

ANGLING NEWS



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BIGGER TROUT ABOUT

After a couple of tough starts to the previous two seasons, this year we're off to a flier with much more settled weather and trout in full-on feeding mode as they look to put on weight quickly after spawning. While the winter was one of the wettest we've experienced in decades in the lower North Island, our spring has been glorious so far and even the winds that often affect this part of the world haven't yet prevailed.

All that rain and snow over winter has also set the rivers and aquifers up really well for summer too, meaning there'll be good base-flows through the critical dry part of the year when rivers and trout can suffer the impacts of over-extraction for irrigation. The floods have cleaned the riverbeds and set the waterways up well and they're looking superb.

Combine this with trout that haven't been fished at for months and we've got some really exciting action in the offing, and those anglers who are getting out and about making the most of it are having a ball!

It's fair to say that our drift dive surveys from last season revealed fewer fish in some key rivers (though numbers were only marginally down and still comparatively high). The upshot is that we recorded greater numbers of larger trout than in previous years.

Notably, we encountered some extremely large browns in the Hutt River, some well over the 10lb mark. To have a fishery of this quality so close to three major urban centres – Upper Hutt, Lower Hutt and Wellington – is staggering. Look out for resources we're currently producing to help anglers make the most of the trout fishing right on their doorsteps.

While the trophy trout potential of the Rangitikei is hardly a secret, staff were staggered by the sheer number of big rainbows and browns seen during summer surveys. As we've previously mentioned, this river is a jewel in our region's crown and one which all anglers should have on their bucket list to fish. Why not make this the year the one to catch a Rangitikei trout if you haven't already experienced it?

What we're hearing from anglers who have been out and about already this season is that with the higher flows the smaller streams are still holding good numbers of trout that are yet to drop back into the larger mainstem rivers. This is providing fun and exciting technical fishing in tight confines.

There are mixed reports on fish condition, with those on the western side of the ranges apparently taking a little longer to fatten after spawning (perhaps the result of a harsher winter on that coast) but the Wairarapa browns are already in peak condition. What's really interesting are reports that fish are already 'looking up' and taking dry flies this early in the season – something that will whet the appetites of die-hard fly fishers.

Also firing is the sea-run trout fishing which shows you don't have to race off to the headwaters for furious action. Sea-runs up to 6lb are being taken in the lower Ruamahanga as they chase the whitebait runs. There will be plenty of lower river action elsewhere in the region too, all the way through to mid-December. Spots to target are the lower reaches of the Hutt, or the numerous estuary areas on the Kapiti Coast.

We know many anglers hold off getting into their fishing until the weather traditionally settles around December, but all we can say is this season you're missing out if you aren't already on the water. We're off to a flier this fishing season and to be honest our fisher folk in this region are owed it. Get your licence, and get into it. Enjoy lower North Island angling at its best!

This well-conditioned 7lb brown was caught only a few weeks into the season. Photo: Michael Murphy



EARLY SEASON TACTICS

Whether you're fly fishing or spin fishing, early season often means higher flows like those we're experiencing in our lower North Island rivers at the moment.

Higher flows mean greater water velocity which, in turn, impacts turbidity or the amount of fine sediment that it stirred up. This obviously reduces water clarity and the fish's ability to spot food items.

It makes sense, then, to opt for a fly or spinner that is going to catch the trout's eye (and ultimately the trout).

Try using a fly with a 'hot spot' - basically a really unnatural colour on it to get the attention of the fish. This could be a fluorescent orange bead head, or a few wraps of hot pink thread around the end of the tail section of a standard fly pattern, for example.

Think a little outside the box with your fly selection and tying. These often 'whacky' looking flies work well early season because the trout aren't so wary.

Amid the higher flows prevalent during the first few months after Opening, you need to also think about getting down to where the fish are holding.

For fly anglers this could mean using a heavier rod and line set-up, as well as larger nymphs with more weight tied into them (this all helps casting in wind too).

Spin fishers will need to start off with weightier lures and pause more between casting and retrieving to give the spinner time to sink deeper.

CATCH THIS!

Check out our awesome short video on the Wellington Fish & Game region's stunning trout fishery.

Use your smart phone to scan the QR code (you made need to download one from an app store) and let the imagery whet your appetite for season ahead.



GET THE BEST BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Our rangers will have a much stronger presence this year, including in the backcountry. Make sure you have your new season licence on you, not in the car or back at home, every time you hit the water.

If you haven't yet got your licence, grab it online the easy way - a few quick clicks and you're "Licenced to Thrill" for another entire year.

Don't get caught short by purchasing one of the lesser licences and find out the hard way that you're very restricted in the angling you can do.

The Whole Season Licence is by far the best category offering the most flexibility and unrestricted freshwater fishing available. You can fish for the entire year - that's 365 days - for a staggeringly low cost of just 35c/day.

What other world-class recreational activity can you get for that?



The Tararua and Ruahine ranges offer challenging but stunning wilderness fishing. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



NEW SEASON BUCKET LIST

The Wellington Fish & Game region fishery is renowned as one of the most diverse in the country. From the Hutt River's world-class brown trout fishing bordered by an urban metropolis, to the isolated wilderness of the internationally famous Rangitikei headwaters, it would almost take a lifetime to fish all the rivers in between.

The sheer amount of fishable water can be quite daunting for newcomers and old hands alike, so here we've highlighted some 'bucket list' water to fish this season.

Wairapa Spring Creeks

Seek and you will find some quaint little waters in Wairapa seldom visited by other anglers. There are a myriad of tiny springs that pop up all over the Wairapa Plains and they all hold fish. Often it is very technical fishing in very tight confines, with delicate presentations on ultra-light gear because of the crystal-clear water. Beware, though, as the browns that inhabit these streams can get large and landing them is not easy.

Ruahine Backcountry

The weather can be pretty brutal in the Ruahines at times but get in on a good day and it's hard to beat fishing in the rugged but beautiful streams that have helped sculpt these ranges. A mixed rainbow/brown trout fishery in most streams offers variety and while numbers aren't huge the fish are generally in great condition and happy to oblige by accepting anglers' offerings. For quality sight fishing minus the pressure of other backcountry areas, the Ruahines are hard to beat.

Lake Wairarapa

Generally overlooked by most anglers, Lake Wairarapa offers plenty of fishing opportunity for anglers of all creeds. It supports a good population of brown trout (some of which are very large) as well as a thriving coarse fishery. Such variety means there's always likely to be some action, making it a great place to take the family for a fish with a high chance of success. Just make sure you go when there isn't a blow... this is no place for the faint hearted in a nor-wester.

Rangitikei Rainbows

Hardly needs introduction as a fishery given its international renown but some anglers are still daunted by the Rangitikei River's size and reputation. Don't be. There are fish throughout its length and often right where you park the car. But it is the upper reaches - around Mangaohane and Springvale and beyond - that are surprisingly easily accessible and offer the iconic fishing this river is famous for. You must experience it. Just don't forget your free backcountry licence endorsement for fishing the upper Rangitikei...

Hutt Sea-Runners

Here's another little 'secret' fishery tucked away right underneath Wellingtonian's noses. From October through to mid-December, when the whitebait are running, the lower reaches of the Hutt River (below Melling Bridge) play host to some ultra-fun sea run trout fishing. The fish aren't huge by South Island sea-run standards but these little silver Hutt bullets are exciting to catch as they slash through and after the whitebait. A great place to take the kids too as the trout will readily smash a spinning lure.

NEW RESOURCES FOR ANGLERS

Wellington Fish & Game wants anglers to get the best value out of their investment in a fishing licence.

That's why we're constantly developing resources and tools to try and help you catch more fish and experience the best the region has to offer. We've recently added a couple more brochures to the suite of information we have available free to anglers.

With the rise in catch and release practiced by anglers, 'Looking After You Catch' details how to best ensure any trout put back survives to fight another day. It includes how to get the fish in as fast as possible, as well as best practice for taking photos before release, and more.

Also new this season is our Hutt River access brochure. This has user-friendly maps with key features and routes to specific sections of the river identified, and even provides tips on how to best tackle the fishing in each.

WANT TO MEET OTHER ANGLERS?

The Wellington Fish & Game region is very fortunate to have an extensive and strong network of angling clubs - no matter where you are in our vast region, there's a club nearby. Clubs are a great way of meeting angling buddies, improving your skills through expert and experienced tuition, and learning local waters and techniques.

The clubs in our region are also fantastic supporters of Wellington Fish & Game and we greatly appreciate their voluntary input. If you want to join a club, or even just pop along to a meeting to see what it's all about, you can find a comprehensive list of clubs in our region and their contacts on the Wellington Fish & Game webpages, or call the office 06-359-0409.



WIN A NEW *Epic* ROD!

Fish & Game NZ magazine now has an online platform with heaps of great free info, articles and prizes.

Fancy a new Epic 'Kiwi Classic' fly rod worth \$1500?

Head on over to the Fish & Game NZ magazine website - www.fishandgamenz.co.nz - and find out how to enter... You'll also have heaps of awesome info at your fingertips including select features, columns and fly tying, gear reviews, accommodation and more.

And if you didn't get your pre-season Special Issue magazine, you'll find it on the website in its entirety. Don't forget to like the magazine on Facebook too - search 'Fish and Game NZ - Online'.

Hutt River sea-run brown trout caught on a whitebait imitation. Photo: Andrew Harding

SEA RUNS IN THE CITY

Another unsung feature of the remarkable Hutt River fishery is the sea-run trout that can be caught in the lower reaches around this time of year. Trout drop downstream into the lower reaches of rivers to chase the whitebait that run from the sea up to their breeding grounds between October and mid-December.

There are a number of rivers throughout the Wellington Fish & Game region that sport a sea-run trout population and the Hutt is one of them. Anywhere from Melling Bridge down to the mouth into Wellington Harbour is a good place to target these fish. And given there is superb access down both banks of the river in much of this lower reach you have options aplenty to find the trout.

Because the whitebait runs are quite tidal, the trout feeding activity is accordingly influenced by when large schools of bait are on the move. But when the trout are on the bite, they are really on and can be seen busting up balls of whitebait that flee the surging runs in great showers across the surface. Excitement plus!

A good hint is to fish the really big tides around the full moon. And watch for the whitebaiters. When they are on the river the 'bait are running... the trout won't be too far away. That said, there is always a population of sea-run trout in the lower reaches making the most of the abundance of rich food on offer in the tidal stretch of the river.

And what's so awesome about chasing these sea-runs is that the fishery suits any level of angling because the trout will just as readily take a silvery lure as they will a fly. Then there's always the added bonus of perhaps hooking a kahawai – action that will keep your kids well entertained.

So instead of beating a path to the backcountry with the hordes early season, get the whole family into some great sport, readily accessible, with a high chance of catching some good fish.



Finn Harding hooked up to a sea-run brown in the lower Hutt River. Photo: Andrew Harding

BACKCOUNTRY IN YOUR BACKYARD

Wellington and Hutt anglers must be the envy of the rest of the country's freshwater fishing population. Indeed, where else in the world, yet alone New Zealand, do you have backcountry-quality sight fishing mere minutes from three major population centres?

The Hutt River is a truly remarkable fishery, unrivalled perhaps anywhere. The sheer density of trout - 150 large fish per kilometre at last year's count - is staggering in its own right. But the fact that there is world-class sight fishing in the headwaters which is on par with, if not better than, other 'named' South Island rivers, all within easy striking distance of half a million people living in the Wellington region... that's just astounding!

The Hutt is one of the most intensively drift dived rivers in the Wellington Fish & Game region, with nine survey sites between Kaitoke Regional Park and Melling Bridge. Fish & Game communications and field officer Hamish Carnachan has been drift diving the Hutt for over four years now and says he is regularly astounded by both the number and size of trout in the system.

"The Hutt is a staggering trout fishery. When you think about the pressures it's under, flowing through two major cities, yet it still sustains a huge population of brown trout. What's more, every time we dive it we're gobsmacked by the size of some of the specimens we encounter."

Trout of trophy size are seen each year. Given that, combined with the crystal clear headwaters above Te Marua, it's surprising the river isn't overrun with anglers like many of the South Island waterways.

Fishing the top section, though, amongst the beech trees and the emerald green water, searching likely lies for surface feeding browns in high summer – you could easily be mistaken for thinking you're a world away from Wellington and the hustle and bustle of big city life. Who else can say they've got backcountry fishing in their backyard?



A large brown feeding in clear emerald water in the Hutt headwaters. Photo: Andrew Harding

LAKE WAIRARAPA - FORGOTTEN FISHERY

While Wellington has world-class river fisheries right from our northern boundary in the Kaimanawa Forest Park to the Rimutaka Range in the south, there are bugger-all still water angling opportunities, right? Wrong! Lake Wairarapa is only a short drive from central Wellington and despite first appearances it actually has some great fishing on offer. In fact, it's almost a forgotten fishery of the region.

Many who are familiar with the lake likely pass it off as a wild, dirty and daunting place. Sure, the weather can be atrocious, and the wind whips up the sediment in the shallow waterbody and makes it brown, but get it on the right day and you'll have a ball.

When the skies are blue and the wind has abated, the lake settles right down and good spin fishing can be had around the lake edge. When the water is coloured up from a blow, look to the numerous inflowing spring creeks and streams - trout seek refuge in the lower reaches, particularly when the lake warms in summer.

Another exciting prospect is finding a lee-shore and stalking the edge spotting trout and perch cruising the shallows. Both species will charge a streamer stripped erratically, or a nymph twitched off the bottom. And because of the good perch population, it's a great place to introduce kids to angling as well with a high catch rate.

Key places to target:

- Cast around the numerous inflowing springs and shoreline at Lake Domain, at the northern end. There are good perch numbers and trout can be caught here too.
- Lake Domain also offers access to the Tauherenikau delta, where good sized browns can be sight-fished in the lower reaches and slow backwaters. Drive as far as you can east to the small foot bridge, then walk around the shoreline to the delta.
- The Oporua Spillway adjacent to the Wairio stopbank is a great place to target trout and perch cruising flats-like shallows. You need no wind or a light southerly to fish this area effectively. There is a walkway at the end of the stop bank that provides access out to the shoreline.
- The Barrage Gates on the East West Access Road, at the southern end of the lake, provides exciting fishing for large browns, kahawai and occasionally some enormous carp can be spotted here to. Best when the gates are open. This site provides good access to the lower Ruamahanga as well.

Lake Wairarapa truly is an underutilised fishery offering something for all levels of angling ability. And it also pays to remember that it remains fishable when rivers aren't because of high flow. It's well worth anglers paying more attention to this forgotten fishery. You'll be surprised by the resource sitting right under your nose.

WHEN THE WEATHER TURNS

We all know the weather in the lower North Island can be extreme at this time of the season until spring abates and summer settles in. It's a fact of life for anglers that wind will plague the rivers on occasion and so too will freshes and high flows. This doesn't mean you have to stay inside and suffer. Far from it. While we'd all like to fish ideal conditions, the fact is that often you just have to make the most of the hand you're dealt... the alternative is no fishing.

Indeed, often when the rivers are up slightly, or the wind has driven fickle fishers from the water, trout will let down their guard and feed with abandon. Some of us have even had our best fishing on days that would force 95% of anglers to retreat! There are many ways you can deal with so-called 'bad' fishing condition as long as you're prepared to adapt.

Often the best bet to beat a blow or high flow and coloured rivers is to go heavy. Go up a few rod weights if fly fishing - the heavy line will drive better through the wind, and higher density lines will sink faster getting your flies down to where they need to be more quickly.

Switching to spinning is also a great option. Spinning lures are naturally heavy and so sink faster into the strike zone, and are easily lobbed into even the strong headwinds. Try mixing it up too with a bubble and fly combination - the weighted bubble offers the ease of casting with threadline gear and the flies are often more natural than large metal lures. That said, when water clarity is down due to a fresh, shiny lures stand out and can be far more effective because trout have less time to discern between artificial object and prey item.

If you're determined to stick to fly fishing in high flows here's a rule of thumb: If you stand knee-deep and can see your foot it's good to fish. Trout will ride up onto this clearer edge to feed and get out of the highest velocity water, which is generally in mid-stream. Often they can be spotted and stalked on the edge and this can provide productive and super exciting fishing as the low visibility allows the angler to sneak in really close.

If the main rivers are all really blown out and don't even have clear edge flow, don't despair. Look to the handful of lakes and spring creeks scattered around the region. Wairarapa has numerous spring creeks, many of which flow clear even after heavy rain, and Lake Wairarapa itself can fish well after rain and a strong blow. These unique all-weather fishing options are described elsewhere in our newsletter. For more advice though, call our office and we'll steer you in the right direction. Most importantly, don't feel you have to stay house-bound if the weather turns...

Some lures and flies that work well in high flow.



*Fish are attracted to the clear-water inflows at river deltas.
Photo: Hamish Carnachan*

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FISHING

With the Christmas break and summer school holidays only weeks away, now is the time to think about how you're going to keep the kids entertained. Why not take them fishing? Cheap and healthy thrills that could well lead to a life-long passion for angling and the outdoors...

Pretty much every stream and river you cross on your way out of Wellington to your favoured summer holiday spot has trout in it. So, pack the rods and a bit of gear and you've essentially got entertainment on tap. And on long road trips, a short half hour fishing stop at a likely looking spot is also a great way to break the journey.

Kids love fishing. They are genetically disposed to it. All they need is a bit of your time invested to ensure they can do the basics and they'll be away. There are plenty of places to take the whole family fishing in the Wellington Fish & Game region, but because most are around rivers vigilance is always required and it's best to let them do the angling while you supervise.

Spots to target include:

Hutt River - The Hutt is full of browns and kids can fish with bait to make success that much more likely. A worm under a bubble float will seldom fail. Spinners at the lower end early season will invariably be hit by sea-run browns chasing whitebait.

Lake Onoke - There's a great camping ground here and every chance of catching something, whether it's a sea-run brown trout, a yellow-eyed mullet or kahawai. There's even a chance of hooking a salmon which turn up periodically. Fish the outflow into Cook Straight on the incoming tide (but stay well back from the edge because of the strong currents).

Vinegar Hill - About as quintessential as Kiwi summer camping spots come, this little possie is just south of Mangaweka and provides good access to the Rangitikei where the kids can happily spin for small rainbows with every chance of success. Stay a night or use it as a rest stop... toilet facilities are on sight.

Lake Wairarapa - Only an hour from Wellington, Lake Domain at the northern end is a super spot for catching perch. These feisty sport fish readily take lures, bait or fly and can be found around the lake edge or congregated where the many small streams flow in. A great day trip for over the school holidays to break the boredom. Take a picnic; you may even return home with a feed - perch are very good eating!

Manawatu River - With good numbers of trout often found right in town (Fitzherbert Bridge vicinity) and ready public access along the true right bank, this a great spot to send the kids off with some spinning gear if they're old enough. Chances of success are high and it's relatively safe too as there's no need to wade or enter the water.

If you're taking your kids and partner fishing, please make sure you've got the right licence. A Family Season licence is the way to go. Kids aged 12 to 17 can fish by themselves for as little as \$25 for the whole season; under 12s still need a free licence. Check the website for information on finding the best fit licence for you and your family.

Lake Onoke in Wairarapa is a great place to take the kids for a chance at a sea-run trout or salmon, and there are always plenty of kahawai and yellow-eye mullet to keep the interest levels up.



Photo: Andrew Harding



DAM DEBACLE OVER?

Wellington Fish & Game anticipates the changes to the Crown Irrigation Investment announced by the new Government will be the final nail in the coffin for the Water Wairarapa dam proposal. The large-scale irrigation scheme would have doubled dairy cow numbers, placing even more pollution pressure on the Ruamahanga catchment. Water Wairarapa and Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), coerced by the former National Government's irrigation subsidies, spent over \$8 million of ratepayer and taxpayer money on consultants, reports and dam lobbyists.

When independent reports proved the scheme was financially unviable because of the high water costs, Water Wairarapa and GWRC moved to 'reshape' the proposal, arguing that it would mitigate climate change despite evidence proving dams actually compound the problems. Wellington Fish & Game has opposed the scheme because of the threats it poses to the waterways of Wairarapa and the trout fishery. We continue to advocate for alternative sustainable options for economic growth and adapting to future climate projections.

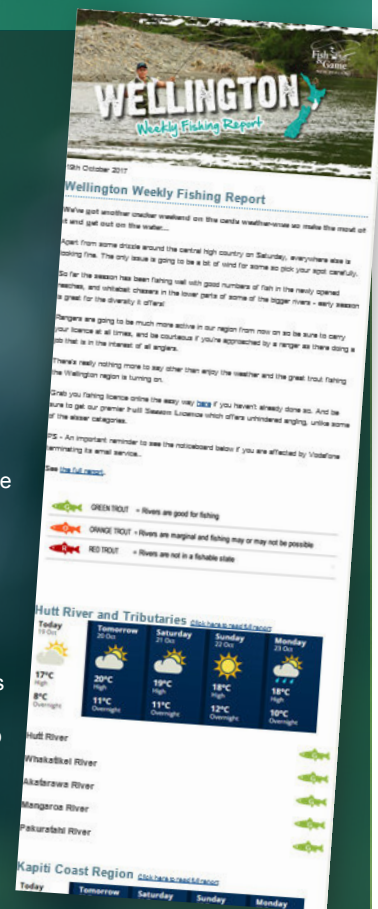
THE BEST ANGLING INTEL

Wellington Fish & Game provides its licence holders with the best angling intel around, a free service delivered weekly to you via email. Our Weekly Fishing Reports keep you up to date with the latest weather, the fishing conditions and live river flows.

There's also heaps of handy info like tips and fly tying, and how to handle seasonal conditions. All this emailed direct to you every Thursday - for free - to help you plan the perfect fishing weekend!

If you are interested in receiving our Weekly Fishing Reports go to the 'Newsletter sign up' page under the 'Fishing Media' drop down on Fish & Game's website - www.fishandgame.org.nz

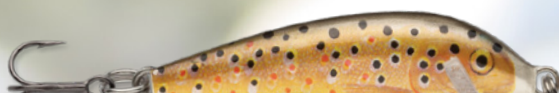
If you can't find the link, send us an email - swray@fishandgame.org.nz - with 'Sign Me Up' in the subject line.



PLAY A PART IN THE FUTURE OF FISHING

Fish & Game council elections are next year - October 2018. While it's a way out, we strongly encourage you to consider standing for the Wellington Fish & Game Council. As a councillor you would have a direct influence on the management of your chosen freshwater fishing or game bird hunting pursuits.

The Fish & Game system of anglers and hunters managing their own affairs is unique in the world of wildlife management but it relies on the voluntary effort of passionate participants to be successful. Becoming a councillor is an enjoyable and rewarding way of giving back to Fish & Game and adding to the pursuits you get so much enjoyment from. If you don't decide to stand for election, at the very least please make sure you vote. More information will be sent out to anglers well ahead of election day.



The Manawatu River has a fishery well worth protecting and improving for future generations. Photo: Hamish Carnachan

ONE PLAN - SEPARATING FAKE NEWS FROM FACT

If there was one fishery that encapsulated all the competing pressures faced by rivers throughout the country today it would have to be the Manawatu. With its headwaters on the eastern flank of the southern Ruahine Range, and flowing for 180km before entering the Tasman Sea near Foxton Beach, it is not a particularly long river but it still faces the full gamut of stresses including pollution from intensive farming and town waste inputs.

It is also a key fishery, highly valued by those who live adjacent to or near it, including the population of Palmerston North. Unfortunately the Manawatu River has the unenviable reputation as being one of the most polluted waterways in the world. For that reason, it has been the centre of a long-running and often bitter battle between those wanting to improve water quality in the catchment and the industries that want to maintain the status quo.

Wellington Fish & Game, together with the Environmental Defence Society (EDS), have been involved in long-running legal action against Horizons Regional Council for failing to implement the regional plan – the One Plan – which would have set intensive farming in Manawatu on a trajectory towards sustainable land-use. In April this year the latest chapter unfolded whereby the Environment Court confirmed that Horizons has not been interpreting and implementing the One Plan in conformity with the law.

Horizons was issuing multiple consents for intensive farming with nitrogen leaching figures significantly over those identified as necessary to achieve the One Plan's water quality outcomes. Further, resource consents were being issued with no assessment of environmental effects, no assessment against the relevant One Plan or National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management provisions. It is widely suspected that this approach was being driven by the elected council members.

The reaction to the Court ruling against Horizons has been a switch to a scaremongering fake news campaign driven by primary industry lobby groups and sympathetic politicians, outlandishly suggesting that the transition to sustainable farming can't proceed because it would lead to bankruptcy, and that pollution subsidies should continue to be carried by the general public. This runs directly counter to evidence presented by Fish & Game and EDS in Court proving intensive farming systems can significantly reduce nutrient leaching to waterways without any impact on profit.

Fish & Game has doggedly contested Horizons and the farming lobby groups over the One Plan because the outcome of the case has significant ramifications for regional councils across the country. The Environment Court's ruling has confirmed that simply because managing within freshwater limits has its difficulties, it doesn't mean councils can make up alternative approaches. When a way forward is found, and Horizons takes the required action, it should result in positive outcomes for water quality and, subsequently, fishery health, in the Wellington Fish & Game region and throughout New Zealand.

KIDS LOVE FISHING!

Wellington Fish & Game is helping disconnect kids from artificial reality and re-engage them with nature, through fishing. We hold a Kids' Fish Out event in Palmerston North with the Manawatu Anglers Club early each November and the Wellington Fly Fishers do a superb job running a similar event at Happy Valley, in the capital.

Currently, we are looking for more sites and a likely contender is at the Winstone Aggregates quarry (due to be decommissioned) on the true right bank of the Otaki River and adjacent to SH1. If the plan proceeds, we will hold Kids' Fish Outs at this venue at certain times of the year and for the remainder have it open to all licenced anglers - it will be a great still water option for this part of the region. The area surrounding the large artificial lake is set to be landscaped into a recreational facility by Greater Wellington Regional Council; Wellington Fish & Game has already entered into discussions with the authority regarding our aspirations for establishing a fishery onsite.

This is an exciting prospect for Fish & Game and local anglers - we'll keep you up to date with developments. Another option being investigated is the old turf farm sites at Otaihanga East. Kapiti Coast District Council has purchased the land and is developing a management plan for the proposed reserve area, which Wellington Fish & Game has submitted on. The district council has expressed a favourable view of the proposal for a Junior Fishery at this site.

The other possibility, and one for which Wellington Fish & Game has received funds to conduct further investigations and develop a proposal during the 2017-18 financial year, is in the vicinity of the Esplanade, Palmerston North. Again, the location close to the large urban population base is intentional with expected high-usage rates.



Wellington Fish & Game is helping reconnect kids with nature through fishing. Photo: Hamish Carnachan

The Rangitikei River catchment is a stunning mixed rainbow and brown trout fishery that requires careful management. Photo: Andrew Harding

RANGITIKEI - AN INTERNATIONAL ICON

There's little doubt that the upper Rangitikei River is an internationally famous fishery, with anglers coming from all over the world to fish it every year. Wellington Fish & Game conducts extensive trout population monitoring in the top reaches every three years through our drift diving programme and also electric fishing. Having conducted our latest triennial survey last summer, we can report that the fishery remains in very good stead.

There are an amazing number of very large fish in the survey area, a feature that undoubtedly has given rise to the rivers prestige along with the stunning backcountry scenery. Downstream of Taihape, the Rangitikei has traditionally always been a very good fishery too with much easier access and high catch rates, albeit of fish of a smaller size than in the headwaters. We are starting to notice, however, increasing pressures on the fishery in these reaches from the impacts of adjacent land use, some of which have questionably been authorised by Horizons Regional Council.

We have impressed on the council their obligations towards mitigating adverse impacts on this waterway, particularly in light of the fact that it is supposedly safeguarded by a Water Conservation Order - the highest level of protection that can be afforded to any waterbody. As well as keeping a close watch on consenting, we're also going to up our game in terms of compliance monitoring throughout the catchment - from the headwaters to the mouth. We were disappointed to note that a number of anglers checked last season in the upper reaches had failed to get the free Backcountry Licence Endorsement that is required by law to fish this stretch.

A Backcountry Licence Endorsement is free to all full season licence holders, and it allows Fish & Game to monitor who fishes the backcountry water, providing valuable information for the management of the fishery. If you are planning on fishing the backcountry stretches, please be sure to get your endorsement as chances are you will run into rangers, even in the remote reaches of the river. We're also looking at unlocking some of the access into the upper reaches - we hope to have good news to report on this front later in the season.

HOW WE'RE WORKING FOR OUR ANGLERS

Here's a very brief overview of what we've been doing for the fishery and anglers in the Wellington Fish & Game region:

SPECIES MONITORING -

Counting and measuring

- Research into spawning value of tributary streams and recruitment in key river catchments.
- Drift diving to help ascertain trout populations in core fisheries.

ADVOCACY -

Enlightening others about our issues

- Attending meetings with regional councils and other local authorities.
- Highlighting the adverse impacts of irrigation on fisheries and water quality.
- Working with GWRC to try and minimize the impact of their river bulldozing activity.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT -

Protecting trout habitat

- Attending hearings and submitting on regional plans.
- Keeping Horizons Regional Council honest on implementing the One Plan to improve water quality outcomes while also protecting farmers' livelihoods.

ACCESS -

Maintaining access for angling

- Working with Walking Access Commission to better deliver access information to anglers.
- Keeping a watching brief on overseas sales of land to ensure access to public fishing and hunting resources is maintained.
- Producing access pamphlets and maintaining angling access signage.
- Working with land owners to maintain and open access to fisheries.

INFORMATION TO LICENCEHOLDERS -

Keeping you informed

- Producing newsletters like this one as well as Reel Life and our increasingly popular Weekly Fishing Reports.

JUNIOR/NOVICE PARTICIPATION -

Getting others involved

- The Fish in Schools programme is now in nine schools throughout the lower North Island, teaching kids about the importance of water quality
- Assisting with Kids' Fish Out Days in Manawatu and Wellington.

COMPLIANCE AND REGULATIONS -

Keeping everyone honest

- Checking licences and, where required, prosecuting offenders.

More details of Wellington Fish & Game's work stream and achievements can be found on our website under the 'Council Downloads' section where meeting minutes and end of year reports are published.

