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## **Tourist Tax must address more than toilets, car parks**

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network said a Tourist Tax needed to reflect that tourism was now placing real stress on delivery of rural health services.

The NZRGPN is the national network representing the doctors and nurses of rural medical practices across New Zealand.

“Tourism is a great thing for the New Zealand economy but managing its impacts goes beyond more toilets and car parks,” said Chief Executive, Dalton Kelly.

“It is projected that five million tourists per annum will visit New Zealand by the middle of next decade with up to half visiting a national park.

“The classic New Zealand tourism experience is accessed directly through rural New Zealand and already booming tourism numbers are placing great strain on stretched rural health services,” he said.

Dalton Kelly said some rural communities experience a tenfold increase in population over the summer holiday season. These people are driving, consuming alcohol, accessing New Zealand’s wilderness places and overwhelming local health services.

“Across 75 regions of New Zealand outside urban centres many rural doctors and nurses – often the only medical staff in their community – provide the rural emergency first responder service as well as trying to manage local patients and the tourism influx.

“At the height of the tourism season a rural doctor or nurse can undertake up to six air ambulance call-outs in a single day, leaving the local community with no health support.”

Dalton Kelly said the national rural emergency response service received just \$2 million in annual funding and required additional funding to deliver a sustainable service. He said funding via a Tourist Tax could provide a funding boost to this essential service.

“Last week’s refreshed ‘rural proofing’ policy to ensure rural communities are reflected in all policy decisions is a welcome initiative. Already rural communities are struggling for equitable access to health care and the tourism boom is exacerbating that.

“Decisions around allocating revenue from a Tourist Tax will need to reflect the real needs of rural communities, not just the highly visible issues like car park congestion.”

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