

Salmon Symposium Opening Address

Fish & Game Chief Executive Martin Taylor

November 11 2017

Good morning and welcome to Fish & Game's symposium on the state of our wild salmon fishery.

I am privileged to have been asked to open this event and start the next two days of discussions rolling.

First, I would like to acknowledge the symposium organising committee led by Matthew Hall and Trevor Issit - who have both done a lot of hard work getting this event off the ground.

Lyndsay Lyons, the Chair of Fish and Game NZ, cannot be here today due to a long standing engagement

And he has asked me to pass on his good wishes and he looks forward to reading what actions will come out of our deliberations.

I would also like to say how important it is that the new Minister of Conservation is attending later this morning and I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

In terms of my role I am new to this job as chief executive of the New Zealand Council although I had been on the Wellington council for many years and three as chairman.

This symposium is a joint Central South Island and North Canterbury initiative.

And is a good demonstration of how two Fish & Game regions can work together to meet a challenge and achieve a common goal.

And just as importantly, at the same time, working in the interests of all Fish & Game licence holders.

I also want to thank you the anglers who care enough about our salmon runs to attend this symposium and contribute your thoughts and hard-won experience to help crack the riddle of what is affecting salmon numbers.

I am one of those salmon anglers.

From about the age of 12 when I was growing up in Christchurch, my friends and I would climb on our bikes and ride from Redwood to the Waimak mouth and fish all day.

We would stand in the cold water, in our shorts, inline with dozens of others, waiting for someone to hook up. We never caught many but some years we saw a lot caught and some of them were large 30 pounders.

You here today know that feeling and the thrill of those mornings and those days on the river.

That's what brings us all here today.

Sadly, those exciting salmon runs are in decline, a severe decline, and we all agree we need to bring them back.

There are probably many reasons and theories for the decline of wild salmon populations, but my suspicion is that a few will be far more significant than others.

There is no doubt nature itself is contributing. And this weekend we will hear about the range of the other influencing factors on this important fishery.

And the good thing about this event is we all accept that the decisions we make at Fish and Game can help or hinder the situation, just as the decisions we make as a community impact on the issue.

One factor which may be having an impact, and which is certainly having an impact on our overall fresh water fishery, for both indigenous and valued introduced species, is the impact commercial activities are having on the environment across the country especially right here in Canterbury.

It is Canterbury that has borne the brunt of industrial scale intensive farming development in recent years.

Once, dairying was a novelty in Canterbury but not anymore. A sizeable chunk of New Zealand's dairy herd is now in Canterbury. How many?

One and a quarter million cows now live in this region and those are 2015 figures.

That's a staggering number – more than the number of people who live in all the South Island.

Even more eye-opening is the scale of the increase – more than a million extra cows over the 21 years. That's an increase of almost 500 percent.

And remember each cow produces as much sewerage as 15 people – so that means the raw sewerage of about 19 million people is dropped on Canterbury each and every day.

And to produce this sewerage they use billions and billions of litres of fresh water.

This has meant more pollution of our waterways.

More water taken from our rivers, lakes and streams and too much pressure put on our valuable aquifers and worryingly, contamination of our drinking water supplies.

This all contributes to the impact on the environment and the wild birds, fish and other life which need to live in it. This obviously includes our salmon.

Fish & Game has done its best to fight this unthinking development and to secure a better deal for the environment and we can always do more.

I was proud to see our organisation really begin the fight back on this issue with the dirty dairying campaign. And I want to acknowledge Bryce who started that campaign and it is an important part of his strong legacy.

That sort of advocacy is what licence holders expect of Fish and Game and the sort of advocacy that I will continue.

It is the sort of advocacy and support we need to bring to our Salmon issue.

And once we have clearly established the fundamental cause of our fisheries demise we must agree on what needs to be done, by whom, by when.

In my view this has to be the outcome of this symposium.

But one thing I do want to say is that I am not prepared to have our organisation's efforts to promote our fisheries and protect the environment casually dismissed by our opponents.

And most of all, I do not accept it being characterised as just an example of the urban rural divide.

That is wrong. The whole phrase was trotted out by corporate farmers and their lobbyists as a way of dismissing the majority of New Zealanders' concerns about the state of our rivers, lakes and streams.

This isn't to say that a divide doesn't exist – it clearly does.

It is between commercial polluters and the rest of New Zealand.

The public doesn't care if the pollution is the fault of town, city or farm – they want to be able to swim in their rivers, picnic beside them and gather food from them.

And this year and during this election campaign, we saw that patience start to run out.

Water quality became one of the top issues of the election, right alongside child poverty, health and housing.

Freshwater quality has never attracted such high political interest.

Politicians of all shades and beliefs grasped the reality that we can't continue ruining our environment for temporary economic gain, nor go on rewarding or subsidising polluters.

In terms of this symposium, I am hoping a headline outcome will be a concrete plan which identifies what man-made changes can be actioned to improve and restore the salmon runs.

Our challenge is to agree on those actions that will make a difference, and then make sure they are delivered.

The time for just talking is past.

I know Fish and Game NZ will do all we can to make agreed actions a reality and I am sure the same commitment will come from the Central South Island and North Canterbury Fish and Game.

Our licence holders expect nothing less.

Whatever those actions are my promise is that I will be doing my best to deliver them and if that means challenging the status quo and upsetting some people, so be it.

I say that as New Zealand Councils new chief executive – but I also say it as a salmon angler.

Thankyou.