



27 October 2023

Steve Hill  
Chief Executive  
Clutha District Council  
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### **Clutha District Council must respect speech rights and allow billboards**

Dear Mr Hill,

1. The Free Speech Union is a registered trade union with a mission to fight for, protect, and expand New Zealanders' rights to freedom of speech, conscience, and intellectual inquiry. We support the right for landowners to erect billboards on their own property to advocate for issues that are important to them. Expression of this kind is common, and a healthy feature of a democratic society.
2. Members of our union who are landowners in South Otago have complained to us that Clutha District Council is proposing to charge/has already implemented a permit fee of \$1,200 for private landowners who have erected billboards on their property along the fenceline bordering roads. \$1,200 is prohibitively expensive and will cause existing billboards to be taken down. It would likely also prevent future ones from being erected.
3. We consider this an unjustified limitation of the speech rights of landowners and other private citizens who choose to contract with them to put up billboards on their property.
4. We have been told that this is in the name of road safety. Drivers encounter many billboards and signs on the sides of roads that don't pose an excessive threat to road safety. We accept it is possible the concern for road safety is genuine. We believe it is also possible a permit of this kind, and cost, could be used as an excuse to suppress the speech rights of Clutha ratepayers.
5. Would you please provide comment on the following questions:
  1. Is it correct that the Council has proposed/implemented a permit fee of \$1,200 to erect billboards on private land?
  2. Why is a permit fee required for those erecting billboards on their own land?
  3. Why has the fee been set at \$1,200?
  4. What costs is the Council seeking to cover through this charge?
  5. What is the road safety issue, and what evidence exists that road signs present an unacceptable danger?
  6. Does the Council accept that private individuals possess the right to express themselves freely, not least of all on their own land?

6. I look forward to your response on this matter. Where necessary, please consider these questions as a LGOIMA request.

Yours faithfully,

**Free Speech Union (New Zealand) Inc.**



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