

Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Council Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 14th June 2018.

Present:

Graeme Watson (Chair)	Chris Owen
Paul Stenning	Russel Graham
Dave Harris	Ken Cochrane
Mike Hartstonge	Cyril Gilroy
Ray Waghorn	Bevan McNaughton. (Co-opted).
Corey Carston	Chris Frisby

In attendance:

Z Moss (Manager), J Smyth (RM Officer), C Mason (Minutes).

Members of the Public: Len Prentice, Alan Leitch, & David Giles.

Welcome:

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.30pm and welcomed those present.

The Chairman reported that Fred Inder had requested a leave of absence for this and the next meeting due to ill health recovery. This was agreed to by the meeting.

Resolved Owen/Hartstonge that Cr Inder be given leave of absence for this and the next meeting. Carried.

Apologies:

There were no apologies.

Conflicts of Interest with items on the agenda:

Cr Harris noted to the meeting his possible conflict of interest as a Meridian shareholder during the Water & Land Plan Appeal discussions concerning Meridian Energy.

Cr Owen advised a possible conflict of interest also due to his work interests with ES. If any further 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 April - 31st May 2018 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 31st May 2018 be received. Carried.

The Manager updated the meeting on health & safety. The Health & Safety Plan was continually updated during the year when required and was currently due for its annual review, which was underway.

Some obsolete documents were removed, those based around Eastern's operation which were superfluous to ours. The Hazardous substances register was being brought up to date along with tailgate forms etc. Staff health & safety meetings were held. We have identified additional hazards as we go along, and the fire evacuation plan had been actioned. We had not displayed the Health & Safety Policy in the Te Anau Office, an oversight that had now been remedied. Hazards to do with the new water pump for fish salvage operations were being worked through prior to next summer use. A standardised induction sheet for visitors for meetings in the office was being worked on. We have reviewed F&G NM online field intentions system which included an App, however staff have decided that our own system works just as well. We have a notice at the front door where a defibrillator can be found in an emergency (Go Bus, next door), Staff all knew how to use them from first aid training courses. Erin is the fire warden and was identified through evacuation signage. Spill procedures have been put up on the workshop wall. Staff training was continually being updated & identified. A kayak course was being considered and a defensive driving course. First Aid kits were also updated.

The Chairman gave a brief outline to the meeting of all exits in case of an emergency.

Minutes of the meeting held 12th April 2018.

Resolved Owen/Stenning that the minutes of the meeting held 12th April 2018 were a true and accurate record. Carried.

Matters arising from Minutes:

There were no matters arising from the minutes that were not dealt with in the agenda.

Administration Reports:

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

Licence Sales:

Southland Fish licence sales were up +2.0% on last years' sales at the same time, nationally fish sales were down - 0.5%. The very good Southland summer probably contributed to the increase in fish licence sales this year.

Game sales were down -3.5% and nationally down -0.1%. Southland's very dry spring/summer would have contributed to less birds around and hence lower game sales.

Cr Cochrane drew the meetings attention to the continued increase in non-resident adult licence sales, about a 20% increase. While good for licence income it created other issues, which would be discussed later in the meeting.

Actual to Budget progress:

Cr Harris queried why the non-specific income was well down to budget. Staff explained that it was a timing issue and that now the monitoring season had just finished that income would come through by the end of June.

In reply to Cr Cochrane's query, he was advised that the rental of the Te Anau cottage had been increased, in alignment with current market rental values, when the new tenant moved in.

The new tenant was a very good tenant and worked in well with the Wildlife Park.

Correspondence Reports:

Council were pleased to see the full correspondence list emailed to them.

Letters had been received from Glenys Dickson, Gore District Mayor, Tracy Hicks & the Hokonui Runanga, Terry Nicholas, requesting consideration to the closure of a small section of the Mataura River to fishing on each side of the Gore bridge of about 50-100 metres maximum.

The reason was outlined in the letters but was mainly to promote the brown trout viewing in their habitat as part of the Gore “*World capital of brown trout*”. For many years members of the public, especially children & tourists have viewed brown trout sunning themselves in the water around & under the Gore bridge. This was a good drawcard for tourism and the education of children. It was a disappointing sight for them to see anglers disposing of those trout when caught, while they were viewing them in their habitat.

David Giles – Gore:

Mr Giles said that the section of water concerned was well used by junior and tourist anglers. It was a great safe area for kids to fish in and parents liked their kids fishing there. A small section 50-100m closed would not make any difference to people viewing from the bridge. They would still see anglers immediately upstream or downstream taking fish, so what was the point.

Alan Leitch – Wyndham

Mr Leitch said that with farmers now fencing off their waterways it was getting harder and harder to get good family friendly access to the rivers and that piece of river was good family friendly access. He circulated a picture showing many anglers fishing beside a bridge at Tongariro. The reality was we were hunters & gatherers who still liked to catch a fish to eat. Hitting a fish on the head was a fact of life. Another point made was who was going to police it? It could raise more problems than it solved, and he did not believe it was a problem anyway.

After discussions.

The Manager suggested this was a good opportunity for Fish & Game to maintain a good working relationship with the GDC to continue to celebrate Gore being the “*World capital of brown trout*”, as there had been talk of them moving away from that and re-branding themselves. This was an opportunity to develop more family friendly better access around the Gore area, which has been noted as being short of those angling areas. For very little trade off of loss of opportunity for anglers (50-100m) we could get greater benefits for anglers through negotiating better accesses & outcomes with the GDC.

While Council had some empathy with the correspondence writers and were happy to help the GDC to promote their fishery in other ways, Council concluded they were there to promote and provide opportunity for anglers, not to protect trout viewing by closing water to fishing. They were also trying to simplify regulations not complicate them more and would rather see people fishing and using the resource than closing it for some other opportunities that were unknown at this stage. The area was a good family friendly place for kids to fish safely and they did not want to lose that, it was becoming more difficult to find places like that in the Gore area.

Fishing there was not extreme, and it was a bit out of touch to think that killing a fish to take home to eat was not good, as it was a fact of life, and something children should be aware of where their food came from. People viewing the trout from the Bridge would still see anglers killing a fish immediately upstream or downstream from a closed area.

The process for any changes to the Angler Notice was that every three years a review took place and public submissions were called for and discussed by Council. The next Angler Notice review was the 19/20 fishing season.

Resolved Hartstonge /Owen that the Council respectfully declined the request to close fishing 50-100m either side of the Gore Bridge and wanted to keep the family friendly fishing area open to anglers. Carried.

Council emphasised again that Fish & Game wanted a good positive relationship with the GDC and were keen to work with them to promote the brown trout fishery in Gore in any way but had to decline this request at this time.

Further letters listed in the correspondence were discussed. (particularly letters # 4,5, & 8). These had been replied to by Staff and Council were pleased to receive those well written letters of feedback from experienced hunters and anglers and shared many of their concerns. The Manager went over the replies that staff had made to the writers.

The Manager noted that given the poor game season this year, more work was required to show hunters we were doing something. It was such a widely held belief with hunters that the big reduction in the number of birds around this year was of our own making, because we allowed a longer season length, and that this was negatively impacting on our population, also to the impact of unpinning shotguns. However, research had shown us that it was a product of a very poor breeding season, due to the very dry spring and summer drought conditions. Surveys have shown that during a typical three-month season 80% of the total harvest occurred in the first month, with 60% of that harvested over opening weekend itself. There was a genuine concern from hunters about our mallard population.

At the August meeting Staff would present background information to season length & hunting behaviour over this current season, including the proportion of birds shot during different periods and hunter activity during the season. This would help in the Council decisions on Game regulations for next season, at the December meeting.

The Chairman updated the meeting on why the compassionate game licence to David Carter, Queenstown, was issued. Mr Carter had rung the office to thank the Council for their consideration to his request.

Staff Report:

Lakes Fisheries Research:

Cohen Stewart had been familiarising himself with otolith processing for aging trout captured during the Lakes Poteriteri & Manapouri work last year. Results of that work would be available in due course.

Staff had been liaising with Dr Michel Dedual, (Internationally recognised Fisheries Scientist - DoC Taupo) about the potential to use acoustic sounding to monitor Lakes Manapouri & Te Anau productivity. The Manager had spoken to Meridian Energy about that, as we should be considering this for our lakes to identify the abundance & production of food for trout. The technique would help in the understanding of how lake level fluctuations affected lake productivity and would give us a long set of data to use during the negotiations for the renewal of the resource consent to operate the Manapouri Power Scheme in 2031. It was hoped that Meridian would fund the programme as it affected their management and how that impacted on the ecosystem. They would need that sort of data set when assessing the environmental effects leading into their consent renewal.

Eel abundance in artificially created waterfowl habitat:

A SIT student will be looking at eel abundance in Southland duck ponds. Data collection would begin in the late Spring, after the research programme planning and ethics approval was completed.

Salmon Spawning:

Staff conducted a salmon spawning survey on the Irthing Stream. Numbers were lower than historic observations but there was a suggestion that the majority were yet to spawn.

Opening Weekend Game Bird harvest:

The average number of mallards harvested by Southland hunters over opening weekend 2018 was 8.6. This was significantly lower than the long-term average of 12.0.

The results from the opening weekend game harvest survey on differential bag limits were in the agenda, however it was noted that it was a challenge to conduct this survey without imparting a bias on the results. Different types of surveys would be conducted again later in the season. More information would be presented to the August meeting as discussed earlier.

Cr Cochrane, in respect to differential bags, agreed that the result could be influenced by a low harvest year. However, the bigger picture to him was that the game bird hunters did care. Licence holders do care what we did and about looking after the resource. He said the results were encouraging and worthy of further consideration.

Bevan McNaughton noted the problems that some hunters had at identifying male from female birds.

Cr Carston thanked the staff for doing his opening weekend survey due to unforeseen circumstances leaving him unable to do so.

Upper Mataura Survey results – Len Prentice:

The results of the Upper Mataura River satisfaction survey, conducted by Len Prentice over the 17/18 fishing season, were in the agenda. There were three aims to the survey and 35 surveys were completed throughout the season. Len Prentice's outstanding contribution to this work was acknowledged by the Staff & Council. Overall the survey was well received and reflected well

on Southland Fish & Game. The information would be very useful in discussions on pressure sensitive fisheries.

Pressure Sensitive Fisheries:

An Otago University student would be engaged next fishing season, in a joint study with Otago, to research some background information from tourists of their perceptions around drivers and barriers to angling in NZ. We would also be looking at international mechanisms and the suite of options available to us to manage angling numbers on our pressure sensitive fisheries, so we get it right the first time, if broad changes of management were required.

Otago were also focused on angling numbers at sensitive rivers and have proposed a joint meeting with Southland Council on the 4th August 2018 to discuss ideas. It appeared to be mainly a South Island issue, but some North Island regions were also affected, and it was hoped that following the Council meeting with Otago, staff of the regions involved could get together to try and develop momentum on some of the options available. If those options could then be regulated under the Conservation Act and identified as mechanisms, we could then pick and choose which management options were suitable for different fisheries. It was important that this was done nationally in the Manager's view.

Cr Cochrane suggested that opportunities to manage international pressure or control of our fisheries was limited by legislation. However, the Manager said there was now a narrow window of opportunity for us with the current Govt. There were barriers, but they may not be insurmountable. DoC now being allowed to charge more for international users of the great walks gave us some optimism.

Cr Owen noted his lack of knowledge for upper reaches fishing as he usually fished the lower reaches and with that in mind suggested that a sub-committee be formed to have those interested focus on the upper reaches fisheries. It was important to act quickly before that window of opportunity closed and a sub-committee could expediate that.

Staff would provide background material on what was being done internationally to bring Council up to speed on some of the mechanisms used internationally for their information before the Otago joint meeting.

Cr Stenning noted that it was mainly a Southland, Otago, West Coast & Nelson Marlborough issue. The other regions Councils were not concerned at this point. The Manager said that if there was no support nationally, then we could still do it locally, hand in hand with Otago. Cr Cochrane said that we should not aim too high and sort out our own rivers first. This could be done through the District Anglers Notice and hopefully the rest of the regions concerned would follow. Cyril Gilroy agreed that we should do it locally first.

After discussions it was agreed that those keen to discuss the issue should have a workshop prior to the Otago joint meeting to debate ideas and think about what our objectives were. This should occur before the Otago joint meeting on the 4th August. Those interested in attending a workshop would be emailed meeting date options.

Proposed Southland Water & Land Plan

Jacob Smyth gave a brief background of the Proposed Plan to the meeting.

Appeals to the Plan had now closed & 25 Appeals had been lodged with the Environment Court including Southland Fish & Game. Those who have appealed in line with Fish & Game were advocating for clear policies, objectives and rules with respect to activities including land use activities and impacts on water quality and to see some measurable improvements over time. Others who had appealed were interested in the status quo or less.

There were opportunities for Fish & Game to align with other parties – Iwi, Forest & Bird & DoC with respect to both sharing of witnesses & presenting a joint case, as there was a high degree of commonality. Due to the high number of appeals it was probably unlikely that a mediated outcome would occur. Instead of using Anderson Lloyd as our Lawyers we have engaged an alternative lawyer based in New Plymouth. Her costs of travelling were offset by a cheaper hourly rate than Anderson Lloyd, but she was very experienced in both private practice as a Barrister and working with Fish & Game in the Environment Court previously.

Generous changes to the Plan were being sought by Meridian Energy in their Appeal. There were significant issues associated with the management of the catchment, in relation to how the lakes were managed (regulations controlled by the Lakes Guidelines) and the flow regime of the lower Waiau. Once the minimum flows were agreed to the population of trout in the lower Waiau increased significantly, but that had now declined in the wake of didymo.

The Waiau Working Party, which Fish & Game was a member of, had entered into a MoU with Meridian regarding flushing flows, which was a best endeavours approach of providing water if and when they could. It did not always coincide with the issues of didymo, which had a major impact on the fishery.

Meridian wanted the existing operation recognised under the Plan as being the existing environment. This would have significant implications in relation to the consent renewal in 2031. As the existing environment would be used as comparison rather than what was there historically. The second point was they have been given under the Plan, a *Controlled Activity Status*, which meant that consent had to be granted. In addition, they were asking for other policies that were advantageous to them and advanced their interests, as opposed to environmental interests.

We would now oppose Meridian by becoming a s274 Party under the RMA.

The Waiau catchment was regarded as being fully allocated – to Meridian Energy, which made it very difficult for anyone else to obtain water for irrigation. Meridian opposed any irrigation takes as they needed to maintain the minimum flows, which they predominantly did with Mararoa River flows.

Meridian were also asking for exemption from water quality standards.

It appeared that Meridian were trying to guarantee the outcome, as much as they could, for the consent renewal process. The problem was the status quo was not delivering good environmental outcomes and the community were very unhappy generally, with their current approach.

Game season compliance:

Less offences were detected this year during the game season opening weekend ranging than last year.

Those that previously were offered reparation would now be processed under the diversion scheme.

NZ Council Issues:

2018/2019 Licence fee recommendation:

NZ Council had recommended a 2018/2019 licence fee for consultation with regions.

The recommendation was the 2018/2019 adult whole season sports fish licence fee be \$130 and an adult whole season game licence fee \$96 (inclusive of the \$3 fee for the Gamebird Habitat Stamp).

Cr Owen explained to the meeting why the new category non-resident junior & child licences were \$20 per day.

Council considered the recommendations with following comments made:

- Did not want to see the junior licences go up in fish or game – they were our future and the increase of this category did not amount to much financially.
- Not sure about the local area licence – was it worthwhile?
- Increases in short term licences were too high.
- Oppose the game increase. We are charging more for less.
- Non-resident fish licence only up \$4 while resident licence up \$3. NR increase should be more.
- Every year it seems to be acceptable to just put our licence fee up without trying to reduce our costs.
- Fact of life that costs increase. F&G have very little money and that is reducing each year.
- Last year this Council unanimously opposed any increase other than the CPI. We also requested that NZ F&G live within the CPI increase. We were the only Council to oppose the full increase last year. What's changed this year?
- We are getting to the maximum that licence holders will accept. We need to live within our means.
- We should only accept a CPI increase but charge more for non-residents.
- Looking at the bigger picture by increasing fees only by the CPI, the Fish & Game organisation could not live within its means. Even with the recommended increase, funding for the contestable fund was not covered and would have to come out of reserves. We can't keep doing that.
- Non-resident licences were still too cheap, and they should be charged more.
- The NZ budget was still only a recommendation, harder decisions should be made on reducing that budget.
- We may have to go back to our core role of looking after the resource and not be champions of the environment, taking on legal battles anymore.

At the end of discussions, the general consensus was that Fish & Game needed to live within its means. We needed to stop extending expenditure beyond our reserves each year.

This may mean a return to only our core role or by making some hard decisions at budget time. The Council would like to see an increase of the CPI for residents only but were happy to have the non-resident licence increased by more.

Resolved Hartstonge/Stenning that the Southland Council recommends for the 2018/2019 year a CPI increase in licence fees for all categories, except for the non-resident licence which should have an increase of at least 10%. Carried with Cr. Cochrane against.

Cr Cochrane said we should be mindful that by giving the non-residents a higher fee, the more their expectations would be.

Cr Stenning countered this saying the higher non-resident fee would provide resources for the impacts on the resource to be better managed.

The Chairman then circulated two letters regarding the licence fees from Nelson Marlborough F&G and Otago F&G for Council's information.

Marketing:

A Fish & Game NZ marketing analysis had been prepared by Steve Doughty, Doughty Consulting Ltd, and was circulated to the Councillors prior to the meeting.

The conclusion and recommendations of the report was that the decline in participation needed to be stopped and reversed. To do this an R3 (recruitment, retention & reactivation) programme needed to be established & costed at a national level focussing on making it easy for people who want to fish and increasing their chances of success.

Cr Cochrane referred to page 9 of the report and item #4. He read that out and said he was very pleased to see a key strategy was to identify and seek partnership opportunities with people who shared our goals. That was something he had been promoting for a long time.

Bevan McNaughton left the meeting 8.35pm

The Council also noted that the report highlighted the importance of the perceived value of the licence price and noted the reduction in satisfaction of that.

Cr Carston mentioned the magazine and his disappointment in it since ownership changes were made. He would like that discussed further at the next meeting.

The general consensus after discussion was that the Council were in favour of the recommendations of the report.

NZ Council Meeting:

Cr Owen reported that at the last NZ Council meeting Cr Stenning was recognised for his excellent input to the NZ Council during his term, which was very much appreciated.

He also acknowledged Jacob Smyth's commendable input at the Managers meeting which he attended on behalf of Zane.

Cr Owen had enjoyed his first NZC joint meeting with the Managers where he said he learnt a lot.

The Chairman also congratulated Cr Stenning on his excellent well balanced RNZ interview pre-duck hunting.

Cr Carston took the opportunity to relay a positive report he had received of staff ranging during the opening weekend of duck hunting. Cohen Stewart was congratulated for his excellent conduct at the maimai.

General Business:

Waiau Fisheries & Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Trust nominee:

Fred Inder, the Southland Fish & Game Council nominee to the Waiau Trust had resigned from the Trust on the 8th May 2018, due to ill health. The Council, as one of the three nominating bodies of the Trust needed to now appoint a new Trustee.

The Chairman declared his interest in the nomination and left the meeting room. Cr Owen then took over the Chair and called for nominations for the position.

Stenning/Hartstonge nominated Graeme Watson

There were no further nominations and Graeme Watson was declared the new Trustee for the Waiau Trust.

The Manager would write to Fred Inder and thank him for his long-standing service (20yrs) to the Trust.

The Chairman was then called back into the meeting.

Elections 2018:

The next Council elections were to be held on Friday 12th October with nominations closing 30th August 2018.

The Chairman was conscious of arousing more interest in the positions from licence holders and suggested that Councillors encourage people to apply. He would like to see women on the Council as well.

Cr Cochrane noted a barrier was the lack of information about the elections and the requirements of a Councillor, could this be remedied by information going out to all licence holders?

The Manager said that information would be given on the Fish & Game NZ website and facebook page. Our Southland facebook page would also have info available.

Items for the next Council meeting agenda:

- National F&G magazine.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 8.50pm

Chairman _____ Date _____

