



## PRESS RELEASE

### Challenging winter season for Mt Ruapehu: summer season confirmed

**Mt Ruapehu, 18 September 2020:** COVID-19 Alert Level restrictions have contributed to a challenging winter season for Mt Ruapehu, like many other tourism businesses around the country.

Ruapehu Alpine Lifts Chairman Murray Gribben says, "Climate change and operating on a volcano present challenges every year, however COVID-19 has made things even more difficult.

"Adapting our processes and procedures to operate in the new COVID-19 environment has required our teams and guests to be patient and flexible which we are extremely grateful for. We remind ourselves every day that we are extremely fortunate to be able to operate under COVID-19 Alert Level 1 and 2, which is something the board, management and staff do not take for granted."

Murray adds that RAL's COVID-19 affected financial forecasts weren't strong but the great news is that bank funding has now been secured through until November 2021 ensuring that the 2020/21 summer season and 2021 winter season can go ahead.

"This is great news particularly with summer on our doorstep and Sky Waka gondola being a major tourism attraction and income earner all year round, not just in winter. It means that we can now say with certainty that the Sky Waka will be open during the summer season."

RAL CEO Jono Dean says, "It's been a challenging time for the RAL team who have worked hard to deliver a ski season, while at the same time facing uncertainty with their own jobs and concern about COVID-19 and their own health and that of their families.

"It's great that we've been able to offer so many Kiwis a chance to get out in the fresh air and snow and dust off the COVID blues. We're hopeful of a move to Alert Level 1 soon so even more people can enjoy the last 6 weeks of snow."

It's been a 2020 ski season unlike any other. COVID-19 to one side, the start to this season saw warm weather, limited ability to make snow and minimal natural snowfall. This meant the experience was limited and it has only been since August that Mt Ruapehu has been able to offer top to bottom skiing and riding at both ski areas.

Since the beginning of July, more than 215,000 manuhiri (guests) have been welcomed to the maunga. "Our guest numbers are ahead of where we were for the same period in 2019 with one less month of operations. The key factor driving this increase compared to 2019 has been the sightseeing guests on Sky Waka," Murray says.

"These sightseeing numbers have doubled over the same period in 2019. This growth is significant for RAL and our region, especially with the limited snow offering at the start of this season."

Murray says that there are still some challenging times ahead but RAL is committed to continuing to operate and update its facilities.

"RAL's company capital structure is unusual. We're a limited liability company, but with shareholders that cannot receive any benefit other than RAL reinvesting any profits back into the ski fields.

"In more recent times, those profits have simply not been enough to adequately reinvest in our lift infrastructure – while we have made good progress at Whakapapa we are well behind at Tūroa and we need both ski fields to be at a higher standard.

"We are commencing a process reviewing our sources of capital. We expect there to be changes but we enter this review with an expectation that both fields continue to operate."

Check [www.mtruapehu.com](http://www.mtruapehu.com) and Facebook for the latest updates

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