



Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ

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Holdsworth- Jumbo Circuit Bookable Hut Trial Findings

Dear Lisa,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this report.

We would first like to thank the Palmerston North, and Masterton offices for including in its booking system management two critical principles (from our perspective) that should be applied in any hut (bunk) booking system across the country.

1. That the Annual Hut pass remains valid for staying at the hut. Those will annual passes could book paying only an additional \$5 fee booking fee.
2. That the booking system provides a guaranteed bunk only. Spare bunks and if necessary other space in the hut remains available to all comers.

Beyond that we have some real concerns with the report and its recommendations. A detailed listing of problems with the report is included in appendix one. We are extremely disappointed that the Department has only considered views that agreed with what appears to be a pre-determined outcome. FMC has attended meetings with local DOC staff where a number local tramping clubs have expressed opposition to the huts being in a booking system, we are also aware of feedback given by the Tararua Aorangi Huts Committee. There is not one word in the report that represents the views of these long term partners of DOC who also represent a significant portion of hut users.

We are also very concerned the approach taken seems to be at variance to the draft Hut Booking Criteria that your head office is discussing with FMC and others. The draft is attached as appendix 1. In particular we draw your attention to the last five bullets:

- *“There will be consultation with affected recreation groups before a final decision is made to place the facility on the booking system*

- *The benefits need to be evident*
- *The use of the booking system should be consistent with the historic use of the facility*
- *Seasonal application of the booking system should be considered (but this should be based on common dates e.g. 1st October to the end of 30th April)*
- *Likelihood of success of the booking system at the hut"*

and also to point 2 on overcrowding.

The data from the trial does not seem to us to indicate that the booking system has provided benefits in terms of the what DoC has stated it is trying to achieve. Usage cannot be claimed to have increased because of the trial. This even applies to Atiwhakatu given the work done on the hut partway through the trial.

We are also surprised to see no data on the administrative and cost aspects of the trial.

We are also bemused by the completely unjustified recommendation that the booking system operate on a year round basis. We are also concerned that the recommendation does not provide any indication as to how any future booking system would work.

It is completely unnecessary for Powell hut and Jumbo hut where booking is more likely in winter conditions to create a safety hazard, or conflict between groups than encourage participation in the great outdoors.

FMC is not arguing that booking has no place in rationing bunks in huts, however it is certainly not appropriate in many cases in the backcountry.

Putting systems where they are not needed can be costly to both users and the department and can change use patterns in ways that is not in keeping with the wishes of many users.

Recommendations:

- The report be withdrawn and rewritten to provide a fuller description of the results of the trial and the context.
- That DOC undertake a proper discussion and consultation with relevant stakeholders on any future steps.

Yours sincerely



Jamie Stewart

Administrator

Federated Mountain Clubs

Appendix One

Comment on deficiencies in the report

Trends in Use

The report talks about trends in use from the booking system. However figures in the graph do not give any confidence that there has been an increase in use. Rather they show:

- a. Powell – bed nights increased from year 1 to Year 2 then dropped in Year 3 to the lowest level over the three years
- b. Jumbo – bed nights dropped from Year 1 to Year 2, and further drop in Year 3. The drop in year two cannot be explained by the removal of the hut from the booking system. This drop may have been due to people moving to the extended Atiwhakatu hut.
- c. Atiwhakatu – bed nights increased slightly from Year 1 to Year 2, then quadrupled in Year 3 but the hut had also had work on it.

The changes here are mixed and it cannot be concluded that the booking system has, or will, lead to an increase in use.

No comment is made as to the changes in use in the 2014/15 year being in different directions for the different huts. There drops in both Powell and Jumbo in 2014/15 but an increase in Atiwhakatu. Ignoring this means that it appears you have not considered that Atiwhakatu might be a destination for some users in itself and that at least some users are not doing the loop.

Usage figures

The total percentages of bed night occupancies are very low:

Powell – 24%, 30%, 19% for Years 1, 2, and 3

Jumbo – 18%, 15%, 5% for Years 1, 2, and 3

Atiwhakatu – 2.2%, 3.8%, and 16% for years 1, 2, and 3

The usage figures and the stated bunk capacity of each hut would indicate that the huts do not have an overcrowding problem that meets the criteria in the DoC service standard. The total bed nights divided by the capacity gives the maximum number of times the huts could be full (and there would need to be no one in the huts on any other nights).

Looking at your usage figures and the stated bunk capacity of each hut it is difficult to see how you can work out the huts are suffering an overcrowding problem. The total bed nights divided by the capacity gives the maximum number of times the huts could be full (and there would need to be no one in the huts on any other nights).

Hut	Bunk space	Bed nights 2013/14	Bed nights 2014/15	2013/14 Nights/Beds	2014/15 Nights/Beds
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Powell	28	718	456	25.64	16.28
Jumbo	20	350	121	17.5	6.05
Atiwhakatu	26	Old size	395	na	15

The DoC hut service standard for overcrowding is that the hut should be overcrowded no more than 10% of the time. Only when this is exceeded that your head office would consider overcrowding to be a problem. On an annual basis this would mean these huts are overfull at least 36 nights. Even if you take a 'season' of only 6 months they would have to be over-full at least 18 nights which given the usage figures is unlikely.

Missing figures on bookings and the age breakdown of users

The report does not say how many of the users during the trial period actually used the booking system. (All we have is a total use figure.)

The age group figures on the page with the use graph has percentages for ages of users. We suspect from our observations that these figures relate only to Atiwhakatu (and the conclusion section refers to the hut (singular) when commenting on this).

In addition, the high percentage of under 10s in the final year needs to be treated with some caution. We note you only provide percentages of bookings without giving a total number of bookings. This makes it difficult to put in context (the significance of the percentage has to be judged in the context of the size of the total). In addition it is only for one year of the trial, not the full three years.

As an aside, while it would be good to see a high percentage of under 10s in Atiwhakatu we would wonder whether you really intend to encourage under 10s to traverse the Holdsworth-Jumbo section of the route in winter.

Administrative and other costs ignored

There is absolutely no comment or discussion on administrative and cost aspects of the trial. Booking systems cost money so the Department must have some cost information on costs to DoC of running the system during the trial. FMC considers this essential given the constrained nature of funding available and the need to be pretty brutal about spending priorities within DoC. This needs to be open to scrutiny.

There is no comment on how easy it was for people to book by contacting the Masterton office and how many of the users did not bother getting a booking. There is no comment on the cost of the booking system to users (both the additional fee for making the booking and the costs of contacting DoC to make the booking). We would have expected some indication of feedback at least.

The biased treatment of public opinion

The 'research' section references only one report (the Mobius work) and yet the section concludes *"The research shows that most people are supportive of more serviced huts (in addition to a number of other types of accommodation becoming bookable and a minority were against it."*

On looking at the Mobius work we find that they did had responses from 2028 Motor Caravan Association members, 12 FMC members, and 501 from a Mobius 'research-only online panel'. We

also note that seven of the 11 focus groups were in Auckland and Tauranga and that 5 of the groups were selected mainly as users of existing bookable accommodation. The Mobius results cannot be taken as being representative of the general population (ie most people) for this to be valid about 80% of the NZ population would need to be members of the MCA.

The report makes no mention of any feedback DoC may have received locally. This is despite DoC having had a number of meetings with user groups (trampers and hunters) including one FMC was represented at. Views opposing the booking system were put at these meetings. This report makes no mention of either these meetings nor of the views expressed at them.

Misleading comments in the Report

The use figures in the graph and the comments in the report on emerging trend comments are not balanced. The drop in use recorded for Powell (to the lowest level in the three years) in 2014/15 is explained away by a suggestion that bears no scrutiny. Further the drop in Jumbo use is all put down to it not being in the booking system in 2014/15 but this does not explain the drop in 2013/14. The discussion completely ignores the effect of the major upgrade to Atiwhakatu that will have affected use of the older Jumbo in 2014/15.

The conclusions section repeats the misleading claim that the trial shows bookings an increase use despite the drop in Powell in 2014/15 and the drop in use of Jumbo in 2013/14. No recognition is given to other factors such as the weather and the major upgrade of Atiwhakatu.

Appendix Two:

Hut booking criteria

DRAFT for discussion with stakeholders March 2015

Making public facilities bookable can be an important way to attract new users to the outdoors, to manage crowding over peak periods and even to market recreation opportunities. However, DOC recognises that placing a hut on the booking system changes the nature of the experience for existing visitors, and that this will have positive and negative impacts for different user groups.

In all cases, there must be an assessment of how the proposed change will benefit visitors and increase either use or the quality of experience. There must also be consultation with affected parties.

DOC also agrees that in principle, the backcountry hut pass should be able to be used as payment for booking on huts other than Great Walks, serviced alpine huts and sole occupancy huts.

In order to improve national consistency, DOC will only place a hut on the booking system when the following criteria are met.

1. Where the hut is an important opportunity for introducing new people to the outdoors, through families and school groups etc. In these cases the following characteristics may be present:

- Hut may be vehicle accessible
- Destination is primarily managed for less experienced people (eg an overnight or 2-3 night easy trip).
- Hut is likely to be a serviced hut
- A warden may be present
- Likely to be in proximity to a larger population,

E.g. Pack Horse Hut or Lake Daniels or Mt Somers, OR

2. The hut service standard requirement for overcrowding is met, OR
3. The hut is bookable on a sole occupancy basis. E.g Orongorongo Valley, OR
4. In any other exceptional circumstances, on a case by case basis, with wide consultation

AND the following principles will be applied:

- Shelter from the storm – all huts are available for safety reasons
- There will be consultation with affected recreation groups before a final decision is made to place the facility on the booking system
- The benefits need to be evident
- The use of the booking system should be consistent with the historic use of the facility
- Seasonal application of the booking system should be considered (but this should be based on common dates e.g. 1st October to the end of 30th April)
- Likelihood of success of the booking system at the hut