

# SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL

23 APRIL 2014

---

## AGENDA ITEM C1

### CHARGING FOR CAMPING ON COUNCIL LAND

---

#### **Purpose of Report**

To discuss issues arising from the possible introduction of fees or charges for persons currently "free camping" on Council land.

#### **Recommendations**

Officers recommend that the Council:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Adopt option c) for implementation in time for the 2014-15 summer camping season.*

#### **1. Executive Summary**

At the July 2013 Council meeting the issue of how to help fund the costs of operation of Council land used by people as free camping areas arose.

Essentially the question was whether some or all of the cost of Council's servicing these sites could be recovered; that is the supervision of such areas (Coastal Ranger), providing bins and removal of garbage and general up-keep of these areas such as mowing/cleaning of toilets.

Council resolved to further consider its options by way of a report on how "some form of camping fees" might be charged as part of this year's Annual Plan process. This report outlines some of the issues associated with a charging regime and recommends an alternative solution.

#### **2. Background**

Council has a number of sites where "freedom camping" currently takes place, notably at Ngawi, Ngawi Surf Breaks, North and South Tora, Te Awaiti, Lake Domain and the Fell Museum. Campers occupy these areas on a first come first served basis.

In addition, Council services 2 sites located on the Ruamahanga River (boat club on the East-West Road and opposite Te Hopai Road corner) and owned by the Department of Conservation. With regard to these, Council has no legal or service requirement to look after these areas but does so as a matter of public interest.

At all of the above sites Council provides a rubbish pick-up service and generally maintains them on an as required basis (mowing etc). Where there are toilets these are cleaned regularly and generally maintained. Potable water is not generally available at all sites. There are restrictions on bringing dogs to these sites.

The regular waste collection services and toilet cleaning/mowing and general upkeep are all contracted activities (to Citycare/Earthcare).

Throughout the periods of intensive use (from 1 December to end of February; Easter and Labour Weekend) Council employs a coastal ranger to monitor campers activities and to ensure that the camping areas are kept in a tidy state.

Over and above what the contractors do, the coastal ranger removes excess rubbish, cleans toilet facilities when required, regulates camper behaviour, ensures the removal of dogs from camping sites, prevents camping at unauthorised locations and liaises with local residents to answer any concerns they may have.

The approximate cost of these services provided by Council at coastal, lake and river sites is as follows:

- a) Coastal ranger (wages/vehicle/equipment/ consumables) \$16,000 approx.
- b) Contracted services (I and S Group – toilet cleaning, Portaloos, mowing, rubbish) \$10,600 approx.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1 Options**

There appear to be only 3 options for Council to consider: a) no charge as at present, all costs a charge on rates, b) set fees and actively collect to either replace rates or partially cover rates cost, and c) an honesty box/donation system to partially cover rates cost.

Which option is chosen is dependent upon the effectiveness of each relative to the others and costs.

##### **3.1.1 Option a)**

This is well known and understood in terms of costs. However the benefits are less well known. Certainly Council is providing a low cost opportunity for both its citizens and visitors to our district, to holiday and relax at some quite remote and spectacular locations. This has a strong appeal to many people and Council receives quite a number of unsolicited compliments for this. In addition there is undoubtedly some "spin off" spending on services that would benefit other ratepayers such as in food and fuel. How much this might be is unable to be established.

##### **3.1.2 Option b)**

This approach would target the recovery of the costs identified above. It would also need to recover the costs of collection and enforcement of the

fees. While it is normal for camping areas to be subject to fees, these areas are generally far more structured with full facilities when compared to the areas Council has available for camping.

It would also mean (by accepting payment) Council triggers the provisions of the Camping Grounds Regulations made under the Health Act. This would likely require Council to upgrade the sites so that appropriate lighting, laundry, cooking, sanitary facilities were in place, including provision of potable water and fire fighting capacity, along with pre-set camp sites for people to occupy.

By doing this these sites would need to be run as a business and full onsite supervision would likely need to be in place to maintain the facilities in accord with the regulations and to manage a site. These matters would be expensive to address in terms of both capital and operations.

### **3.1.3 Option c)**

This would seek to recover costs by way of voluntary donations, but it needs to be noted, that even this can trigger the requirements of the Camping Grounds Regulations.

However, Council would be justified in applying an exemption from the full requirements of the regulations, as it would only be accepting donations to off-set some of its costs and is not treating the camping areas as a business as in b) above.

This approach has been used elsewhere, for instance the Hawkes Bay Regional Council applied it at the Lake Tutira Country Park where free camping takes place. It was quite successful (after initial start-up issues – security/design of donation boxes) in raising a reasonable amount of funds (approx. \$4000 a year, the site did however have relatively high usage levels) to off-set some of that Councils costs. This system was applied after an attempt to charge fees for camping at the site.

This approach is often used by the Department of Conservation at its remote sites to raise funds.

The set-up costs are also reasonable although the provision of secure/sturdy donation boxes/signage is required (to deal with vandalism), this being estimated to be in the order of up to \$900 per site plus installation (for one sign and donation box).

## **3.2 Financial Estimates**

The usage figures provided by the Coastal Ranger for SouthTora and North Tora, Te Awaiti and Ngawi (not the breaks site) show the number of campers at the coastal sites through the December 2013 to March 2014 period (Appendix 2). Using the averaged number per day based on these figures (as presented in the February P and E Monthly Report), potential donation revenue can be roughly estimated (Ngawi has been discounted from this).

If each user gave at least a gold coin @ \$2 for a night, donations across all of the sites covered by the Coastal Ranger, may generate anything from

\$7000 to \$16000 per season. Over the rest of the year, (the Easter and Labour Weekends and weekend use generally), contributions may come to a further \$900. This possible revenue would be largely off-set in year 1 by the cost of signs/donation boxes/installation.

Additional revenue could be expected from the DoC sites (assuming the Department agreed to Council receiving any donations), although again the set-up costs would need to be deducted in year 1. Alternatively Council could cease servicing these sites.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Of the 3 options, keeping the current system in place is the easiest, but it does nothing to address the problem Council identified, the on-going costs of operating the "free camping" areas within the district.

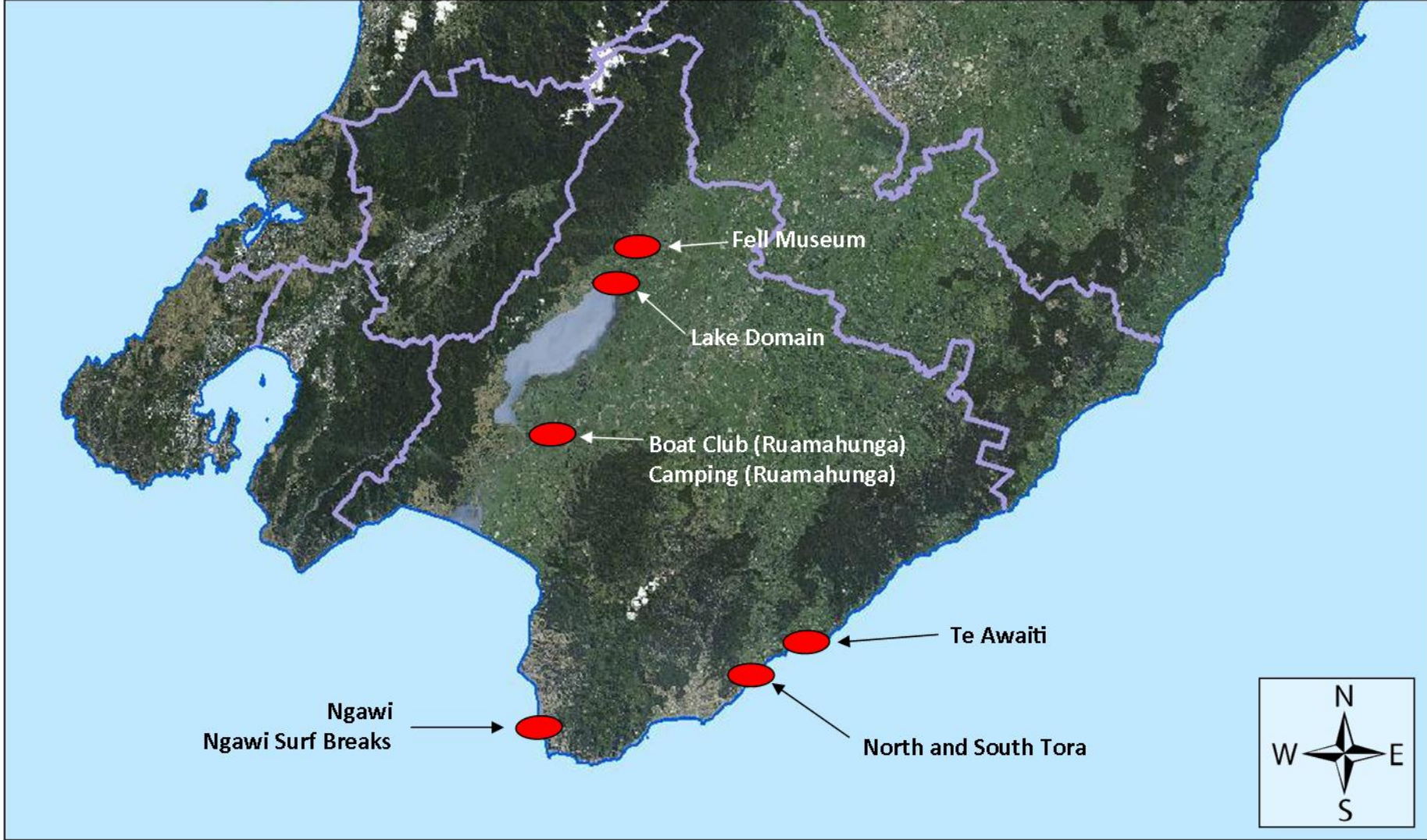
Option b) has the greatest potential to raise most revenue, but it brings with it greatly increased capital and operational costs in terms of the levels of service that council would then have to meet. Because of this it may in fact be more costly than at present. Certainly the level of financial risk would be significantly increased.

Option c) allows Council to "encourage" contributions by users, towards the cost of providing the "free camping" areas. While this is unlikely to raise enough funds to off-set all costs, it would help to defray some. Start-up costs would be relatively low with donation boxes and signage only required.

Option c) is therefore favoured.

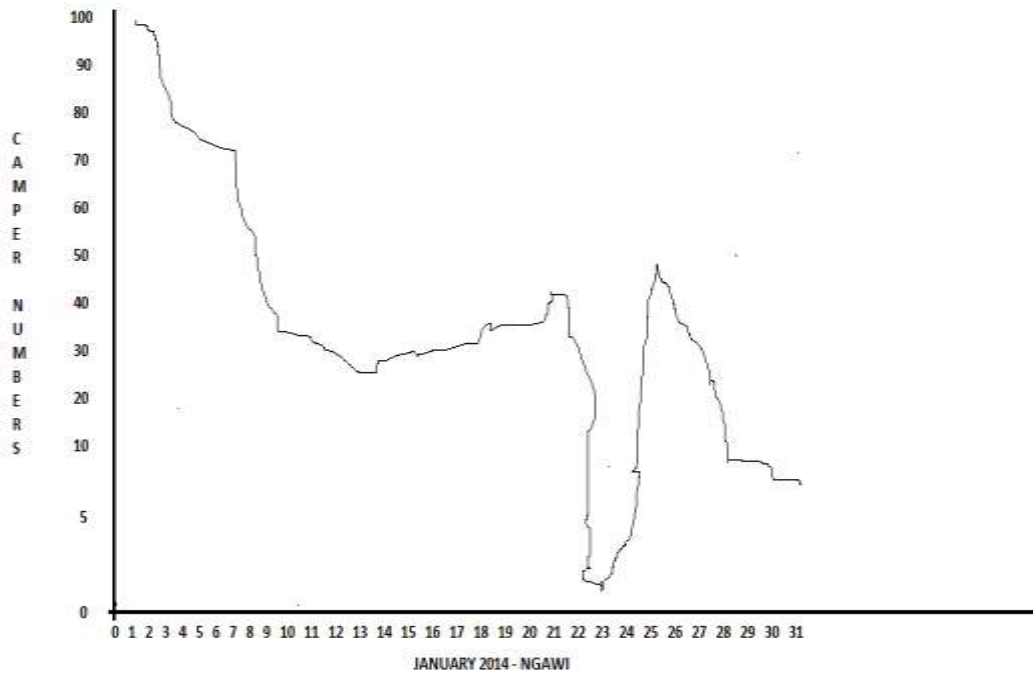
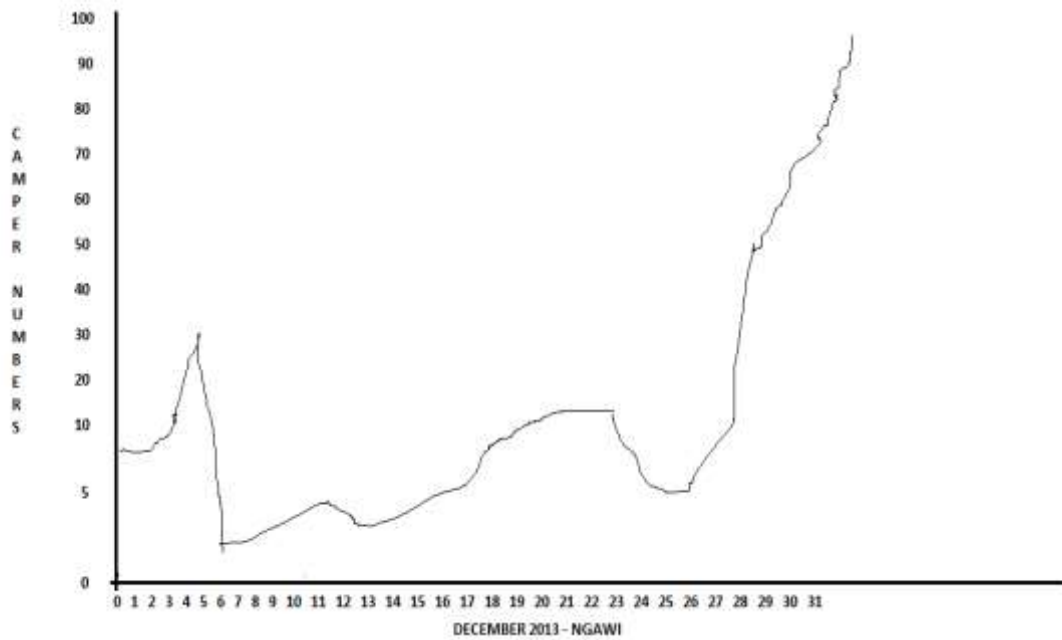
Contact Officer: Murray Buchanan, Group Manager, Planning and Environment.

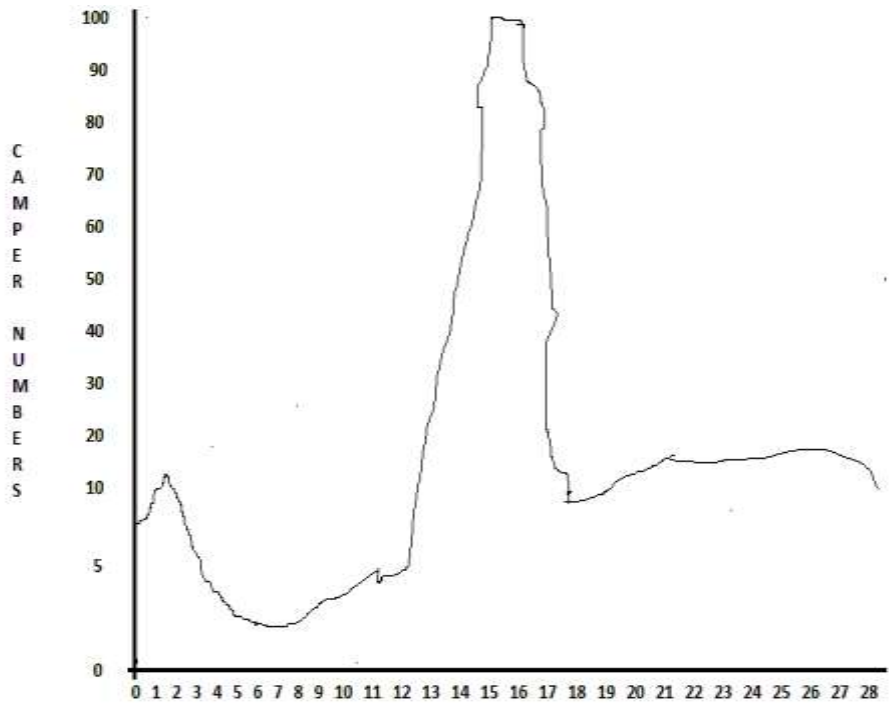
# **Appendix 1 –Free Camping Sites**



# Appendix 2 – Numbers for 2013-14 Summer Season

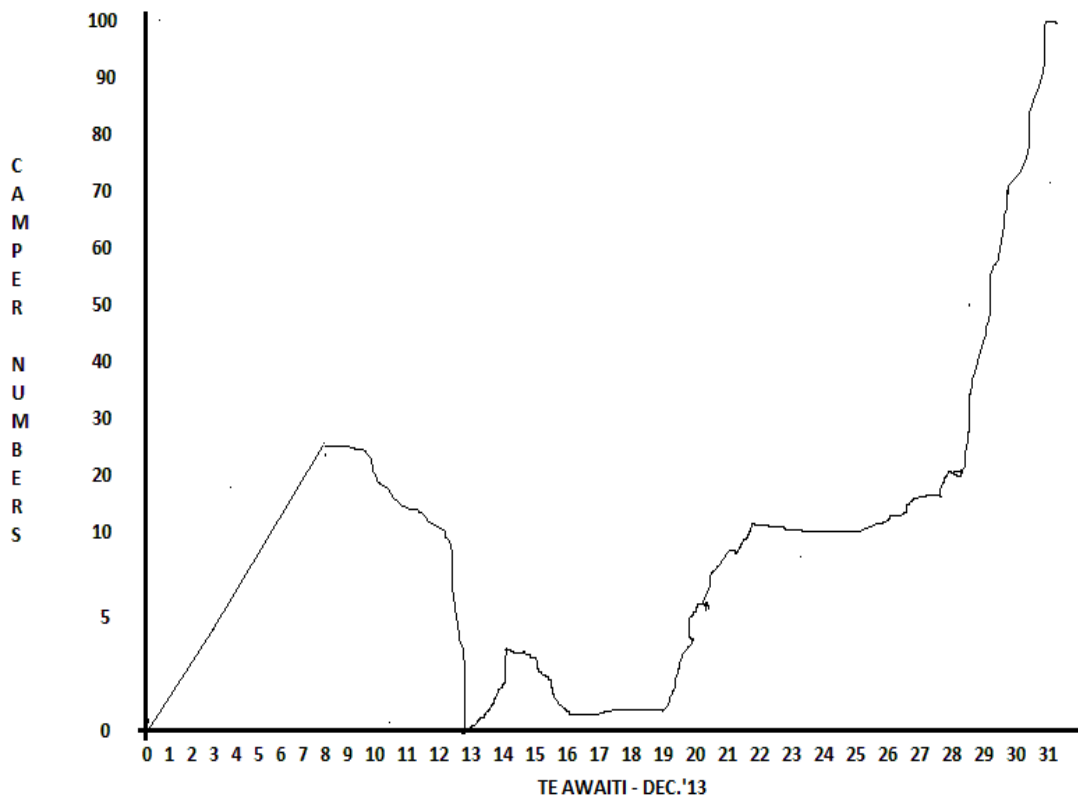
NGAWI CAMPER NUMBERS DEC'13 - FEB'14





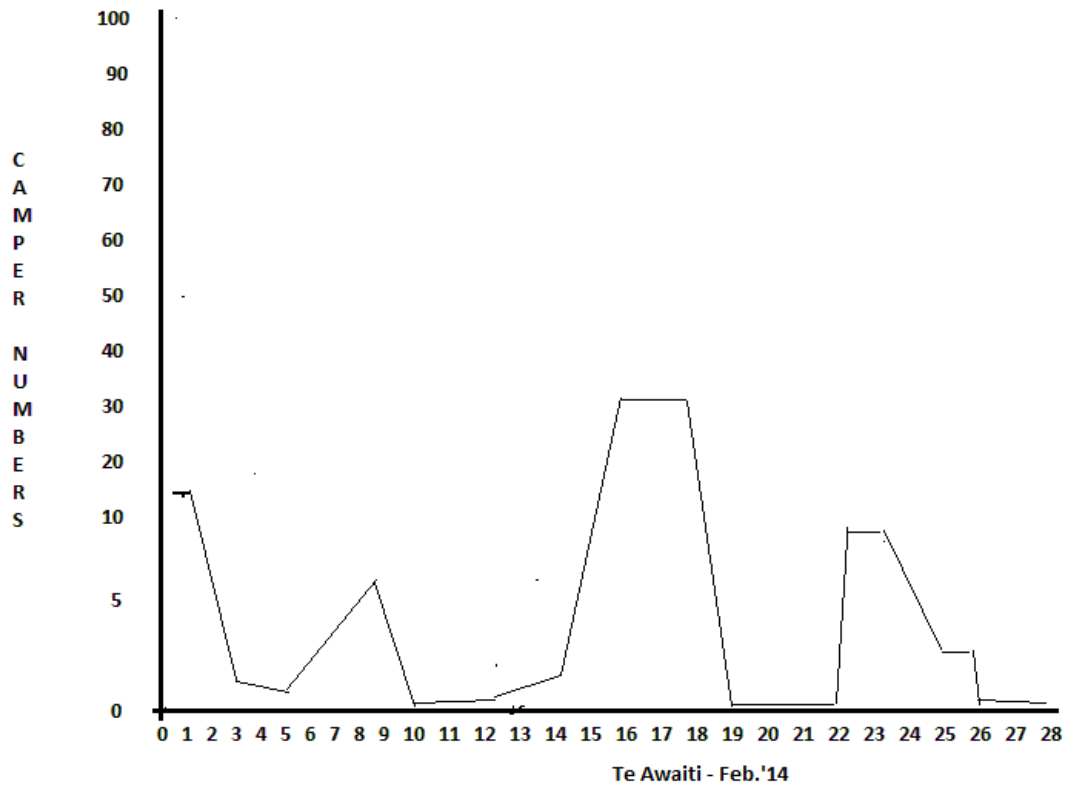
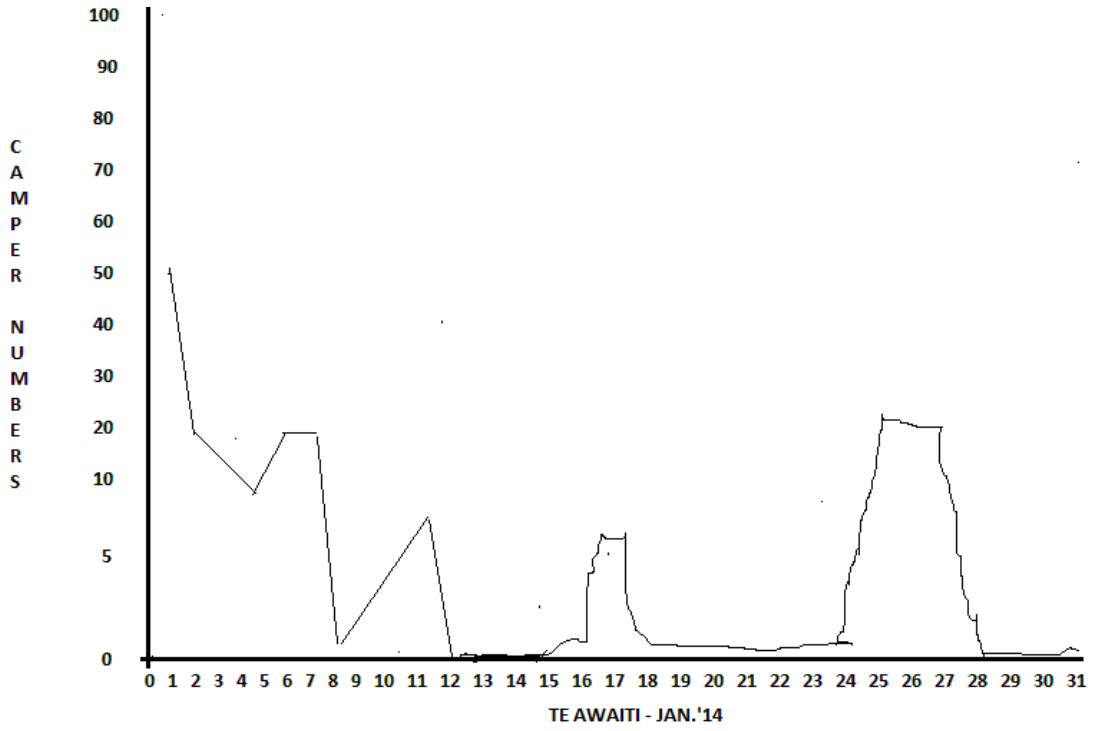
FEB. '14 - NGAWI

TE AWAITI CAMPER NUMBERS DEC'13 - FEB'14

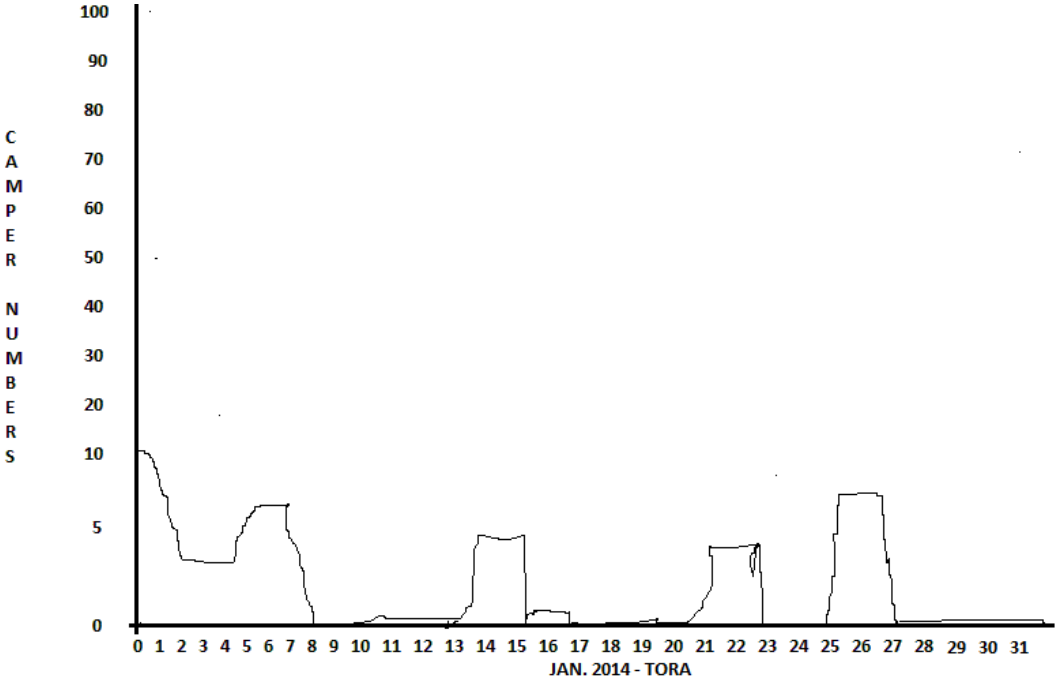
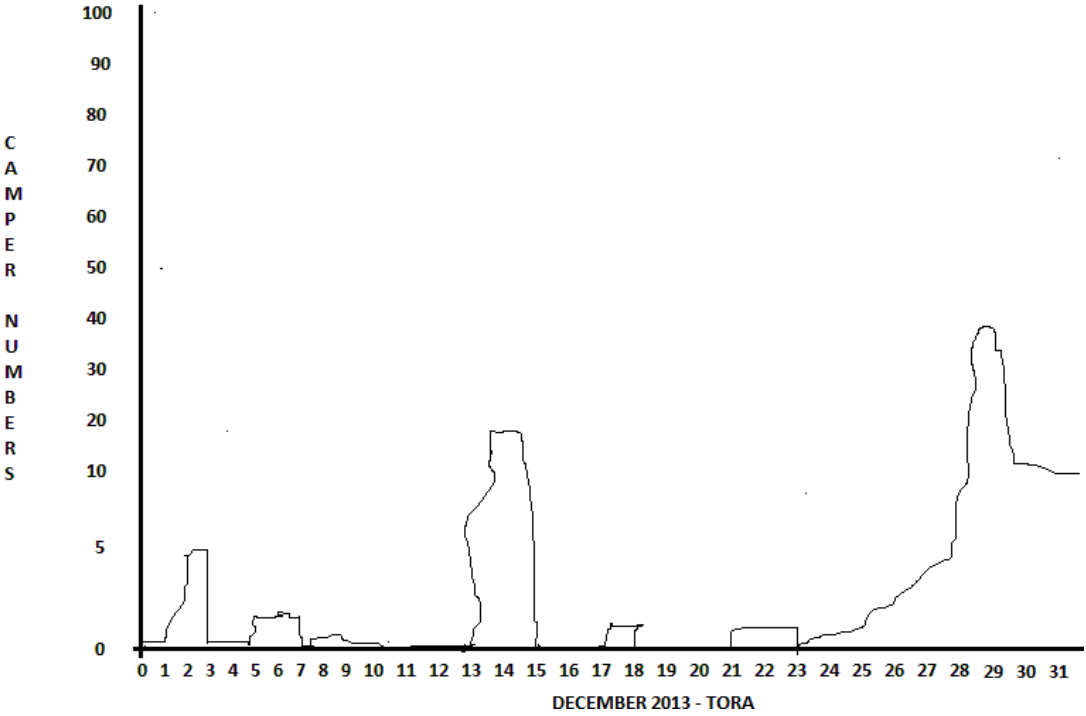


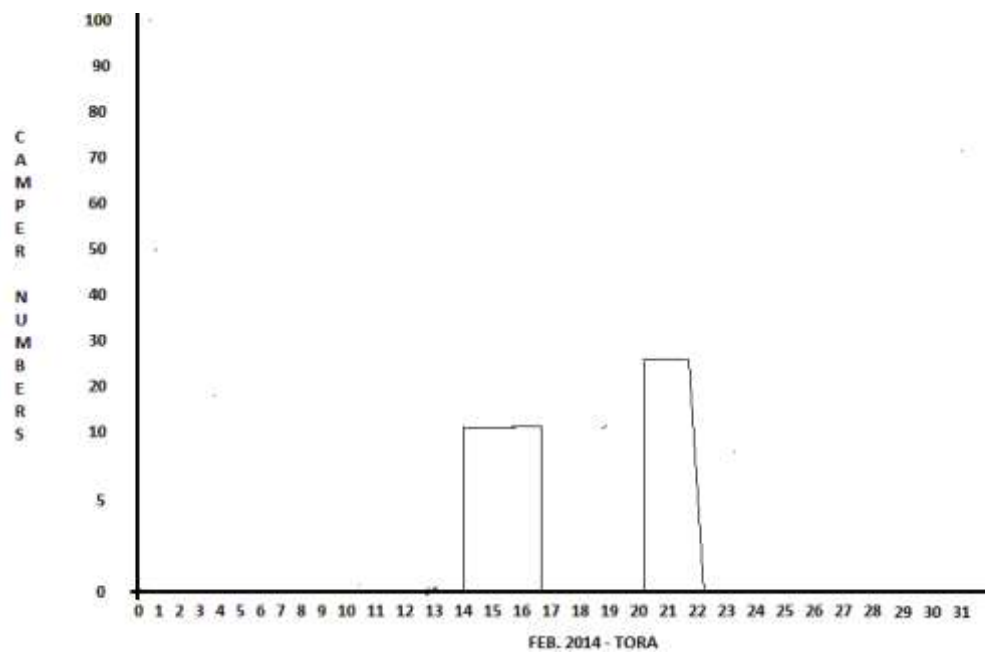
TE AWAITI - DEC.'13





TORA CAMPER NUMBERS DEC '13 - FEB '14





NORTH TORA CAMPER NUMBERS DEC. '13 - FEB. '14

