



# Concessions

## Description

In New Zealand the Department of Conservation (DoC) Concessions framework is the allocation model for commercial activity in New Zealand public conservation areas; that is, DoC's basis of allocation for commercial tourism. The concessions process is analogous to the [Resource Management Act consent process](#) but without formal public consultation processes. Applications are assessed by DoC staff according to a set of criteria for the activity and the area. Concessions are handled by conservancies, with central oversight.

Assessing applications requires a method for identifying resource capacities, ie [Recreational Opportunity Spectrum](#), [Limits of Acceptable Change](#). Defining sustainable level of activity from cumulative impacts ([cumulative effects assessment](#)) is difficult and not often done.

Application fees cover costs of administration and some costs of management.

## How and when the tool is used

There are many New Zealand examples mainly but not exclusively linked to activities in National Parks. An example of application that is not linked to a National Park is Whale Watching in Kaikoura.

A similar system is now used by Auckland and Wellington Regional Parks for commercial visits.

The Department routinely uses [visitor satisfaction surveys](#), however, there are other options such as spot checks to ensure that conditions are being met.

The Concessions system is used in all conservancies. It handles a low number of visitors overall, but they tend to be in some of the most conspicuous and fragile areas.

Many tourism operators do not like the system, as it is seen as very bureaucratic but in practice many older operators have benefited greatly from monopoly or preferential access to DoC resources.

The system is largely driven by conservation legislation which sets a distinction between recreation (non-commercial) and tourism (commercial) into law and thus blurs the focus on visitor effects. There is little opportunity for public input into applications, and this has been frustrating for environmental NGOs as well as affected individuals.

## Application

The concessions system cannot achieve sustainability when total number of visitors to an area is much greater than number of visitors on concessions to that area, which is the case for most of the DoC estate. It is notable too that the current system is almost always reactive - responding to a single application. Defining a sustainable level of activity from cumulative impacts is difficult so there have been many calls for DoC to allocate the total resource in one call for concession tenders.

## Our evaluation

Concessions are useful tool for limiting numbers for commercial activities in specific areas or for specific activities. However, as they can only be applied to commercial activities are not the total answer to visitor management on the DoC estate.