



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Media release

17 August 2023

Report emphasises risks of rockfall, landslides at Cathedral Cove, Hahei

An independent report confirms the risk of potentially harmful rockfall and landslides at Coromandel's Cathedral Cove and its adjacent bays and tracks.

After extreme weather events in January and February caused landslips and rockfalls – and damaged tracks to the point some are impassable – the Department of Conservation has urged people to stay away from Cathedral Cove and nearby bays, and the network of tracks connecting them.

Following those weather events, DOC commissioned Tonkin + Taylor (T+T) to produce a landslide risk assessment report for the area. DOC also requested the report include options for mitigation of track damage.

T+T's report is the result of several site visits by the company's specialists. The report highlights the need for practical risk reduction strategies at the site.

DOC Hauraki-Waikato-Taranaki Regional Director Tinaka Mearns says DOC's internal review of the T+T report, when set against DOC's own visitor safety framework and measures, has determined an increased risk of injury or fatality at the location.

"The report details ongoing risk of landslide across the wider site," Tinaka Mearns says.

"Across the 3.8km of tracks around Cathedral Cove and the adjacent bays, 180 historical or recent landslides were identified. Beach cliffs, including those overlooking Cathedral Cove were described as 'particularly hazardous' due to ongoing landslides and rockfall."

Landslides washed away sections of the main track down to Cathedral Cove, and the report signals more of the same kind of damage could emerge.

DOC's Visitor Safety Team has determined the associated risk is at the top end of the scale DOC can manage for the type of day-trip visitors who have traditionally visited Cathedral Cove.

With the main track to Cathedral Cove extensively damaged and at risk of further instability – and no “quick fixes” available for other tracks compromised tracks in the area – DOC will not reinstate the current walking routes down to the beach for this summer.

Visitors are also strongly urged not to go through the cove's famous arch, with debris falling from the arch to the sand below as recently as last weekend (12/13 August).

However, within the next few weeks visitors will be able to return to the beach via the Te Whanganui-A-Hei Marine Reserve.

“Renewing access to Cathedral Cove from the sea allows people to go there – but we want to make very clear there is still risk associated with going to this site and people need to inform themselves properly before visiting,” Tinaka Mearns says.

“There is still potential for rockfall landslides at these sites, and we need to emphasise this to the public. You go at your own risk.”

DOC will also decommission the toilet block at Cathedral Cove beach. Visitor numbers to Cathedral Cove will be monitored by DOC's Coromandel District team.

“We need to make sensible long-term investments at this site, rather than spend money on short-term solutions which are not sustainable and will not withstand the increasing extreme weather events caused by climate change,” Tinaka Mearns says.

Ngāti Hei, the local iwi to which Cathedral Cove is a significant site, will lift its rāhui over the area, in place to protect visitor safety since last summer's extreme weather events.

Today's announcement comes during Conservation Week, which encourages people to ‘take action for nature’.

“We're making this announcement during Conservation Week because we are taking action for nature by developing a longer-term sustainable plan for this site,” Tinaka Mearns says.

“We want to work with stakeholders and iwi to reimagine the wider Hahei area and experience, so it is safe, enjoyable and is in line with our conservation

goals and strategies. We've contracted an experienced project manager to commence work on a plan to reimagine the Hahei conservation experience – a project which will include community consultation on future options.”

DOC has updated website information on Cathedral Cove on its website, including making the T+T report publicly available.

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Contacts

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Background information

Cathedral Cove is an iconic visitor destination, famous for its idyllic coastal location and natural archway. It has historically received up to 250,000 visitors a year.

The site is managed by DOC with support from Ngāti Hei, the local iwi.

Extreme weather events in January and February 2023 – including Cyclone Gabrielle – caused storm surge, landslides, erosion and rockfall at Cathedral Cove.

The damage to tracks, stairs and natural features like cliff faces and slopes was significant.

People have still been able to visit Te Whanganui-a-Hei Marine Reserve, adjacent to Cathedral Cove but were asked not to land on the beach.