Hunter who shot near camp charged

ANNA PEARSON

A hunter is facing three charges after firing in the direction of campers at Totaranui, an act described by the Department of Conservation as dangerous, reckless and illegal.

The man, who was hunting at night, shot two stags.

A 31-year-old Wanaka man faces three charges of breaching the National Parks Act in relation to the incident on May 18. He will appear in the Nelson District Court on February 9.

The man is charged with possessing a firearm in a national park without authority, discharging a firearm in a national park without authority, and shooting at an animal within the park from a public road outside the park.

DOC Golden Bay area manager John Mason said there had been three instances in the past six months of deer being shot near the public campground's entrance.

"This illegal and unsafe hunting activity has to stop," he said.

"Shooting deer at night in public areas is dangerous, and it is particularly reckless when carried out close to camping areas where people are likely to be."

Mr Mason said this was clear from the tragic incident near Turangi at Labour Weekend.

Lower Hutt teacher Rosemary Ives was accidentally shot dead by a hunter while brushing her teeth at a campsite.

The hunter is alleged to have been spotlighting from a nearby road, and fired at Ms Ives thinking she was a deer.

Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson said that just 24 hours after Ms Ives was killed, a DOC staff member camping at Butchers Flat in the Marlborough Sounds dodged bullets when a vehicle drove by.

Wairarapa DOC staff also received complaints the same weekend of spotlighting within 50 metres of a hut.

Mr Mason said hunting in darkness was prohibited on public conservation land, and hunting was not allowed at any time in the Totaranui campground area.

"The campground is popular with people staying most nights, and over the peak summer holiday period it is full, with up to 850 campers a night."

In the May 18 incident, campground staff heard shots around 4.50am, and found the man and his vehicle on the road to the campground and two shot stags about 50m away, on national park land.

The man's rifle and ammunition were seized by DOC staff.

In two later incidents, the remains of gutted deer and a foetus were found near the Totaranui road away from the campground.

Campground staff both times found signs of a fallen animal on grassed areas and vehicle tracks, indicating that deer had been shot and a vehicle used to take the carcasses away.

Mr Mason said that in the most recent incident, a camper heard a shot between 11pm and midnight and told staff the next morning. At the time, about 130 people were staying at the campground.

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