

STATEMENT OF SERVICE PERFORMANCE

OTAGO FISH & GAME COUNCIL

2022-23 FINANCIAL YEAR



Chair's Report

It gives me great pleasure to report to you on the financial year to 31 August 2023.

This brings an end to our three-year planning cycle of Council. Nobody could have anticipated the impact the Covid pandemic would have on the strategic objectives set at the 2019 planning meeting but the organisation has carefully navigated this disruptive period and delivered much of what was intended, albeit under trying circumstances. I'm proud of the way the Council and staff have worked positively and practically to ensure licence holders get the service they expect from us.

The financial position of Council also remains healthy. Fishing licence sales volumes in Otago were behind the ambitious budget set by New Zealand Council but still held up revenue, even though the country was in a technical recession. Game bird licence sales were also steady. Our total licence income was \$2,337,695, which was ahead of budgeted sales revenue and better than last year's total revenue (\$2,101,439). We paid levies of \$1,200,082 to the New Zealand Fish & Game Council, up from \$959,241 the previous year. The Otago Fish & Game Council's end-of-year position was a deficit of \$83,890 which was better than the budgeted deficit expected of \$100,622. The deficit was planned by Council to spend down reserves to fund specific projects. This is a good result under the circumstances.

Angler and hunter compliance was of a high standard this year and while we didn't quite achieve our target contact rates, I want to thank our honorary ranger team for the effort they put in and particularly the support they have given staff in field projects over the year.

Advocating for better ecological health in waterways, wetlands and habitat through RMA processes remains a major workload. Staff have attended stakeholder meetings, made submissions and appeared before hearings on the Otago Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and the Land and Water Regional Plan. The quality of the staff submissions has been excellent and really does reflect the values important to Otago licence holders.

One of the highlights over the year was the very positive results in our stakeholder survey. The Council has invested additional resources into communication and strategic relationships and the results clearly show that this is paying off. The report, written by a third-party provider, confirmed our positive and growing working relationships with key parties, particularly mana whenua. However, there is still work to do and the Council and staff will build the recommendations into a communications and engagement plan this coming year.



Colin Weatherall QSM

**Chairman,
Otago Fish & Game Council**

Staff continued to work with Contact Energy during the year to improve their sports fish mitigation programme on the lower Clutha River. The development of a trust to better coordinate Contact's Sports Fish Management Programme has been signed by our Councillor trustees and now awaits signatures from Contact Energy following staff approval of the funding agreement. Next year should see the trust come into fruition and progress on sports fish projects, including investigations, and hopefully, confirmation of construction of a salmon hatchery at Roxburgh to improve sea-run salmon returns into the Clutha River.

Stormwater management on the boundary of the former Wanaka Hatchery site continues to frustrate the Council with discharges of stormwater into Bullock Creek headwaters and onto Fish & Game property. The Queenstown Lakes District Council deferred its stormwater upgrade, to help address their situation, a decision which disappointed our Council. Legal advice recently sought should help progress the matter in the new financial year.

More positively, the Council was successful in obtaining a Queen Elizabeth II open space covenant over the Bullock Creek Hatchery Springs wetland area, which will protect the sensitive urban spring headwater area from development in perpetuity. Again, our thanks must go to the Friends of Bullock Creek, who continue to champion this important spawning stream and are doing a fantastic job of removing weeds and planting the wetland springs area on our property.

I would like to thank our chief executive and staff, councillors, our New Zealand Council appointee Mike Barker, and our co-opted Ngai Tahu member Richard Twining for their hard work and support over the year, especially while I have also been supporting Central South Island Fish & Game Council at the start of the year. We look forward to a positive 2024.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Weatherall', written in a cursive style.

Colin Weatherall, Chair

Who is Otago Fish & Game Council?



What we aim to do

Conservation and Sustainability:

Conserve and manage Otago's freshwater fisheries and game bird populations. Work to ensure that these resources are sustainable and healthy for future generations to enjoy.

Recreational Opportunities:

Provide recreational opportunities for anglers and hunters. Manage and maintain access to public fishing and hunting areas in Otago, ensuring that these activities can be enjoyed by all New Zealanders and visitors.

Advocacy:

Advocate for the interests of recreational anglers and hunters. We represent the concerns and preferences of licence holders in regulatory and policy decisions related to fisheries and game bird management, and the habitat which supports them.

Research and Education:

Conduct research and monitoring of fish and game populations and habitats, which helps inform management decisions. Engage in educational efforts to promote responsible and sustainable angling and hunting practices.

Regulation and Licensing:

Issue fishing and hunting licences and collect revenue to fund management and its operations. We communicate with licence holders regularly and enforce regulations to ensure that recreational activities are conducted in a sustainable and lawful manner.

Environmental Stewardship:

In addition to a focus on fish and game species, we work on broader environmental issues related to freshwater ecosystems, including wetlands, as their health is essential for the well-being of all species.



Who are we?

Otago Fish & Game Council is an independent crown entity with nine staff, nine governors and 16 volunteer rangers. The current Chair is Colin Weatherall QSM.

Why do we exist?

Otago Fish & Game Council is the statutory manager of sports fish and game bird resources within Otago Region. It holds functions and responsibilities set out in the Conservation Act 1987. The organisation's functions include managing, maintaining and enhancing the sports fish and game resources of Otago in the long-term recreational interests of anglers and hunters; representing the interests and aspirations of anglers and hunters in the statutory planning process; and advocating the interests of the Council, including its interests in the habitats of sports fish and game birds.

Links:

- [Conservation Act 1987](#)
- [Otago Region homepage on F&GNZ website](#)



2020-23 Strategic Priorities for Otago

The Otago Fish & Game Council developed a set of strategic priorities at its February 2020 meeting. The goal and priorities were reconfirmed at the February 2022 planning meeting and an annual operations workplan was generated to achieve those outcomes.

GOAL:

To manage, maintain and enhance Otago sports fish and game birds and their habitats in the best long-term interests of present and future generations of anglers and hunters



Public Awareness and Strategic Relationships

Improved understanding by the general public of F&G role and work

Form alliances/collaborations with landowners, mana whenua and other stakeholders on areas of common interest

Links:

- [Otago Operational Workplan 2022-2023](#)
- [Otago Strategic Priorities 2020-2023](#)



Species Management

That Otago Fish & Game Council has sufficient understanding of Southern Lakes sports fish populations to meet management needs



Habitat Protection and Management

Improve outcomes in Resource Management planning processes – Plans reflect Fish & Game input



Licence holder Communication

High licence holder understanding of F&G organisation and its work on their behalf





Public Awareness and Strategic Relationships

Public Awareness

The delay in the organisation's communications strategy (deferred to 2023/24 financial year) didn't discourage staff from engaging with the general public and media across a number of channels.

Generating print and mainstream online media content is one of the primary vehicles for communicating with the general public. In addition there were editorial pieces in the Otago Daily Times.

Social media, mainly Facebook, has provided a useful two-way channel to communicate with both licence holders and members of the public. That is a growing medium.

MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS	2023	2022
Media releases generated	63	56
Print media appearances	106	113
Facebook page followers	3751	3061
Facebook posts	177	190

Stakeholder Perceptions Survey

To stay relevant and be more effective, the organisation needed to measure and understand how we were perceived by stakeholders. A qualitative research study was completed by independent consultant Primary Purpose and consisted of in-depth interviews and online surveys from a wider group. Among the survey participants were representatives from angling and hunting groups, farming, iwi, NGOs, researchers and local government.

Otago Fish & Game Council received very positive ratings for the way it engages and works with other stakeholder organisations. We were described as "pragmatic, responsive and open to other perspectives".

75% of respondents said they felt positively about how Otago Fish & Game was engaging and working with their organisation.



Donald Scott Memorial Fund Launch

Otago Fish & Game supported the launch of a fund dedicated to freshwater and sports fish research. Dr Scott was a past councillor and would be pleased to see us making a \$5,000 annual contribution to support masters students researching areas of direct interest to the organisation.

Most stakeholders understood our main role, although a few knew less about its environmental and habitat protection work. Otago Fish & Game received a high rating for its efforts to encourage recreational participation, such as Take A Kid Fishing.

The few poorer ratings in the survey came from online survey participants who had much less direct contact with the organisation. Some thought Otago Fish & Game knew when to be assertive but "could potentially pick its battles a bit more".

The findings, including the critical feedback, will help develop a communications strategy to keep improving our advocacy and how we engage with stakeholders.

Links:

- [Otago Fish & Game Council Facebook Page](#)
- [Stakeholder Perceptions survey.](#)
- [Editorial Content](#)



Species Management

Southern Lakes fisheries a focus

According to the National Angler Survey, lakes Wanaka, Hawea, Dunstan and Wakatipu rank in the top five angling destinations in Otago. Accordingly, the Council's medium-term objective is to establish a robust monitoring system for the lakes fisheries with enough sensitivity to detect long-term population changes.

Regular angler surveys are also undertaken at Southern Lakes on a rotational basis. The first of three years of angler surveys to gather effort and catch data for Lake Hawea was completed. 196 angler surveys were done in 36 visits to the lake. The average catch rate was 2.9 hours/fish. By way of comparison, Lake Wanaka was 7.13 hours/fish.

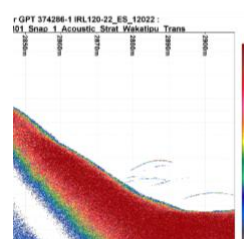
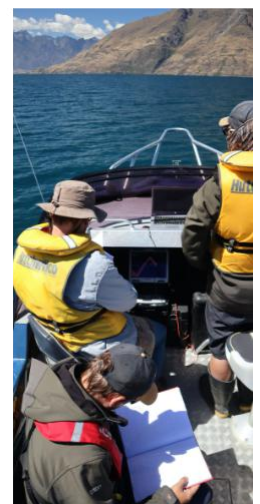
In addition to lake surveys, work on identification of key spawning tributaries, particularly for landlocked salmon, was initiated in the lake Wanaka and Wakatipu catchments. Finding salmon spawning in thousands of hectares of often remote backcountry terrain is no easy task so staff welcomed the use of eDNA technology to help narrow the focus for on-the-ground surveys. Of significance was that foot surveys identified salmon spawning in a Makarora side stream, which was the first documented in a Lake Wanaka tributary for a decade.

One project not completed was the hosting of a lakes fisheries monitoring workshop in Wanaka. A similar event on monitoring southern lakes health was conducted by the Otago Regional Council (ORC) so F&G staff attended that event and are now on an ORC lake health monitoring working party.

In summary, this year's work continues to build the organisation's understanding of these fisheries, which are critically important to anglers and the wider community. All three of these major projects, including the acoustic monitoring, are to be continued in the 2023/24 financial year.

Acoustic Monitoring at Southern Lakes

Establishing a fit-for-purpose monitoring system for sports fish in Southern Lakes took a significant step forward this year. NIWA were contracted to undertake acoustic surveying using high definition sonar to detect fish. Staff supported NIWA to undertake the repeat surveys of sports fish populations in lakes Wanaka, Wakatipu, Hawea and Dunstan. Results showed there was a decline in the number of fish recorded per hectare in Lakes Wanaka and little change in Hawea since 2009 but an improvement was noted in Lake Wakatipu over the time period. Lake Dunstan was also surveyed in 2023 but repeat surveys of this lake were not recommended due to bubbles from sediments and decaying material interfering with sonar efficacy.



Links:

- [National Angler Survey 2021/22](#)
- [Niwa Report on Acoustic Monitoring of Southern Lakes](#)
- [Hawea Angler Survey Report 2023](#)
- [Landlocked Salmon spawning surveys 2023](#)

Habitat Protection and Management

RMA Policy and Planning

The Council's primary aim was to improve the outcomes from our statutory involvement in Resource Management Act (RMA) planning and consenting matters.

Meaningful measurement of the impact of this sort of RMA advocacy is problematic. Firstly the policy or plan changes happen over several financial years and, secondly, it is difficult to measure how our advocacy influenced the final outcome, especially when neither plan has been finalised yet. Given the complexity of the process and the lack of a suitable metric, it is appropriate to simply just record our effort and cost.

Making submissions and attending RMA hearings has been a large body of work this last year, which was exacerbated by the simultaneous development of an Otago Regional Policy Statement and a Land and Water Regional Plan. This stretched the organisation's staff resources, and external planning and legal assistance was required to improve the prospects of a good outcome for the species and habitat. Contractors were funded (\$33,255) from Reserves, which Otago set aside in 2020 for the purpose.



The Upper Clutha River, which is the subject of a RMA consent application for suction dredging, is a highly productive fishery and is especially attractive to youth anglers.

Resource Consents

The RMA consent application workload continues to diminish as Otago Regional Council (ORC) plan changes take effect. This has been especially noticeable around water allocation consents as these are now managed with standard conditions (to protect flows) and fixed terms by ORC staff meaning little F&G input is required.

RMA CONSENTS	2023	2022
Total received	30	31
Affected Party approval given (with conditions)	20	21
Submissions made	4	3
Hearings attended	0	3

Two major consent applications are noteworthy.

- An application by Cold Gold Ltd to operate a dredge in the Upper Clutha River channel was opposed due to the potential disturbance of spawning sports fish and rearing habitat. Staff will likely have to prepare for a hearing in the new financial year unless resolved by way of conditions.
- An application by Aotearoa Anglers to run commercial activities (drift boating) on the surface of waterbodies in Central Otago resulted in a negotiated outcome and affected party approval was eventually given by OF&GC. Conditions included limiting the number of boats, trips and timing to reduce the impact on other anglers.

Links:

- [Submission to Draft Otago Land and Water Plan](#)
- [Submission on Otago Regional Policy Statement](#)
- [Further Submission on Otago Regional Policy Statement](#)

Licence Holder Communication



Connecting with licence holders

Improving the knowledge of the organisation and its work among licence holders has been a priority for Council since 2021 survey results reported decreasing levels of understanding about the Council's activities. A specialist communications officer role was established, which has helped considerably with the volume and quality of material reaching licence holders.

The Fish & Game magazine remains the primary vehicle for distribution of information to licence holders. 11,679 fishing and 4344 game licence holders were posted the F&G magazine, which contained 8 pages of dedicated Otago material.

Emailed weekly river reports were instigated this year following 2022 survey results showing that licence holders preferred a direct feed of information to their inboxes. The report containing information on river condition and fishing tips was sent to 13,940 people and has an average 49% open rate. This, alongside monthly ezines, has provided an additional channel to showcase the organisations' activities.

A further opportunity for direct contact with licence holders is through compliance activity. Taking that into account, staff and volunteers had face-to-face contact with 1877 (17%) whole season fish licence holders and 377 (10%) game bird licence holders in the field – each encounter being a prime opportunity to share information.

Links:

- [Otago Fish & Game Council Facebook Page](#)
- [Weekly river reports for anglers](#)
- [Fish & Game Magazine](#)
- [Compliance Summary Report 2022/23](#)

Volunteer Rangers

At year end Otago had 16 volunteer rangers (up from 12 in 2022). This group of dedicated individuals contributed to angler training days, coordinated compliance activities and also did their own self-directed ranging. They accounted for 156 angler and hunter interviews in Otago and many more in support of staff doing compliance work. Their generous assistance with novice angler events such as Take A Kid Fishing days was also appreciated.



Communications Strategy delayed

A formal communications strategy was to be developed in 2022/23 but was not completed, however, staff made contributions to a national communications strategy, which can be adapted and adopted locally.

Output Expenditure

Changes in spending

There were three notable changes in expenditure between this financial year and the last:

- The increase in spending in the **Species Management** area was primarily related to increased staff hours and external costs associated with the Southern Lakes acoustic survey project.
- **Public Interface** was given greater emphasis in 2022/23, particularly in staff time, as a result of surveys which suggested that we needed to be more visible in the field.
- The **Compliance** output spending was more than the previous year due to higher than expected prosecution costs.



Output	2023	2022
Species Management	\$306,270	\$230,511
Habitat Protection and Management	\$412,597	\$433,754
Angler and Hunter Participation	\$162,568	\$149,285
Public Interface	\$159,368	\$116,731
Compliance	\$125,342	\$87,363
Licencing	\$111,632	\$105,320
Council	\$66,149	\$63,916
Planning and Reporting	\$104,498	\$93,820



Fish & Game Otago staff electric fishing Back Stream as part of a research project funded by Contact Energy to determine the natal origin of lower Clutha River adult brown trout.



Links:

- [2022/23 Otago F&G Council Financial Report](#)
- [Otago F&G Council Agendas and Minutes](#)