**Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Marakura Yacht Club, Te Anau Manapouri Highway, Te Anau on Friday 15th December 2017, following the AGM.**

**Present**: Graeme Watson (Chair) Chris Owen

Paul Stenning Russel Graham

Dave Harris Chris Frisby

Corey Carston Cyril Gilroy (Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu)

Ray Waghorn Ken Cochrane

Bevan McNaughton. (Co-opted).

**In attendance:**

Z Moss (Manager). J Smyth, E Garrick, C Stewart, W Jarvie (Officers).

H Angus (Fiordland Compliance)

C Mason (Minutes).

**Members of the public**: 5 x members of the public attended.

**Welcome:**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 8.40pm and welcomed those present.

**Apologies:**

***Resolved Graham/Owen that apologies be received & sustained from Fred Inder & Mike Hartstonge***. Carried.

**Conflicts of Interest with items on the agenda:**

There were no conflicts of interest advised to the Chairman.

If any conflicts should arise during the meeting Councillors were to let the Chairman know before any discussion began.

**Health & Safety:**

The health & safety report for the period 1st October – 3oth November 2017 was attached to the agenda for consideration.

All known hazards were listed in the Southland Health & Safety Plan.

***Resolved Watson/Stenning that the Health & Safety Report to 30th November 2017 be received***. Carried.

**Minutes of the meeting held 19th October 2017.**

Corey Carston noted that he was at the last meeting held in Bluff, and Mike Hartstonge had an apology in for that meeting.

***Resolved Harris/Owen that with the above corrections the minutes of the meeting held 19th October 2017 were a true and accurate record.*** Carried.

**Matters arising from Minutes:**

**Waituna Stream fish deaths:**

Cr Waghorn expressed his disappointment that he saw nothing done about the hundreds of trout and kokopu that had died at Waituna, after he had bought it up at the October meeting. He said he had taken flack also from a lot of anglers who fished Waituna and would no longer eat the fish caught there. He wanted to know what Fish & Game were doing about it. Why did they miss the chance to find out what it was? He said next time he would go straight to the Southland Times about it.

The Chairman noted to the meeting that it was imperative to notify Fish & Game & Environment Southland immediately, if this type of event occurred. Not much later after the event. Also, it was very helpful to take as many photos as possible and supply all the information known.

The manager referred to the staff report that documented what had been done & said that after receiving varied reports of the numbers of dead trout observed in the Waituna Stream he had followed it up after the October meeting with the landowner who had first observed them. In total the landowner stated that it was not hundreds but was probably around 40. This was certainly higher than the usual deaths we would have expected to observe after spawning. He was unaware that other fish species were also involved. He made the point that it would have been easier to respond if Councillor Waghorn had contacted him directly, rather than waiting until the next meeting.

Observations of a couple of the dead trout still in the stream showed symptoms that appeared consistent with a chemical burn to their eyes. Environment Southland staff were contacted along with staff at NIWA and Cawthron, with a view to analysing a sample of the trout to try and determine pathology of the legions. A sample trout was collected and couriered to NIWA. No results were available yet from NIWA.

Zane said that after talking to the landowner, it seemed there may have been an individual event in a side stream of the Creek. Once the juvenile trout had hatched electrofishing surveys would be conducted to try and determine, through a process of elimination, where any chemicals may have entered the Creek. Macroinvertebrate samples would also be taken. Hopefully this would give us a clearer picture of what had occurred and where.

Cr Carston added that he had caught a lot of fish in Waituna this year and he was pleased to report they had all been in very good condition.

**Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit list & automatic payments since the last meeting, licence sales progress, correspondence reports and the actual to budget progress were attached to the agenda for Council’s consideration.

**Correspondence Reports:**

The Chairman read out a letter from Family Works Southland asking for support for the Buddy Programme, by way of providing complimentary fishing licences for 75 adult buddies and little buddies. Consideration by the Council followed.

After discussions, while the Council admired the positive influence of the programme on these children’s lives, they observed that the children that the programme covered were already eligible for a free fishing licence, as they were under 12yrs old. Further to that, if an adult assisting did not already have a fishing licence themselves, they did not actually need one to assist a child learning to fish.

Also past experience had shown that if the adult was not an experienced angler themselves it was unlikely they would be able to adequately supervise or mentor a child and actually fish themselves, without neglecting the child. Children learning always had plenty of tangles that required attention.

A Group based activity was another option under a Group licence, that the organisation could consider.

The request for free adult licences for the individual adult Buddies was declined.

**Staff Report:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

**Fish in Schools:**

This successful programme was completed again for the year with schools releasing their fish before the Xmas break. Teachers had given positive feedback on the programme. Large salmon had been donated to the schools by Sandfords, which were dissected in class and then cooked for the students & teachers during the release of the fish. Staff also spoke about water quality, salmon life cycles and fish physiology during the releases. The programme would be ongoing again next year.

**Ranger Training:**

On 25th & 26th November 2017, Southland hosted a Ranger training course for Southland & Otago Honorary Rangers at Tautuku. Cert Systems gave refresher training to those attendees.

**Fiordland Compliance:**

Hamish Angus has taken up the CCD advocacy position in Fiordland again this summer. This role was jointly funded by MPI & F&G with ES contributing a smaller amount as well. During the CCD advocacy work Hamish checked the compliance of anglers in the Fiordland Region & Te Anau basin for F&G, hence our contribution.

**Licence Administration:**

The Manager was involved in the contract renewal meeting for our licence administration. Eyede, the current provider had been administering the licence system since 2005. The meeting agreed to source external advice from alternate IT providers with comparable systems. It was important to do that to make sure the large administration costs were giving F&G value for money. The licence system had evolved from paper licence books and manual input to a full online point of sale system. The next step was the development of an App that supported electronic licences.

**NZ Council Issues:**

Cr Stenning said the last NZ Council meeting was held on the 24th November 2017. The NZ Council visited key areas of the F&G Wellington Region, including the Rangitikei River.

* Lake Wairarapa – hunters were very engaged in habitat work there.
* The meeting had a visit form the Minister of Conservation, Eugenie Sage and her staff. The Minister acknowledged that F&G advocacy had been a valued & recognised contribution. Her advice was F&G needed to continue to advocate for healthy waterways and look at making savings to do that.
* Legal expenditure was approved for Ward Ranch vs DoC & A/W F&G-$30,000, Section 128 review of R/C’s, A/W F&G-$50,000, historic mining privilege takes Otago F&G reserves approved $150,000, Kye Burn E/C Hearing $85,000-Otago F&G, HB Regional Policy Plan change process $30,000, lease for new premises Taranaki $13,500.
* A vehicle purchase for the South Island Communications Advisor was approved.
* Discussion on Regional Managers pay structure occurred.
* Martin Taylor, new CE, would continue with representation with the New Zealand Landcare Trust.
* NZ Council would prepare a revised guide licence proposal for submission to the MoC by the end of February. Fishing Guides Association and interested F&G Councils (Otago, Southland, West Coast, Nelson/Marlborough) would also receive a copy of the draft submission.
* Matthew Hall updated the Council on the achievements and points discussed at the successful two-day Salmon Symposium. Eugene Sage would be formally thanked for her time and address to the Symposium.

**Release of Captive Reared Mallards:**

The subject of captive reared mallards was a growing practice in the North Island, as a means of augmenting wild populations, and had generated diverse opinion on its legal & ethical position. NZ Council had a wish to develop a F&G policy and or guidelines on the issue to determine whether F&G was supportive of and wished to promote the practise or not. NZC had prepared a memo paper for discussion by Regions and asked for feedback on 5 x questions set out on page 7 of the memorandum by 1st March 2018 for further discussion by NZ Council.

NZ Fish & Game had also commissioned an independent review, by Dr Murray Williams, of the potential pros and cons of releasing captive reared mallards in NZ. That report was distributed to the regions with the memo.

Cr Cochrane asked what the legalities were before discussions, as DoC issued permits to allow this without consulting with F&G. What is the point of discussions if we have no input into the issuing of permits for the activity.

Jacob replied that legally speaking, people could raise mallards, subject to holding a permit issued by DoC. His belief was that given F&G ‘s Statutory role, in terms of management of game populations, we should be consulted in relation to those permits. However, there were other legal issues as well e.g. people could sell the birds but not the right to shoot those birds. According to the report by Dr Williams there were other significant issues as well. F&G needed to discuss the appropriateness of the activity, to have a view on it.

Cr Stenning clarified and said that if F&G approved the release of captive reared mallards as a tool for wildlife populations, then we were supporting DoC. If we did not support it then we would be approaching the Minister about it.

The 5 questions asked of Regions were:

As a precursor to drafting policy, NZ Fish & Game needed to determine what its position was in relation to the following matters:

* 1. Is Fish & Game supportive of releasing CRMs as a tool to augment wild populations?
  2. Is Fish & Game supportive of releasing CRMs as a tool that could be used to hasten the recovery of wild populations that are at low levels, as a consequence for example, of a series of very poor breeding seasons or serious botulism outbreaks arising from climatic conditions, or over harvesting?
  3. Does Fish & Game support the concept of ‘put and take’ operations where CRMs are released for the principal purpose of providing an immediate hunting opportunity?
  4. If the latter is something Fish & Game wishes to facilitate, support or promote, would we accept the development of commercial enterprises run along the lines of many upland game operations, or would we require ‘put and take’ operations to be of a non-commercial nature only? [An argument to consider is if Fish & Game allows commercial pheasant/quail/partridge hunting, should it not also allow commercial exploitation of mallards or other gamebirds and change the law to enable this if necessary?].
  5. If Fish & Game allows release of ‘put and take’ operations, would we wish to see the birds hunted in a similar way to how wild mallards are hunted now, or would we be accepting of the upland game equivalent of ‘driven hunts’, where birds are encouraged to fly over hunters from point A to point B, or some other approach?

Once these questions have been answered, and any others that might be raised, policy, criteria, and conditions or controls could be developed.

Discussions followed with the results to the questions as follows:

1. No – Southland did not support this. (Report did not support this & Southland did not need to augment populations).
2. Yes – Southland supported if directly managed by Fish & Game on a needs basis only.
3. No – Southland did not support “put and take” operations.
4. No – Southland did not support this.
5. No – Southland did not support this.

Cr Stenning commented on his positive outlook re the NZ Council meetings and the new Minister and passed on her comments that Fish & Game needed to keep issues of water quality and habitat in the foreground. Parliament were always looking at subjects that were in the public eye and the issues that affected them.

**General Business:**

**2018-2019 Game Season Regulations:**

A staff report and recommendations for the 2018 Game season regulations was attached to the agenda for Council’s consideration.

Cr Cochrane had added a discussion document to the agenda on game regulations for Council to consider as a way forward in the future, to use the science and data collected during the mallard research study for the benefit of licence holders. He said that the easiest & most cost-effective way to do that was to consider changes to the hunting regulations.

He had suggested for discussion that to help assist the survival rate of hen birds, we could reduce the harvest numbers of hens by having a points system in the 2nd & 3rd month of the season that encouraged the harvest of male birds instead of hen birds. This would not affect the opening weekend or 1st month of the season regulations.

Cr Stenning said that while it had a good feel factor he was not convinced that this would actually make a difference to the breeding population, given the small numbers of hunters, hunting in that period. Overseas data did not suggest this would make a difference to populations. It had to be remembered that older drakes were more successful breeders, than younger birds. We were also trying to simplify regs and be more consistent with other regions.

Cr Cochrane said that with 15-20% of our hens predated on the nest, this must lead to an imbalance of males versus females eventually. Where was the tipping point? His rationale said that this system would put possibly up to 6,000 hen birds on the nest at the start of each breeding season. Surely that would help offset the 15-20% predation of hens.

Zane Moss said it would certainly send a signal to hunters, but he was unsure just how that would be received by them. We could start by asking hunters during the game surveys this year if they would support that idea and then look closer at the harvest data to get more information.

After discussions on the 2018 regulations:

**Mallard/Grey hybrids:**

***Resolved Cochrane/Stenning that the bag limit for the 2018 game season mallard/grey hybrids for the opening weekend be 20 birds per day and 10 birds per day for the rest of the 3-month season.* Carried.**

**Paradise Shelduck:**

***Resolved Graham/Stenning that the bag limit for the 2018 game season for paradise shelduck be 6 birds per day with season length as for other waterfowl.*** ***Subject to counts in January***. Carried.

**Shoveler Duck:**

***Resolved Graham/Stenning that the daily bag limit for Shoveler duck be 2 birds per day with season length as for other waterfowl***. Carried.

**Black Swan:**

***Resolved Stenning/Frisby that the bag limit for black swan be 3x birds per day with season length as for other waterfowl*.** Carried.

Cr Frisby suggested a permitted cull be allowed in problem areas e.g. properties close to estuaries, during the season.

Zane referred to Phil Liver’s, Landcare Research study on the black swans in conjunction with Iwi, currently occurring in Southland & other South Island areas, where census and modelling was happening. While the research was being undertaken it was probably not a good time to have a cull.

**Pukeko:**

***Resolved Graham/Owen that the bag limit for Pukeko remain at zero.*** Carried.

Bevan McNaughton reported he had been asked by some hunters if one pukeko per day could be allowed for opening weekend only, as there appeared to be more birds around.

Cyril Gilroy said that there were still some concerns from Iwi re the pukeko populations.

Zane noted that populations in Southland were not robust and did not justify a harvest. Also management costs made it uneconomical to monitor these birds. The recommendation was a zero-bag limit.

**Upland Game:**

***Resolved Gilroy/Stenning that the bag limits and season length for upland game remain the same as last season.*** Carried.

**Other regulations:**

***Resolved Frisby/Owen that all other regulations stay the same as last season.*** Carried.

**Items for next Council meeting:**

Cr Owen reported he had been asked on multiple occasions “are the fish safe to eat”, particularly in the lower & mid reaches of the rivers. We sold licences with the expectations that a fish would be eaten. How safe were they? We had no data on that. Licence holders were questioning if the fish were safe to eat.

Zane said that if we did have a general concern we would raise it with Public Health Southland.

He suggested it would be useful to have a “literature review” of the toxic alga, phormidium (blue green algae) in relation to trout, so staff and Councillors were better informed. It had been in the news media recently. Zane noted that unless point sources were going into the river generally algal blooms were not an issue for the palatability of trout.

Cr Cochrane referred to the Canterbury 3x lakes that had recently been closed to fishing due to unusual rashes found on the fish. He reported that a few weeks ago there was an effluent spill in the lower Makarewa, and ES had put out a notice not to eat shellfish or take whitebait from it. So there were some problems occurring with environmental changes going on.

Zane said that a “literature review” looking at the risks associated with algal blooms in our rivers and the effects on trout should be available at the next meeting. Hopefully it would be reassuring. If the review did raise any issues we could take it from there.

Councillors agreed that it would be good to have that information as a first step.

There was no further business and the meeting was closed at 10.08 pm followed by supper.

Chairman\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_