

# Leisure Trends in the South Waikato

*A Report Prepared for the  
South Waikato District Council*

*by*

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# Executive Summary

- This report provides an overview of leisure trends in the South Waikato. It will provide the basis for the development of a Leisure Strategy for the South Waikato District.

## *Overall Trends*

- With the growth in the range of leisure activities available, there has been a decline in numbers participating in traditional sports.
- Participation is becoming more informal and focused on individual needs.
- Local Government is a key leisure service provider. Councils are continually challenged to look at more cost-effective ways of providing services.
- With increasing commercialisation in the leisure sector, local government is one of the few providers that has the opportunity issues of access and equity to leisure services.

## *Leisure Trends in the South Waikato District*

- With a declining population, the problems of attracting members club administrators and coaches are accentuated.
- Consistent with national trends physical activities with the highest participation rates tend to be informal and focused on individual needs. Walking and exercising at home are the top activities across all age groups and different ethnic groups. The only team sport to feature is touch.
- South Waikato residents participate in greater numbers in leisure activities than nationally. Like other New Zealanders, South Waikato residents favour sedentary, home-based activities like listening to music watching TV and visiting friends.
- Top leisure destinations away from home are shopping centres, beaches, restaurants and pubs.
- Young people have a strong interest in physical activities and take part in them because they enjoy them. Participation rates in the South Waikato appear to be lower than national rates. This may be because of the higher percentage of Maori youth in the District who tend to have lower participation rates than their non-Maori peers.
- Playing sport and going out for a meal are the favoured activities among children in the South Waikato. The sport children participate in, in greatest numbers, is swimming.
- There are a broad range of leisure opportunities in the District. People tend to travel away from the District to participate in activities when there are limited or no local opportunities like water based activities, dining out, and ten-pin bowling.

## *Initial Assessment of Recreation Needs*

Based on the emerging recreation trends in the District some initial comments can be made about likely recreation needs in the South Waikato District:

- The provision of quality facilities and sportsgrounds will continue to be important.
- The rationalisation of sportsgrounds needs further investigation and community input.
- The development of any sportsgrounds will need to be balanced against the informal recreation needs of residents.
- Walking is the number one activity across all sectors of the population so consideration should be given to developing reserves, particularly along streams as walkways and cycleways.

- While there may be opportunities to rationalise the management of parks where they have low levels of use, this will need to be balanced against the contribution parks make to an attractive living environment.
- The upgrading of the town centres in the District combined with the opening of the new movie theatre in Tokoroa targets two of the most common leisure destinations away from home.
- Targeted recreation programmes, like Te Papa Takaro which promotes healthy lifestyles targeting the Maori population, many need to be considered.
- Because of the higher proportions of people receiving benefits in the District and greater numbers of unemployed people, discounted entry and charges through programmes like " Passport to Leisure " could be considered.
- There may be potential to develop a locally based sports membership card with an annual subscription which provides access to a range of facilities. This enables people to enjoy a wider range of activities without the cost of belonging to specific clubs.
- Because of the high proportion of Maori and Pacific Islanders in the District it will be important that Maori and Pacific Island perspectives are taken into account.

### ***Further Work***

- Some further work should be completed before the recreation strategy is developed including:
  - Completion of the inventory of Council services and programmes and those provided by other public and private sector providers.
  - A comparative analysis of demographic information at the ward and meshblock level to provide further direction on recreation patterns.
  - Meetings with key informants to help confirm gaps in leisure provision, changing trends in leisure participation and future leisure directions in the District. These meetings should help consolidate key strategic directions for leisure provision.

## **Introduction**

Local authorities are continually challenged to look at different ways of achieving cost effective and positive recreation outcomes for their communities. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of leisure trends in the South Waikato based on the analysis of local and national information. This report will provide the basis for the development of a Leisure Strategy for the South Waikato District.

### ***Definition of Leisure***

“ Recreation is an activity through which leisure may be experienced and enjoyed ” (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1998: 508). Leisure is an “ individual's quality of experience ” (ibid) and may be achieved through various activities. It can include physical activities such competitive and informal sport and activities like skateboarding, walking, cycling and playing. It can also include the creative arts like pottery and performing arts such as drama and dance. Leisure activities also include home based activities like reading and watching television. While these activities are discussed here, the focus of the report is on activities away from home provided by the public and private sector.

### ***Report Outline***

This report:

- Provides an overview of general leisure trends.
- Looks at the likely trends in participation based on a demographic profile of people in the South Waikato.
- Considers trends in participation in the South Waikato District based on the results of local surveys. This information is supplemented by the use of national surveys for comparative purposes. National surveys are also used where local information is not available.
- Gives an overview of existing leisure opportunities in the South Waikato District.
- Provides an initial assessment of likely recreation needs in the South Waikato and potential gaps in leisure activities.
- Identifies further work that needs to be done to develop a Leisure Strategy for the District.

# General Trends and Issues in Recreation

## *Trends in Participation*

- The availability of a wider range of recreational and sporting activities has resulted in a decrease in the numbers participating in each sport or activity, particularly traditional sports. People seem to shy away from the commitments of being a member of a club or team.
- Participation is becoming more informal and focused on individuals needs (Palmerston North City Council, 1992: 28; LINZ, 1991).
- People value their leisure time. Most people use weekends, holidays or summertime to maximise their recreation and leisure opportunities.
- More recently there have been growing numbers of paid employees and managers being brought into sports organisations (Sadler, 1994, Hillary Commission, 1994). There is potential conflict between volunteers and paid employees. Volunteers need to be recognised, trained and rewarded.
- New Zealand has a tradition of strong volunteer involvement in the sporting sector. In recent years some clubs have found it increasingly difficult to attract volunteers.
- People will also change their activities or discontinue activities if there is no challenge, it becomes boring, they are no longer having fun, something else appears more exciting or different and provides better returns in terms of time and cost (Hayes, 1993).
- The most frequently given for not participating in recreation activities include:
  - Lack of time.
  - Lack of energy or motivation.
  - Work or family commitments.
  - Lack of childcare facilities.
  - Affordability.
- An in-depth study by the Hillary Commission in 1994, of people who were inactive but wanted to be more active, showed that the underlying reasons for non-participation were:
  - Feelings of inadequacy generated by the body beautiful images of people taking part in sport and physical activity portrayed in advertising and the media
  - A fear of failure stemming from inactive people's fear that they will " look stupid " taking part in physical activity.

## ***The Leisure Industry***

- Sport and leisure is a growth industry. Between 1991 and 1996 there was a 16% rise in economic activity in this area, to \$1,758 million. Over the same period, net spending in this area by local authorities increased by 7% while spending on leisure goods and services in the private sector increased by 26% (Hillary Commission, 1998, 10).
- Leisure activity, including tourism, is a significant part of the New Zealand economy with potential for further growth. Around 1 million overseas tourists (75%) take part in one or more sports/physical activities during their stay while 51,000 overseas visitors (4%) come specifically to take part in sport and physical activity and spend \$120 million a year (Hillary Commission, 1998).

## ***Local Government***

- Local government is a key leisure services provider spending \$395 million dollars annually (Hillary Commission, 1998). Annual expenditure by individual local authorities ranges from \$15 to \$170 per person, with an average of \$78 (Hillary Commission, 1996). The South Waikato District Council spends around \$48.00 a year per resident.
- Flexible legislation enables Councils to get involved in the provision of a wide range of leisure activities (Appendix 1). Today most authorities provide a broad range of recreational facilities including sports grounds, reserves, swimming pools and sports stadia. Some authorities also provide showgrounds, camping grounds and golf courses. One authority has a wildlife reserve (Local Government Business Group, 1993).

## ***Access and Equity***

- Increasing commercialisation in the leisure sector means more resources are being allocated based on a return on investment and are consequently targeted and marketed to those with the greatest ability to pay.
- Unlike the private sector, local authorities have the opportunity to address issues of equity and access through:
  - Their approach to charging for services. Many authorities have introduced user charges for some facilities, which reflect the balance between public and private good.
  - The provision of targeted recreation programmes and subsidised activities that provide opportunities to groups who are less able to afford activities. For example, a 50% discount to leisure facilities is provided upon application for a "passport to leisure" for low-income earners.

- Providing services in areas where they may not be cost effective, like many isolated communities in rural areas. Providing parks for leisure activities like walking the dog and picnics on a non-commercial basis also come into this category.

### *Benefits of Recreation*

- Local government has an important role to play in the promotion of community well-being. Local and overseas studies show recreation benefits the community as well as individuals (Appendix 2).
- Some of the individual benefits of recreation can include improved mental health, physical health and spiritual health.
- As long as programmes are provided in the right way these individual benefits can contribute to healthy communities in many ways including:
  - Helping build self-reliant and adaptable communities.
  - Reducing the cost of social service intervention.
  - Reducing crime levels (into sport, out of court).
  - Reducing health care costs (A 10% increase in the number of physically active adults in New Zealand would save \$55 million a year).
  - Generating economic benefits. There was a 16% increase in economic activity in the sport and leisure industry between 1991 and 1996, to \$1,758 million.
  - Creating new employment opportunities. In 1991, there were 15,300 jobs in sport and leisure. By 1996, this number had increased 25% to 19,200.

### *New Challenges*

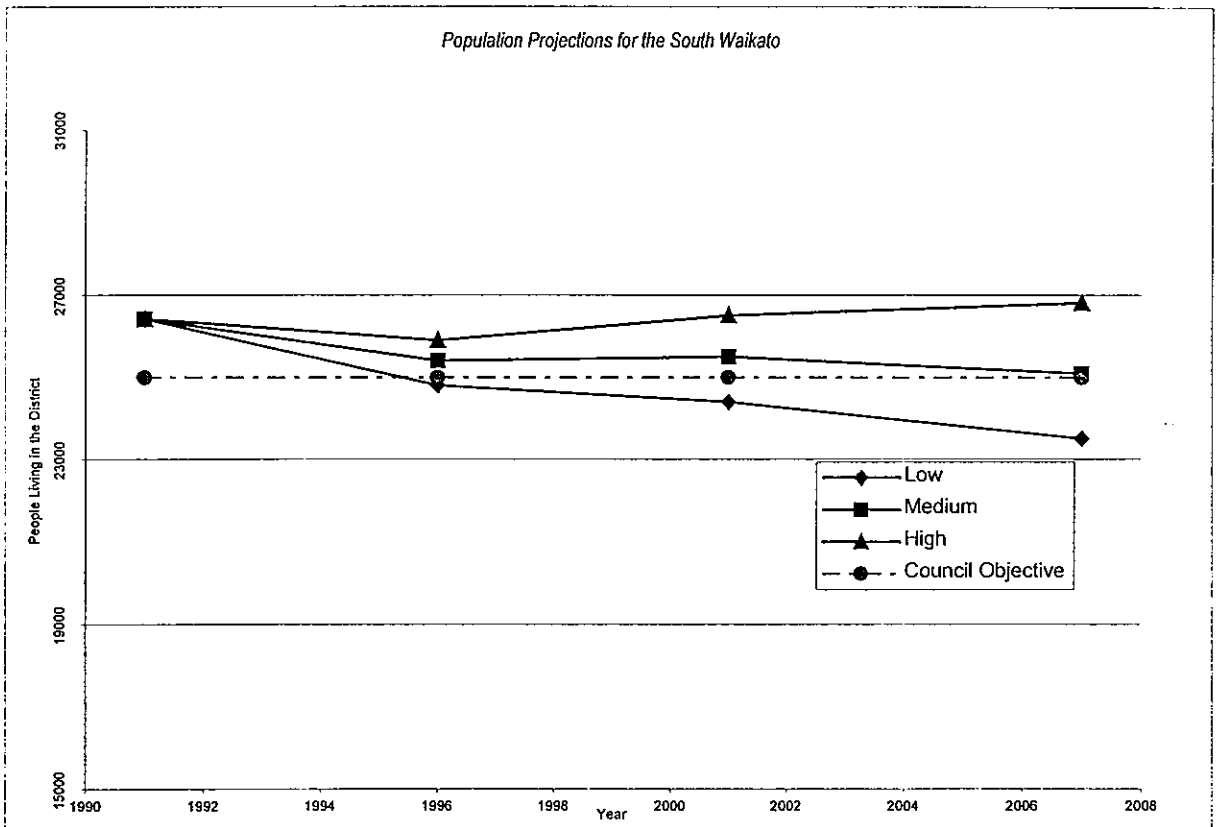
- Councils are continually challenged to look at more cost-effective ways of providing services. They are also put under increasing pressure to do more.
- Strategic Planning, including the development of recreation strategies, is a focus for councils.
- Councils are looking for new ways of achieving positive recreation outcomes for their communities like:
  - Marketing facilities.
  - Supporting (and funding) community organisations providing community recreation opportunities.
  - Building strategic alliances with central government agencies like the Hillary Commission and Health Authorities.
  - Joint venture partnerships for new facilities.
  - Advocating to central government on local recreation issues.
  - Contracting facilities management to the private sector or community organisations.

# General Trends in Participation

## Population Change

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been a decline in the District population from 26,193 in 1991 to 25,011 in 1996.</li> <li>• The greatest decline occurred in the Tokoroa area where the population dropped to 16,302 (6.6%), compared to a decline of 4.5% to 6,528 in the Putaruru area and an increase of 2.7% to 2,123 in the Tirau ward.</li> <li>• A focus for the District is stabilising the population at existing levels (Figure 1)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be expected that the general trend of declining membership of clubs will be accentuated by a population decline.</li> <li>• Associated with this, is a reduction in the standard of facilities and clubs struggling to attract members, administrators and coaches.</li> </ul> |
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Figure 1

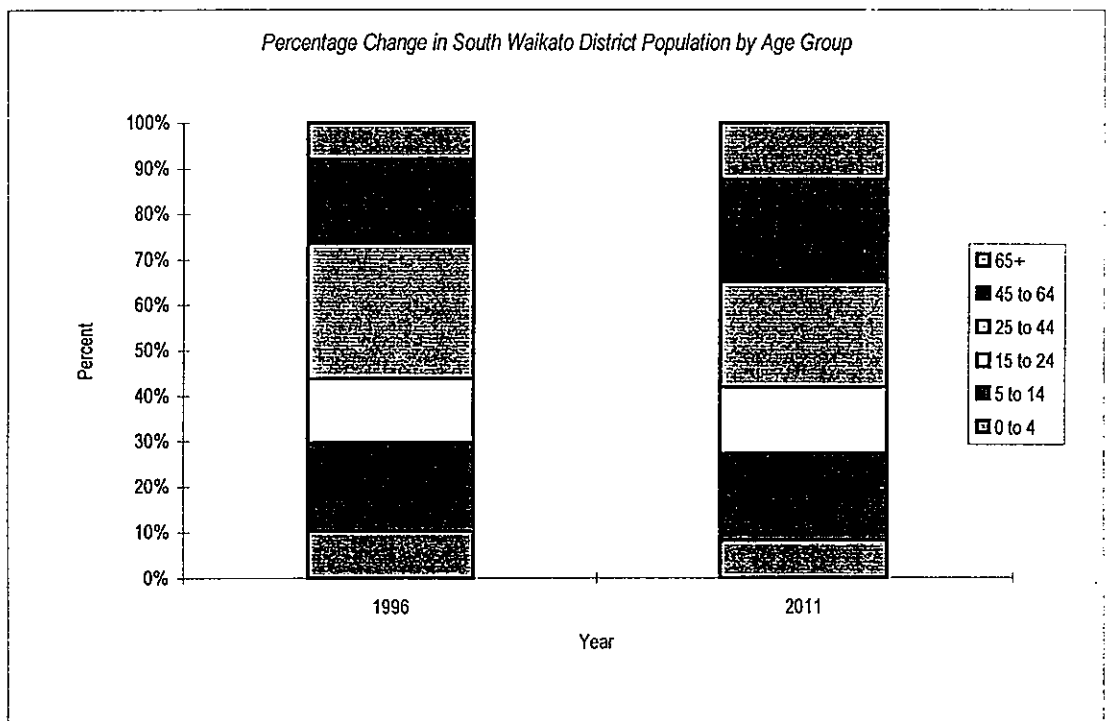


## Age and Gender

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just under half of the residents in the District (49.25%) are female.</li> <li>• Compared with New Zealand as a whole, the South Waikato District has a young population structure. Around 30% of residents are 14 or younger compared with only 23% nationally.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall women's participation rates tend to be lower than that of men.</li> <li>• A younger population means there will be higher rates of participation in physical activity.</li> </ul> |
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- There are significantly lower numbers of people 65+ (5.8%) compared with 11% nationally. However, consistent with New Zealand wide trends, there are likely to be increasing numbers of retired people in the District by 2011 (Figure 2).
- Older people are becoming more active.
- Some older people are taking retirement earlier, living in their own homes longer, changing residence upon retirement and travel more extensively than previous generations.
- Many older people are less mobile, are on fixed incomes, and require more recreation services close to home.

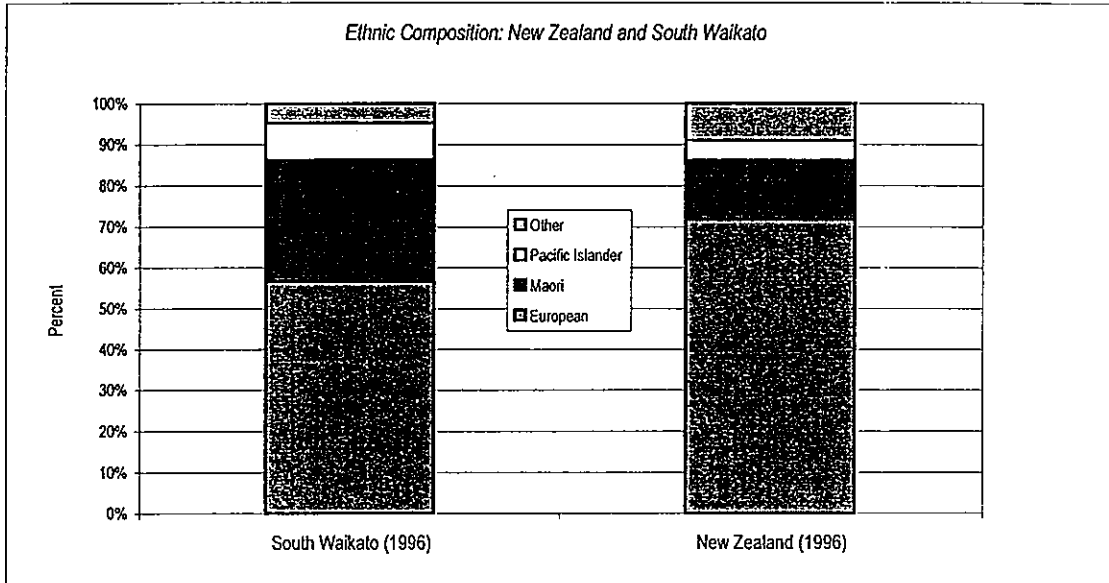
Figure 2



**Ethnicity**

- There are greater numbers of Maori and Pacific Islanders in the District than New Zealand wide (Figure 3)
- Because of the younger age structure of these groups, the proportion of Maori and Pacific Islanders in the District is expected to rise in future.
- It is important that the Maori and Pacific Island perspectives of leisure are recognised and taken into account.
- Informal group activities and team sports are important activities for Maori and Pacific Islanders.

Figure 3



### Employment

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirty three percent of residents are not in the paid labour force (33% nationally). This group includes all residents over 15 years who are unemployed, retired, caregivers or students</li> <li>• Unemployment levels in the District are also higher at 12.3% compared with 7.7% nationally.</li> <li>• Over a third of those unemployed in the District are aged 24 or younger.</li> <li>• While there are fewer short term unemployed people in the District at 42% (48% nationally), there are slightly greater numbers of long term unemployed (208+ weeks), 8% (6% nationally).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted physical leisure programmes can increase the participation of the long-term unemployed in the community.</li> <li>• Changes in the economic structure has had a marked impact on young people especially, often resulting in socially alienated, unemployed young people, for whom traditional recreation and sport opportunities are inappropriate (Waitaki District Council, 1997).</li> </ul> |
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### Work

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the time of the 1996 Census, similar proportions of South Waikato residents (13.1%) were in part time work as there were in part time work New Zealand wide (13.5%).</li> <li>• In the South Waikato, this figure has increased since the 1991 census from just under 3% from 10.4%.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept of the 5 day working week is changing with many people working over seven days or in part -time or casual employment. Traditionally, there have been a significant number of shift workers in the South Waikato.</li> <li>• There is a need for greater flexibility in providing leisure opportunities.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

## ***Income***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Similar proportions of residents in the South Waikato are on low incomes of less than \$20,000 (52.8%) compared with national figures (53.1%).</li><li>• There is a higher proportion of individuals earning over \$60,000 in the District (7.9%) than nationally (6.6 %).</li><li>• There are higher numbers of people in the South Waikato receiving benefits (23.6%) than across New Zealand as a whole (19.6%).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Those on low or fixed incomes are generally "more restricted as to what they can afford, how far they can travel and how frequently they can use leisure facilities, programmes and services (Marriott, 1990, 45).</li></ul>
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## ***Education***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer people in the District have tertiary qualifications (19.8%) than New Zealand wide (26%) while greater numbers of residents have no qualifications (42%) than nationally (32%).</li><li>• Fewer people in the South Waikato labour force are in professional occupations (21.9%) than nationally (34.2%).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher educational, occupational groups and income levels have generally been associated with a demand for small group, non-competitive interests and more art and cultural activities.</li></ul>
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## ***Household Composition***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sole parent households make up 22% of all families in the District compared with 18% nationally.</li><li>• Almost a quarter of households in the District have children under 5 years in them.</li><li>• Of the one and two parent households in the South Waikato, 28.3% have three or more dependent children. This compared with 23.6% nationally.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sole parents, large families and families with young children are often restricted in their access to leisure opportunities.</li></ul>
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## ***Housing Type***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slightly lower proportions of people in the South Waikato own their homes freehold (28.7%) than nationally (31.0%).</li><li>• Similar proportions of local residents own their homes with a mortgage (35.8%) to nationally (35.2%).</li><li>• 21.6% of houses are rented (22.9% nationally).</li><li>• Consistent with national trends, home ownership levels in the South Waikato are declining. In 1991, 71.7% of people were in their own homes. By 1996 this figure had dropped to 64.5%.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People living in their own homes identify more strongly with the community. They are also more likely to use community facilities and be concerned about issues facing their neighbourhoods.</li><li>• There are indications that areas with a high turnover of residents and a large proportion of rental properties may not have the same degree of facility use.</li></ul>
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## ***Access to a Vehicle***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growing numbers of families have two cars.</li><li>• There are 36% of households with access to 2 or more vehicles compared with 43.2% nationally.</li><li>• There are 13.9% of households that do not have access to any vehicle. This is slightly higher than New Zealand wide (11.5%).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Car ownership can be an indicator of the capacity to be more selective in choice of recreational services through ability to meet more distant opportunities.</li><li>• Conversely people who do not have access to a car may be more limited in their leisure choices and need to have facilities nearby.</li></ul>
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## South Waikato District Activity Patterns

During 1998, an independent research company, Digipoll, was commissioned by the South Waikato District Council to undertake two surveys to find out:

- What leisure activities residents had participated in over the last four weeks
- What sporting activities residents had participated in over the last year.

The questions in these local surveys were structured to enable comparison with the results of national surveys by the Hillary Commission including:

- The Life in New Zealand Survey of over 11,000 New Zealanders undertaken in 1989/90 by the University of Otago and covered physical and leisure activities.
- The Hillary Commission Sport and Leisure Survey which has been undertaken on an annual basis since 1996. This survey focuses on sport and physical activity.

Additional information was sought in the local surveys to find out about frequency of participation and whether people participated in leisure activities within or out of the District.

### *Physical Activity Patterns*

The South Waikato shows similar patterns of sports participation to New Zealand (Table 1) as a whole.

*Table 1: Top Ten Sport and Physical Activities*

	<i>New Zealand</i>	<i>South Waikato</i>
1	Short walks (37%)	Short walks (54.7%)
2	Long walks (over half and hour) (36%)	Long walks (43.5%)
3	Swimming (29%)	Exercise at home (31.1%)
4	Exercising at home (28%)	Fishing (27.5%)
5	Exercise classes/going to the gym (17%)	Swimming (24.2)
6	Cycling (excluding mountain biking) (16%)	Cycling (17.8%)
7	Golf (16%)	Running/jogging (16.4%)
8	Running/jogging (15%)	Touch football (15.5%)
9	Aerobics (13%)	Golf (13.9%)
10	Tennis (11%)	Exercise classes/Going to the gym (13.7%)

Fishing and touch football stand out, as activities with high levels of participation in the South Waikato but not New Zealand wide, while tennis and aerobics do not feature in the top ten sports for the South Waikato.

Age and gender have the greatest influence on physical activity patterns with participation rates declining sharply with age (Appendix 3). The exceptions are golf and bowls which showed increasing participation rates with increased age. Walking and exercise at home are amongst the top physical activities across all age groups.

Overall, women's participation rates tend to be lower than that of men. On average men participate in 4-5 sports in activities while women take part in 4 (Hillary Commission, 1997). Participation rates for people in the South Waikato are higher than New Zealanders generally with men participating in an average of 6 sports and women participating in an average of 5 sports.

Ethnicity is another influence. Maori participation in physical activity is greater than non-Maori with the exception of Maori youth. Nationally, organised sport has a higher profile among Maori than non-Maori with basketball, netball and touch featuring in the top ten sport and physical activities participated in by Maori (Table 2).

**Table 2: Top 10 Sports for people of Different Cultures: New Zealand -wide**

	<i>European New Zealanders</i>	<i>Maori</i>	<i>Other</i>
1	Short walks (40%)	Short walks (31%)	Short Walks (27%)
2	Long walks (39%)	Swimming (31%)	Long walks (24%)
3	Swimming (30%)	Long walks (29%)	Exercising at home (21%)
4	Exercising at home (29%)	Exercising at home (28%)	Exercise classes/gym (18%)
5	Cycling (17%)	Touch (22%)	Swimming (18%)
6	Exercise class/gym (17%)	Aerobics (20%)	Running/jogging (15%)
7	Golf (17%)	Exercise class/gym (19%)	Cricket (15%)
8	Running/jogging (14%)	Running/jogging (17%)	Basketball (13%)
9	Tramping (13%)	Cycling (16%)	Volleyball (13%)
10	Aerobics (12%)	Basketball (15%) Netball (15%)	Touch (12%)

While the sports most frequently participated in change with ethnicity individual sports continue to have the highest ranking regardless of ethnic background (Table 3). Kapa haka stands out as an activity with high levels of participation among Maori. The "other" category, which is predominantly Pacific

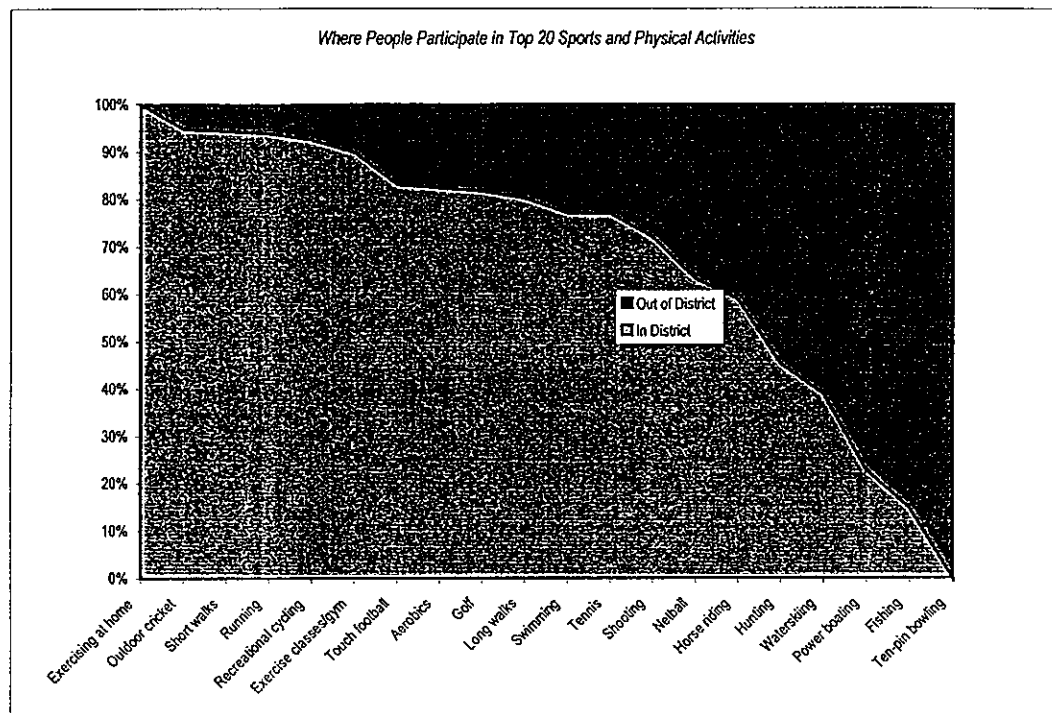
Islanders, includes several team sports. It should be noted that the sample size for this group is small and therefore subject to a higher margin of error.

*Table 3: Top 10 Sports for People of Different Cultures: South Waikato*

	<i>European</i>	<i>Maori</i>	<i>Other</i>
1	Short walk (58.7%)	Short walk (55.6%)	Short walk (48.2%)
2	Long walk (44.5%)	Long walk (47.9%)	Fishing (41.1%)
3	Exercise at home (29.4%)	Fishing (39.3%)	Long walk (23.2%)
4	Fishing (25.6%)	Pool/Snooker (32.5%)	Exercise at home (23.2%)
5	Swimming (21.8%)	Exercise at home (31.6%)	Touch (19.6%)
6	Pool/snooker (20.3%)	Touch (29.9%)	Pool/snooker (17.9%)
7	Recreational cycling (17.2%)	Swimming (21.4%)	Recreational cycling (16.1%)
8	Running/jogging (16.3%)	Hunting (20.5%)	Exercise class/gym (14.3%)
9	Ten-pin Bowling (15.7%)	Running/jogging (18.8%)	Netball (14.3%)
10	Touch (13.4%)	Kapa haka (17.9%)	Tennis / Rugby (12.5%) Squash/Basketball (12.5%)

People tend to travel away from the District to participate in activities when there are only limited or no local opportunities like water sports and ten-pin bowling (Figure 4).

Figure 4

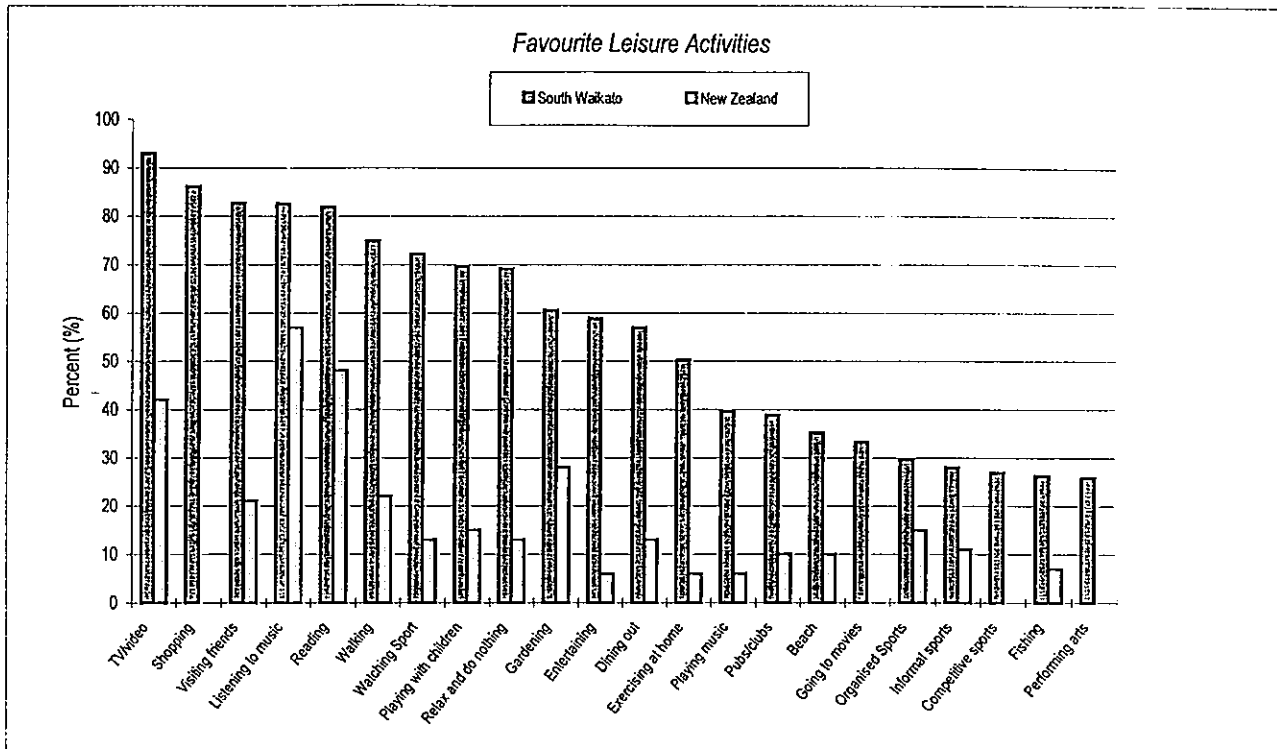


### Leisure Activity Patterns

The results of LINZ and other national surveys show that New Zealanders favour sedentary, home based leisure activities (Laidler and Cushman, 1993, 3). The LINZ survey showed that reading, watching TV and videos, visiting friends, listening to music, gardening, and walking are the most popular leisure activities enjoyed by at least a fifth of all respondents. Organised sport and watching sport have a high rating among Maori.

A local survey showed higher levels of participation in leisure activities across the board than the LINZ Survey (Figure 5). Higher levels of participation may be attributed to a younger age structure of the District as well as the growing trend on informal participation in leisure activities based on individual needs in the eight years since the LINZ survey was completed. Because of lower living costs, some groups in the community may have more disposable income for leisure activities. Out of the cities travel time to and from work is generally reduced, potentially giving people more leisure time.

Figure 5



Music, reading, watching TV and walking are among the top five activities from both surveys. The local survey showed participation rates at least 50% higher than in the LINZ survey for the following activities:

- Visiting friends
- Watching sport
- Relaxing and doing nothing
- Playing with children
- Walking
- Entertaining
- Watching TV or videos.

When looking at leisure activities away from home (Table 4), shopping centres, beaches, rivers and restaurants and pubs are top leisure destinations away from home for South Waikato residents. This is a similar pattern to nationally.

*Table 4: Top 10 Leisure Activities Away from Home*

	<i>South Waikato</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
1	Visit friends & family (69.8%)	Visit friends & family (68%)
2	Shopping for Leisure (50%)	Shopping for Leisure (30%)
3	Dining out (31.7%)	Hobbies/interests (26%)
4	Picnic or BBQ (30.9%)	Gathering food (25%)
5	Going to the beach (27.4%)	Socialising at Pubs(24%)
6	Socialising at Pubs(24.3%)	Dining out (20%)
7	Movies (22.4%)	Watching sport (18%)
8	Watching sport (22.2%)	Going to the beach (17%)
9	Go to a park (21.0%)	Church activities (17%)
10	Church activities (17.9%)	Go to a park (13%)

Movies, picnics and bar-b-ques stand out as being among the top leisure activities away from home in the South Waikato. It is noted that movies have enjoyed a resurgence since the LINZ survey was completed in 1991 with the growth of multiplex cinemas. As with sports, most people go to leisure destinations outside the District when there are limited opportunities locally like festivals and dining out (Figure 6).

