

WELLINGTON FISH & GAME COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE WELLINGTON FISH & GAME COUNCIL, HELD ON TUESDAY 11 AUGUST 2020 AT 3.05PM HELD AT HOTEL COACHMAN, 140 FITZHERBERT AVENUE, PALMERSTON NORTH.

1. **Present:**

Chairman Strato Cotsilinis, Councillors Jim Cook, Malcolm Francis, Don Scott, John Hancock, Chris O'Meara, Colin Shore, Paul Shortis, Andy Tannock, Richard McIntyre, Andrew McGregor, Aaron Passey,

In Attendance:

(Fish and Game Office) Staff: Phil Teal (Regional Manager), Dr Matt Kavermann, Nathan Field, Hamish Carnachan

Licence Holders: Marc Flaws, Dan Waechter, Roger Smaile

2. **Apologies:**

Councillors Aaron Passey (for lateness)

It was moved

that apologies be accepted

Jim Cook/Andy Tannock

Carried

Welcome and Confirmation of Agenda

Chairman Cotsilinis welcomed the Council and public.

3. **Conflict of Interest**

There were no additional conflicts of interest that were identified specific to the agenda.

Councillor Shore noted an additional potential conflict of interest relating to casual work undertaken for the Wellington Fish and Game Council from time to time. Councillors McIntyre and Passey updated their respective governor positions held in Federated Farmers.

Mr Teal outlined the draft Conflict of Interest management plan and it was then moved that

The Conflict of Interest Management Plan be adopted as a transparent way of managing conflicts of interest.

Malcolm Francis/Jim Cook

Carried

4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting of 9 June 2020:**

After brief discussion it was moved that

the Minutes of the meeting of the Wellington Fish & Game Council of 9 June 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings of that meeting.

Jim Cook/John Pansters

Carried

5. **Matters Arising:**

Mr Teal updated Council on the option actively considered by NZ Council producing an APP replacing all printed regulation guides for the upcoming fishing season but eventual regional feedback noted that this option would not be available for all licence holders and it was finally decided that all regulation information would be produced as per previous using hard copy and website information.

6. **NZ Fish and Game Council Business**

Councillor Shortis outlined two projects that were currently progressing by NZ Council:

1. **Reserves Policy:** Mr Teal confirmed that Chairman Cotsilinis and he had provided separate comments on the reserve policy from a governance and an operational perspective, respectively, regarding the principle of reserve management for the organisation. Councillor Shortis confirmed that a second round of consultation with regional Fish and Game councils would occur before a final draft is prepared for NZ Council. Chairman Cotsilinis invited other councillors with additional comments to him so they could be fed back into the process for consideration.
2. **Resource Allocation Project:** Councillor Shortis noted that the budget setting process used by Fish and Game had its origins over 30 years ago and material changes had occurred in the resource usage patterns since then. He noted that more licences are now sold in the South Island regions but the licence income is redistributed to North Island regions – and there was increasing concern that an adjustment to this arrangement was required. The Terms of Reference will be developed independently to consider the changes in resourcing requirements for each region. He noted that this is parallel work to the Ministerial review currently underway. NZ Council will be asking the Department of Conservation to help find independent experts to undertake the project – with a completion date hopefully before Christmas 2020 and starting in September. It was confirmed that resource allocation model may include parameters such as hunter and angler effort, LEQs for angling and hunting, and other resourcing issues particular for each region. The resource allocation process would also include assessing the resourcing of NZ Council.

Chairman Cotsilinis confirmed that he was aware that several South Island regions had concerns of the distribution of income due to the large number of licences they sell. He noted that this needed to be put into context of the actual cost/budget requirements and that licence sales numbers per se was only part of the story. He further noted that if something happens to any of the large South Island's region income or levy payment (income to the system) then this affects the overall business model. The process should identify an inventory to maintain the minimum required resourcing for the organisation.

Councillor Scott noted that there had also been public comments that South Island regions had particular concern of resources derived from licence revenue being directed to Taranaki and Northland regions. He considered the premise that if Fish and Game was to be viewed as a national organisation then the business model should support the smaller regions in the 'national good' – especially if there is revenue surplus to cost requirements being generated. Further discussion and items noted:

- There was a large put and take fishery based on Eastern region lakes;
- Patterns in angler usage showed a decline
- What are the long term scenarios for future usage and staff and financial resources required to manage the physical resources.

It was reiterated that the Organisational Review Panel recognised that this was an important piece of work to be considered in their deliberations.

3. **Budgets 2020/2021**: Councillor Shortis outlined that currently NZ Council is trying to co-ordinate regional budgets with all 12 regional councils being requested to save 5% of their base funding and 10% to be allocated from cash reserves. North Canterbury region was currently the outlier region by requesting a potential increase in base line budget. It was noted that all 12 entities are financially linked even if there are interpretations of the original legislation that may allow for what is best for regional and/or national interest.

Councillor Shortis confirmed that the budgets would be reforecast in November 2020 once the initial sales figures are known and that there are sufficient reserves available to avoid radical action.

Discussion then focused on a need to put more effort internally to promote opportunities under the R3 programme, but Fish and Game

doesn't appear to be making the most of any marketing development team. Councillor McIntyre considered Fish and Game should be trying to encourage more anglers (in these times) to take up the option as a hobby or experience. Councillor Shortis noted that there is approximately 30% 'churn' (participants not renewing a licence but matched by those buying a licence for first time or not recently) and we need to pick up some of those part-time occasional anglers. Councillor Passey suggested that the lapsed participants could be targeted by clubs to promote themselves and mentor that cohort of anglers. Mr Teal noted the example from Tourism Taupo advertisements where they focused on different age and gender cohorts for angling, whereas Tourism Rotorua had a 'family focus' campaign for other activities. Councillor McGregor noted there were some perceived financial barriers to new, part-time or infrequent participants. Councillor Tannock brought to attention other options being pursued by Hunting and Fishing to provide 28 free fly fishing clinics around the country. It was pointed out that there needs to be an awareness of clubs to link into these events to establish contact with anglers. Councillor Scott considered there could also be more of a focus on spin fishing as a valued pursuit – which is perceived to be easier to participate in and less elitist by occasional anglers.

Council commended Councillor Shortis on the new direction he had already brought to the NZ Council as Chair.

It was then moved that

The report from Councillor Shortis on business relating to the NZ Fish and Game Council be received.

Malcolm Francis/Richard McIntyre

Carried

7. Public Forum

Marc Flaws considered that the number of swans aggregating on the surrounds of Lake Wairarapa appears to be high in numbers and would support the raising of the limit for black swan for the 2021 Game Season.

Dan Waechter acknowledged the issues being dealt with by Wellington Council.

Roger Smaile noted aspects of the budgeting system including lack of contestable fund bids this year. He further noted that NZ Council couldn't compel regions to transfer reserves and currently had to rely on forcing regions to use reserves for their budgets (via levy/grant system adjustment).

It was confirmed that NZ Council reserves could support regions in terms of cash flow if required.

8. Health and Safety Reporting

A brief discussion was held on various approaches to COVID19 level restrictions and Mr Teal confirmed that a supply of face masks had been purchased following considerable Government/expert promotion on their potential (and predicted) need to use them.

It was moved that

Council receive the Health and Safety Report for June and July 2020

Aaron Passey/Richard McIntyre

Carried

9. Revised Annual Budget – Draft Operational Workplan

Council reviewed the revised draft budget for 2020/2021 financial year and adjusted Operational Work Plan (OWP) presented by Mr Teal.

It was noted that the current budget process is not that efficient in reacting to changes in scenarios, and while NZ Council co-ordinates the budgets principally via the levy/grant system.

Discussion then ensued on the previous business budget report and the amended OWP. It was noted that it would be unlikely to have 350+ compliance interactions given any COVID restrictions and use of honorary rangers being restricted.

It was then moved that

The proposed budget for the 2020/21 Financial Year be approved and adopted

Jim Cook/Malcolm Francis

Carried

and it was further moved that

the Operational Work Plan for the 2020/21 Financial Year be approved and adopted

Aaron Passey/Colin Shore

Carried

Councillor Shortis acknowledged the efforts that had been made to reduce the budgets as requested by NZ Council.

10. Policy Review

Dr Kavermann provide an overview of application for taking sports fish by GWRC focusing on aspects of timing, frequency, and methods. He confirmed that it was not preferable to have an open-ended permit extending into May and therefore recommended any permit issued for an lengthy period be between November and April – but could look at other options on a case by case basis. The State of Environment (SOE) monitoring and reporting should be completed in the December to March period.

There were concerns on item 4 for Wairarapa regarding frequency and duration: monthly fish surveys using gill nets – gill nets left overnight are not an appropriate method for monitoring with Australian protocols by checking every 30 to 60 minutes and are moving away from gill nets per se given a potential effect on population – and are now using standardised camera monitoring. Other methods such as using spotlights as non-destructive compared with netting techniques.

Other timing issues include sampling of wetland sites during the waterfowl hunting season – especially if monitoring is considered necessary throughout the year.

After wider discussion it was considered any permits should not be able to be used as a way to reduce introduced fish (including sports fish) and a potential conflict of interest in the future was identified. Dr Kavermann noted that torrent fish were being investigated as a potential indicator species for river flows in addition to, or an alternative to, using salmonid river flow requirements which is well known and established.

Councillors considered a strong preference that use of gill nets should not be used anywhere. It was also noted responsibilities on all regional councils for monitoring fish populations that are derived from the national policy statement implementation.

It was concluded that a draft permit be developed with the time period defined from November to March with May sampling being considered and assessed as a one-off basis and gill netting not to be widely used and may only be considered as a short term option in the future. It was considered that other techniques other than using gill nets needed to be defined.

Council discussed the possibility of the regional council going directly to the DOC Minister and/or the DG of DOC to by-pass Fish and Game which was not preferred action.

It was then moved that

Council present a draft Sports Fish Special Licence to GWRC that reflects the application but has a monitoring period from November to April and no gill nets to be used

Don Scott/Chris O'Meara

Carried

Mr Teal noted that operational policies were still being updated with assistance of an external HR advisor.

A general discussion was held on the information presented on defining the organisational budgeting setting process and reserves policy. The different types and form of different reserves were discussed including dedicated reserves, how physical property should be considered fixed asset (less 'liquid') but could be realised as cash if in dire financial situation.

11. Draft Communications Strategy

Mr Teal confirmed that the alternative communications strategy was provided to NZ Council as part of consultation conducted.

Dr Kavermann note that he had informed NZ Council staff about the upcoming Conservation Week and how Fish and Game could get some publicity leverage – but there appeared to be no follow-up action by NZC staff.

It was then moved

to receive report on communications strategy and actions

Aaron Passey/Andrew McGregor

Carried

12. Draft Sports Fish and Game Bird Management Plan

Deferred

13. Project report 1112 Rangitikei River Trout Fishery Management Report

Dr Kavermann provided an overview of the management activities for the Rangitikei River – with higher numbers of fish found. Of the 234 backcountry licences issued over 70% of anglers were identified as being based overseas so an expected reduction in usage by angler overseas numbers is being anticipated for the upcoming season.

Dr Kavermann confirmed that he would present this report to the Moawhanga community management group and Genesis Energy as part of the mitigation reporting.

It was noted that there had been a request for policy for public liability insurance as a component of access to fisheries adjacent to NZDF land.

Chairman Cotsilinis thanked staff for their efforts in undertaking the monitoring programme and management actions for this valued fishery.

It was then moved to

Receive the report Project Report 1112 Rangitikei River Trout Fishery Management for 2019/2020

Malcolm Francis/Andy Tannock

Carried

14. Licence Management System

Mr Teal outlined the contract had been signed by all regions for Eyede Ltd to provide management services, and the policy development requirements that had been defined in the consultation process. It was agreed that the policy should have been developed by NZC in conjunction with the progression of the contract with the provider and therefore should have been confirmed by September 1 in line with the contract.

After discussion it was moved that

Wellington Fish and Game Council request that NZ Council should proceed with development of policy with urgency

Malcolm Francis/Richard McIntyre

Carried

Further discussion ensued on the signed contract with Eyede Ltd and that all regions should have a copy of the final signed contract document.

15. R3 Marketing Update

Mr Teal noted that NZ Council staff had developed a 'Take Me Fishing' logo to be potentially be used to link events undertaken by regions. The 'Take Me Fishing' programme is one developed and used in the United States to recruit anglers.

16. Action Plan for Healthy Rivers

Chairman Cotsilinis provided a brief overview of the recently released Action Plan for Healthy Waterways initiative from Government and noted that the National Environmental Standards (NES) were being implemented.

It was then moved that

The report on the update to the Action Plan for Healthy Waterways be received

Malcolm Francis/Paul Shortis

Carried

17. One Plan - Plan Change 2 Update

Mr Teal noted the pre-hearing mediation with expert conferencing had concluded and the hearing is anticipated for mid-October 2020

After brief discussion it was moved that

The report on the One Plan - Plan Change 2 update be received

Paul Shortis/Malcolm Francis

Carried

18. Wairarapa Water Project

Mr Teal noted that it had been confirmed that the project managers were interacting with GWRC in a pre-application phase with a timetable for progressing resource consents applications and notification before the end of the calendar year.

It was confirmed that Councillor Shortis, Peter Wilson and Mr Teal were planning to meet with Water Wairarapa representatives to update Fish and Game on the latest plans. The undertaking of appropriate environmental assessments will be key discussion point.

After brief discussion it was moved that

The report on the Water Wairarapa project update be received

Aaron Passey/Andrew McGregor

Carried

19. Western Region GWRC Resource Consent Applications

It was noted that nothing had progressed with iwi or other stakeholders in recent months.

20. Lake Wairarapa

It was noted that there had still been no progress in determining the legal mandate for the Kahungunu negotiators to progress the Treaty Settlement process.

Dr Kavermann confirmed that Fish and Game will seek to talk to the Wairarapa Moana governance group to provide an overview of other consequences of removing introduced fish (such as reduction for piscivorous bird foraging).

Mr Teal confirmed that the Ramsar Wetland Status Application was likely to be successful and any announcement would be forthcoming.

Dr Kavermann outlined the work undertaken by Nathan Field who had been establishing an inventory of hunting sites with GPS co-ordinates and photos of status.

Mr Teal confirmed that Wairarapa Moana via GWRC had been granted \$3.5 million in a 'spade ready' job creation scheme by Government but had not seen the final confirmed projects that this would be spent on.

It was then moved that

The update report on management issues at Lake Wairarapa be received

Andy Tannock/Colin Shore

Carried

21. Research Update

Mr Teal and Dr Kavermann provided a brief update on the eDNA project and the Native Fish – Trout Interaction Project.

The eDNA project had focused on sites on the Kahuterawa Stream near Palmerston North indicating spikes in DNA in filters contained in sampling tubes. The research had also looked at presence of spawning trout below Birchville dam – with an eDNA sample confirming presence of trout and evidence of trout spawning.

NZC staff also appeared to be working on an alternative eDNA project – using a different technique – focused on only presence / absence of sportfish. This is somewhat disappointing that NZC staff had not consulted with Wellington Fish and Game staff prior to widely publicising an alternative technique as fit for purpose – as the technique used currently only confirms presence of adult trout based on fragments of DNA_{nuclear}.

Mr Teal confirmed that Ami Coughlan had been processing samples and establishing an inventory for oxygen isotope analysis for the native fish – trout interaction project.

As part of a larger MBIE grant application the Cawthron Institute was looking at co-ordinating a project that would assess the financial and social values of trout fisheries in NZ.

Dr Adam Canning continues to provide advice and interest in the projects.

After brief discussion it was moved that

The update report on research projects be received

Jim Cook/John Hancock

Carried

Meeting was suspended at 5.05pm for workshop and dinner and was re-convened at 6.50pm.

It was agreed that Chairman Cotsilinis and Mr Teal would collate the views of councillors regarding the organisational review and provide to councillors input prior to the planned meeting with the review panel on 29/30 September.

Councillor Scott left the meeting at 7.00pm.

22. Junior/Novice Participation Update

It was confirmed that 1000 fish for the Capital Trout Centre run by Wellington Flyfishing Club should be available from Eastern Region's Ngongataha hatchery.

It was also anticipated that an alternative format would be used for the Hokowhitu Lagoon promotion by the Manawatu Freshwater Anglers.

It was also confirmed that the Fish in Schools programme for this year would be deferred as there were uncertainties in getting ova and school management of the project due to the COVID 19 restrictions.

It was then moved

To receive the update report on junior/novice participation

Aaron Passey/Malcolm Francis

Carried

23. Access Issues

Mr Teal noted that there were no issues for hunter management at the Otaki River mouth but there was considerably more public use of Crystals Lagoon upstream of Highway One which may create safety issues. GWRC had verbally indicated that continued hunting at the latter site would discontinue at the conclusion of this season.

It was noted that QEII Park north of Paekakariki was - re-establishing a large wetland (currently grazed) and is likely to cause aggregations of waterfowl that eventually will require management. While it is unlikely to re-establish hunting per se at this site, Fish and Game would advocate for limited hunting opportunities.

Mr Teal confirmed that access to the small lake at Pencarrow lakes was retained but there are limited opportunities for hunting away from public tracks. He reiterated that the GWRC had informed Fish and Game that there was the presence of *Egeria densa* (an aquatic oxygen weed) in Pencarrow Lakes and had restricted access to hunters on the main lake. He expressed his disappointment in the communications and consultation afforded to Fish and Game and the hunters, as they were aware of this since January 2020 on receipt of the NIWA report. Despite requests for updates from GWRC none had been provided.

It was then moved that

The update report on access issues be received

Jim Cook/Chris O'Meara

Carried

24. Management Report – 1 June to 31 July 2020

Mr Teal noted that Dr Adam Canning was currently finalising a report on suggested monitoring sites on the Rangitikei River to establish changes in water quality through risks of potential land use changes.

After brief discussion it was moved that

Council receive the Management Report for period 1 June to 31 July 2020 be received.

Colin Shore/Malcolm Francis

Carried

25. Licence Sales report

Mr Teal provided an overview of the fishing and game licence sales:

- 2019/20 fish licence sales LEQs were up slightly compare to last year. (with an expectation that there would be virtual no non-resident
- Licences issued for 2020 game season were approximately 8% down on budget given the game season started on 23 May 2020.

It was moved that

The licence sales reports for Fish Licence Sales 2019/2020 and Game 2020 be received

Aaron Passey/Colin Shore

Carried

26. Expenditure Report/Financial Transactions

The summary of income and expenditure to 30 June 2020 indicated that the financial position was not too bad. It was confirmed that the wage subsidy had assisted greatly with cash flow and was legitimately applied for and used appropriately.

Mr Teal noted that he had undertaken an analysis of overhead expenditure and had taken a very aggressive approach to suspending spending on overhead items if possible.

Mr Teal noted that he had sought specific HR advice for COVID19 restrictions.

It was then moved

Receive and Accept the Expenditure Reports to 30 June 2020 and Financial Transactions for May and June 2020.

Jim Cook/Colin Shore

Carried

Mr Teal noted that he would be actively assessing vehicle replacement as it had been deferred for over six months in the planned conservative replacement cycle.

27. Communications

Council acknowledge the passing of Don McCulloch and Reg Cull who had been vast contributors to Wellington Fish and Game governance over the years.

Council considered a letter from GWRC General Manager, Environment Management, Al Cross, regrading a request to withdraw warning letters to staff and reissue a warning letter to GWRC as an organisation (or to General Manager, Environment Management).

After considerable discussion Council confirmed it would not withdraw a warning letter – being the least consequential compliance tool available and further suggested sending a letter to the organisation to assist in future compliance.

It was then moved

To receive report on items of interest in communications and media

Colin Shore/Jim Cook

Carried

28. Recognition Medals

It was confirmed that Hugh Driver and Wayne Cameron had been presented recognition medals on 27 July 2020 at the Kapiti Flyfishing Club meeting for outstanding contribution to advocacy of maintain trout habitat in the Wellington region.

29. Wellington Conservation Board Liaison

Mr Teal confirmed that Councillor Scott had previously indicated that he was keen to attend meetings in Palmerston North area, with topics of interest including Reservoir fisheries, and concerns relating to the Manawatu River trout fisheries.

30. General Business

Mr Teal noted that Councillor Scott had requested clarification of access arrangements for Namunamu lake – including walking, vehicular, and use row boat on the lake. It was acknowledged that this lake was in Taranaki Fish and Game region and a letter would be sent to Taranaki Fish and Game to request an update.

It was confirmed that that Andy Tannock has been reappointed as Chairman of Game Bird Habitat Trust (acclamation).

A brief discussion ensued on the presentation quality of Nelson/Marlborough Fish and Game reports which was undertaken by a local design student. This is something that currently is beyond staff resourcing in Wellington region but could look at Victoria University (or other tertiary institutions) design groups being involved in either developing template or more extensive work on presentation of project reports. It was agreed that this can show the licence holder the value of what Fish and Game does, but wanted to avoid the communication spin provided by larger organisations such as regional councils and DOC. Mr Teal indicated that it was planned to do a short 8 page presentation on banding results and interpretations in due course.

There being no items of general business the meeting was closed at 7.50pm.

Next Meeting to be held: ***Club Wairarapa, 20 Essex Street, Masterton on 13 October 2020 at 3pm.***

Chairman_____

Date_____