

Memo

To: North Canterbury Fish & Game Council
From: Chief Executive
Date: April 2020
Subject: Angling Regulations Review Proposal

Angling Regulations Review for 2020/21 fishing season

A number of angling regulation changes are proposed for consultation with licence holders for the upcoming fishing season. This document describes the proposed changes developed with consideration to North Canterbury Fish & Game Councils strategic priorities ¹.

There are three main themes in the proposed regulation changes recommended for consultation with licence holders, these are:

1. The need to understand more about angling use and satisfaction in our backcountry fisheries
2. Improved methods to manage the harvest of our wild sea-run salmon fishery
3. Increasing angler opportunity and participation, particularly during the winter period

The proposal was formed with guidance from the central purpose of Fish and Game Councils, which is to *“manage, maintain and enhance the sports fish and game resource in the recreational interests of anglers”* while at the same having regard to *“provisions which maximise recreational opportunities for anglers”*.

Theme 1. Managing Pressure Sensitive Fisheries (of which backcountry fisheries are one type)

Many of the region’s backcountry fisheries² have come under increasing angling pressure in recent years. There are many factors leading to this. The popularity of social media has increased in the last few years. There are now many social media platforms where the fishing in these backcountry fisheries is promoted, sometimes unintentionally.

The backcountry rivers of North Canterbury have gained a reputation as some of the best brown trout trophy fisheries in New Zealand. In part because these rivers regularly produce fish in the 10-15 lb weight range every season. In mouse plague years, such as the season we have just had, the

¹ For details see North Canterbury Fish & Game Council Statement of Purpose and Priorities for the period 2019-2021, which can be found <https://fishandgame.org.nz/northcanterbury>

² A type of recreational fisheries often referred to as ‘pressure sensitive fisheries’

number of trophy sized trout often increase markedly. This has also been well publicised on social media platforms.

Backcountry fisheries with reputations for trophy trout fishing have become increasingly popular both with resident and non-resident anglers. Cheaper air fares and strong overseas economies in parts of Europe and the United States has seen sustained increases in overseas visitors to New Zealand. Guided fly fishing has also increased in North Canterbury rivers, but anecdotal evidence from anglers suggests that it is unguided non-resident angler use that has increased the most. There is concern from the angling community that this had led to conflict with, or displacement of resident anglers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the government to introduce a border closure for New Zealand. It is likely that this border closure will extend into the 2020/21 fishing season. This would cause a dramatic decrease in non-resident angler activity on our backcountry rivers. However, this decrease in numbers is likely to be of a short-term nature. There will be a big push from the tourism sector to attract overseas visitors once the border controls are relaxed. Additionally, even if it does take the world economy years to recover completely from the pandemic it is worth noting that 50% of non-resident licence holders are from Australia³. These non-resident anglers may still be able to travel to New Zealand relatively cheaply and easily before long.

The difficulty with backcountry rivers is measuring the amount of angling use. This year game trail cameras were trialled in effort to capture angling activity on sections of the upper Hope and Waiau rivers. While this method has some potential, it is reliant on dedicating staff time to run the project. Angler surveys were also carried out by staff and a volunteer in the Lewis Pass area. This too was very time consuming for those involved. Phone surveys have been trialled in the past, but sampling from our licence holder database to ask specific questions about specific backcountry rivers has not been successful.

Most other regions in the South Island (along with the Wellington Fish & Game region) have dedicated a number of rivers to be backcountry fisheries, where anglers are required to get a "Backcountry Licence Endorsement". This endorsement does not yet come at an additional cost to the angler, but it is a requirement that any angler fishing these rivers must have a Backcountry Licence Endorsement, in addition to their whole season licence. The endorsement is available to all whole season licence categories, including local area but is not available to any short-term licence holders. It has been proposed that non-resident anglers may eventually need to pay an additional fee for their endorsement.

The purpose of designating high-quality fisheries as "Backcountry" or "Pressure Sensitive Fisheries", is in part the ability to capture and maintain a database of anglers who specifically fish these rivers. This is a valuable tool for gathering information on angling use and perception of our high-quality but pressure sensitive backcountry river fisheries. Without a dedicated database it is very time consuming and costly to monitor backcountry angler behaviour and satisfaction levels using other survey methods. This is especially the case with non-resident anglers and angling guides, which together have over the last decade been a large user group of the region's wilderness fisheries.

³ For details see <https://fishandgame.org.nz/assets/Uploads/National-Anglers-Survey-2015-16.pdf>

Having North Canterbury join the existing Backcountry Fisheries management regime and feed into the national Backcountry Licence Endorsement database would mean we (and others) can survey users more effectively, with little or no cost involved.

Proposed regulations changes for the 2020/21 angling season

It is recommended the Council initiate a trial and designate the following rivers in the North Canterbury region to be appointed as Pressure Sensitive Fisheries, which will require anglers wanting to fish them to get a Backcountry Licence Endorsement.

1. Hurunui River South Branch (upstream of the North Esk River confluence).

The South Branch is a popular backcountry fishery. The lower reaches, near the confluence with the North Branch of the Hurunui River, are easily accessible and heavily fished from the Lake Sumner Road. The North Canterbury Backcountry Licence Endorsement would target those anglers fishing upstream of the North Esk River confluence. To get access to this reach requires some effort either by way of crossing private land by permission, or using a helicopter. Currently the National Angler Survey provides no angling use on the South Branch. It has been included in a general upper Hurunui catchment, however for the next National Angler Survey this should be amended.

2. Hurunui River North Branch (from signpost circa 500 metres upstream of Lake Sumner).

A popular backcountry river which has gained a reputation for large brown trout. Access is by 4WD from the end of Lake Sumner Road to a carpark just past Lock Katrine. From there it is walking or mountain biking access to the Hurunui swing bridge. The river segment below the swing bridge to the lake has been left out of the proposal as it is popular with anglers fishing mainly from boats to also fish the river as it enters Lake Sumner. This part would be too difficult to manage as a designated backcountry fishery. Like the South Branch, the Hurunui above Lake Sumner does not yet have any specific National Angler Survey data.

3. Upper Hope River (upstream of the confluence with the Boyle River).

The Hope River is a very highly regarded backcountry fishery that is popular with non-resident anglers and fishing guides. The lower section from the Boyle confluence downstream to union with the Waiau River is easily accessible from State Highway 7, so is not part of this proposed endorsement. The reach upstream from the Boyle confluence is accessible by foot from the Windy Point carpark. From here anglers fish right up beyond the St Jacobs Hut. Access is also by helicopter in the St Jacobs area, or vehicle access through private land. The Hope River does have National Angler Survey data. Angler use has fluctuated, but the last survey of 750 angler days in 2014/15 is the highest, and indicative of escalating pressure.

4. Upper Waiau River (upstream of the confluence with the Hope River).

This is another river with a reputation for trophy brown trout fishing. Apart from helicopter, there are only two access points from a 4WD vehicle. These are through the Edwards or Malings passes. It takes considerable effort to access these areas. There is no angler use data as the National Angler Survey does not yet differentiate the upper reaches from the rest of the Waiau River.

Theme 2. Increasing Angling Opportunity and Participation.

Currently the only capacity to increase angler opportunity for trout fishing using regulation changes is to increase season lengths and increase the number and/or sections of waterways that can use all methods. This involves providing a winter season on a variety of waters including river and lake fisheries. There is currently a mixture of rules for winter fishing on the mainstem rivers and a small number of lakes. The easiest way to propose the changes is the table below which shows the current and proposed regulations.

Proposed regulations changes for the 2020/21 angling season

Table 1. Comparison of current and proposed angling regulation changes intended to increase opportunity and participation in the North Canterbury Fish & Game region.

Waterbody	Current fishing season	Proposed fishing season, method and daily limit.
Lake Coleridge	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April & 1 June to 31 August	All year, all methods, 4 sports fish in total (trout or salmon).
Lake Selfe	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April & 1 June to 30 September	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Lake Lyndon	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April & 1 June to 31 August	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Lake Pearson	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April & 1 June to 30 September	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Lake Taylor	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April & 1 June to 30 September	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Lake Guyon	1 st Saturday of November to 30 April	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Rakaia River	Downstream of Coleridge Tailrace confluence to SH1 winter season is 1 May to 30 September, trout only but catch and release. Below SH1 closed for winter season.	All year, all methods and 2 trout from Coleridge Tailrace ⁴ to the mouth.
Waimakariri River	Downstream of Staircase Stream to SH1 winter season is 1 May to 30 September, trout only but catch and release. Below SH1 closed for winter season.	All year, all methods and 2 trout from Staircase Stream ⁴ to the mouth.

⁴ Alternative winter fishery boundary markers could be the Rakaia Gorge Bridge (SH77) and Waimakariri Gorge Bridge (near Gorge Hill).

Ashley / Rakahuri River	Downstream of Ashley Gorge Road to SH1 winter season is 1 May to 30 September, trout only but catch and release. Below SH1 closed for winter season.	All year, all methods and 2 trout from Ashley Gorge Road to the mouth.
Hurunui River	Downstream of confluence with South Branch to mouth winter season is 1 May to 30 September, trout only but catch and release.	Downstream of outlet from Lake Sumner to mouth, all year, all methods, 2 trout.
Waiau River	Downstream of confluence with Hope River to mouth winter season is 1 May to 30 September, trout only but catch and release.	Downstream of confluence with Hope River to mouth, all year, all methods, 2 trout.
Te Waihora / Lake Ellesmere	1 October to 30 April	All year, all methods, 2 trout.
Selwyn/Waikirikiri River (downstream of State Highway 77 Bridge)	1 October to 30 April	Selwyn/Waikirikiri River (downstream of State Highway 77 Bridge), all year, all methods, 2 trout.

Theme 3. Implement a season bag limit regulation for sea run salmon

The sea run Chinook salmon fishery on the East Coast of the South Island has experienced record low returns in most all rivers in recent years. Following the Sea Run Salmon Symposium in Ashburton in 2017, the newly formed National Sea-Run Salmon Committee,⁵ under direction from New Zealand Fish & Game Council, requested that South Island Fish & Game Councils find ways to reduce the harvest of wild sea-run salmon, in order to rebuild the wild salmon populations.

Anglers have been strongly encouraged to limit their season catch to a maximum of four sea-run salmon. Angler harvest data and model predictions indicate that introducing a season limit that restricts each individual salmon angler's total allowable harvest to a defined number of sea-run salmon for the season is likely to allow an increase in spawning salmon, which in Canterbury may be one of the key freshwater components having an impact on the declining salmon fishery.

There are many options available for implementing a season limit for salmon. One of the simplest just requires angler to fill in a harvest record card as soon as a sea-run salmon is caught. Anglers caught in possession of a sea-run salmon without having filled in the harvest card may be issued an infringement notice or instant fine.

From a fishery management perspective, the season limit offers better control over the number of sea-run salmon caught by anglers and the number therefore left to spawn. With

⁵ The 'National Sea Run Salmon Committee' is a sub-committee of the New Zealand Fish and & Game Council.

the current state of the salmon fishery, ensuring sufficient numbers of wild salmon survive to spawn is a key priority for Fish & Game.

In addition to helping the continued existence of the wild salmon fishery, a season limit also offers direct benefits to the majority of anglers. Firstly, the recommended season bag limit is unlikely to affect most anglers. Secondly, while expert salmon anglers may find their harvest reduced, this will benefit those yet to reach the season limit. Every fish not caught by the more experienced anglers is one more available to someone who isn't an expert.

The current state of the wild fishery demands further improvement in the spawning population size and would likely justify a very low season bag limit. Access to a season bag as a control on harvest only became available in early 2020 and successful implementation of a sea-run salmon season limit test in Canterbury area will require significant administrative and enforcement commitment, and a period of adjustment for salmon anglers.

Proposed regulations changes for the 2020/21 angling season

Staff advice the Council consult with anglers regarding that:

A season bag limit of 4 sea run salmon per angler and a daily regional limit of 2 sea-run salmon per angler, be introduced in Canterbury (i.e. across both North Canterbury AND Central South Island Fish & Game regions), AND that the customary sea-run salmon angling season (1 Oct – 30 April) is also reinstated from 1 October 2020.