

Vehicle restricted areas on beaches – Frequently Asked Questions

What's changed from the previous rules?

The key change to our rules is the vehicle exclusion zones, which will provide greater protection in the mapped areas to sensitive ecosystems and habitats.

Why those places?

The areas in the mapped vehicle exclusion zones were already identified as significant ecological areas or nesting and roosting sites for threatened shore birds.

Why only below mean high water springs?

Northland Regional Council's RMA functions don't allow it to make rules for vehicles on beaches above mean high water springs. However, other agencies do operate in this space – for example, there are district council bylaws that apply to beaches in some places.

We work closely together with other agencies involved in beach driving to make sure we have a well-coordinated approach.

Why was there no public consultation on the mapped vehicle exclusion zones?

While some restrictions on vehicles on beaches were included in council's Proposed Regional Plan (which was released for consultation in 2017), the mapped vehicle exclusion zones were not in there (so they weren't consulted on). A desire for stronger restrictions on vehicles on beaches prompted appeals from a number of parties to the Environment Court. The court process did not allow for community consultation while the issue was before the court.

Council supported the court's decision on the basis that the evidence showed restrictions were necessary to better protect vulnerable species and habitats within significant ecological areas or roosting and nesting sites of indigenous shore birds.

Who will oversee the new rules?

Northland Regional Council will oversee the new rules, working together with other agencies, iwi and hapū, and stakeholder groups around public education and advocacy.

Are there other vehicle restrictions on beaches?

Yes – there are also some existing places where district council bylaws or Department of Conservation rules apply to driving on beaches or dunes.

Are there exceptions to the rules?

Yes. Exceptions in the vehicle exclusion zones allow for access to private property, boat launching, the use, maintenance, repair or removal of structures, Council and Department of Conservation activities, environmental monitoring, kaitiaki monitoring, access to customary marine title, rescue of stranded marine mammals, burial of dead animals, removal or recovery of wrecked vessels, coastal restoration, access for people with mobility disabilities, surf lifesaving operations and clearance of tidal stream mouths, artificial water courses or pipe outlets.

Where can I see the full rules?

C.1.5.1 of the Proposed Regional Plan for Northland sets rules for the use of vehicles on beaches (below mean high water springs). www.nrc.govt.nz/newregionalplan

How will the rules be policed?

The initial focus will be on public education, likely beginning with a few key areas.

What if I see a vehicle in a restricted area?

You can contact our Incident Hotline on 0800 504 639. To take action, we need a date, time and location; make, model and registration of the vehicle; and a photograph showing the vehicle and distinctive landmarks if possible.

Because our initial focus is education, our first action will likely be getting in touch with the vehicle owner and explaining what the new rules are and where they apply.

What are the penalties?

While the main focus is on education and advocacy around the reasons why the rules for vehicle restricted areas are in place, compliance measures available under the RMA include abatement notices and infringement fines of up to \$500.

We will take an education-based approach to compliance, monitoring and enforcement initially.