



Wairoa In Focus

Your Community, Your Future

Whenua Rāhui offers rates relief for Māori land

If you are an owner or trustee of Māori land in the Wairoa District, you may be entitled to apply for rates relief under 'whenua rāhui'. Below are some frequently asked questions about how to take advantage of this opportunity.

How much land is currently under 'whenua rāhui' in the Wairoa District?

There are approximately 90 properties that have been registered under the whenua rāhui within the Wairoa District.

What land is eligible for 'whenua rāhui'?

All land that is listed on the application must be:

- Māori freehold land, whether it be in individual or multiple ownership
- Of historical, ancestral or cultural significance
- If the land has been purchased instead of being inherited, then it must have been purchased for its ancestral or cultural significance and not as saleable land
- The land must be 'unoccupied'. In accordance with Section 96(2)(b) of the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002, 'occupation' is where a person/persons does one or more of the following - Resides on the land, depastures or maintains livestock on the land, stores anything on the land, or uses the land in any other way.

How do I apply?

If land owners believe their Māori freehold land is eligible they can contact the Council directly and ask for an application form to be sent out. Sometimes the Council may identify eligible land and will make contact with the owner (if possible) directly.

What information do I need to supply?

Information required for the application includes:

- Details of ownership (burden of proof of eligibility is on the owner/s of the property)
- Details of contacts
- Details of property and 'occupancy'
- Details of any rates outstanding
- Conditions of application covering land and other issues

What happens once the application has been lodged?

Once the completed form is received either the CEO or Māori Liaison Officer (MLO) will check through it to ensure that it is complete. The MLO will then carry out a site visit, and compile a report and recommendation

to the CEO for consideration. If the application is approved, the Senior Rates Officer is informed and a letter is sent to the owners.

How often do I need to reapply?

If accepted, the land is entered on the register for no more than three years. After the three years expire, the owner/s may re-apply. In the event of the land being occupied or sold within that three year period, a 'claw back' provision applies to enable the Council to recover the rates remitted for the applicable period. Once registered, Council or other duly designated officers are given approval to undertake periodic inspection of land to confirm unoccupied status.

What if my application is declined?

If the application is declined, the owner/s can appeal the decision either directly with the CEO or MLO. If required, the application can be referred to the Māori Standing Committee for consideration. Once the appeal has been reviewed, a further recommendation will be made to the CEO for consideration.

What is the purpose of whenua rāhui?

The Wairoa District Council recognises the many and varied issues surrounding the ownership of Māori land, in particular the question of local authority rates. In order to address these issues the Council developed a Whenua Rāhui register and policy to enable it to utilise the provisions of Section 114 and Section 202 (4)(f) of the Local Government (Rating) Act 2002. The policy works on the principle of the recognition of occasions when it would be unfair and/or unreasonable to collect rates from owners of Māori land due to varying circumstances resulting from the unique form of ownership of Māori land.

What benefits can it bring to whanau to have land designated as whenua rāhui?

The benefits of having land designated as whenua rāhui are:

- The owner/s would not have to pay rates for up to three years
- The owner/s will not incur a debt for land not being utilised during this time
- The owner/s can re-apply for continued registration at the completion of the three year exemption (providing they still meet all the criteria)
- It alleviates the stress of trying to contact multiple owners annually to pay the rates.



Lazy dumpers in spotlight

Wairoa ratepayers are paying the price of illegal dumping of rubbish in hot spots around the district. Everything from household rubbish to animal skins are littering some of our most scenic areas. Kopu Road is a particular problem area, with waste being left alongside the walkway/cycleway and down on the river bank.

Council's Environmental Health Officer Vic Minter is encouraging people to "think before they throw". "People are dumping trailer loads of rubbish – it's just not right," he said. "Council resources are spent cleaning up after people who could just as easily have dumped their rubbish at the landfill. Instead, everyone ends up paying for it." While it was not possible to maintain 24-hour surveillance of every illegal dump site, Mr Minter said efforts to identify the offenders would be increased. In addition, council is reminding people of their responsibility to



An example of the illegal littering that continues to blight the Wairoa landscape.

dispose of rubbish and recycling using either the regular collection service, or by taking litter to the Wairoa landfill. "Please make use of the rubbish dump and recycling service – leave the environment for all to enjoy." Fines of up to \$400 for individuals and up to \$1200 for commercial dumping can be enforced on those found responsible for ruining the landscape with litter. To find out more about rubbish and recycling services provided by Wairoa District Council, visit www.wairoadc.govt.nz and click on 'Services'.

Unlocking land potential

The Māori Committee is keeping a close eye on the Central Government's review of Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993. An expert panel has been appointed to review the Act "with a view to unlocking the economic potential of Māori land for its beneficiaries, while preserving its cultural significance for future generations". The follows a 2011 report by the former Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry indicating that an estimated 80% of Māori land was under-performing for its owners. In many cases this was because of structural issues which stemmed from the legislation.

The Panel has been instructed to make recommendation on four key areas: Ownership - Māori land owners are affiliated and engaged with the land; Governance - there are appropriate structures and trustees with expertise to support effective decision-making; Access to resources - resources are available to enact decisions; and Utilisation - the better utilisation of Māori land is enabled. A final report is expected to be submitted to the Associate Minister of Māori Affairs, Chris Finlayson, later this year.

For the diary:

Council meetings:
October 9
November 13
December 11

Forum:
October 23
November 27

Maori Standing Committee:
September 28
October 26
November 30

Meetings are held in the Council Chambers in the Queen Street offices and are open to the public, unless otherwise specified.

For more information phone 838 7309 or visit www.wairoadc.govt.nz