

**Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Southland Fish & Game Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019.**

**Present:**

Graeme Watson (Chair)	Lindsay Withington
Chris Owen	Lyndon Norman
Paul Stenning	Craig Horrell
Dave Harris	Ken Cochrane
Mike Hartstonge	Cyril Gilroy (Te Runanga Ngai Tahu, 6.25pm)
David MacGregor	Bevan McNaughton
Corey Carston	

**In attendance:**

Martin Taylor, Chief Executive, NZ Fish & Game Council.  
Roy Knight, North Canterbury Fish & Game NZ Council rep.  
Z Moss (Manager), C Stewart, E Garrick, W Jarvie, (F&G Officers) J Smyth (Resource Management Officer - 6.15pm), C Mason (Minutes).

**Members of the Public:**

Geoffrey Young (Southland Federated Farmers, President).  
Stephen Rabbidge (Southland Federated Farmers).  
Crystal Brindle (Dept. of Conservation).

**Welcome:**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.00pm and welcomed those present with a special welcome to Martin Taylor, Roy Knight, Southland Federated Farmer's representatives and Crystal Brindle, DoC.

The Chairman pointed out all exits from the building should an emergency occur.

**Apologies:**

*Resolved Withington/Hartstonge that apologies be received & accepted from Jacob Smyth (6.15pm) & Cyril Gilroy (6.25pm) for lateness.* Carried.

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

The individual member declaration of conflicts of interest with any item on the agenda had been circulated to members for signature before the start of the meeting.  
Any conflicts were noted by the Chairman.

**Health & Safety Report:**

The Council health & safety report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31st May 2019 was attached to the agenda for consideration. The report showed a nil return for the period.  
All known hazards were listed in the Southland Health & Safety Plan.

*Resolved Owen/Harris that the Health & Safety Report to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019 be received.* Carried.

**Minutes of the meeting held 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019.**

*Resolved Harris / McNaughton that the minutes of the meeting held 11th April 2019 were taken as read and were a true and accurate record.* Carried.

**Matters arising from Minutes:**

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

**Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit payments list & automatic payments since the last meeting, licence sales progress to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2019, budget to actual expenses to 31/05/2019 & correspondence reports were attached to the agenda for Councillors consideration.

The Manager reported that the Southland Water & Land Plan Hearing was taking longer than expected, now going into a third week. This would mean an overspend in that area.

Licence sales in both game & fish were down compared to the same time last year.

Cr Cochrane suggested that the adult whole season game sales were down due to the regulations of shortening the season and reducing the bag limit. However other members of Council did not agree with that suggestion.

The Chairman referred to the game bird harvest survey where hunters were asked how satisfied they were with their opening weekend experience. That survey question was also asked in 2017. The results were 2017 – 72% were very satisfied and in 2019 77% were very satisfied. That result should give confidence that the reduced bag limit and shortened season did not affect the opening weekend satisfaction of the average Southland hunter.

**Correspondence Reports:**

The Chairman reported that he would try to attend the next meeting of the Southland Conservation Board on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August at the Te Rau Aroha Marae in Bluff.

Maurice Rodway had suggested that Councillors may wish to attend the 1<sup>st</sup> October meeting of the Conservation Board also as it would be held in Invercargill. The November meeting of the Board was to be held in Stewart Island.

*Resolved Hartstonge/ Stenning that the Administration Reports be received.* Carried.

**Public Forum:**

**Crystal Brindle – Community Ranger, Dept of Conservation, Te Anau.**

Crystal introduced herself & gave a brief background of her role in the Dept. and her involvement with the Te Anau Bird Sanctuary. She was currently involved in consultation on how they could bring more life into the Park and to show more connectivity to the natural & cultural heritage it provided. A local Te Anau business had approached DoC with a donation for the Bird Sanctuary. Staff of the Sanctuary suggested the donation go to a visitor's shelter, to get out of the elements, to learn and partake in activities and to serve as an educational opportunity for students.

A community workshop had been held yesterday to create ideas for future projects at the Te Anau Bird Sanctuary and to develop a plan for the first project.

The first project was to be a children's shelter. The area it would be built in the Park was shown. The workshop was run by Design & Make Architects and several others in the community, including DoC, ES, local schools & students etc. 15 adults and 17 students attended the workshop. Bill Jarvie also attended. Potential designs of what the shelter could look like were shown. Practical needs, educational needs, creativity & connection ideas were put forward at the workshop. Focus ideas for the shelter were discussed including showcasing ecosystems, running craft & cultural sessions, creating our own energy, showcasing species & how we cared for the environment and keeping the shelter relevant.

The students had been left with follow up questions and the next step was to retrieve their answers to the questions. From there, ideas from the workshop & the students would be shared with the steering group. After that they would engage with wider partnerships e.g. early childhood centres to make sure a design would appeal to very young children, as well as older students. After that a further meeting with the steering group to come up with a final plan and costing options would be held.

Crystal understood that the Wildlife Park was vested to the Southland Fish & Game Council and as this was only at the concept stage, they welcomed Fish & Game's input and asked would F&G like to be involved in this concept. Did Fish and Game agree in principle and what guidance would they like to provide?

Bill Jarvie gave a brief background to the meeting of how & why Fish & Game had the Park vested with them. The Park existed because of the stream of water from a natural spring source that drove the original hatchery on the property. The Dept of Internal Affairs, Wildlife Service, took over the running of the hatchery & grounds & introduced birds to the sanctuary. The Wildlife Service then became the Dept. of Conservation. At one point the Minister at the time decided that DoC was no longer going to invest in aviaries and the birds should eventually go from the Park display. Before that, there was an understanding that the land had equal value to the Wildlife Service for fish and game species as well as protected species. It was then agreed that the Fish & Game Council should be vested with all assets and land of the Wildlife Park for their use, until no longer required, at which time it would revert back to the Crown.

The Fish & Game Te Anau Office was situated in the Park and we still used a small part of the hatchery facilities for our put and take fisheries. Doc had also successfully reared Whio duck broods in the old raceways of the hatchery. The bird sanctuary was now clearly recognised as a valuable advocacy asset for the Dept and for Fish & Game potentially as well to jointly develop. As vested owners of the land we were part of the consultation process.

The Council were generally in support of the concept at this stage, but to what level and degree required further discussion. In the meantime:

***Resolved Harris/Horrell that Council preliminarily supported the concept in principle of the children's shelter in the Te Anau Wildlife Park, subject to further development and discussion.*** Carried.

*Cyril Gilroy joined the meeting 6.25pm*

*Crystal Brindle left the meeting 6.30pm*

#### **Staff Report:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

**Pressure Sensitive Fisheries: Upper Oreti - Cohen Stewart.**

The fishing season in the upper Oreti River was now closed and all data from the cameras had been retrieved and analysed. The data set report was circulated to the Council at the meeting. Cohen then went over the key results of the data.

The beat occupancy rates from October to April - number of days monitored, number of days occupied & occupancy % rates were shown.

The overall occupancy rate of the beats in Oct & Nov was 33%, December was 53%, January was 34%, February 52%, March 32%, & April 22%.

The weekend occupancy rates over the course of the season were also shown with the overall weekend occupancy rate being 42% for the whole season.

The angling duration time by month was shown, less than 4 hrs and more than 4hrs fishing. Roughly a third were fishing less than 4 hrs.

Beat arrival times each month before & after 9.00am were shown.

As the Ashton Burn was the most popular beat Cohen had looked at the environmental variables affecting occupancy of the beat. This was in relation to river flow, wind and rainfall data. There was no statistically significant evidence to suggest that these variables affected whether the Ashton Burn beat was fished on a given day or not. Anglers still fished there when conditions were rainy, windy or the river level elevated.

He then analysed if the environmental variables affected multiple visitation rates on the Ashton Burn beat. The environmental variables did not significantly affect multiple visitation rates on the Ashton Burn beat, however rainfall was close to being, a significant variable. Graphs showed that despite high rainfall anglers did still fish the beat.

Upper Oreti angler origins were determined by 367 staff visits to beat signs in Jan – Apr 19. Of the 168 physical licence checks 83% were non-resident & 17% were resident. Historical angler surveys (2000/2001) showed non-resident use to be 69%. So, either non-resident use had increased, or resident anglers had been displaced because of perceptions around crowding.

We now had angler origin data & angler usage/visitation rates. We were now waiting for the angler perceptions on crowding data from the back-country email survey results currently being done and once that was received Council would be able to make an informed management decision on the fishery.

Cr Cochrane noted that with 83% non-resident rate and low resident rate this suggested a strong correlation that non-residents still chose to fish the fishery in imperfect conditions.

**Proposed Southland Water & Land Plan Hearing update – Jacob Smyth.**

Jacob gave the meeting a quick update on progress of the Hearing currently underway.

Since the staff notes were prepared the first week and a half of the Hearing had begun. The Hearing for the first part of the Plan, Tranche A – covering state of the environment, the objectives and policies, had originally been set for two weeks. However, progress had been slower than anticipated and was now going to go for a full three weeks, with a further 3 days in late July for closing submissions. Tranche B – dealing with specific rules, would be dealt with at a later stage (early next year).

Fish & Game's evidence was presented yesterday & today by Ben Farrell in relation to planning and by Russell Death in relation to ecological health & water quality. Ben Farrell was being shared as a witness with Forest & Bird.

Fish & Game's case was that we needed to set attributes to determine where degradation existed. The old Water Plan set a goal to improve water quality by 10% in lowland, spring fed & hill water bodies, with regard to nutrients & microbial contaminates, to be achieved by 2020. It had already been abridged back from a 20% improvement. The incumbent Plan adopting a non-regulatory approach had essentially failed and this 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Plan was now underway.

There had been many questions on the state of the environment and how that had been responded to. Consequently, it was all taking longer than expected and a decision was not expected until later in the year.

The Manager said that once the decision of Tranche A was known that would give us guidance on Tranche B and how complex that would be, and how we would need to be involved.

Jacob added that before the Hearing there was a lot of scientific evidence presented in respect to water quality, particularly in respect to the existing state and to trends. There was a large degree of consensus reached among the experts that we needed numerics set for the purpose of determining degradation. In Jacob's view there would be a large gap in the Plan where it says that we will improve water quality where it was degraded, but there would be no means or tools to identify where that degradation existed. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater required that both ecosystem health & human health for recreation was safeguarded, and that requirement should apply now. There was until 2025 to set limits but that did not mean that nothing should be done in the meantime and that was Fish & Game's case. We needed to see something done now, we know we have a problem and we should do something about it.

### **Game Bird Season 2019:**

The average opening weekend bag was lower than staff had expected given the relatively high abundance of ducks this season. Staff had completed a larger sample size in the subsequent game harvest surveys and got the same result. Cr Stenning suggested it was indicative of more juvenile birds this year, that tended to congregate at the food sources, whereas adult birds spread out further. Hence the reason why some hunters, near areas of food sources, had their best season ever while others, away from the food sources, did not do as well.

### **New Zealand Council Issues:**

#### **Martin Taylor, CE, New Zealand Council – Budgets & licence prices:**

Mr Taylor congratulated staff for the work they were doing at the Southland Water & Land Plan Hearing. The whole issue of water quality was a national one and across the country there were real issues of water degradation.

Mr Taylor said he would like to slow or stop the increases in licence prices. They were reaching the peak that people would accept. After seeing two budget rounds with the NZC he said the current system did not support a strategic approach to the setting of the organisation's finances. As budgets were a bottom up, individual year by year process, it did not support a multi-year planned approach, taking into account trends, internal cost growth & licence price sensitivity.

He said there was a need to look at our budgets over a longer time period, such as three to five years. He circulated at the meeting a graph showing actual revenue & expenditure of the organisation since 2013-2014 & projected revenue & expenditure to 2023-2024 with 3 scenarios.

He noted that the participation rate was decreasing slightly, which was a concern. There had been a dramatic increase in the price of a fishing licence over the years, which needed looking at. He referred to the survey by Steve Doughty which suggested the fish licence at \$150 was the price people would stop buying it, as the perceived value of it was reached at that point.

Mr Taylor explained the graph & the three scenarios to the meeting. The scenarios highlighted possible outcomes for the organisation in the next few years.

The good news was that NZC were looking seriously at alternative revenue sources & looking for a licence sales system that was more cost effective than the current system. NZC was looking generally at all areas, to be more cost effective and efficient to hopefully make a reduction in the costs of the whole organisation. However, looking at the projections, in the meantime, the licence fee was going to have to increase by a couple of dollars a year.

Mr Taylor said that the average age of participation was increasing. This highlighted the importance of the R3 programme to increase participation. At present there was no replacement for those dropping off. This was not a unique trend to Fish & Game and mirrored many other organisations both in NZ and overseas. F&G needed to plan for the future now.

Cr Cochrane noted the non-resident levy collected by the regions and how some regions struggled to use that money it was ring fenced for. Could that not be an alternative source of revenue to subsidise resident licences. Mr Taylor replied that the non-resident revenue was already included in the graph shown tonight. He added that it was up to F&G what they did with the non-resident revenue and not the Minister's decision.

Cr Harris believed we had already reached the peak of the licence price and that was why participation was dropping off. We needed to look much harder at that red line (organisational expenses). We can't just keep putting licence fees up. He had looked at the budgets of the regions and noted that some were very expensive to run. Only four regions actually paid for themselves. The regions themselves needed to look more closely at their budgets to try and get expenses down.

The Manager said that the churn rate was very high across fishing & hunting, which implied that a high proportion of our clients just needed a bit of motivation to bring them back to the sport. Some were just on the cusp of buying licences, so there was hope there, but it was important to be more flexible in our sales channels, so we don't get left behind.

Sir Geoffrey Palmer had said that climate change was going to be a big threat to Fish & Game in the long-term future. As temperatures rose trout would not survive in some areas - lowland and some lake fisheries. This meant that more people would be concentrated fishing in smaller spaces.

Roy Knight added that we had to be open to & accept change. Fish & Game had plateaued for a few years. Costs had risen, staff numbers had risen, habitat had been lost. NZC had some initiatives coming up to raise more funds to try and help stop the downward trend.

Cr Owen agreed that we all needed to change, and we all had to be prepared to do that. Regions needed to address their spending also.

Cr Harris commented that this year the weather for fishing in Southland in the first part of the season was poor and he suspected that with better weather next year the licence sales would come up again.

### **National Policy on Prosecutions & the Conservation Infringement Policy.**

Jacob Smyth advised the updated prosecution document was a revised version of National Policy on Prosecutions, approved in July 2014, to be more consistent with the Conservation Infringement Policy developed and now included the diversion process and removed the reparation option.

The Infringement Systems Bill was now passed into law and the Conservation Act amended. The Infringement Policy established national compliance and law enforcement policy to enable F&G to issue infringement fines.

The Infringement & Prosecution policies were designed to complement each other and set out principles and guidelines and process to follow. The policies were to be considered by each region before being finalised and ratified by NZC as National Policy.

It was unknown if DoC had begun the infringement system process or not at this stage.

Cr Harris queried who the infringement fee revenue went to. If it wasn't Fish & Game, then there would be an impact on our wetland habitat development and access creation funds.

Jacob replied that his understanding was the fee would go into the Crown's consolidated fund. He said it would have an impact on our revenue but that was not a reason for not using the infringement system, as we had to be seen to be acting in good faith.

The Manager also reminded the meeting that Southland did not incur significant external costs for prosecutions & diversions because Jacob dealt with all legal issues here. However other regions did not have that, so there were savings to be made nationally in external legal fees with the infringement system.

After discussions:

**National Policy on Prosecutions.**

***Resolved Owen/Stenning that the Southland Council accepts and approves the 3 recommendations from NZC on the National Policy on Prosecutions.*** Carried.

**Conservation Infringement Systems Policy.**

***Resolved Withington/Hartstonge that the Southland Council accepts and approves the two recommendations from NZC on the Conservation Infringement System Policy.*** Carried.

**General Business:**

**2019/2020 Licence fee recommendations:**

Cr Harris expressed his disappointment at how the 2019/2020 licence fee recommendation from NZC was handled. Firstly, the paper was not received in time to discuss it at our normal meeting cycle and had to be done by email. Secondly, was the quality of the document to make the decision on. There seemed to be some omissions from the document supplied to Council, compared to that supplied to NZC, which was poor in his view.

Mr Taylor responded and said that the timing of the NZC meeting was changed so there could be a full formal meeting to set the fee instead of the usual teleconference as held other years and to meet the deadline of Officials & the Minister.

He said that the reasons the meeting dates were changed was sent out last year sometime.

He advised that a letter would be received by the Regions Chairs tomorrow asking for their meeting dates next year to be changed to accommodate the deadline of late June for the Licence fee process. This would mean the June regional meeting may have to be shifted to the middle two weeks of the month so response was back to NZC by the third week of June where the licence fee would be formally adopted and the process with the Minister started in time to be gazetted and the Cabinet 28 day rule to apply. (Regulations could not come into effect until 28 days after they were gazetted).

Mr Taylor, in terms of the quality of the document, said he was sorry to hear that and would look at that further. He admitted that it was difficult to understand the document as the budgets were set not only by licence fee but also spending of regional one-off reserves approved.

Cr Harris added that in his view the whole process needed more work, both regionally & nationally. He believed it was the Regions who should be setting the licence fee and that the fee should be set before the budgets were completed to ensure budgets were within the expected revenue rather than the other way around.

In reply to Cr Cochrane's query it was unknown if the pressure sensitive fishery email perception survey results would be available by the next meeting.

Items for the next Council meeting agenda:

- Game bird harvest regulations. (Further options within current legislation).
- Pressure sensitive fisheries - (perception survey update).
- Te Anau Wildlife Park – Children's shelter discussion.

Cr Owen on behalf of the Council, thanked Mr Knight for his attendance at the meeting. The Chairman thanked both Mr Taylor & Mr Knight for their attendance and the public who attended. It was always good to have people attend the meetings, and he welcomed that.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 7.35pm

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_