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Tekapo's new public toilets example of 'infrastructure that pays for itself'

JOHN BISSET/FAIRFAX NZ

Lake Tekapo's new toilets officially opened by Associate Tourism Minister Nicky Wagner.

Lake Tekapo's mix of pay-per-entry and free toilets are a good example of infrastructure that will pay for itself, Associate Tourism Minister Nicky Wagner says.

Wagner was in Tekapo to open the town's new automated loos, in the lakeside carpark, on Tuesday. The toilets, with another block near the Church of the Good Shepherd, were built with 50/50 funding from the Mackenzie District Council and the Government's regional mid-sized tourism facilities grant.



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Associate Tourism Minister Nicky Wagner, pictured with Mackenzie mayor Graham Smith, raises the shears before cutting the tartan ribbon at the opening of Lake Tekapo's new loos

The council decided to build them last year. Then, they were called an important step in helping to meet burgeoning tourist demand.

They have since proven popular: 29,000 people used them in the three weeks from late January and 50,000 had used them by the official opening on Tuesday.



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The merino sheep on Lake Tekapo's new toilets which were opened by Associate Tourism Minister Nicky Wagner on Tuesday.

There was a \$1 entry fee to the toilets toward the church, which Wagner said was a good example of how infrastructural costs could be shared.

"If you have infrastructure that pays for itself, even for maintenance, it makes it much easier. Travellers are quite happy to pay, we just need to find a way to provide the facilities."

Tekapo, a town of about 400 people, received more than 100,000 visitors a month during summer. This brought high demand for new facilities, Wagner said.



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New pay toilets near the walk bridge across to the Church of the Good Shepherd at Lake Tekapo.

Last week, an Environment Canterbury water zone committee challenged Waitaki MP Jacqui Dean for the Government's position on catering for freedom campers, particularly toilet provision.

This week, New Zealand First leader Winston Peters said the Government's just-announced plan to encourage more tourism from China needed to include more money for council-owned infrastructure. On Tuesday, Wagner cautioned that not all tourism-affected infrastructure could or should be delivered by the Government.



JOHN BISSET/FAIRFAX NZ
Associate Tourism Minister Nicky Wagner, right, who presented Mackenzie Mayor Graham Smith with a toilet brush at the opening of Tekapo's new toilets.

"It won't all be delivered by Government. I don't think we should ever think this is necessarily central Government's job.

"Local government is involved and other groups too."

Wagner said an audit around New Zealand had shown how much was possibly needed and how it could be delivered.

Tourism was a "really strong regional development tool".

"People who come to New Zealand don't necessarily want to see another international city, they want to see the real Kiwi lifestyle, and our small regional areas can provide that," Wagner said.

"South Canterbury could show international visitors the real Kiwi lifestyle and this is what will attract them to the region", she said.

She said South Canterbury was doing very well but noted the tourism industry nationally was "filled with quite a large number of small businesses and it is fragmented".

"My plea, particularly to smaller towns, is to get together and collaborate. Come up with a package, support each other and everybody can grow the cake," she said.

Acknowledging the new focus on Chinese tourism, Wagner said "every bit" of advertising about New Zealand in China is now focused on the "shoulder seasons".

She noted Lake Tekapo's night sky was clearer during winter, enhancing the appeal of a world-renowned attraction during the shoulder season.

"Any kind of attraction or event or any reason to come to New Zealand outside peak season, we want to support," she said.

Tourists spent about \$723m in South Canterbury in the year to January - 8 per cent more than 2016, she said.

"Tourism drives growth and job creation in this region, as in so many others around the country," she said. Wagner opened the self-cleaning Exeloo toilets by clipping a Mackenzie tartan ribbon with a pair of gleaming old-style sheep shears.

She pushed a button to open a toilet door, declaring them officially open.

Mackenzie Mayor Graham Smith, councillors, Tekapo Community Board members, residents - and tourists waiting to use the facility - stood in near silence for a few moments before the door opened and Wagner emerged to say, with a grin "it works".

The previous toilet block, in the Tekapo shopping area, was closed earlier this month and the council proposes demolishing it to make way for landscape improvements.

Smith said about \$1600 had been collected from the pay-for toilets since they were opened in the third week of January.

The council is monitoring use of the toilets to see if there is a need for more.

- Stuff