**Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Council Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 6th April 2017.**

**Present**: Graeme Watson (Chair) Chris Owen

Paul Stenning Russel Graham

Ken Cochrane Corey Carston

Ray Waghorn Dave Harris

Cyril Gilroy (Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu)

**In attendance:**

Z Moss (Manager) J Smyth (Resource Consent Officer).

C Mason (Minutes).

Gail Thompson (Southland Conservation Board).

**Members of the Public:** Len Prentice,

**Welcome:**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.30pm and welcomed those present with a special welcome to Gail Thompson, who would be attending the Council meetings as a Fish & Game liaison person for the Southland Conservation Board.

Gail Thompson introduced herself to the meeting by giving a brief background of her work. This was her third term with the Conservation Board.

The Chairman gave a Health & Safety briefing to the meeting, pointing out all emergency exits etc.

**Apologies:**

***Resolved Watson/ Harris that apologies be received & sustained from Chris Frisby, Kevin Fiveash, Michael Hartstonge, Fred Inder, Bill Jarvie, Cohen Stewart & Erin Garrick***. Carried.

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

There were no conflicts of interest advised to the Chairman.

If any 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 February to 31st March 2017 was attached to the agenda for consideration.

All known hazards were listed in the Southland Health & Safety Plan.

***Resolved Harris/Cochrane that the Health & Safety Report to 31st March 2017 be received***. Carried.

**Minutes of the meeting held 15th December 2016.**

***Resolved Owen/Gilroy that the minutes of the meeting held 15th December 2016 were a true and accurate record.*** Carried.

**Matters arising from the 15th December 2016 Minutes:**

There were no matters arising from the 15th December minutes.

**Minutes of the meeting held 9th February 2017.**

***Resolved Graham/Owen that the minutes of the meeting held 9th February 2017 were a true and accurate record.*** Carried.

**Matters arising from the 9th February 2017 meeting.**

There were no matters arising from the 9th February meeting.

**Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit list & automatic payments since the last meeting, budget to actual report to 29th March 2017, licence sales progress to 21st March 17, and correspondence reports were attached to the agenda for Council’s consideration.

Fish licence sales had reached 100% of target for the year which was pleasing, thanks to the very good start to the fishing season.

The non-resident licence sales levy had earned us $31,996 (gst incl.) to date which was significant and a great initiative for the regions.

**Staff Reports:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

**Summer Drift Diving:**

This summer season had been challenging for staff to get drift dives completed due to weather conditions. Results were presented in the agenda.

Historically low flows in Southland were in the late February period but this year April was presenting low flows, so there had been an anomaly this season in terms of weather conditions.

Upper Oreti:

The Upper Oreti drift dive count was lower than last year, but did not differ much from the long term average count. However overall the trout population trend had increased over time.

With monitoring of the Oreti extended to looking at habitat and any changes of that habitat it had been noted that the Upper Oreti generally, through the zone dived, had lost good pool habitat at a greater rate than it had been replaced, when the river naturally changed its course. Good pool losses have had an influence on trout populations in the Upper Oreti.

Aparima:

There was a slight improvement in the Aparima count than last year. Staff reported the fish were also in a much better condition this year than last year.

Upper Mataura:

Staff were very impressed with trout abundance and their condition in the Upper Mataura. The trout population in the Upper Mataura has significantly increased over time.

Monowai:

Trout numbers were still disappointing compared to historic counts. We still did not know why, despite the naturalised flow regime in the river system now, it did not support as many trout numbers as it did historically.

Lower Mararoa:

The rainbow trout population in the lower Mararoa River had significantly increased over time. Trout abundance was particularly high in the reaches below the Whitestone confluence and generally the rainbows were in very good condition. Salmon abundance was also above average compared to previous years.

**Mallard transect flights:**

Transect flights were conducted in late March with very good bird numbers recorded (page 8 of the staff report). The technique used was continuing to be refined.

120 ponds across the Southland Plains were randomly selected to count duck numbers, along with 10kms of river transects along the mainstem rivers, cross country transects were also included.

Daryl McKenzie (national mallard monitoring advisor) had approved the technique and the data that was being received.

All in all there were good numbers of birds around this year and numbers were on a par with the best year we have had since surveys began six years ago.

Cr Cochrane noted that the mallard transect counts were always after the game bird regs had been set. It was a frustration to him that this information could not be available before the bag limits were set. Zane agreed that it was frustrating that there was no simple mechanism, for various reasons, available to get that information earlier other than through brood counts. Other mechanisms e.g. capture & aging, was very labour intensive & time consuming and would need to be done at a time when other field work was at its peak. Also there was not a lot of evidence that the harvest actually influenced the population numbers.

Cr Cochrane asked the value of the transect counts in that case. The answer was that numbers counted over time would give good population trends in the different transects.

**Mallard Research:**

Trapping and blood sampling of Mallards was successfully completed in late February for the heavy metal study by Katie Gibb, completing her Master’s degree.

*Powerpoint presentation Z Moss.*

**Kids fishing events as a recruitment tool:**

It was acknowledged that kids fishing events were always good fun for kids. Otago monitoring of kids fishing events had asked parents and kids questions and results were that 80% of kids had fished prior to the event, 90% fished once more that season and 10% didn’t fish again the following season. The changed proportion of people fishing from that event was 10%. Most of the people at the event were probably going fishing anyway, so how influential the event was in keeping kids fishing was minimal. Barriers to them fishing more were “time”.

Zane suggested that “time” could be found if fishing was more enjoyable and successful for them, better knowledge would help with better success rates and therefore more enjoyment of the sport. Another barrier was competition from other sports – weekend team events etc.

**Mallard predator study:**

Images were shown of a feral cat walking with a full grown duck in its mouth. This was taken by a game camera set up at a duck trapping pond site for the mallard study.

**Loyal Senior opening weekend game licence:**

A request for Council consideration of an opening weekend game licence for loyal seniors was made by Dan Casey, Gore at the last meeting. To assist with the matter figures from the 2016 game bird licence database were given There were 295 hunters aged 70yrs and over in Southland hunting. This equated to $27,435. If a senior loyal licence was $40 this equated to $11,800 and a loss of income of $15,635 for Southland, plus the cost of making another category licence with Eyede. This licence category, if approved by Council, could be proposed to the national licence working party for consideration.

**Drone footage:**

For mallard counts a helicopter had been used historically. However this year Erin had surveyed ponds in the Te Anau basin transect with the drone, which had been more cost effective and the quality of the drone photos were excellent.

Drone footage was shown of several ponds created recently and some that had been surveyed. The footage was an incredible tool for us to communicate to contractors and landowners where potential wetlands would be built and how, giving them an overall picture of the ponds surveyed to be created.

A potential Game Bird Habitat Trust funding application pond to be created was shown in the lower Aparima. Recently a field trip was held there with ES land sustainability staff. Zane explained how the 2 ha wetland would be created. It would be a very productive habitat.

Fish passage was important with some wetlands created and Zane showed an example of that.

A first effort drone footage was shown of the Upper Oreti River drift diving by staff. It was excellent footage of work carried out by staff and explained what they did and why they did it and the results of the dive. It would be put on our Southland Facebook page as well.

Filming of short pieces of our work, like this, would be made to build a database for film work, TV articles, You Tube etc.

We would also be approaching DoC for a concession for using a drone on DoC land for Fish & Game purposes.

Images showed a pond created 15 yrs ago which was fed only by a tile drain. The farmer had complained about the number of eels in his pond. To help with this Staff had set 3 fyke nets and extracted between 120 & 150kgs of short finned eels from the pond prior to the visit by F&G and ES Land Sustainability people. On the day of the visit Zane had set another fyke net and captured another 50kgs of eels. This showed the value of the ponds in respect to biodiversity values.

Council all agreed that the drone footage was an invaluable communication tool in showing what Fish & Game did.

**Paradise Shelduck count:**

The paradise shelduck count this year was slightly up on last year. A graph was shown of the counts over the last few years.

The graph showed the population had been significantly affected by the bag limit increase in 2008-2010. However with the change in bag limit back to 6 birds per day since, the population had stabilised and was recovering again.

**2017 Game Bird Hunter Survey:**

Zane showed a form that was used for the annual game bird hunter survey. There were seven surveys of 120 random hunters each fortnight over the season, including Opening Weekend.

Cr Cochrane suggested that Councillors may like to complete the survey this year, as it would give them a chance for more interaction with licence holders. Zane noted that Council was also required to survey hunter satisfaction and with that in mind staff had prepared a set of questions that would be asked during the game bird hunter survey on hunter satisfaction. He went over those questions.

The meeting generally agreed that the Councillors instead of staff doing the survey this year was a good idea. Survey forms, including extra questions would be posted out to Councillors and hunters phone numbers to ring would be emailed on the Friday before opening, along with a basic script so all Councillors were on the same page.

Zane referred to the Governance document and reminded Councillors that during the surveys they had to put aside their personal opinions and actively support the collective decisions of the Council.

**Public Forum**

**David Linklater – “Kiwi Anglers First”:**

Mr Linklater firstly put in apology for Dave Witherow, a core member of Kiwi Anglers First, who could not make it to the meeting tonight.

Mr Linklater began by describing angling as a priceless recreational heritage, worth more than money and finite. Angling heritage should never be reduced to dollar values. Recreational means no commercial use, tourism was commercial use. Our fore fathers developed angling to be recreational heritage first and foremost. Heritage meant it belonged to all New Zealanders. Kiwi anglers should never be obliged to surrender their heritage to being overwhelmed by tourists. The South Island back country angling was now dominated by guides and non-resident anglers. Northern Southland was also now threatened. Resident anglers needed to stand up and lobby for their rights, hence “Kiwi Anglers First”.

They saw a four step plan (or 3 step) as a framework to addressing the problem. Tourist angling must be controlled. The four step plan was:

1. The fishery.
2. Citizens and NZ residents.
3. NZ Commercial guides.
4. Non resident anglers.

The Group was formed in Dunedin and had already addressed the Otago F&G Council. A letter from the Otago F&G Council to the Group was circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. Mr Linklater said that Otago F&G shared concerns over the Group’s issues raised, it was all very timely.

The Group wanted to progress things and were asking the Fish & Game organisation to develop the rules to implement the four step/ three step plan so tourism could be controlled, to respect the resident angler and the fishery, as both were affected now by increasing numbers of tourist anglers.

He then referred to a letter from Ian Cole and said it was an admission that guides had oversold back country angling. He referred to the Upper Oreti which he said had too many overseas anglers and over-crowding issues now. Fishing there was becoming increasingly difficult and the enjoyment was diminished because of that. If sensitive back country fisheries were continued to be a free for all there would be nothing of quality left for the future. Tourism was increasing and would continue to do so in the future, where were the overseas anglers going to go to as over-crowding increased.

Mr Linklater said that Kiwi Anglers First Group wanted Fish & Game to lobby the Government on behalf of river health & resident anglers. Lobbying about the problems with non-resident anglers because of increasing numbers and the pressure it was causing, the decline of our fisheries because of pollution, water extraction, etc. Resident anglers and Fish & Game needed to make lots of noise together. It was affecting our heritage and the time was right now to do it.

While everyone around the Council table probably supported what the Group proposed, the apathy of licence holders generally that Councillors spoke of was a huge problem, the snapper analogy was a good one, freedom campers was another one, everyone was sick of it but the government was not proposing any changes. For Fish & Game to get political support based on a groundswell of resident anglers was probably unrealistic. Realistically the only option for Fish & Game was to make a case to central government that we would sell the high profile, blue ribbon fishing opportunity with guided angling, on a proportional basis that did not disadvantage resident anglers. In regards to the Upper Oreti resident anglers perception was that it was not worth going there in February and March because of the overseas anglers using the fishery. That was the perception and realistically we may have to manage it as % split, as there would be no way we would get a 100% kiwi access ahead of guided angling. There would have to be legislative changes for everything the Group wanted as well.

Everyone agreed that the guides licence was a step forward. The Guides association were currently talking about the ethics of guides and their behaviour. It was important that there was a good relationship and good communication with the Guides and Fish & Game.

Mr Linklater was assured that the Council would debate the whole issue seriously.

Mr Linklater asked that the Council send him a letter in reply once that debate had occurred.

**NZ Council Issues:**

Cr Stenning said the last NZC meeting was held in the Central South Island F&G Region.

The Region had many issues but had great fishing and very good duck populations.

A field trip of the region looked at irrigation developments, water storage ponds, the Rangitata Diversion Race and the exclusion barrier designed to stop fish from entering the irrigation raceways at the Rangitata Water Ltd property. They looked at the sockeye salmon from the Twizel bridge, 30,000 of them spawning as shown on TV. They watched big fish being taken out of the hydro canals. Looked at the Hakataramea & had the Deep Creek diversion issue explained. Went through the Wainono lagoon, which was an incredible place with 12-18,000 game birds on it.

At the meeting they had a representation from the North Canterbury Region. The Region had overspent their budget by approx. $680,000 over the last nine years.

Salmon runs were poor which hadn’t helped and hatchery releases were costing huge money. The Region was looking for a top up from the Contestable Fund.

Three legal fund applications were confirmed at the meeting.

**National Licence Sales & Analysis:**

A paper from NZ Council had been circulated by email to Council with recommendations to consider.

The paper covered Licence sales YTD, licence system updates, analysis of the licence sales, switching and lapsing, current licence issues – particularly day licences and their use by non resident anglers, designated fisheries, the term “whole season”, family licences, fee options, etc.

There were four recommendations for Regions to consider.

1. That the March 2017 licence sales tables and licence system update be received
2. That the licence categories and fee ratios remain unchanged for the 2017/2018 financial year.
3. Regions be consulted on support for:
   1. Imposing a limit on the number of consecutive days that a day licence can be issued for, with the proposed limit being three days and not renewable for a further five working days.
   2. Broadening the use of designated fisheries as a useful management tool in the promotion of more whole season (including non-resident) licences.
   3. Changing the name of the “Adult Whole Season” licence to “Premium” licence with an expiry date of September 30th.
   4. Permitting all named people (primary, secondary and family members) to use the family licence as a fish alone licence.
4. That ways to grow participation rates become part of a proposed marketing strategy.

Zane went over the above recommendations and gave an introduction of why the recommendations were made.

Council considered the recommendations. Technically more fishing licences had been sold with more people actually fishing but F&G had not made the revenue they hoped from the current nine categories due to switching etc.

However in terms of perceived value and recognition of choice it had been successful. Council agreed that we needed a better differentiation of our fisheries, we needed to change what we were doing. There was good support for family members on a family licence to be able to fish alone.

After discussions Council agreed with each of the recommendations and supported 3 (a) – (d).

***Resolved Harris/Owen that the Southland Council supported the NZC recommendation 3 (a-d) of the licence sales paper circulated***. Carried.

**General Business:**

**Draft OWP & Budget 2017/2018**

The draft OWP and Budget 2017/2018 had been circulated to Council prior to the meeting for consideration. The budget provided for expenses of $660,402 which was the amount of our bulk funding. Southland had also applied to the contestable fund for a top of reserves to 30% of our bulk funding expenses as per NZC policy being $70,990.

Cr Owen referred to the OWP - Project 1821 on page 14.

This was to be changed for the future to the Budget and OWP to be presented at the February meeting for approval at the April meeting. This was to give Council more time for consideration.

Cr Graham referred to Project 1132 – Fish Pass Nokomai, and queried what was going to happen there? Zane replied this was a difficult problem, work on modifying the existing fish jump had been carried out under the consent we had for it, but that had not been totally successful. To try and help solve the problem Bill Jarvie was currently researching fish passes at gradients internationally to establish if a fish pass was possible at Nokomai.

After consideration:

***Resolved Cochrane/Graham that the 2017/2018 Operational Work Plan and Budget, as presented to the meeting, be approved by Council.*** Carried.

**Anglers Notice 2017-2019:**

The proposed three yearly Angler Notice changes for 2017-2019 had been advertised and submissions called for. No submissions had been received and no one had wished to speak to Council on the changes proposed as below.

**Upper Oreti** – include as a back country fishery to identify & communicate with users.

**Aparima River** – reduce bag limit from Hamilton Burn confluence to Wreys Bush from 4 fish per day to 2 fish per day.

**McGregor’s Pond –** becomes a Junior/Child only fishery with the opening of the fishery coinciding with the “Take a Kid Fishing” event held in October each year.

***Resolved Harris/Cochrane that the Angler Notice changes for 2017-2019 as above be approved.*** Carried.

**Sports Fishing Competition Policy:**

At each new Council some policies had to be reviewed. The review for this meeting was for the Sports Fishing Competition Policy attached to the agenda.

Zane explained the importance of the policy and the emphasis on participation rather than catching the biggest or heaviest fish. The latter tended to lead to unsavoury practises that occurred recently with a competition that had not gained F&G approval. There were no changes suggested by staff for the policy.

Some Councillors would like to see the largest fish or biggest bag removed from the policy, however after further discussion the general consensus was that Council adopt the existing policy for the remaining term of this Council and bring it back for review to the next Council term. In the meantime we could get more feedback from clubs etc on the issue.

***Resolved Stenning/Cochrane that the existing Sports Fishing Competition Policy be adopted for the term of this Council unchanged and reviewed again at the next Council term.*** Carried.

**Otago /Southland combined meeting date:**

Zane would email the date of a combined meeting to Councillors for their response.

**Black Swan issues:**

Issues were appearing with concentrations of Black Swans in certain areas of Southland. To help deal with that the bag limit this game season had been increased to 3 swans per day. However this would probably not affect those areas targeted by the Swans so Cr Stenning would like to see a permit given to hunters in certain areas to shoot a higher number of Swans to help control the population in those areas. Zane replied that we could get permission from the Minister to do that and develop conditions around it. We did not want to risk overharvest in areas where they were not causing problems. There was a lot of movement in the Swan populations. Banding had shown in the past that they travelled the whole South Island Coast.

**Council Vice Chairman:**

Michael Hartstonge (who had an apology for the meeting) had sent a note on this matter to the meeting which the Chairman read out. He did not feel there was a need for a Vice Chairman. If the Chairman was unable to preside, either through a conflict of interest or absence then the Council would elect someone suitable on the night as they usually did. We now also had an executive committee, who were able to be called upon if required.

Cr Cochrane disagreed for two reasons – one being that a Vice Chairman position was one where a person was primarily groomed to take on the Chairman’s position.

The second reason was the conflict of interest register. There was going to be increasingly conflicts that arose at the Council table with fisheries management, including tourism and lobby groups which would put two executive members into a conflict of interest situation.

Cr Stenning made the point that every Councillor potentially had a conflict of interest and as long as it was declared he could not see problems with that.

Councillors generally agreed that should the need arise to be elected Chairman for the night it would be good to be prepared and to develop the skills required rather than go in cold. That would apply to executive members as well.

Cr Cochrane said that an executive committee had a role to play in guidance and the performance for remuneration. Another role was the behind the scenes discussions, which they could organise for the agenda, so it made sense that a Vice Chairman should come from the executive committee as it all followed on.

In relation to conflicts of interest The Chairman said he had talked to Robert Sowman on the matter particularly in respect to his role as a guide. Robert had advised that as long as the conflict of interest was declared before discussions began it was important during discussions for Council to get as much information as possible and guides including Graeme had immense knowledge of the situation and should participate in discussions when invited to by the Council, but could not vote.

After discussion the general consensus was that a Vice Chairman position would be appropriate but it was better to defer that vote until another meeting when all members were present.

**Jet Boat Association meeting:**

Zane reported that ECan had decided it was not appropriate for them to use navigational safety bylaws to control activities. They had stepped away from 5 knot restrictions etc. around rivers. The Southland Jet Boat Assn had met with Zane suggesting that our Council might like to agree to more upliftings in our rivers. They were intending to speak to the Council at some stage re jet boat use on Southland Rivers.

**Items for next Council meeting 8th June 2017:**

* Cyril Gilroy presentation.
* Vice Chairman position.

There was no further business and the meeting was closed at 9.16pm.

Chairman\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_