

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME NEWSBRIEF

If you require further elaboration or clarification of items contained herein, or any other matters relating to F&G business, please don't hesitate to contact your local councillor or the office.

Matters arising from the Council Meeting of 15 October 2022

1. Councillor Williamson raised his concern that the NZ Council letter to DOC on the review of the Wildlife Act didn't fully articulate or promote that there were differing positions between Fish & Game councils on game preserves. Councillor Williamson considered it crucial that changes to the Act did not restrict Council's ability to refuse consent for preserves. Councillor Cocks agreed and reminded Councillors that once the new Act had been drafted it would be difficult to impose changes.
2. Mr Wilson stated that he had received only two enquires from licence holders who were interested in becoming rangers.
3. Councillor Williamson congratulated Mr Klee on his excellent project on the Pungapunga Wetland, which the Councillor considered to be a good use of F&G resources.
4. Dr Daniel updated Councillors on issues with the Mangatutu Stream. The adjacent landowner had requested a meeting with DOC over their refusal to lease out riparian land for farming. Dr Daniel had asked to attend the meeting.
5. Councillor Juby informed Councillors on the recent Chair's meeting to discuss the Governance Review. He emphasised that most Chairs were pushing for Fish & Game to move more quickly on the Governance Review, especially in regard to amalgamations. He had subsequently talked to the Northland Chair about the potential for amalgamating the two regions. Councillor Cocks stressed the importance of Northland licence holders having Council representation. Councillor Juby agreed to prepare a draft MOU on principles for amalgamation.
6. Dr Daniel stated that it should be known by March 2023 whether the sterile trout stocking programme was successful. At that time, he expected that sterile fish would be larger and more numerous than their non-sterile counterparts.
7. Councillor Williamson recommended that a plan should be developed to manage and enhance individual priority fisheries. Such a plan would consider threats and opportunities. Councillor Barnes recommended that staff should identify priority fisheries. Mr Wilson reminded Councillors that significant fisheries had been identified in the Sports Fish and Game Management Plan. It was agreed that staff develop a management plan for one river fishery.
8. Councillor Barker expressed his concern over the imposition of new national regulations and requirements for clay bird ranges. These shoots were the very important "glue" that held game hunter associations together. He noted that while the NZCTA was assisting its clubs, nothing was being done to assist Fish & Game clubs.
9. Councillor Juby asked Councillors whether they were happy for him to continue attending meetings of the regional chairs and emphasised that his position was not to make decisions on behalf of Council. Councillors agreed to the Chair attending meetings of the regional chairs.

Matters Arising from the Chief Executive's Report

- **National Shoveler count:** Staff completed this year's national Shoveler counts with assistance from several volunteers. The national count is showing a significant decline in total count numbers this year, partly due to the low counts witnessed in this region. John Dyer's counts, which take in some large sites, were mostly down this year. For instance, the Lake Waikare count was 2,340 in 2021 and 2,240 in 2020, but just 490 "spoonies" this year.
- **Whangamarino Weir Section 128 Review;** Work is ongoing on the review for the weir consents. Currently engineers are conducting a high-level cost estimate to retrofit the existing flood gates. Trials would need to be undertaken to test its feasibility, and ideally, a retrofit of part of the structure would be undertaken with gates that offer greater water level control and fish passage (while providing the ability to trap pest fish such as koi). Significant technical and political work is necessary before the viability of this option can be determined.
- **Cambridge WWTP:** David Klee has had 2 further meetings with consultants to discuss progress with the long-term option for the upgrades in treatment for the Cambridge WWTP.
- **Fish and Game's comprehensive consent application for maintenance work on wetlands;** Ecological Potential have finalised their report which classifies the different habitat types found on Fish and Game wetlands, a key requirement of the Waikato Regional Council request for further information. During site visits some weed species were discovered which should be given high priority due to their current limited abundance and ability to spread quickly.
- **Piggott Wetland:** A ballot for Pond 6 in the McKenzie Wetland and Ponds 1 & 5 in the Piggott Wetland was undertaken September 24th.
- **Pungapunga Wetland:** David Klee has lodged a consent application to install two weirs on sections of a drain that is dewatering the Pungapunga wetland. This drain was first dug post WW1 and is continuing to have significant adverse effects on wetland hydrology. It forms part of the wider project being conducted in concert with Waikato RiverCare and with funding from WCEET the GBHT and WRA. In total we have successfully secured \$450,000 of funding and in-kind contributions and the project will encompass 4.2 km of fencing, 14 Ha of planting, 27 Ha of weed control and restore the hydrology of over 100ha of remnant wetland and marginal farmland.
- **ABCD Flax Block:** David Klee spent a day in the wetland documenting the hydrological alterations that have been made by the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) since the flood events of March/April 2017. It took F&G several years of staff time, \$180,000 of gamebird licence revenue to restore water levels in the block and create a high value wetland that provided significant habitat for both recreational game birds and taonga species such as bittern. The water levels since 2018 have been low to the point where the ecosystem health of the wetland is compromised. This has been exacerbated by successive droughts but even now after a wet June/July, water levels remain sub-optimal. Despite multiple promises that new flood modelling information would be made available we are yet to see any evidence that the water levels in the wetland had anything to do with the flooding that occurred in March/April 2017, which led to the WRC making several drainage modifications within the wetland. We have requested a meeting with WRC and DOC staff to formulate a plan to ensure these issues are finally rectified. Ultimately the wetland water levels could be increased further to optimise habitat values and this should be the overarching aim.
- **Site Visits:** David Klee has had 3 meetings with landowners wishing to restore wetland habitat on their properties.
- **Moakurarua Stream:** Adam reviewed the Moakurarua Stream access file and contacted Walking Access for advice. Although the owner has not surveyed the marginal strip, they have fulfilled their OIA obligations. The only means to review the access is if we can prove the owner is continuing to refuse access.