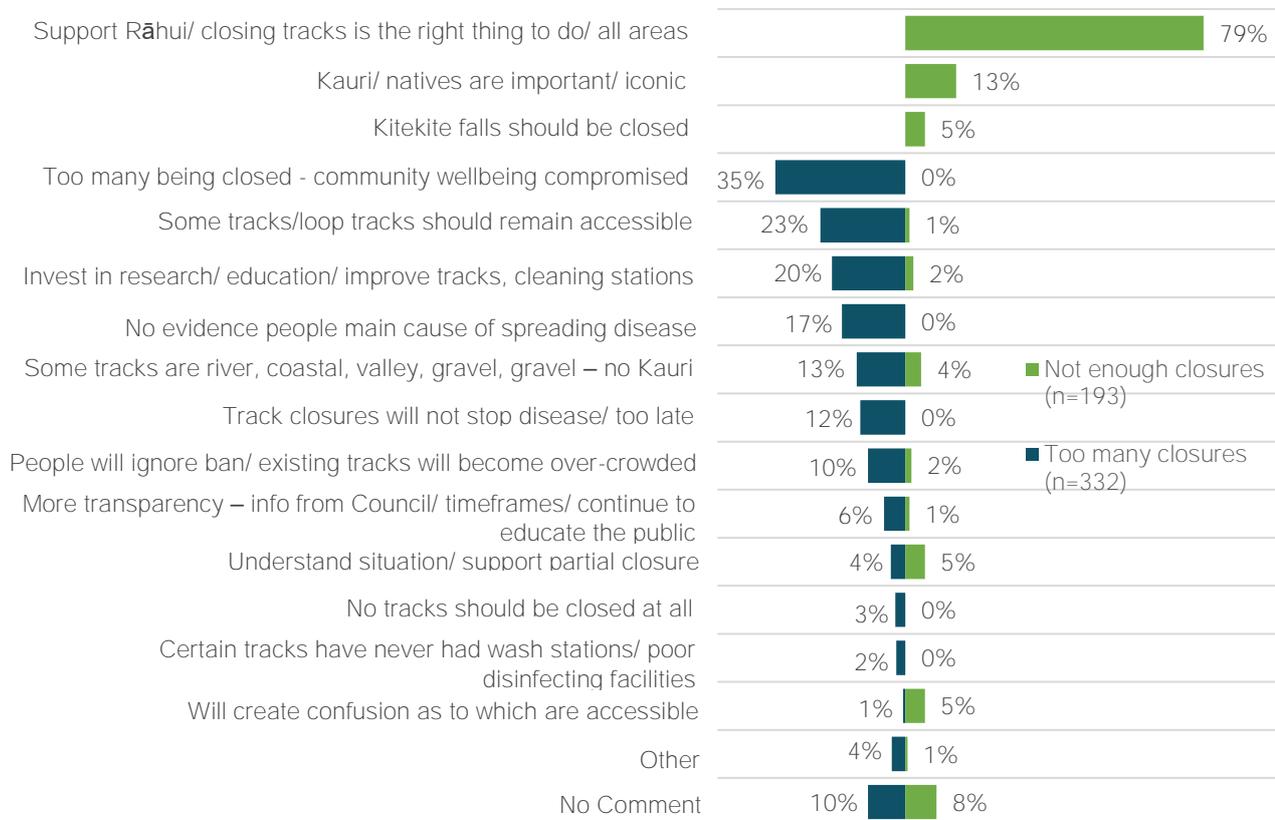
What do you think of the proposed plan for track closures?



Base: 779 responses.

The chart on the next page summarises comments made on the proposed track closures based on those who felt there are not enough closures proposed, and those who felt too many closures were proposed.

Thoughts on the proposed track closures



Bases: Feel there are 'too many closures' (rating of 1 or 2) 332 responses. Feel there are 'not enough closures' (rating of 4 or 5) 193 responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

The prevailing view among those who feel more tracks should be closed is that they support the principle of the rāhui – they feel that closing tracks is the right thing to do. Some felt that all areas must be protected, and the tracks closed indefinitely.

“I believe all areas that are at any risk to kauri dieback should be closed, as it is our duty to do whatever we can to save the Kauri, no matter the cost, whether it is an inconvenience or not to us, and I will respect any closures to the Waitākere Ranges that I call home.”

“Balance is important, but the action should be taken swiftly. It's better to reopen some tracks in future.”

“To prevent Kauri die-back and allow the environment to heal, it is vital that those elements which contribute to the deterioration and/or destruction, be restricted.”

“All areas with Kauri trees must be closed. We support the rāhui placed by Te Kawerau a Maki. Auckland Council and MPI must honour their treaty obligations and ensure that everything is done to protect the kauri forest of the WR regional park, and other Kauri forests in the north island.”

“As some tracks are closed the remaining tracks will be used more. Some of the tracks you have left open cut right into the heart of the ranges. These areas may be die-back free now, but they won't be after your changes are put in place. Better to close the ranges properly as announced last month than to attempt a selective approach that will simply result in a wider spread of the disease.”

“I am incredibly concerned that it is too little too late! Until we understand more about this we need to minimise spread as much as possible or we risk losing the trees that make this forest so special. Do everything possible.”

“if the closures will have the desired effect then by all means the closures should happen and also be enforced.”

This view was also supported by one submitter in a detailed submission:

“I believe all tracks in the Waitākere Ranges Regional Parks should be closed until such time as the individual tracks can be upgraded and efficient pre-brush and ‘walk-through’ pads soaking in disinfectant cleaning stations are installed at the entrance to each track and at track junctions. However complete closure will not be popular and is unlikely to be complied with unless Council agrees to some high usage tracks being upgraded and re-opened as quickly as possible including the two tracks at Arataki, Byers Track, Kitekite Track, Montana Trail.”

However, another submitter (a tour provider in the ranges) offered a more qualified view and felt more information was needed - they would support closure if that was the only option, but felt that alternatives were needed:

“We are committed to supporting the necessary measures, but would like clarified exactly what are the necessary measures? Is it safe to walk in areas protected with spray stations, boardwalks and maintained tracks and with these safeguards being fastidiously followed by operators such as ourselves? If this is not sufficient to safeguard our kauris then we fully support closures, however we cannot understand why other walks within the region where there are no kauris present

are also being closed. We would be very happy to take our guests to alternative tracks if necessary.....but we do need this alternative please! A full closure will deny visitors to Auckland the chance to experience our beautiful flora, fauna and landscapes.”

On the other hand, the main theme among those who feel there are too many track closures is that it's too restrictive and the community's wellbeing would be compromised (35%):

“It doesn't leave many options, clearly too many closures.”

“You are proposing the closure of a regional park on the doorstep of NZ largest city at a time when there is a huge push to get people doing more physical activity.”

“Your proposal will very severely affect the tramping community in Auckland to do one day tramps. There are no alternative areas in the Auckland region for this activity, they all contain kauri and are likely to be subject to closure in the future.”

“This proposal reduces to less than 10% of the available trails and tracks. This severely reduces our exercise and recreation opportunities...”

“The majority of tracks will be closed causing great hardship and loss of benefits to many people. In particular, the Ranges provide a great way for people to get exercise, and activity that is lacking in modern society.”

“Well there is hardly a place left to walk is there? The balance between well-being of people and their mental and physical health is not being taken into account in the decision making. Kauri trees are important but stopping access to the tracks will not save them.”

“Recreation in the bush is very important for human wellbeing and closing all the tracks does not take this into account.”

Another common viewpoint (23%) is that the council should continue to allow access to tracks that meet certain conditions – for example, those tracks with no Kauri, coastal tracks, tracks that are in good condition / with good gravel (so that the risk of spreading the disease is reduced) and/or some of the longer / loop tracks (as these have high recreational value):

“While I support endeavours to try and reduce the Kauri die back efforts, I do not support the total ban or Rāhui to close all tracks in the Ranges. There are many areas where Kauri does not grow, which is mainly on the coastal areas. I see no need to restrict activities at [tracks without Kauri or on sealed or gravel roads]”

“There needs to be sufficient loops that enable you to visit and walk through different terrain for all types of fitness whilst having key sightseeing spots. I would like to see a map that has the tracks that remain shown, instead of the mix of closed, proposed closed and remaining tracks as it is very hard to digest how it all looks going forward.”

“The tracks proposed to stay open are generally very short and only suitable for a quick family walk, very few could be considered to be tramping tracks so there would still be a massive impact on trampers. There is no alternative or mitigation proposed in the plans and it is still essentially a blanket ban.”

“I strongly support the conservation of Kauri, however the proposed track closures seem way in excess of what is required. The closure strategy seems to be more inclined to find the maximum number of tracks to close rather find a balance between conservation and recreation. There are many tracks that meet or are close to the definitions for tracks to remain open but are destined to be closed on the list.”

“The 20 Feb proposal to close whole forest with some exceptions goes too far. The proposal closes many tracks that have high recreational value and appear to be low risk for Kauri.”

“I think that the approach should be more scientific. If there are Kauri close the track, if there are no Kauri leave it open. I fail to see why the Kitekite track is open, I recall Kauri there. Also I believe it is a high dieback area. The main areas to keep open are the areas without Kauri which is probably predominantly coast scrub areas. I suggest making a few more coastal paths to keep people with a few jewels left to play with, maybe Anawhata to Te Henga. I like the idea of a massive coastal track all the way around.”

“Need loops and day trips to remain open.”

“Tracks with actual path and boards mean tree roots are not getting stepped on. Why do these have to close? Tracks that may have a few kauri trees outweigh reasons for keeping them open especially if large areas of more significant kauri forest in the park are closed for protection.”

“How can you keep the Hilary Trail open or what are the plans for a new route?”

“There are tracks that have very little Kauri near the tracks - e.g. Gibbons and Muir Track. I believe to make this work, tracks with high recreational value and low numbers or no kauri particularly on the periphery of the Waitaks should remain open. There needs to remain some tracks that can make circuits and offer long/hard tramping.”

One in five submitters mentioned that they feel more investment is needed in research and education about the Kauri Dieback disease, and improving the tracks (20%):

*“The time, attention, and money need to go towards research into management of *Phytophthora agathidicida*. Our knowledge of it is in its infancy.”*

“What is the cause and effect. From correspondence read, it appears the die back has been in the ranges for some time. When recently using tracks last month, all of the cleaning stations were in disarray, items missing and wash solution empty.”

“How about manage the foot cleaning stations and education better rather than blanket bans.”

“Very popular tracks, more science needed re human impacts.”

“I feel like Council are on the right track proposing some track closures, however more focus needs to be on improving the tracks, the cleaning stations, the monitoring of Kauri dieback and extending the science.”

“More tracks should remain open for public use based on the standard of the track and the implementation of numerous hygiene stations. Council should provide education and/or enforcement of the need for boot hygiene and use of hygiene stations by recreational users. There should be consultation with tramping clubs on how their members can use the tracks while ensuring no spread of kauri dieback.”

One in 6 submitters were sceptical about the potential impact of the closures, and discussed what they felt was a lack of scientific evidence that humans are the primary cause of the disease spreading, and that even if humans did not use the tracks the disease would still be spread by other vectors such as pigs, pests, surface flooding etc (17%):

“The scientific evidence that track closures will make a difference to Kauri dieback is unconvincing.”

“Because the Kauri dieback disease is spread by water i.e. rain, and animals like pigs and possums. Kauri die back near tracks is caused by rain funnelling down the tracks and animals using the tracks.”

“No evidence that closing tracks will prevent the die back.”

“Currently, the reasons to support all these track closures are based on very limited scientific understanding. It is not yet known if this pathogen occurs in cycles, whether it is carried as significantly by water and other animals compared to humans or has exploded to climate change.”

“I do not believe that enough research or understanding the real cause of the dieback has been explored.”

“Closing all of these tracks is premature in my opinion. I have not seen any evidence of an appropriate die-back mitigation programme... There is insufficient published scientific research to suggest that Auckland council have any idea how to effectively mitigate die-back over many generations.”

“Haven’t heard any real science on cause of dieback and that people are the major contributor. Perhaps this is just a nature cycle.”

“Not convinced about the science behind this, also no mention of the pig issue. Pigs walk in the bush, plus the tracks, and they root in the ground. Humans don't disturb the ground like pigs do.”

A number of those who provided more detailed submissions (both individuals and groups) expressed scepticism about the effect of the closure and felt that such widespread closure of the ranges wasn't justified given the uncertainty about the causes and spread of the disease. Some also mentioned alternative steps they felt the council should pursue ahead of closing tracks (such as investing in more science around the disease, education, and more effective spray stations):

“I do not agree with the closure of tracks in the Waitākere Ranges. The Council’s response to dieback, which is to close walking tracks:

- 1. will not have any significant effect on Kauri because an application of common sense and sensible thinking about how dieback spreads shows hikers cannot be a significant cause of dieback spread off track so track closure is unlikely to achieve much; and*
- 2. does not balance public and tourist recreation needs against the low risk that hikers may potentially spread dieback along an existing track; and*
- 3. should instead be focused on spray stations, information about why spray stations are important and how to use them, accessible volunteer Rangers in the Park at peak use times, track metalling and boardwalks in conjunction with encouraging full use of the Park, will likely achieve the best conservation result.*

.....Please do not close any more tracks. Please open the tracks that have recently been closed. And please refocus to improve the ranger resource, consider volunteer ranges at peak times, improve education on the importance of and use of spray stations, improve the quality of spray stations and invest in research.”

“We do not agree with the proposed closure of almost the entire network of tramping tracks in the Waitākere Ranges as a solution to halt the spread of Kauri dieback. We do need to ensure that every effort is made to preserve our iconic native Kauri trees both for now and future generations. However, we do not believe that closing such a large area and numerous tracks to human traffic will achieve this result for a number of reasons. There has been no definitive proof that humans are the main cause of the virus being spread. Oospores can be transmitted in a pinhead amount of soil and transported by anything that moves such as people, pigs, possums, rats, stoats and birds. 71% of the infected trees in the Waitākere Ranges are within 50 metres of public walking tracks – animals frequently use human made walking tracks or are drawn towards them (e.g. fantails approach the track as people stir up insects), so this isn’t a reliable method to attribute humans as the primary transmitters. The disease will also be transported in soil movement related to weather events e.g. the recent flash flooding that occurred but also in normal winter conditions. Saying that we do

believe it is our duty to take care of our environment and put in place measures to minimise our impact. We suggest that the following areas be focussed on:

— Investment

— In research

— Improving at risk tracks with boardwalks where appropriate

— Improving quality and number of spray stations

— Education

— Closing only those tracks which are moderate-high risk and don't have a high recreation value"

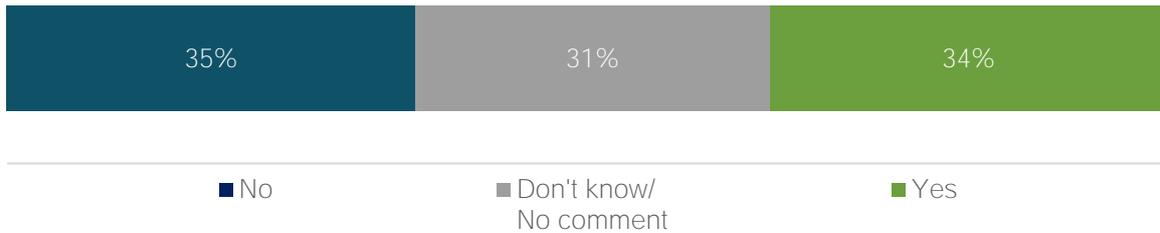
"Too little is known about the disease to allow effective control measures to be implemented... It is considered that only those tracks which present a risk to kauri are deserving of closure. Of the tracks that may remain open, selection should be possible to allow loop circuits of at least 4 hours. Complete closure of the Park is not recommended as it will simply deny access to compliant people and exacerbate the enforcement problem of controlling non-compliant individuals/groups."

"Kauri die back is widespread. Keeping people out of the Waitākere forest Park is not a guaranteed method of saving the Kauri. Compliance is more likely to be achieved by telling people where they may walk rather than a complete closure of the Park. The council need to be seen to be adopting more proactive methods to mitigate the effects of KDB; working with users and following DOC's approach by upgrading tracks and providing cleaning effective stations."

Feedback on specific tracks

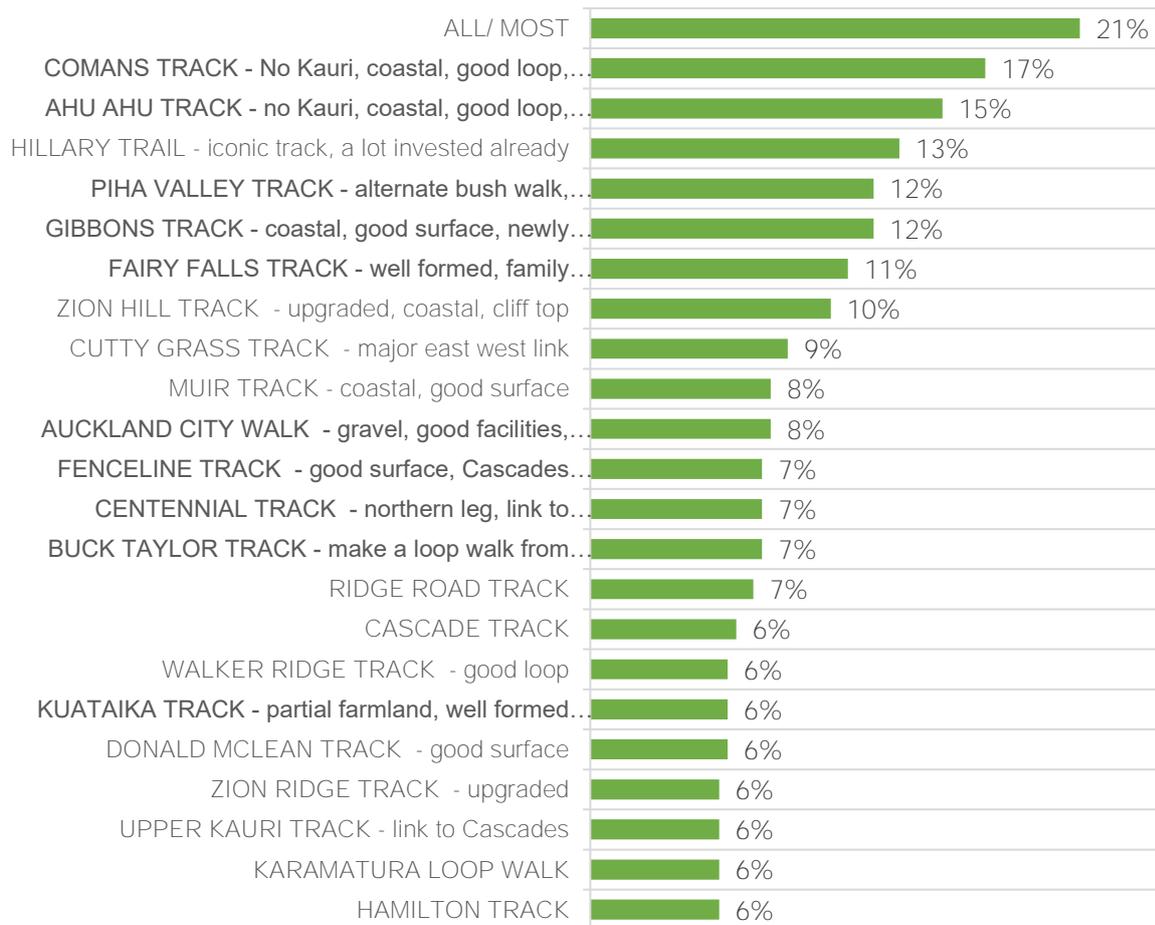
There is mixed opinion among submitters as to whether some tracks should remain open, with around a third of submitters agreeing that some specific tracks should remain open, and a similar proportion disagreeing.

Are there specific tracks that you think should remain open?



Base: 779 responses

Specific tracks that should remain open



Base: 267 responses consider specific tracks should remain open. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

Submitters who consider specific tracks should remain open mentioned a long list of tracks that they would prefer didn't close. In particular, people talked about tracks with few Kauri (including coastal tracks), loop tracks or tracks that could be used as a multi-day or long tramp, and/or tracks with good surfaces. The most frequently mentioned tracks were Comans Track, Ahu Ahu Track, the Hillary Trail, Gibbons Track, Piha Valley Track, Fairy Falls Track and Zion Hill Track. Cutty Grass Track was also mentioned as a major east-west link.

There was a similar view among those who submitted more detailed letters and emails:

"It is noted in the reference document that a number of tracks have been upgraded since December 2017 and a number of improved hygiene stations have been installed. It is to be expected that the upgraded tracks will not be included in the proposed May closure. Or if further work is required, that will be implemented as the highest priority to ensure best results from Council expenditure. For example, since December 2017, the full Zion Hill Track near Karekare has been upgraded to a solid metalled standard, so presumably it now complies with kauri safe criteria. However the linking section onwards down the Buck Taylor Track to the beach in the Pararaha Valley has not been upgraded yet, so it is to be expected that that will also be completed asap, providing a good kauri safe and recreationally enjoyable 3 to 5 hour loop walk from Karekare – a popular visitor walking spot throughout the whole week, not just on the very busy weekends. There are a number of other tracks that have been significantly upgraded recently, including Puriri Ridge, Gibbons and Muir, in some cases where there are minimal or no kauri present. These all form part of the Hillary Trail, which has had significant ratepayer funded investment in recent years. It is to be similarly expected that having invested significantly in these tracks to bring them up to a kauri safe standard, that they will not be included in the May closures. The ATC operates a hut on private property off Anawhata Road that is used principally by family groups, educational groups, and walking groups from outside the Auckland area. To support that continued wide community use, it is a priority for there to be local tracks available, including Cutty Grass Track and the (metalled) Fairy Falls Loop, and a route to Piha (EG via Centennial Track and Piha Valley Track)."

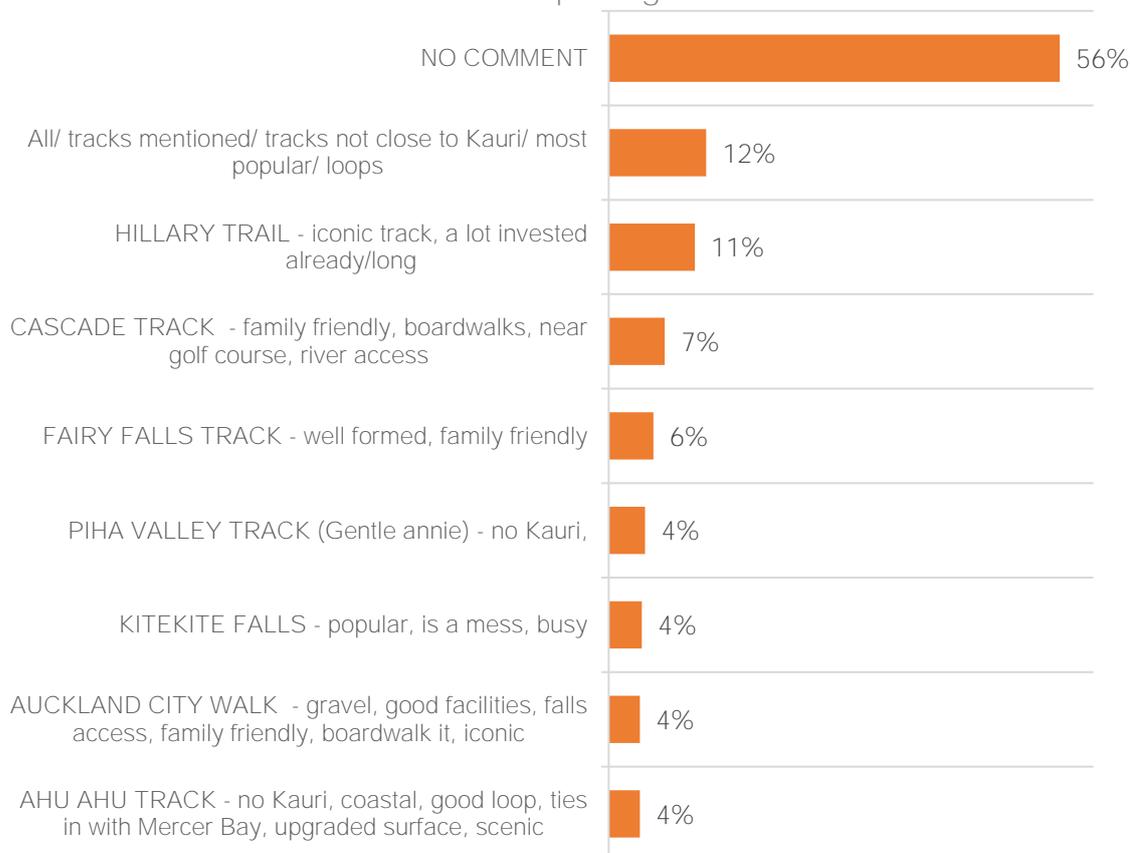
"AUTC supports the upgrading and re-opening of tracks that enable environmental education and conservation. These could include track circuits

associated with Arataki Visitor Centre and with the Ark in the Park project at Cascade Kauri Park. We also support the upgrading and re-opening of some longer tracks or circuits to enable full day or multi-day tramps, such as parts of (ideally eventually all) of The Hillary Trail. We also believe that consideration should be given to Ridge Road Track being a priority for upgrading (with the club being happy to provide volunteers to assist), and consideration being given as to how this could link through to other upgraded parts of the track network.”

“Piha – Piha Valley, McKenzie, Centennial, Quarry and Maungaroa Ridge tracks should remain open as they are away from large concentrations of Kauri and would provide a satisfying loop walk around the valley. Fairy Falls – keep this and Old Coach Road track open – close the short track that connects these 2 tracks and prioritise for installing boardwalks. KareKare – keep Ahu Ahu, Comans and Horoeka tracks open to provide a satisfying loop walk with very few Kauri at risk. Whatipu – keep Gibbons, Walker Ridge, Fletcher (between Walker Ridge and Donald McLean only), Donald McLean walk (including summit), Puriri Ridge tracks open to provide a satisfying loop walk with very few Kauri at risk.”

“The council should concentrate closures on tracks with highest risk. Closing a track that “leads nowhere” is a waste of enforcement costs. For locals, even a boring dead end track is valuable. Around Scenic Drive we have no parks to run in, few footpaths. We need somewhere to go for outdoor exercise. Examples are Cutty Grass Track, Ian Wells, Comans, Ahu Ahu, Whatitiri Track. And many more that could be closed half way to protect Kauri areas but allow forest access.”

Tracks that should be prioritised for future upgrades and re-opening

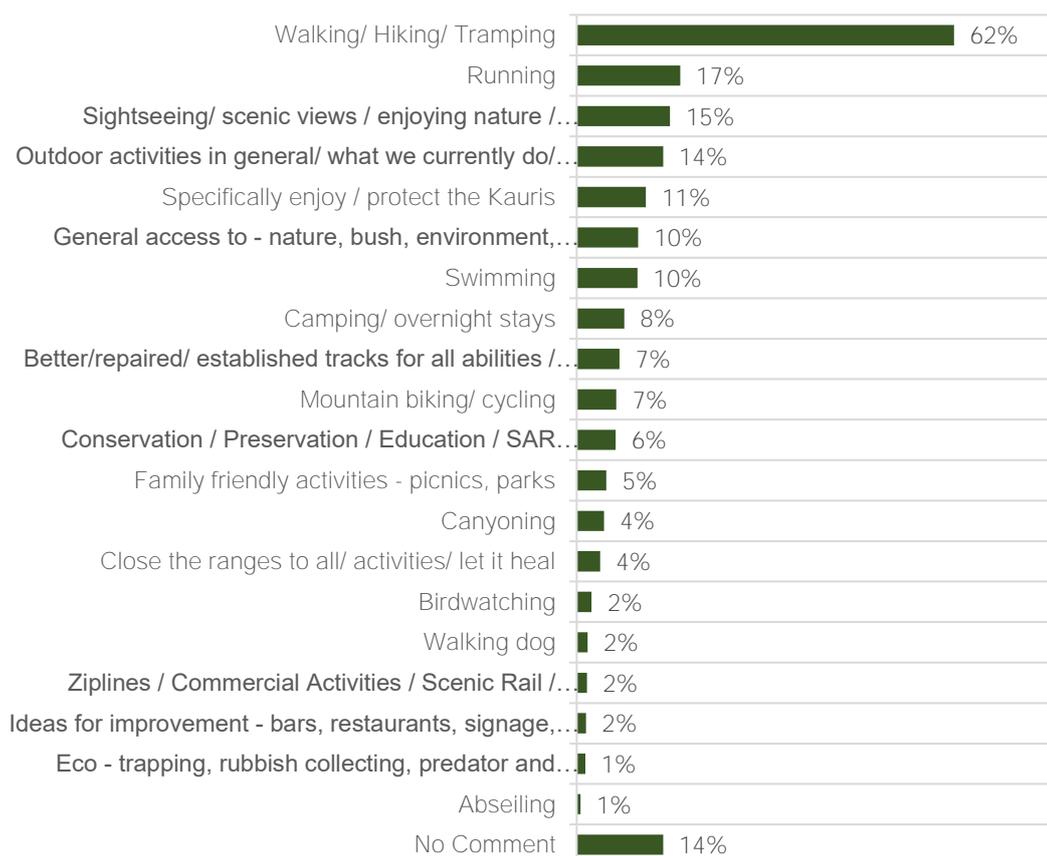


Base: 779 responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

Over half of submitters made no comment when asked what tracks they would like prioritised for upgrade and re-opening. Among those who did comment 12% would like all tracks or the most popular tracks to be prioritised. The Hillary Trail, Cascade and Fairy Falls tracks received the most mention.

4. Future activities and other comments

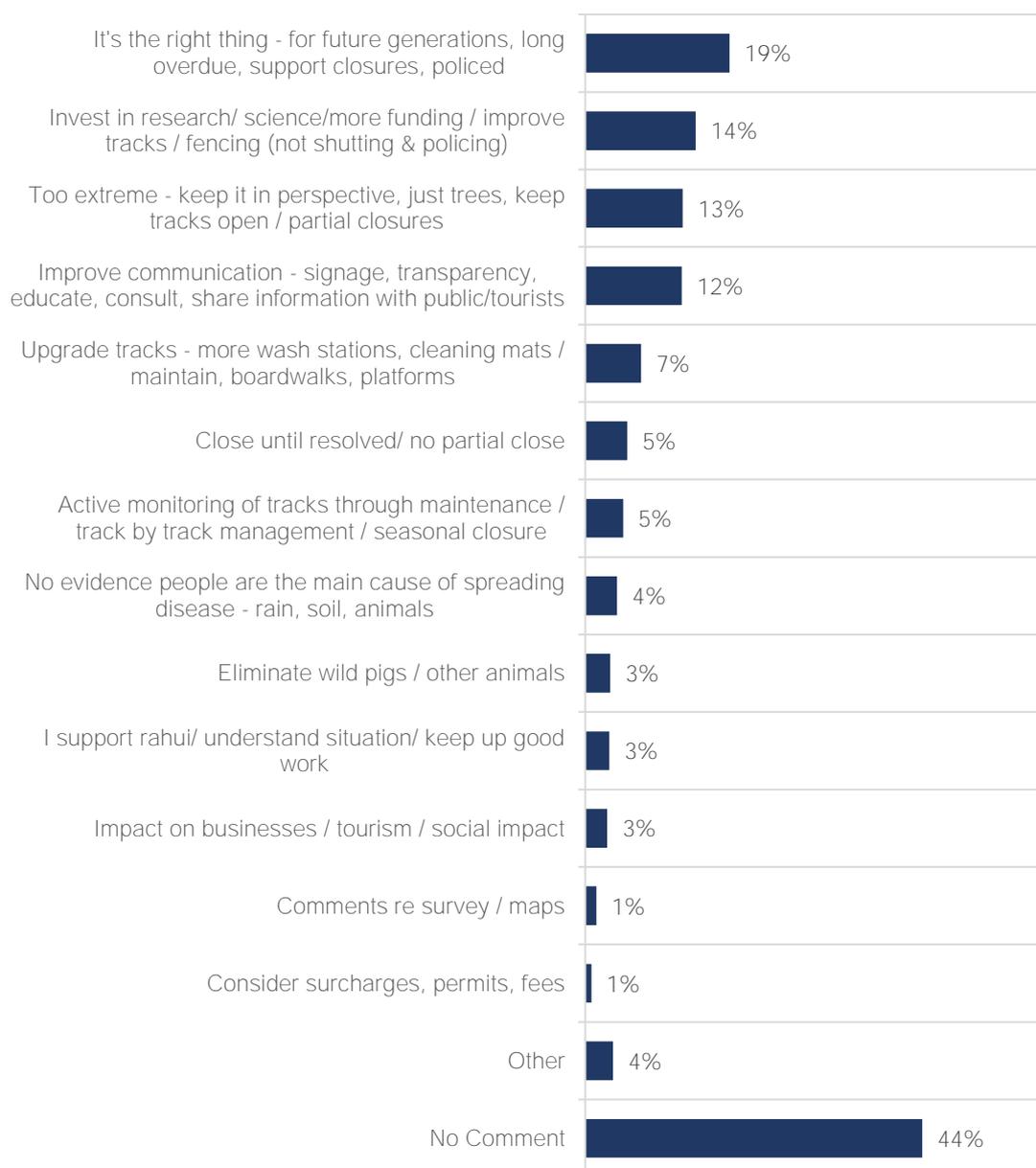
Activities would like to be able to do



Base:779 responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

Overall, there are a wide variety of activities the participants enjoy doing in the Waitākere Ranges. However, walking/hiking is the top activity and will be missed most if the tracks are closed, mentioned by six in ten submitters (62%).

Other comments



Base: 779 responses. Note multiple responses were allowed, so the figures add to over 100%

Most of the 'other' comments received (the final question in the feedback form) mirrored views already expressed and discussed above.

Some of the more detailed submitters raised other points regarding alternative suggestions to battling the disease, concerns over track management, and concerns over the potential impact on the Hunua Ranges as well as the Waitākere Ranges:

“I recently visited the largest NZ Kauri, in the far north. A foot bath system was provided by DOC (?) at the start of the access walk and likely contained some chemical fungicide to kill the disease and so stop its access. Foot bath use is common in the food and Dairy industry and is an effective way to control its access and spread of disease. The disease causing the die back is related to other diseases routinely controlled with chemicals in the Horticultural industry. I am an orchardist and can think of a few fungicides ideal for foot bath use. The same chemicals are also used horticulturally for the treatment of tree roots in sick trees. They can be applied via overhead spray to foliage, or to the ground directly. They can also be applied via truck injection. It could regularly be sprayed on official (and unofficial) tracks, especially those close to trees. I am sure that the general public would support using chemical foot baths if it meant keeping the park open and saving the trees.”

“I write to express my concerns at the existing management of the Waitākere Ranges. Although the conversation about the Waitākeres is now dominated by concerns about kauri dieback, the problems pre-date that. For more than 30 years there was been a policy which neglected the track system and by design or default, discouraged public use. The approach now being adopted by Council is largely a continuation of past practice and it is my submission that the Department of Conservation should assume management of the Park for the benefit of all New Zealanders. The Council’s response to kauri dieback has been inadequate but it fits with the general management theme of the past 30 years to discourage use. Council has always viewed the problem as the users and their shoes rather than the tracks and their mud. Council has readily looked for reasons to deny access when the obvious solution has always been to improve the quality of the tracks. It doesn’t seem to have occurred to anyone with any responsibility for the regions parks, that concerns about dieback ought to be a catalyst for track maintenance.”

“Please separate and / or defer the decision on the Hunua track closures until such time as they can be considered and consulted with Park Users separately from the Waitākeres discussion. Over recent months there has been a lot of discussion on the varying risk levels of different Waitākeres Tracks. There has been no public information provided on the process of assessing the Hunua Tracks. It is

premature to include Hunua track closures on the coat tails of the Waitākere discussions without more considered public information and consultation specific to the Hunuas. As proposed by this submission, based on the information provided, the proposed Hunua track closures are significantly flawed.”

5. Profile of submitters using the feedback form

