

# 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 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023

- 0.410 issue:** Councillor Clark expressed his disappointment at the decision by the NZ Council to support the Minister of Conservation's decision regarding the phasing out of lead shot for .410 shotguns. Councillor Barnes stated that as Chairman of the NZ Council he did not vote on the .410 issue but believed that the Minister was always going to ban lead shot unless Fish & Game could provide considerable evidence that lead shot was accepted internationally for shotguns of this calibre. He didn't believe that it was in Fish & Game's interest to oppose the Minister on this issue, and indeed the Minister was testing Fish & Game as to whether it was going to step up and support her decision.
- Botulism outbreak:** Mr Wilson provided a brief update on recent botulism outbreaks in the region. He informed that the only large outbreak was confined to the Whangamarino with only minor outbreaks elsewhere. Although there was a contractor still working in the wetland, the numbers of affected birds were declining rapidly and would continue to do so with the cooler weather.
- Duck Strategy:** Mr Wilson noted that the strategy was produced in 2013 and that it had been superseded by the 2021-2031 Management Plan. Nevertheless, the main objectives of the strategy had been implemented including considerably more effort on RMA processes and wetland restoration. However, Councillor Williamson believed that the strategy was fundamentally flawed because it did not take into consideration the impact of over-harvest due to the 4-week season. He did not believe that there was any shortage of duck habitat, and in his opinion the season should be reduced to 2 weeks. Mr Wilson replied that staff believed the main limiting factor for the duck population was duckling survival influenced by the relative absence of good quality rearing habitat (good water quality and pest fish free).
- National Environmental Standards:** Councillor Williamson welcomed those aspects of the new legislation that allowed minor earthworks to be undertaken without requiring a consent. Council agreed to thank Mischa Davis for her report and her work on this legislation.
- 2023/24 Draft budget and operational work plan:** Councillors expressed their concerns that licence fees were not keeping up with inflation. Mr Wilson explained the need for a new field officer who would be appointed as part of a succession strategy that will allow for the new officer to work with current staff next summer.
- Northland amalgamation:** The chairman provided an update of his discussions with the Northland Fish & Game Council regarding potential amalgamation of the two regions. He didn't believe that the Auckland/Waikato Council should be directly involved with negotiating financial arrangements with Northland.

## **Matters Arising from the Chief Executive's Report**

**Drift Diving:** Although most rivers have been extremely high, the Blue Spring (upper Waihou) drift dive was completed just before Cyclone Gabrielle. The results were outstanding with plenty of large fish recorded. The drift diving programme is behind schedule and river levels are being evaluated daily to try to squeeze in dives before April. The most concerning area in terms of cyclone damage will be the Ohinemuri River that peaked at over 800 m<sup>3</sup>/s.

**Duck Banding.** This year's banding programme has been severely disrupted by the extreme weather leading to the complete cancellation of the AkaAka and 1 of the Te Awamutu site and very low catches at Wellsford and the Opuatia. In the end given the situation we are relatively satisfied with the total catch of 2001 ducks for the summer.

**Healthy Rivers:** Mediation for Healthy Rivers (Plan Change 1) has been on hold since the Commissioner has been on leave. Starts again in mid-March. We've been using the "break" to discuss strategy with our independent experts, especially Dr Adam Canning from the University of Queensland who specialises in water quality and river ecology, and Dr Ngaire Phillips who specialises on lake water quality.

**Lumbercorp and Max Birt Consents, limited public notification:** These consents have been notified. Clare Robertson and David Klee attended a recent stakeholder meeting and are working on a submission. The recent wet conditions have meant the ponds at both sites have been discharging almost continually since June 2022.

**Whangamarino Weir Review:** David Klee attended a workshop held by Stantec to discuss alternative structures to regulate water in the Whangamarino Wetland as part of the review for the consents for the existing weir.

**Whangamarino Fish Kill and Botulism Outbreak.** Staff and volunteers have spent a huge amount of time and effort trying to combat the outbreak. The wetland experienced another large fish kill at the start of February after cyclone Gabrielle and the number of dead fish must be seen to be believed. David Klee managed to secure \$5000 of funding from DOC and WRC in order to pay for contractors to help manage the outbreak as the size and extent is so large it was too much for staff and volunteers alone to cover. These contractors picked up 600 birds in a single day. DOC have also been assisting by sending out a crew one day a week to recover sick and dead birds. David also took out representatives from the WRA who assisted in retrieving dead birds and got to witness the situation first hand. The epicentre of the outbreak which appeared to have the highest concentration of dead birds was centred around the Raeo Arm and adjacent ponds. With receding water levels this site is getting more difficult to access with boats, but there are fewer fresh carcasses being recovered. Unfortunately, there are also very few healthy living birds in this part of the wetland and we can only hope that some of thousands that were living there a month ago found refuge elsewhere. At the time of writing there have been reports of birds deaths further up the Maramarua River towards the coal bucket line which is an area that was previously unaffected and holding lots of birds. Surveillance has increased in this area.

**Parkinson Lake:** Adam has been building an access platform to replace an existing platform on Parkinson Lake. The platform will be installed when conditions are suitable.

**Disadvantaged youth:** Adam fished with approximately 15 young teenagers on the Whakapapa River and demonstrated drift diving for the Taumarunui Community Kokiri Trust. The fishing swimming and snorkelling were well received by the children who had a great afternoon out. Adam has been asked to assist the Kaitiakitanga Trust to teach a youth group how to fish the upper Waipa on the Oliver property.