



Submissions closing: 16 October 2026

nationalpolicydirection@mcert.govt.nz

[Testing the approach to National Policy Direction - Submitter details - Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport - Citizen Space](#)

RE: National Policy Direction

Synopsis

The policy is heavily weighted toward economic production sectors (housing, infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, mining, aquaculture) and only indirectly captures Fish & Game interests. Protections for the natural environment and recreation (including hunting and angling) have not been provided for in this policy. While the reverse sensitivity provisions would likely benefit hunting-related activities, there is no dedicated recognition of recreational hunting, sports fishing, trout and salmon fisheries, or game bird habitat. A new policy stream or amendments recognising recreational freshwater fisheries, game bird resources, hunting opportunities, habitat protection, and public access as nationally significant public values is urgently required and hasn't been included in this framework.

The omission of angling, sports fisheries and game bird hunting values from the proposed National Policy Direction creates a significant policy gap because these values are not expressly recognised within either the productive-use themes or the public values framework. While the NPD contains extensive enabling provisions for housing, infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, mining and aquaculture, and provides specific protection mechanisms for indigenous biodiversity, there is no equivalent requirement to identify, protect, maintain or enhance trout fisheries, salmon fisheries, game bird habitat, hunting opportunities or associated public access.

As a result, decisions under the new planning system are likely to give greater weight to activities that are explicitly provided for, while recreational fisheries and hunting interests become largely invisible in planning and consenting processes. This risks the gradual loss or degradation of trout spawning streams, salmon habitat, wetlands used by game birds, angling access, and hunting opportunities, particularly where conflicts arise with development, water allocation, infrastructure, aquaculture, forestry or primary production activities.

Because the environmental limits framework is focused on ecosystem health and significant indigenous biodiversity, many nationally and regionally important sports fisheries and game bird habitats may receive no specific recognition despite their substantial recreational, social, cultural, tourism and economic benefits. The result is that recreational freshwater fisheries and game bird resources will fall between production and indigenous biodiversity frameworks, leaving no clear policy basis for protecting these values for future generations.

We would like to continue to engage with you regarding our submission and how the NPD can be improved to provide for hunting and fishing values conflicts and ensure commercial uses are not at the expense of public values.

Contact Details

Helen Brosnan, Senior Policy Advisor

E: hbrosnan@fishandgame.org.nz

P: 021486034



on behalf of
Richie Cosgrove
COO, New Zealand Fish and Game Council



Barrie Barnes
Chair, New Zealand Fish and Game Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new planning system is designed to operate as a funnel, with the legislation at the top establishing the overall purposes and goals, and each lower layer progressively translating those goals into more detailed direction and rules. The Planning Act and Natural Environment Act have set the statutory purposes, goals and system architecture. The National Policy Direction (NPD) then gives practical effect to those goals by identifying national priorities and directing how conflicts between competing objectives are to be managed. Beneath the NPD, national standards and regulations convert policy direction into nationally consistent methods, rules, environmental limits, processes and plan content requirements.

Regional spatial plans then apply that national direction to each region by identifying growth patterns, infrastructure needs, environmental values and strategic priorities over the long term. Finally, land use plans and natural environment plans implement those directions through zones, overlays, limits, rules and consent requirements that guide decisions on individual proposals. The intent is that key policy debates are resolved at the highest level possible, with each subsequent layer having less discretion and greater certainty, thereby creating a more efficient and predictable planning system from national goals through to local consent decisions.

While we welcome the opportunity to submit on the top tier of policy sitting under the new Natural Environment and Planning Bill we are disappointed to see policy that is so permissive and geared towards consenting uses. The public values are not adequately provided for in their own right or protected from degradation from those extractive industries.

A serious re-think and re-write is in order to ensure that resource use is sustainable with direction for conflicting users and cumulative effects of activities.

This submission however doesn't aim to re-write the NPD which is indeed needed. This is a job for government officials. This submission will provide some additional wording for the Public Values section of the draft NPD.

We structure our submission under the following key areas:

1. Fish and game values are largely absent from the NPD.
2. Indigenous biodiversity focus
The biodiversity framework will overlook important non-indigenous recreational species and habitats.
3. Highly enabling development framework
Housing, infrastructure, farming, forestry, mining and aquaculture receive strong enabling direction. This should not be a priority over common values.
4. Environmental limits will be critical

Habitat outcomes will largely depend on future environmental limits and standards rather than broad planning discretion. We are concerned these will not provide for habitat of trout, salmon and introduced game birds.

5. Public access protected but not Improved

Existing access is supported, but private property rights are strongly prioritised. This will not provide for good social, cultural or environmental outcomes in the future.

6. Recreation Values are Absent

There is no dedicated recreation framework and no specific attention to recreational fishing or hunting interests.

1. Fish and game values are largely absent from the NPD

While the draft contains extensive policy direction for primary production, infrastructure, mining, quarrying, forestry, aquaculture, indigenous biodiversity, historic heritage, Māori interests, and public access, it contains virtually no recognition of New Zealand's recreational freshwater fisheries and game bird resources as values requiring consideration in planning decisions.

This omission is particularly important because many of the species and habitats managed by Fish & Game do not fall within the draft's indigenous biodiversity framework. The proposed policy architecture places substantial weight on the protection of indigenous biodiversity and ecosystem health, but does not clearly provide for the protection of introduced sports fish species, introduced game bird species, or the recreational opportunities they support. As currently drafted, nationally and regionally significant trout fisheries, salmon fisheries, game bird habitats, and hunting opportunities risk becoming largely invisible (and unprotected) within the planning system.

We submitted that our values were absent in the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. We also provided amendment papers to remedy this oversight. We were assured that our species will be provided for in the National Policy Direction, but they are not.

Page 70 of the NPD contains the sole explicit reference to "fisheries."

Overall, the Illustrative NPD contains no direct protection for trout, salmon, sports fish, game birds, or their habitats, but it does contain broader protections and management provisions relating to wetlands, rivers, lakes, biodiversity, ecosystem health, water quality, coastal environments, and access that could indirectly affect those resources. We are concerned that protecting the habitat alone, rather than the needs of the species to survive, will not suffice.

Fish & Game recommends the inclusion of a new policy framework that explicitly recognises and protects:

- Recreational freshwater fisheries.
- Sports fish habitat.
- Game bird habitat.
- Hunting and freshwater fishing opportunities.
- Public access required to support those opportunities.

Existing Regional Plans recognise the habitat of trout and salmon. The NPD needs to replicate this by requiring councils to:

- Identify sports fish habitat
- Protect sports fish habitat (along with indigenous species)
- Improve sports fish habitat (where degraded)

- Avoid adverse effects on fisheries
- Maintain recreational fishing opportunities
- The statutory role of Fish & Game New Zealand in managing sports fish and game bird resources.

A remedy to this issue is to add the following policy:

"Regional spatial plans and land use plans must recognise and provide protections for game bird hunting and sports fishing habitat as regionally and nationally significant public values."

Areas with high natural character within wetlands, lakes, rivers and their margins provide the habitat of trout and salmon and game birds. The values framework should include habitat of introduced species.

The NPD is also lacking any particular Coastal Marine Area protections. Page 8 provides protection of high natural character in coastal environment and wetlands. Page 49 allows for Aquaculture to locate in the coastal marine area and freshwater environments. Page 56 provides for Quarrying/mining effects on freshwater and coastal marine area to be managed. Page 73/74 provides for public access to the coastal marine area to be protected maintained and if appropriate enhanced and page 75/76 states that high natural character areas in the coastal environment to be protected from inappropriate development. As drafted there are no protections for sports fish or game birds in the coastal marine or estuarine habitats whilst there is provision for aquaculture, which may well displace sports fish.

The status quo should remain with the many existing trout and salmon consent conditions remaining in place. Refer to examples of conditions in Appendix 5.

2. Indigenous Biodiversity Doesn't Include Introduced Species

Introduced Species Gap

Fish and Game values are largely invisible in the policy architecture as sports fish and some game birds are introduced species – refer to appendix 2 for more information about indigenous game birds. The historical resource management framework has consistently translated trout and salmon habitat values into enforceable consent conditions including minimum flow regimes, fish passage requirements, spawning habitat protection, sediment controls, gravel extraction restrictions and habitat monitoring, examples of these conditions is included in Appendix 5.

The removal of statutory recognition for trout and salmon habitat would create a policy gap because many resource consent conditions have historically been justified by the need to protect recreational fisheries and associated habitat. While indigenous biodiversity values may continue to support some protections (and therefore consent conditions), the distinct ecological requirements that sustain nationally important trout and salmon fisheries would no longer be recognised, resulting in weaker habitat protection, declining recreational fisheries outcomes and the removal of many of these consent conditions.

We are concerned that the legislation and now the NPD public values are limited to indigenous biodiversity. This framework will not provide for introduced species such as sports fish and game birds which is a significant tourism industry in New Zealand. Species like Trout have higher habitat requirements than many indigenous freshwater species so by only protecting indigenous species the NPD will provide for further environmental degradation. Trout also have differing habitat extent than many indigenous species which means that many water bodies that are currently protected, would not be in the future.

Sports fish and introduced game birds fall in the gap and are not provided for in this policy. Appendix 2 differentiates our indigenous and introduced game birds. Our species are not provided for as an industry like primary production (and all those introduced species) or aquaculture (and those introduced species) and forestry (and those introduced species) which are clearly provided for in this policy. In the natural environment only indigenous species are included and provide for the limits setting framework. Appendix 5 sets out how trout and salmon consent conditions protect so many other values for example swimming in clean freshwater.

The proposed Regional Biodiversity Strategy will only protect significant indigenous biodiversity. So you could have a world famous trout fishery that doesn't feature as important regional biodiversity because the water body contains Trout. We suggest that the biodiversity strategies to be created under this policy is amended to identify both indigenous and introduced recreational species such as sports fish and game birds.

Economic Significance of Recreational Fisheries

The economic contribution of recreational freshwater angling is significant. The New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER)¹¹ was commissioned by the New Zealand Fish & Game Council to assess the economic impact of recreational freshwater angling. The report found that each year, around 100,000 Fish & Game freshwater angling licences are sold, with domestic and international anglers collectively spending up to a million days fishing. Total expenditure on angling trips ranges from \$113 million to \$138.6 million, generating \$96 million to \$117.7 million in total output and contributing \$66.2 million to \$81.2 million in GDP.

Wetlands for Game birds?

It is not clear if the constructed wetland provisions will provide new wetlands for game birds. We are keen to see new wetlands created to claw back some of the 90% of wetlands that have been drained or destroyed in New Zealand as additional habitat for game birds. We have provided constructed wetland rules to MfE in the past and attach this again for reference as our rules don't just provide ecosystem services, they also provide for the habitat of game birds. The evidence that we provided on wetlands for the Natural Environment Bill is included in appendix 3 and our constructed wetland rule is included in appendix 4.

¹¹ [NZIER-economic-contribution-of-freshwater-angling_Final-report_external_29112024-006.pdf](#)

Essentially the NPD's environmental protection framework is built around indigenous biodiversity, ecosystem health, high natural character, maori values and environmental limits. You could have a premier trout fishery that does not have significant indigenous biodiversity and therefore this water body would not be protected from harmful discharges and degradation.

The proposed use of indigenous biodiversity in tiers does not protect recreational fishery habitat as a value in its own right. This will mean that trout spawning streams, angling rivers and game bird wetlands will not be protected.

We support the directives to protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity, but not without protecting trout fisheries which should also be identified and mapped with environmental limits set. Introduced species also provides benefits for tourism that should be recognised.

3. Highly Enabling (Permissive) Development Framework

Housing, infrastructure, farming, forestry, mining and aquaculture receive strong enabling direction. The policy is generally written directing councils to enable land use and economic activity. Furthermore where limits are breached, existing lawfully established activities may continue provided there is a pathway towards improvement through action plans. This is not going to result in common values being retained.

The policy provides explicit recognition to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, mining, infrastructure and aquaculture but not to sports fishing, game bird hunting, recreational freshwater values or hunting infrastructure.

Apparently Implied Hierarchy

There appears to be a hierarchy in the policy that works like this:

1. Enable land use and economic activity.
2. Protect existing lawful activities.
3. Manage reverse sensitivity.
4. Meet environmental limits - although these can be breached by a number of industries if there is an action plan for improvement some time in the future.
5. Protect identified public values, although we are not sure if the limits will actually protect these.

This provides a structural imbalance towards production values and away from freshwater recreational and habitat values.

By topic there is clear support for extractive uses, while no corresponding support for recreational use using the example of water allocation decisions. The agriculture and horticulture directions strongly support water storage, irrigation, water allocation and productive use of water. Conversely there is not explicit recognition compared with productive uses for instream recreational values, trout habitat, angling experiences. In the NPD draft, water is repeatedly discussed as production resource and recreational fisheries are largely absent.

The NPD has no equivalent protection of habitat of trout and salmon similar to the former RMA section 7(h). There is no freshwater fisheries chapter. No protections for the Coastal Marine Area. There are no explicit recognition of recreational salmon fisheries. However the decision maker is directed to consider economic benefits of aquaculture, aquaculture expansion and the operational needs of aquaculture. There is no equivalent directive to protect recreational salmon fisheries, the economic benefits of recreational fisheries and the expansion of recreational fishing opportunities.

Despite the NPD saying that goals sit alongside each other with no hierarchy, in practice the directives create a fairly clear implicit hierarchy through the language used, the conflict resolution provisions and the way certain activities are given preferential treatment.

The strongest system wide drivers are property rights and economic development. The default position is that development proceeds unless a sufficiently important public value justifies restrictions. This contrasts with the former RMA effects based approach.

The public values chapter explicitly says protection must seek to avoid unnecessary constraints on private property rights and the reasonable use and development of land. Rather than saying public values prevail, it says protection should be balanced against development and property rights. Environmental values are also protected proportionately rather than absolutely. Public access is not a top tier value. Indigenous biodiversity is not automatically dominant. The following provides an implied hierarchy in the NPD as drafted:

Property rights and economic growth
Infrastructure, energy, primary production, mining and quarrying
Housing and urban development
Public values (access, natural character, heritage, biodiversity)
Recreation (sports fish and game bird habitat indirectly recognised)

The above hierarchy is not expressly stated, but emerges from the wording of the directives and the specific conflict resolution clauses.

The NPD hierarchy is in stark contrast to Te Mana o te Wai (NPS-FM2020) which provides the following priorities and conflict resolution:

First: the health and wellbeing of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems.
Second: the health needs of people, such as drinking water.
Third: the ability of people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

This meant before TMoTW was removed via amendment² that if there was a conflict, decision makers could be directed to start at the top of the hierarchy and work down. Economic activity is important but it is expressly subordinate to protecting freshwater health and the health of the water body.

² Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Act

Aquaculture vs Wild Salmon Recreational Fisheries

Aquaculture receives an entire sub-theme devoted to expansion, operational flexibility, species changes, innovation, and future growth. There is no discussion of impacts on wild salmon, fish disease, genetic interactions and effects on recreational fisheries.

We support aquaculture in certain circumstances, for example the Central South Island canal fishery which is a recreational sports fishery with significant economic value³ and initially created as a mitigation for loss of natural state fishery. The total economic impact of the Hydro Canals fishery was assessed at \$13.6 million comprised of a direct economic impact of \$8.0 million and an indirect economic impact of \$5.6 million.

Fish and Game's position on fish farming is primarily driven by concerns about protecting the integrity of wild fish populations and freshwater ecosystems. Salmon farming may be considered acceptable in some circumstances because salmon are not naturally widespread throughout New Zealand's freshwater environments and, where robust safeguards are in place, the risks to wild fisheries can be more manageable. However, any proposal would still need to demonstrate that nutrient, sediment, and other farm discharges do not degrade water quality or aquatic habitats.

In contrast, trout farming is generally not considered acceptable because of the significant risks it poses to New Zealand's valued wild trout fisheries. Escaped farmed trout could interbreed with wild populations, potentially altering the genetic characteristics that support high-quality recreational fisheries. Disease from farms can also be detrimental to non farmed trout. At present trout cannot be purchased (or sold) which makes compliance work very easy for Fish and Game and DOC (for the Taupo fishery). There are also concerns that fish farm discharges, including nutrients and organic waste, could adversely affect water quality, aquatic ecosystems, and the habitats that sustain wild trout populations. For these reasons, Fish and Game's key concerns focus on preventing genetic impacts on wild fish stocks and avoiding environmental effects from farm discharges.

Salmon farms can occupy coastal space that may also be important for recreational fishing, fish migration, estuarine ecosystems and bird habitat. Therefore farms can displace and exclude the previous occupants.

Overall the starting presumption is expansion (to new locations) and adaptation of aquaculture, rather than protection of wild fisheries. We think wild recreational fisheries should take priority and where conflict arises.

Strong Enabling Provisions for Water Storage

The agriculture directive requires plans to provide for taking and storage of water during periods of high flow. However this is often detrimental to trout and salmon populations. High flow harvesting can negatively affect flushing flows, migration cues, sediment transport and habitat formation. The NPD strongly

³ [Economic-Impact.pdf](#)

enables water storage but contains very little fisheries specific balancing direction.

Forestry and Sediment

The illustrative NPD seeks to enable commercial forestry while managing environmental effects through a "proportionate and risk-based" framework. However, from a freshwater fisheries perspective, forestry can be problematic because forestry harvesting, earthworks, river crossings, forestry quarrying and associated activities can generate large volumes of sediment and slash that enter streams and rivers during rainfall events. The NPD's forestry provisions specifically recognise the need to manage effects associated with sediment, debris, river crossings and severe erosion, indicating that these are known risks from forestry operations.

Excessive sediment can smother trout and native fish spawning gravels, reduce aquatic invertebrate abundance, impair fish feeding and visibility, and degrade habitat quality. While the NPD requires councils to target controls to locations where risks to water quality are highest, it also emphasises avoiding unnecessary restrictions on forestry and enabling continued forestry operations, even where environmental limits are breached provided an action plan is developed. This creates a risk that fisheries values may continue to be affected while improvement programmes are implemented.

Primary Production and Nutrients

The NPD places strong emphasis on enabling agriculture and horticulture, with freshwater farm plans and action plans being the primary mechanisms for managing effects on freshwater ecosystems. While environmental limits are described as the environmental "guardrails" of the system, the NPD allows existing agricultural activities to continue operating where limits are breached if there is an enforceable mechanism to achieve improvement over time. We propose limits need to be set to protect trout and salmon along side other uses such as primary production.

Nutrients from fertiliser, effluent and intensive land use can contribute to algal growth, reduced water clarity and oxygen depletion, while sediment from land disturbance, stock access and erosion can reduce habitat quality and spawning success. Together, excess nutrients and sediment can diminish the quality of freshwater fisheries by degrading water quality, altering food webs, reducing aquatic insect production, and reducing the abundance and quality of fish habitat.

For recreational fisheries, this can result not only in ecological impacts but also reduced angling quality and recreational opportunity. The NPD recognises ecosystem health limits, sediment retention and nutrient management as important freshwater outcomes, but places those outcomes within a broader framework that also seeks to enable agricultural production and continued resource use.

Hydro Generation Receives Stronger Recognition than Fisheries

The illustrative NPD provides particularly strong direction for the protection and expansion of hydroelectric generation assets, requiring natural environment

plans to recognise the national significance of existing hydro-generation schemes and to protect their generation capacity and output when managing and allocating natural resources. It also directs that renewable energy generation be significantly expanded and that existing assets be protected and enabled to increase capacity.

While hydroelectric generation provides important national benefits, hydro schemes can affect freshwater fisheries by altering natural flow regimes, reducing flow variability, changing water temperatures, impeding fish migration, reducing spawning and rearing habitat, modifying sediment transport processes, and creating barriers between fish populations. Changes to water level management and water allocation can also affect the quality of angling opportunities, access to fisheries, and the ecological processes that sustain both indigenous and sports fish populations.

From a fisheries perspective, a key concern is that the NPD expressly prioritises protecting the capacity and output of existing hydro-generation assets and enabling further renewable energy development, but does not provide equivalent direction to maintain or enhance recreational fisheries, fish habitat, fish passage, or angling opportunities where conflicts arise between hydro-generation and freshwater fishery values.

The NPD states that existing hydro-generation schemes are nationally significant and that renewable energy infrastructure should be enabled and expanded.

There is no comparable recognition for nationally important trout fisheries. Only 16 Water Conservation Orders exist and not all of them exist to protect habitat of Trout. There are many more nationally important trout fisheries that should also be protected from inappropriate use and development. This creates an obvious asymmetry. Hydro interests would have direct recognition whereas national and internationally significant sports fisheries would not have any recognition or protection.

4. Environmental limits will be critical but unknown

Habitat outcomes will largely depend on future environmental limits and standards and relate only to indigenous species.

If trout, salmon and game bird values are not included in the limits framework, environmental degradation could occur despite a waterbody technically complying with environmental standards. Furthermore if the right standards aren't used, a trout spawning river may meet nitrogen, phosphorus and dissolved oxygen limits while still experiencing increasing fine sediment deposition that fills spawning gravels and reduces egg survival. Likewise, a salmon river could satisfy general ecosystem health measures while high-flow water harvesting reduces migration cues, spawning habitat formation and flushing flows necessary for maintaining a healthy fishery. In these cases, the river may remain compliant with environmental limits even while the fishery declines.

The NPD also allows existing activities in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, infrastructure, quarrying and mining to continue where environmental limits are breached provided pathways exist for improvement through action plans. This means that if limits are not specifically designed around trout, salmon and game bird habitat requirements, adverse effects may continue for extended periods while improvement programmes are implemented. Sediment from forestry harvesting can smother trout redds and reduce aquatic invertebrate production. Excess nutrients from intensive land use can promote algal growth, reduce water clarity and alter food webs. Water abstraction can reduce habitat availability and migration pathways. Wetland drainage or degradation can diminish nesting, feeding and moulting habitat for game birds. Yet none of these effects may trigger action if the relevant fishery or habitat attributes are not included within the limit-setting framework.

Game birds provide another example of why limits matter. The proposed biodiversity framework focuses on significant indigenous biodiversity, while many game bird species and much of their managed habitat fall outside those provisions. A wetland could lose water quantity, water quality, emergent vegetation or seasonal inundation patterns important for waterfowl breeding and feeding, yet remain outside any measured biodiversity limit because the primary values being assessed are indigenous species. Without specific wetland and habitat limits that also recognise recreational waterfowl values, game bird habitats could continue to decline without triggering regulatory intervention.

From a Fish & Game perspective, environmental limits should therefore include attributes directly linked to fisheries and hunting outcomes, such as spawning habitat quality, sediment levels, water temperature, fish passage, minimum and flushing flows, habitat connectivity, wetland extent, waterfowl habitat condition, trout and salmon population indicators, and measures of recreational fishery quality.

These attributes would provide an early warning system for degradation and ensure that nationally and regionally important recreational fisheries and game bird resources are protected as values in their own right rather than only receiving indirect protection through broader ecosystem health measures. Trout and salmon are often more environmentally demanding than many indigenous freshwater species. Consequently, limits designed only to maintain the minimum conditions necessary for indigenous biodiversity may still allow a gradual decline in trout and salmon fisheries. In that sense, protecting trout and salmon habitat through environmental limits can simultaneously protect a much wider suite of freshwater values, including indigenous biodiversity, swimming, recreation, landscape values and ecosystem health

The draft NPD has not looked at fishery quality and recreational opportunity as values in their own right and this omission is critical to the sustainable use of fishing resources and the detection of environmental degradation. A new environmental limits directive should provide for fish habitat, fish passage, water quality, water quantity and recreational fishery quality.

5. Public Access Protected But Not Necessarily Enhanced

Maintaining public access is of little practical benefit if the rivers, lakes, wetlands and coastal environments being accessed no longer support healthy fisheries, game bird habitat, or quality recreational experiences. The NPD should therefore not only protect existing access, but also provide for new access opportunities and the protection and enhancement of the natural resources that underpin recreation.

Existing access is supported, but private property rights are strongly prioritised. Access provisions focus on maintaining access where already present. We believe there is need for access through infrastructure assets to lakes and rivers which should be maintained and enhanced and restrictions on access should be minimal.

Provision of public access should be an important consideration in the design and mitigation of infrastructure, energy, quarrying, and mining projects. Where development affects existing recreational opportunities, proponents should be required to maintain, enhance, or create alternative access arrangements to ensure the public continues to enjoy rivers, lakes, wetlands, coastal areas, and other recreational resources. Examples of appropriate mitigation measures include:

- Power generation facilities: Maintaining existing public access to water bodies through, around, or adjacent to existing or proposed hydroelectric infrastructure. Where existing access or recreational values are lost, new access routes, facilities, or recreational opportunities should be provided as mitigation.
- Transport and other infrastructure projects: Major infrastructure projects, such as arterial roads, rail corridors, or utility corridors, should be designed to facilitate public access wherever practicable. This may include providing underpasses, overpasses, shared pathways, access tracks, parking areas, or parallel access routes that improve access to rivers, lakes, wetlands, coastal areas, and other places of recreational significance.
- Quarrying and mining activities: Quarrying and mining developments should incorporate public access and recreation outcomes as part of their mitigation, restoration, and rehabilitation programmes. This may include maintaining access around active sites, securing alternative access routes where existing access is interrupted, and creating new recreational opportunities associated with site restoration to ensure there is no net loss of public recreation opportunities.

The overarching objective should be that significant infrastructure and extractive developments maintain or enhance long-term public access and recreation opportunities, rather than merely avoiding the loss of existing access.

Theme 5 contains directives supporting public access to rivers, lakes and coastal marine area. But it mainly provides for maintenance of existing access. This does not provide for new or improved access and recreation to be secured.

When subdivision occurs, creation of Esplanade Reserves is critical to providing new public access to water bodies. This is a small price for developers to pay for the advantage of subdivision and the creation of new titles. These reserves also provide the buffer from the water body that often provides for flood and erosion management. It also provides a good setback to waterbodies to allow for planting and nutrient retention and other ecosystem services.

We are concerned that an environment may be considered "well-functioning" under the proposed framework while still experiencing the loss of recreational fishing opportunities, game bird habitat, and hunting access. A truly well-functioning environment should recognise and provide for these recreational values alongside other social, environmental, and economic outcomes.

Natural environment plans and regional spatial plans should be required to recognise and provide for recreational freshwater fisheries, sports fish habitat, game bird habitat, and hunting and fishing opportunities as significant public values.

6. Recreation Values are Absent

The NPD contains extensive operational direction for productive sectors but no equivalent framework for recreation. Recreational fishing, game bird hunting, and the habitats that sustain these activities are largely absent from the policy architecture despite their significant social, environmental, cultural, tourism, and economic benefits. Because many of these values occur outside public conservation land, they should not be dependent upon the Conservation Act or conservation estate protections alone.

This imbalance risks elevating production and development interests above recreational and public values. Unless recreational fisheries, game bird habitat, hunting opportunities, and public access are expressly recognised and provided for, these values are likely to receive less consideration in planning and consenting decisions than activities that are specifically enabled by the NPD.

There is reference to "supporting access to recreation in rural communities", "recognising recreation benefits associated with rivers, lakes, wetlands and landscapes, and recognising public access values. However there is no linkage to provide that recreation or access. New access has been traditionally provided via subdivision through esplanade reserves. With these becoming regulatory takings, it is unlikely that new reserves will be created.

Access and recreation should be central to any resource management framework and policy as it provides for people.

High natural character areas are recognised as providing recreation, economic benefits, tourism, ecosystem services, cultural and heritage benefits. However there is no policy to protect any of these areas from inappropriate use and development.

The NPD appears to treat recreation as an incidental outcome of environmental protection or public access. However, recreation is one of the primary ways

communities interact with freshwater, wetlands, rivers and lakes. Without explicit recognition, recreational values risk being treated as a by-product rather than a planning objective. A river may remain accessible and environmentally functional while no longer supporting a quality angling experience.

We would expect to see strongly worded direction such as the following to ensure recreation features in planning documents. *"Regional spatial plans and natural environment plans must recognise recreation, including angling, hunting, swimming, boating and associated public access, as significant public values that contribute directly to community wellbeing and quality of life."*

The NPD requires councils to identify mineral resources, high value growing areas, infrastructure corridors, indigenous biodiversity and sites of significance to Māori, but does not require identification of important recreational resources. As a result, nationally significant trout fisheries, salmon rivers, waterfowl habitats and hunting areas may never be formally recognised in planning documents.

Existing regional plans table and often map extent of trout fisheries.
Regional Spatial Plans and regional plans shall map national significant trout fisheries, salmon fisheries, game bird wetlands, important access corridors, major recreational waterbodies

"No Net Loss" Outcome for Recreation

Many environmental policies seek no net loss or maintenance of values. Recreation receives no equivalent direction.

This means development may gradually reduce fishing quality, hunting opportunities or access over time without any obligation to replace those lost opportunities.

We suggest that the following direction should be included to ensure no net loss:

"Development and resource use activities must achieve no net loss of recreational fisheries, hunting opportunities, associated habitat, and public access at a catchment or regional scale."

Public access without recreational value is meaningless

The NPD contains relatively strong public access provisions. However, public access only has practical value if the resource being accessed remains worth visiting. There is little point maintaining access to a river if trout populations decline, salmon runs disappear or wetlands cease supporting game birds.

The kind of provision that you need to provide is:

"Public access provisions should be supported by policies that maintain or improve the environmental and habitat conditions that support recreational use."

Recreation contributes substantial economic value

Agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, mining and infrastructure receive strong enabling provisions partly because of their economic contribution.

The NPD fails to recognise that angling and game bird hunting also contribute regional economic benefits through tourism, accommodation, guiding, equipment sales and hospitality.

The draft NPD repeatedly recognises economic benefits for productive industries but does not apply the same recognition to recreational industries.

A directive should spell out that *"Decision makers must recognise the economic, social and community benefits of recreational fisheries and hunting opportunities."*

Loss of recreation often occurs before ecological collapse

Recreational indicators detect environmental decline earlier than many ecosystem health indicators. This is why we survey our anglers and hunters. They often identify changes early, or confirm our monitoring work. Examples include reduced trout growth rates, fewer catchable fish, reduced salmon returns, declining water clarity affecting angling, reduced duck numbers, declining hunting success.

The fishery may have already deteriorated substantially before broader ecosystem indicators trigger concern.

Therefore *environmental limits should also include fishery quality indicators, spawning habitat quality, fish abundance indicators, recreational opportunity indicators as well as ecosystem health indicators.*

Recreation provides environmental stewardship

Hunters and angler often fund and undertake wetland restoration, riparian planting, fish habitat enhancement, predator control, water quality advocacy, access protection.

If recreation is not recognised, the policy ignores the public conservation benefits generated by recreational users themselves.

A directive should spell out that *"Recreational fisheries and hunting opportunities contribute to environmental stewardship and restoration outcomes and should be maintained and supported."*

Recreation outcomes deserve equivalent operational policy direction

One of the strongest submission themes could be that the NPD provides detailed operational direction for productive sectors but no equivalent direction for recreation.

For example:

- agriculture has dedicated freshwater directives
- horticulture has dedicated water allocation directives
- forestry has dedicated sediment management directives
- aquaculture has dedicated growth and adaptation directives
- mining has dedicated resource protection directives

This almost is set as a given right to exploit the resources, regardless of adverse effects on other values.

Yet recreation receives only indirect references through access provisions. This gives the appearance that recreational use of natural resources is less important than commercial use.

A new sub-theme should be created, that is no less important than industrial uses.

Recreation and Public Enjoyment of Natural Resources

With directives requiring:

- *maintenance and improvement of recreational opportunities;*
- *protection of recreational fisheries and hunting resources;*
- *maintenance and enhancement of public access;*
- *avoidance of significant adverse effects on nationally important recreational resources;*
- *consideration of recreation when allocating water and managing environmental limits.*

You could potentially finish Section 6 with something like:

Recreation is one of the principal ways New Zealanders experience and value the natural environment. Angling, game bird hunting, swimming, boating and other outdoor pursuits connect people to rivers, lakes, wetlands and coastal environments and create strong incentives for environmental stewardship.

While the draft NPD provides extensive operational direction for productive land and water uses, there is no equivalent policy framework for recreation. As a result, recreation is treated as a secondary consequence of other planning outcomes rather than a public value in its own right. Fish and Game considers that recreational fisheries, game bird resources, hunting opportunities and associated public access should be expressly recognised and provided for as nationally significant public values within the NPD. This would create a more balanced planning framework that better reflects how New Zealanders use, value and enjoy the natural environment.

Nature Based Solutions

We recognise the use of ecosystem services, nature based solutions, environmental co-benefits and the use of natural features to reduce hazards. However we are first and foremost interested in avoiding degradation or loss of natural river extent, rather than the more costly exercise of flood plain restoration, wetland restoration or river corridor restoration.

Swimming and Contact Recreation

We want to maintain and improve water bodies for swimming, and other types of recreation. This requires planning for water quality (measured particularly but not only by microbiological indicator, E. coli); water quantity; river form; and access. In other words, healthy water bodies are places where people want to swim and ecosystem health supports swimming and recreation.

Swimming and recreation will likely be your communities' most regular, and tangible connection to, and valued use of, freshwater. So, swimming and recreation provide an important link between your community and all other parts and should feature strongly in your human health limits, with limits that don't allow for industries to long term degrade sites used for swimming and recreation.

The NPD is silent on swimmable water bodies, where as the NPS-FM established a national goal to make 90 Percent of the total length of rivers in Aotearoa New Zealand swimmable by 2040 in Policy 12. Human contact with water through activities such as swimming, and for other recreation or cultural purposes, has always been a central part of all iterations of the NPS-FM, alongside ecosystem health.

Many recreational uses are highly sensitive to environmental degradation but are not necessarily captured by indigenous biodiversity limits alone. For example:

- A river may retain indigenous fish populations but become unsuitable for swimming due to toxic algal blooms.
- Water abstraction may leave a river with sufficient ecological function yet eliminate kayaking opportunities.
- Sedimentation may not cause biodiversity collapse but can substantially reduce water clarity valued by swimmers, paddlers and visitors.
- Public access can be lost despite ecological values remaining intact.

Accordingly, environmental limits should be designed not only to avoid ecological collapse but also to maintain the environmental conditions required for recreational use and enjoyment.

The kind of policy direction that we would expect to see is:

"Freshwater recreation values comprise the use and enjoyment of rivers, lakes, wetlands and their margins for swimming, boating, paddling, angling, game bird hunting, wildlife observation, walking, camping and related outdoor recreation activities. Environmental limits must maintain or improve water quality, water quantity, habitat condition, ecological health, public access and natural character to ensure these values are sustained for present and future generations."

Community Consultation on Recreation Values Has Already Been Done

The following example provides an overview from the Land and Water Plan process in Otago:

"Land use such as agriculture, forestry and urban expansion increases the level of contaminants, including nutrients, heavy metals and sediment, entering our waterways. This can have detrimental effects on water quality."

Diverting, controlling and extracting water all change the natural flow in, and between, waterways. This can impact freshwater species and ecosystems."

Water quality in rivers across Otago shows a clear spatial pattern related to land cover and land use. Water quality is best at river and stream reaches located in

high or mountainous areas with predominantly native vegetation cover. These sites tend to be associated with the upper catchments of larger rivers (for example, Clutha River/Matau-Au, Taieri River and Lindis River) and the outlets from large lakes (for example, Hāwea, Whakatipu and Wānaka). Water quality is generally poorer at sites located on smaller, low-elevation streams that drain pastoral or urban catchments.⁴

“We began this journey in 2019 when the Minister for the Environment asked the Otago Regional Council to prepare a new Regional Policy Statement and Land and Water Plan. Previous planning rules and regulations were no longer deemed fit to provide protection for Otago’s waterways and surrounding environment.

Between 2020 and 2022 we engaged with our community around the visions and values people wanted for our waterways and the land affecting them in this new, more in-depth Plan. We also spoke with communities about actions that would help us reach positive environmental outcomes – these were that Otago's freshwater and land activities need to be:

- *Healthy for plants, animals, and people and look after our region for future generations*
- *Safe for activities like swimming*
- *Beneficial for activities like fishing*
- *Sustainably managed; and*
- *Respectful of cultural and historical places⁵*

Therefore, consultation has already occurred in many regions under the NPS-FM2020, with community values confirmed. These values do not prioritise primary industry or other commercial uses over all other values. While we recognise the economic value of commercial uses, we urge you to not provide for their adverse effects at the expense recreational values including game bird hunting and angling that rely on clean freshwater. This consultation has already occurred in other regions with similar results.

7. Expansion of Reverse Sensitivity Definition

We welcome the definition and use of the term “reverse sensitivity” and note the example provided for firing rangers. However we also want to see this term applied to game bird hunting generally as this concept also applies when new housing development occurs too close to game bird hunting areas. Other examples include clay target facilities, fish hatcheries, wetland restoration projects including predator control, existing hunting access corridors and water management infrastructure serving wetlands. Each of the examples provided have the potential to be constrained by later arriving residential or lifestyle development.

⁴ Lakes, Rivers, and Streams | Otago Regional Council

⁵ Land and Water Regional Plan | Draft Framework to Guide Freshwater and Land Use

8. Existing Use Definition

We note the inclusion of the existing use definition in the NPD. This applies to existing lawfully established activities. This concept can be applied to existing shooting rangers. We would like you to ensure that existing lawfully established uses of common resources such as angling and game bird hunting can continue to occur without being compromised by environmental degradation caused by other land uses and activities, often by consented activities. Angling and Game bird hunting are “permitted activities” having little or no effect on the environment.

Territorial authorities should be required to identify such activities and apply appropriate setback distances or alternative management controls to prevent later-arriving residential or lifestyle development from constraining their operation. Please note that distances vary significantly between districts depending on acoustic modelling used rather than a nationally consistent setback. It is also important to consider firing direction and safety parameters providing for ricochet.

Indicative setbacks could include:

- 100 - 300 m from established game bird hunting areas;
- 500 m from clay target shooting facilities and consideration of direction of firing in relation to neighbouring properties and uses.
- 50 m from fish hatcheries depending on noise, vehicle movements and water infrastructure.
- 200-500 m from wetland restoration areas;
- 500 m management areas around predator control programmes;
- 100 m either side of recognised hunting access corridors; and
- 200-300 m from wetland water management infrastructure.

These distances should be refined through local planning processes but should provide a clear national expectation that lawful established activities are protected from reverse sensitivity effects.

9. Wetland Recognition, Although not for Game Bird Hunting

We are happy to see significant support for constructed wetlands, however these tend to only apply to ecosystem services. These must be enabled and can provide for water quality treatment, sediment treatment, nutrient reduction and provide flood mitigation.

Fish and Game in contrast want to help landowners to construct wetlands to create or restore game bird hunting habitat. Game bird hunters have contributed millions in funds to create and restore wetlands on private and public property providing benefits for both indigenous and introduced game birds (and non game bird species) via the Wildlife Habitat Trust and the Game Bird Habitat Stamp.

We have provided suitable rules for constructed wetland standards in the past to MfE. We have attached these provisions again for you to consider including

in the NPD or revised NES. See appendix 4 for our recommended constructed wetland rules.

Conclusion

Recreational freshwater fisheries and game bird resources are largely absent from the NPD.

Environmental limits and indigenous biodiversity provisions alone will not protect sports fishing and game bird hunting values.

The NPD should contain a dedicated recreation and recreational fisheries policy framework with clear operational direction equivalent to that provided for productive sectors.

Appendix 1 – About Fish and Game

Appendix 2 – The Species that we manage

Appendix 3 – Wetland Evidence by Nicholas Singers

Appendix 4 – Constructed Wetland rule

Appendix 5 – How trout and salmon consent conditions protect so many other values

Appendix 6 - General Policy Additions

What does Fish & Game do?

Who are we? Fish & Game New Zealand manages, maintains and enhances sports fish and game birds and their freshwater habitats in the best long-term interests of anglers, hunters and all New Zealanders.

Our vision

A New Zealand where freshwater habitats and species flourish, where game bird hunting and fishing traditions thrive and all New Zealanders enjoy access to sustainable wild fish and game resources.

**Together, let's ensure a thriving future
for fishing and game bird hunting!**

What we do

- Manage fishing and hunting regulations
- Conduct research to monitor fish and game bird populations
- Collaborate with communities to protect natural habitats
- Provide educational programmes and resources
- Advocate for valued habitats and species
- Negotiate and maintain access for anglers, hunters and all New Zealanders

fishandgame.org.nz
#ReWild



What does Fish & Game do?

Species management: We monitor and survey species populations; set season regulations; and sustainably manage pressure on the resource.

Habitat protection: Advocate and take action to protect and enhance lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands; and secure 'national park' status to important rivers through Water Conservation Orders.



Compliance: Recruit, train, equip and coordinate warranted rangers, to educate and enforce regulations to ensure the fish and game resource is sustained.

Licensing: Provide a nationwide licensing system with a range of licence categories and sales channels that makes it easy to buy a licence. We are solely funded by licence holders.



Access and participation: Negotiate and advocate so all New Zealanders can access our natural places; maintain access signage, information and brochures; organise fishing and hunting events and classes.

Public awareness: Maintain public advocacy; schools programmes; website and newsletters; community liaison; promote the right of licensed anglers and game bird hunters to pursue their chosen pastime.



Council: Hold public meetings of elected licence holders to approve regulations and budgets, set policies and provide governance for the Fish & Game system.

Coordination and planning: Provide research, planning and reporting; financial management and general coordination across Fish & Game New Zealand.

Species we manage



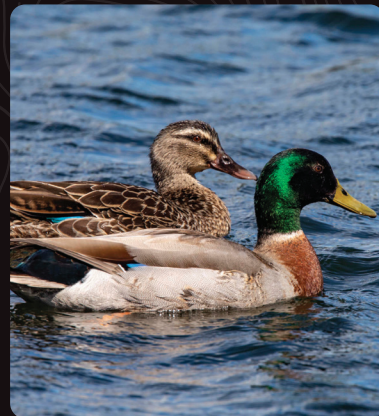
GAME BIRD SPECIES



Black Swan
Kakīānau



California Quail
Tikaokao



Mallard
Rakiraki



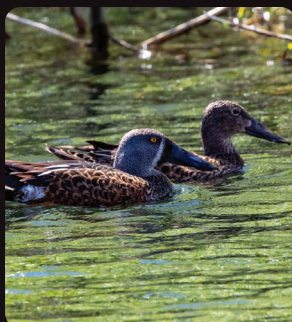
Paradise Shelduck
Pūtakitaki



Pheasant
Peihana



Pukeko



Shoveler
Kuruwhengi



Chukar



Grey Duck
Pārera



Brown Quail
Kuera

Note, the following game birds are indigenous to New Zealand:
Black Swan, Paradise Shelduck, Pukeko, Shoveler, Grey Duck.

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Species we manage



FISH SPECIES



Brown Trout - Taraute



Rainbow Trout - Taraute



Chinook Salmon - Hāmana



Sockeye Salmon - Hāmana



Brook Trout - Taraute



Tiger Trout - Taraute



Perch - Pūaihakarua



Tench

Appendix 3 - Inclusion of wetlands within the Natural Environment Bill 2026

Nicholas J. D. Singers. M.Sc.; Freelance Ecologist (see appendix for qualifications and experience)

Introduction

This paper covers the following matters in relation to the inclusion of wetlands in the Natural Environment Bill (NEB):

- What is a wetland?
- Why should wetlands be recognised within the NEB?
- Overview of inclusion and importance of wetlands in the Resource Management Act.
- Changes needed to the NEB to better encompass, safeguard, and protect wetlands.

What is a wetland?

Wetlands are defined as *‘permanently or intermittently wet areas, shallow water, and land water margins that support a natural ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions’*¹.

Wetlands occur from sea level to mountain tops so encompass a wide range of climates. The water which supports wetlands can be saline, brackish or freshwater via rainfall, springs or overland flow. Different sources of water have different nutrients. Seasonally water tables can vary from being below ground in droughts to being submerged by up to 50 cm in the wettest periods. These abiotic factors influence what ecosystem and habitat types are present. Wetlands ecosystem and habitats range from shallow water to tall swamp forest and from tidal rushes to alpine cushion bogs. Consequently, they support a very wide diversity of plants and animals.

Why should wetlands be recognised within the NEB?

There has been a disproportionate loss of wetlands in New Zealand with a far greater loss in our most developed regions and intermittent and more fertile wetland types². For example, approximately 6% of ‘swamps’ remain³. Swamps encompass shallow water, raupō, sedges, harakeke (flax), shrubs and cabbage trees, and are the primary habitat that support wetland game bird populations⁴.

Despite the inclusion of wetlands within the Resource Management Act 1991, and regulations to better protect them, loss of wetland extent is still occurring. For example, between 1996 and 2021, a loss of approximately 5,954 hectares of wetland were measured².

Wetlands provide a broad range of high value ecosystem services⁵. They are part of the water cycle and are often described as being the ‘kidneys of the land’. They improve water quality by assimilating sediments and nutrients including denitrifying nitrates to the atmosphere. They also help to mitigate flood impacts especially by reducing peak water levels and then release stored water slowly, maintaining stream and river flow.

The trend of many freshwater domains across much of developed regions in New Zealand is declining and there is a strong connection with population density and a more degraded environment⁶. To

reverse this trend, in these regions, districts and cities we need to retain the wetlands we have and expand their extent and functionality, including building and restoring constructed wetlands designed for specific outcomes.

Wetlands sequester large amounts of soil carbon and, on an area for area, basis sequester more carbon than any other ecosystem on Earth. Globally they contain 20–25% of the world’s organic soil carbon⁷. In New Zealand it is estimated that 36 Tg of carbon is stored in the upper 30 cm of wetland soils, rising to 164 Tg if the full peat profile is considered⁵. When wetlands are developed such as into pasture, this stored carbon is oxidised and released into the atmosphere. New Zealand is struggling to reduce its carbon footprint⁸ and retaining existing wetland is an inexpensive method to assist with this goal.

The economic value of ecosystem services for wetlands has been estimated. The value of water regulation alone from wetlands was estimated at NZ\$3,403 million in 2013⁹. On a per hectare basis wetlands had the highest value per hectare of all ecosystems assessed in the Manawatu Whanganui Region of \$43,320¹⁰.

Wetlands also provide habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals. They support fish populations which are food such as whitebait, tuna (eels) and waterfowl. They have significant recreational and cultural values for Māori and New Zealanders. Fish and Game NZ sell approximately 40,000 duck shooting licenses though more landowners hunt on private land.

New Zealand wetlands occur from sea level to mountain tops. Of the 149 described ecosystem types⁴, 21% are wetlands, and include swamp forest, 25 freshwater and seepages and 3 estuarine wetland types. To maintain indigenous biodiversity a full range of wetland ecosystems need protection and conservation management. Some small wetlands on private land are critical for safeguarding rare and threatened species¹¹.

Wetlands also contain a disproportionate plant diversity. There are 341 endemic and native obligate and facultative wetland plants within the New Zealand wetland plant indicator ratings (2021)¹². This is 17% of the total endemic and native flora of New Zealand. Yet prior to human arrival, wetlands were thought to only occupy 9.2% of New Zealand’ surface area³.

Wetlands are also particularly vulnerable to modification from a wide range of threats associated with land use and development, water abstraction, nutrient enrichment and invasive species. In most developed places in New Zealand wetlands are no longer being formed, such as after large floods because of the intensive management of our land. Consequently, the wetlands remaining are precious and require protection.

The inclusion of and importance of wetlands within the Resource Management Act

The Resource Management Act includes wetlands within the definition of “water body” and a specific definition of “wetland”. Section 6 ‘Matters of Importance’ provisions to preserve the natural character of wetlands and to protect them from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development. The functions of regional councils under the RMA includes management of effects on waterbodies, including the quality, quantity, indigenous biodiversity, and managing their beds. This gives regional councils explicit ability to manage and regulate wetlands.

Wetlands were specifically included within the RMA because land development of New Zealand, resulted in a high loss of wetland extent (c.90%+) due to clearance, drainage and conversion to agriculture and urban land². Often the wetland area that remains, is a fraction of the former extent, being fragmented and compromised by drainage and surrounding land uses. In some regions such as Hawkes Bay the remaining extent is less than 5%¹³ with most wetlands being small. The inclusion of wetlands in the Act recognised the importance of wetlands for biodiversity, as well as their unique role with providing essential ecosystem services, such as filtering water and carbon sequestration, as well as for their cultural and recreational values.

This direction created the emphasis for local and national government and research agencies to improve the understanding of the extent, diversity and ecological health of the wetland resource.

Protecting our Places (2007)¹⁴ and more recently the National Policy Statement for Freshwater (2020) (NPSFM) and Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (2020) (NESF) directed local and central government to improve data and better protect wetlands.

Policy 6 of the NPSFM exemplifies this direction *‘There is no further loss of extent of natural inland wetlands, their values are protected, and their restoration is promoted.’*

The NESF strengthened regulatory oversight for a range of activities, making earthworks, vegetation clearance and modifying the wetland hydrology discretionary whilst drainage of natural inland wetlands was either non-complying or prohibited. These regulations attempt to restrict the causes of continued wetland loss.

This emphasis provides local governments the regulatory mechanisms to protect wetlands. Further, with wetlands included in the RMA, it has resulted in local governments prioritising and undertaking active management to protect a wide range of wetlands ecosystem types, working collaboratively with landowners and other agencies. Through this focus landowners have increasingly become involved with wetland protection.

Fish and Game New Zealand have assisted many landowners to restore and create wetland habitat and have led several large wetland restoration projects such as Para Swamp, the largest remaining wetland within Marlborough District. Through revenue provided by duck shooters licenses, the Game Bird Habitat Trust has either managed existing wetlands and or constructed new wetlands totalling 563 hectares, between 2019 and 2025. In addition to providing and improving game bird habitat, restored and constructed wetlands have improved habitat for native wetland biodiversity, such as increasing spawning habitat for native fish (whitebait) and providing more and better quality habitat for other wetland birds.

Wetlands are increasingly valued by the agricultural industry. The Dairy NZ website expresses the following *‘Wetlands have an important part to play in reducing our environmental footprint.... Wetlands help reduce flooding by acting as a sponge, and improve water quality by trapping, filtering, and removing nutrients and contaminants, especially sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus’*. Dairy NZ, in collaboration with the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere (NIWA), the Ministry of Primary Industries and farmers, constructed six wetlands to measure the efficacy of wetlands to assimilate nutrients and pathogens¹⁵.

With RMA inclusion of wetland protections promoted, and industry delivering wetland construction and science, there is a greater understanding of the values of wetlands by New Zealanders, especially within rural New Zealand. Many farmers have protected wetlands within freshwater farm plans and are actively managing them. With the proliferation of catchment management groups, wetlands are often the first areas to be prioritised for protection and management by rural communities. As examples, for two Hawkes Bay wetland restoration projects, which I wrote restoration plans for, Wanstead Wetland¹⁶ and Lake Runanga¹⁷, two catchment groups have contributed to restoration costs.

Constructed wetlands as management tools (to capture sediment and nutrients) are increasingly becoming common and are now routinely being built as treatment devices as part of large infrastructure projects for Roads of National Significance and within urban areas. This further increases recognition of the value wetlands provide to maintain and or improve water quality.

How can the NEB be improved to better safeguard and protect wetlands?

Unlike the RMA wetlands are not explicitly included to be protected though are encompassed within more general terms such as ecosystems. Given their value I consider this to be deficient.

This should be achieved by incorporating wetlands explicitly into the relevant parts of the NEB to ensure they are safeguarded and protected. A definition of wetland should be provided in the NEB, that mirrors the definition in the RMA. My experience using this is that the definition works, though I do consider that there is scope to include a wider range of induced wetlands associated anthropogenically landforms, as exclusions within the NPSFM definition.

Wetlands should be explicitly provided for within the goals of the NEB.

The NEB as drafted requires limits and regulation for 'water'. As set out earlier, wetlands [are both wet and dry environments, and sometimes will be addressed by provisions relating to 'water' and sometimes they will not. It is important that wetlands are specifically included. This could be by mentioning wetlands specifically in the appropriate places, or by using the term 'waterbodies' to encompass multiple types of environments, including wetlands.

I understand that goal 11c is purposefully written to protect human health caused by the discharge of pollutants. Environmentally however, the best way to do this is to avoid and manage pollutants entering the environment in the first place so they do not impact the environment health. I therefore consider that environmental health needs to be included in parallel within human health within this goal.

This is particularly pertinent in the contamination of the natural environment and water by plant available nutrients, which can lead to blooms of toxic cyanobacteria which can be detrimental to wildlife, humans and pet dogs¹⁸. For example, avian botulism, caused by the *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria is exacerbated by high nutrient levels in water and outbreaks regularly cause the death of 1000's of ducks and waterfowl annually. Other cyanobacteria can cause severe impacts to a wide range of organisms, including humans and dogs. This issue is of particular significance to Fish and Game New Zealand because it directly effects the valued fish and game species managed by them.

This relationship provides a real example why it is critical to include the natural environment within goal 11(c). Without this inclusion, it will be more difficult to protect human health from contaminants.

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Appendix: Professional Expertise

My name is Nicholas James Drysdale Singers. I am a freelance ecologist residing in the Taupō District and principally working within the North Island.

I hold a BSc (1994) in Plant Health and Ecology and a MSc (1997) in Ecology from Massey University. My thesis research was on a dune wetland ecosystem.

I have 28 years' experience in ecology, with a focus on wetland ecology.

From 1998 to 2012, I worked as a plant ecologist for the Department of Conservation in the Central North Island. In that role I surveyed hundreds of wetlands and developed management programmes to protect many of these.

Since 2012, I have been a freelance ecologist. This role, in relation to wetlands, involves delineating wetlands, mapping habitat, preparing conservation action plans, assessing values, assessing effects including on several roads of national importance and I also undertake technical reviews of consents that affect wetlands for Greater Wellington Regional Council and the Hawkes Bay Regional Council (HBRC), which requires an understanding of pertinent national and regional policy statements and regulations.

I was the wetland technical expert for HBRC in an Environment Court hearing (ENV-2013-WLG-000054) which debated the definition of 'wetlands' in the Hawke's Bay Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and its application to map five specific wetlands within the Hawke's Bay region. More recently, in 2022, I technically reviewed HBRC's wetland spatial layer which involved checking 4078 wetland polygons and adding a further 1193 new wetlands.

Over my career I have trained ecologists and land managers with wetland surveying and delineation, including Waikato Regional Council land management staff in 2024.

Appendix 4 NES-F Permitted Activity Rule

The scope of this work is narrow – it does not involve a full review of the NES. The only outcome we are asked for is an improved permitted activity rule to better allow for access, creation and maintenance of wetlands. No changes to definitions are proposed or other existing discretionary / non complying rules.

Scope of work:

Regulation 38 – restoration, wetland maintenance and biosecurity of natural inland wetlands

Regulation 42 – NEW – Wetland utility structures

Alternative Restricted Discretionary rule

Regulation 52 - 1 change suggested

Regulation 53 & 54 – no changes proposed

Regulation 55 General conditions – proposed amendments

Regulation – NEW – Dams and Weirs to enhance, restore or create wetlands

Restoration, wetland maintenance, and biosecurity of natural inland wetlands

Heading: replaced, on 5 January 2023, by [regulation 12](#) of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Amendment Regulations (No 2) 2022 (SL 2022/320).

Regulation 38 Permitted activities

(1) Vegetation clearance within, or within a **10 m setback from**, a natural inland wetland is a permitted activity if it—

- (a) is for the purpose of natural inland wetland restoration, wetland maintenance, or biosecurity; and
- (b) complies with the conditions.

(2) Earthworks or land disturbance within, or within a **10 m setback from**, a natural inland wetland is a permitted activity if it—

- (a) is for the purpose of natural inland wetland restoration, wetland maintenance, or biosecurity; and
- (b) complies with the conditions.

(3) The taking, use, damming, diversion, or discharge of water within, or within a 100 m setback from, a natural inland wetland is a permitted activity if—

- (a) the activity is for the purpose of natural inland wetland restoration, wetland maintenance, or biosecurity; and
- (b) there is a hydrological connection between the taking, use, damming, diversion, or discharge and the wetland; and
- (c) the taking, use, damming, diversion, or discharge will change, or is likely to change, the water level range or hydrological function of the wetland; and
- (d) the activity complies with the conditions.

Conditions

(4) The conditions are that—

- (a) the activity must comply with the general conditions on natural inland wetland activities in [regulation 55](#); and

Regulation 42 – new

Construction, use, reconstruction, placement, alteration or maintenance of Wetland Utility Structures

Permitted Activity

The construction, use, reconstruction, placement, alteration or maintenance of a wetland utility structure in, on, under, or over the bed of, or within a 10 metre setback from, a natural inland wetland, and associated bed disturbance, earthworks and vegetation clearance are permitted activities provided the following conditions are met –

- (1) The wetland utility structure is –
 - (1) A maimai, bird watching hide or game bird shooting structure with a floor area of less than 10 square metres, or
 - (2) A boardwalk with a floor area of less than **30 square** metres height of less than 1.5m or
 - ~~(3) A bridge less than **5 metres** in length, or~~
 - (4) A sign.
- (2) The overall (maximum) height of the structure must not exceed 3 metres.
- (3) The floor of the structure must be no higher than 0.5 metres above maximum water level.
- (4) The structure shall be maintained in a structurally sound condition for the purpose that it was constructed at all times.
- (5) The structure must be open piled.
- (6) The erection or placement of the structure does not impede:
 - ~~(a) Any legal access to the wetland; or~~
 - (a) Fish passage.
- (7) No clearance of vegetation must occur as a result of the activity, other than immediately underneath the structure, or within 1 metre of the structure, and the minimum clearance necessary to maintain single file foot access to the structure.
- (8) Any bed disturbance or earthworks is kept to the minimum to undertake the activity and the bed is returned as near as practicable to its original shape, area, depth, and gradient on completion of the activity (except for revegetation).
~~The activity must comply with the general conditions on natural wetland activities in regulation 55.~~
- (9) the activity must not result in the discharge of a contaminant if the receiving environment includes any natural inland wetland in which the contaminant, after reasonable mixing, causes, or may cause, 1 or more of the following effects:
 - (i) the production of conspicuous oil or grease films, scums or foams, or floatable or suspended materials;
 - (ii) a conspicuous change in colour or visual clarity;
 - (iii) an emission of objectionable odour;

- (iv) the contamination of freshwater to the extent that it is not suitable for farm animals to drink;
 - (v) adverse effects on aquatic life that are more than minor
- (10) The activity must not;
- (a) disturb the roosting or nesting of indigenous birds during their breeding season; or
 - (b) disturb an area that is listed in a regional plan or water conservation order as a habitat for threatened indigenous fish; or
 - (c) during a spawning season, disturb an area that is listed in a regional plan or water conservation order as a fish spawning area.
- (11) The general condition relating to historic heritage is that the activity must not destroy, damage, or modify a site that is protected by an enactment because of the site's historic heritage (including, to avoid doubt, because of its significance to Māori), except in accordance with that enactment.
- (12) The general conditions on the use of vehicles, machinery, equipment, and materials are as follows:
- (a) machinery, vehicles, and equipment used for the activity must be cleaned before entering any natural inland wetland (to avoid introducing pests, unwanted organisms, or exotic plants); and
 - (b) machinery that is used for the activity must sit outside a natural inland wetland, unless it is necessary for the machinery to enter the natural inland wetland to achieve the purpose of the activity.

Alternative suggested restricted discretionary activity rule:

The construction, use, reconstruction, placement, alteration or maintenance of a wetland utility structure in, on, under, or over the bed of, or within a 10 metre setback from, a natural inland wetland, and associated bed disturbance, earthworks and vegetation clearance that is not permitted by Rule X, is a restricted discretionary activity.

The discretion of a consent authority is restricted to the following matters:

1. Any effects on wetland ecosystems and habitats (including fish passage), flood risk, the spiritual and cultural values and beliefs of tangata whenua, taonga species, landscape, natural character and amenity values, navigation hazard, public access and recreation values; and
2. The actual and potential environmental effects of not meeting the condition or conditions of Rule X.

Drainage of natural inland wetlands

Heading: replaced, on 5 January 2023, by [regulation 27](#) of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Amendment Regulations (No 2) 2022 (SL 2022/320).

Regulation 52 Non-complying activities

(1) Earthworks outside, but within a 100 m setback from, a natural inland wetland is a non-complying activity if it—

- (a) results, or is likely to result, in the complete or partial drainage of all or part of a natural inland wetland; and is not already excluded as a permitted activity for maintenance work.
- (b) does not have another status under any of [regulations 38 to 51](#).

(2) The taking, use, damming, or diversion of water outside, but within a 100 m setback from, a natural inland wetland is a non-complying activity if it—

- (a) results, or is likely to result, in the complete or partial drainage of all or part of a natural inland wetland; and
- (b) does not have another status under any of [regulations 38 to 51](#).

Regulation 53 Prohibited activities – no change out of scope

Regulation 54 Non-complying activities – no change out of scope

General matters

55 General conditions on natural inland wetland activities

(1) This regulation applies if a regulation in this subpart refers to the compliance of an activity with the general conditions in this regulation.

General condition for permitted activities: prior notice of activity

(2) If this regulation applies in relation to a permitted activity, the 1 or more persons responsible for undertaking the activity must, at least 10 working days before starting the activity, provide the relevant regional council with the following information in writing:

- (a) a description of the activity to be undertaken; and
- (b) a description of, and map showing, where the activity will be undertaken; and
- (c) a statement of when the activity will start and when it is expected to end; and
- (d) a description of the extent of the activity; and
- (e) their contact details.

General conditions: water quality and movement

(3) The general conditions relating to water quality and movement are as follows:

(a) the activity must not result in the discharge of a contaminant if the receiving environment includes any natural inland wetland in which the contaminant, after reasonable mixing, causes, or may cause, 1 or more of the following effects:

- (i) the production of conspicuous oil or grease films, scums or foams, or floatable or suspended materials;
- (ii) a conspicuous change in colour or visual clarity;
- (iii) an emission of objectionable odour;
- (iv) the contamination of freshwater to the extent that it is not suitable for farm animals to drink;
- (v) adverse effects on aquatic life that are more than minor; and

(b) the activity must not increase the level of flood waters that would, in any flood event (regardless of probability), inundate all or any part of the 1% AEP floodplain (but see subclause (4)); and

(c) the activity must not alter the natural movement of water into, within, or from any natural inland wetland (but see subclause (5)); and

(d) the activity must not involve taking or discharging water to or from any natural inland wetland (but see subclause (5)); and

(e)

~~debris and sediment must not be placed~~

(i)

~~within a setback of 10 m from any natural inland wetland; or~~

(ii)

~~in a position where it may enter any natural inland wetland.~~

(4)

Subclause (3)(b) does not apply if the person undertaking the activity—

(a)

owns or controls the only land or structures that would be affected by a flood in all or any part of the 1% AEP floodplain; or

(b)

has—

(i)

obtained written consent to undertaking the activity from each person who owns or controls the land or structures that would be affected by a flood in all or part of the 1% AEP floodplain, after informing them of the expected increase in the level of flood waters; and

(ii)

satisfied the relevant regional council that they have complied with subparagraph (i).

(5)

~~Despite subclause (3)(c) and (d), the temporary taking, use, damming, or diversion of water around a work site, or discharges of water into the water around a work site, may be undertaken if the following conditions are complied with:~~

(a)

~~the activity must be undertaken during a period when there is a low risk of flooding; and~~

(b)

~~the activity must be undertaken only for as long as necessary to achieve its purpose; and~~

(c)

~~before the activity starts, a record must be made (for example, by taking photographs) of the original condition of any affected natural inland wetland's bed profile and hydrological regime that is sufficiently detailed to enable compliance with paragraph (d) to be verified; and~~

(d)

~~the bed profile and hydrological regime of the natural inland wetland must be returned to their original condition no later than 14 days after the start of the activity; and~~

(e)

~~if the activity is damming, the dam must be no higher than 600 mm 4m or impound 20,000m³ of water and~~

(f)

~~if the activity is a diversion that uses a pump, a fish screen with mesh spacing no greater than 3 mm must be used on the intake.~~

(6)

In subclauses (3) and (4), **1% AEP floodplain** means the area that would be inundated in a flood event of a size that has a 1% or greater probability of occurring in any one year.

General condition: earth stability and drainage

(7)

The general condition relating to earth stability and drainage is that the activity must not create or contribute to—

(a)

~~the instability or subsidence of a slope or another land surface; or~~

(b)

~~the erosion of the bed or bank of any natural inland wetland; or~~

(c)

~~a change in the points at which water flows into or out of any natural inland wetland; or~~

(d)

~~a constriction on the flow of water within, into, or out of any natural inland wetland; or~~

(e)

~~the flooding or overland flow of water within, or flowing into or out of, any natural inland wetland.~~

General conditions: earthworks, land disturbance, and vegetation clearance

(8) The general conditions on earthworks, land disturbance, and vegetation clearance are as follows:

(a) during and after the activity, erosion and sediment control measures must be applied and maintained at the site of the activity to minimise adverse effects of sediment on natural inland wetlands; and

(b) the measures must include stabilising or containing soil that is exposed or disturbed by the activity as soon as practicable after the activity ends; and

(c) the measures referred to in paragraph (b) must remain in place until vegetation covers more than 80% of the site; and

(d) if the activity is vegetation clearance, it must not result in earth remaining bare for longer than 3 months.

General conditions: vegetation and bird and fish habitats

(9) The general conditions relating to vegetation and bird and fish habitats are as follows:

~~(a)~~

~~only indigenous species that are appropriate to a natural inland wetland (given the location and type of the natural inland wetland) may be planted in it; and~~

(b)

~~the activity must not result in the smothering of indigenous vegetation by debris and sediment; and~~

(c) the activity must not disturb the roosting or nesting of indigenous birds during their breeding season; and

(d) the activity must not disturb an area that is listed in a regional plan or water conservation order as a habitat for threatened indigenous fish; and

(e) the activity must not, during a spawning season, disturb an area that is listed in a regional plan or water conservation order as a fish spawning area.

General condition: historic heritage

(10) The general condition relating to historic heritage is that the activity must not destroy, damage, or modify a site that is protected by an enactment because of the site's historic heritage (including, to avoid doubt, because of its significance to Māori), except in accordance with that enactment.

(11) In subclause (10), **enactment** includes any kind of instrument made under an enactment.

General conditions: machinery, vehicles, equipment, and construction materials

(12) The general conditions on the use of vehicles, machinery, equipment, and materials are as follows:

- (a) machinery, vehicles, and equipment used for the activity must be cleaned before entering any natural inland wetland (to avoid introducing pests, unwanted organisms, or exotic plants); and
- (b) machinery that is used for the activity must sit outside a natural inland wetland, unless it is necessary for the machinery to enter the natural inland wetland to achieve the purpose of the activity; and

~~(c)~~

~~if machinery or vehicles enter any natural inland wetland, they must be modified or supported to prevent them from damaging the natural inland wetland (for example, by widening the tracks of track-driven vehicles or using platforms for machinery to sit on); and~~

~~Where machinery or vehicles are required to carry out works in natural inland wetlands, restoration of the access track that they have created to do the works will be necessary.~~

(d)

~~the mixing of construction materials, and the refuelling and maintenance of vehicles, machinery, and equipment, must be done outside a 10 m setback from any natural inland wetland.~~

General conditions: miscellaneous

(13) The other general conditions are as follows:

- (a) the activity must be undertaken only to the extent necessary to achieve its purpose; and
- (b) the activity must not involve the use of fire or explosives; and
- (c) if there is existing public access to a natural inland wetland, the activity must not prevent the public from continuing to access the natural inland wetland (unless that is required to protect the health and safety of the public or the persons undertaking the activity); and
- (d) no later than 5 days after the activity ends,—
- (i) debris, materials, and equipment relating to the activity must be removed from the site; and
- (ii) the site must be free from litter.

Reg X – Dams and weirs to enhance, restore or create wetland habitats

1. The placement, erection or reconstruction of any dam or weir in, on or over the bed of a wetland, modified watercourse or artificial drain and any associated bed disturbance and discharge resulting from the activity, is a permitted activity provided the following conditions are met:
 - a. The primary purpose must be to **enhance, restore, or create wetland habitats;**
 - b. If the dam or weir exceeds 4 meters in height or 20,000 cubic meters in water impoundment volume, a building consent must be obtained prior to construction;
 - c. The dam or weir must be in a catchment area of less than **500** hectares;
 - d. The dam or weir must not be located upstream of any railway, formed public road, or residence that could be affected by its failure;
 - e. The dam or weir must have a spillway or auxiliary spillway capable of safely conveying flood flows;
 - f. The dam or weir must not impound water or adversely affect drainage beyond the landholding unless agreed in writing by the affected landowner;

- g. The dam or weir must allow fish passage for species that exist in the catchment, except for pest fish¹ species;
 - h. The discharge from the dam or weir must return to the original channel without causing significant erosion or deposition downstream;
 - i. The dam or weir must not be within any mātaihai, nohoanga, or taiāpure areas; and
 - j. For Reg X(1)(b), the height of a dam or weir is measured from the crest to:
 - i. The natural bed of the wetland at the lowest downstream point; and
 - ii. The lowest elevation at the downstream limit for a modified watercourse or drain.
2. The use of any dam or weir is a permitted activity provided the following conditions are met:
- a. The primary purpose must be to enhance, restore, or create wetland habitats;
 - b. The structure is lawfully established;
 - c. The activity must allow fish passage, except for pest fish species; and
 - d. The structure is maintained in a good state of repair.
3. Despite Reg 55(3)(c) and (d), the taking, use, damming, or diversion of water by a dam or weir to enhance, restore, or create wetland habitats is a permitted activity provided the following conditions are met:
- a. The primary purpose must be to enhance, restore, or create wetland habitats;
 - b. The activity must allow fish passage, except for pest fish species;
 - c. The total volume of water taken, used, dammed or diverted must be non-consumptive;
 - d. If the activity is damming, the dam must be no higher than 4m, or the impoundment volume must not exceed 20,000 cubic meters of water; and
 - e. If the activity is diverting water using a pump, a fish screen with mesh spacing no greater than 3 mm must be used on the intake.
4. The use, placement, erection or reconstruction of any dam or weir in, on or over the bed of a wetland, river, modified watercourse or drain and the associated damming of water (either inside or outside the bed), and any associated bed disturbance and discharge resulting from the carrying out of the activity, that does not meet one or more of the conditions of Reg X(1) or (2) is a discretionary activity.
5. The taking, use, damming, or diversion of water by a dam or weir to enhance, restore, or create wetland habitats that does not meet one or more of the conditions of Reg X(3) is a discretionary activity.

¹ As listed in your regional Pest Management Plan.

- Note 1: In addition to this rule, weirs are managed under Regulations 72 and 73 of the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Regulations 2020.
- Note 2: The Building Act 2004 specifies obligations on the owner of a dam as defined in that Act regarding classification, certification and other matters of safety.

Appendix 5 - Why Protecting Trout and Salmon Habitat Helps Protect Rivers for Everyone

Discussions about trout and salmon habitat are sometimes framed as though they are only about protecting recreational fishing. In reality, the environmental protections developed to sustain trout and salmon have delivered much wider benefits to New Zealand's freshwater environments. Over many decades, the need to maintain suitable habitat for these species has helped justify resource consent conditions relating to minimum river flows, fish passage requirements, sediment controls, spawning habitat protection, riparian management, and monitoring programmes. These measures have not only benefited fisheries, but have also supported indigenous biodiversity, cleaner water, swimming, boating, kayaking, and the overall health of rivers and streams.

Trout and salmon are among the most environmentally demanding freshwater fish found in New Zealand waterways. They generally require cold, clear, oxygen-rich water, healthy gravels for spawning, and rivers that remain connected from headwaters to lower reaches. According to Protecting the habitat of trout and salmon, trout and salmon require very high water quality and fast-flowing habitats, making them indicators of healthy freshwater systems.

This means that when river management protects conditions suitable for trout and salmon, it often protects many other environmental values at the same time. A river capable of supporting healthy populations of trout and salmon is often a river with good water quality, healthy aquatic life, and recreational opportunities that are valued by the public.

One example can be seen in river flow management. Across New Zealand, many resource consents for water abstraction contain minimum flow requirements partly because fisheries values have historically been recognised as important environmental outcomes. The Rakaia River, for example, is protected by a Water Conservation Order that recognises its outstanding fisheries values. Environment Canterbury notes that water-take consents on the river operate within a minimum-flow regime that helps protect those values.

The benefits of maintaining sufficient river flows extend well beyond fish. Adequate flows help keep water temperatures lower during summer, maintain dissolved oxygen levels, reduce the risk of excessive algal growth, preserve habitat for aquatic invertebrates, and improve the quality of swimming and boating opportunities. A river managed to support trout and salmon habitat is often a better river for families wanting to swim, paddlers wanting to kayak, and communities wanting healthy waterways.

Fish passage provides another important example. Modern freshwater regulations recognise that both sports fish and indigenous fish require access to feeding and spawning habitats. Government guidance explains that structures such as culverts,

dams, weirs, and flap gates can block fish movement and prevent access to critical habitats. It also notes that trout and salmon, alongside indigenous freshwater fish, require passage between habitats to maintain viable populations.

When a new culvert is designed to allow trout and salmon to move upstream, it often allows passage for native fish species as well. Tuna (eels), inanga, koaro, kōkopu and other indigenous fish can benefit from the same improvements. In this way, habitat protection for trout and salmon often complements rather than competes with indigenous biodiversity objectives.

The control of sediment provides a further example of these wider benefits. Excess sediment entering waterways from forestry, earthworks, mining, gravel extraction, or poor land management can damage ecosystems by smothering stream habitats and reducing water clarity. Regional council guidance for gravel extraction specifically identifies avoiding increased sediment discharge during fish spawning periods and maintaining fish passage as important considerations.

Protecting spawning gravels from sedimentation helps trout and salmon reproduce successfully, but it also improves water clarity for swimmers, protects habitat used by aquatic insects, and benefits native fish species that depend on healthy stream environments. The same sediment controls that protect fisheries often protect the wider freshwater ecosystem.

The protection of spawning streams may be one of the clearest examples of how fisheries management can support broader environmental outcomes. Many trout and salmon spawn in small headwater streams and tributaries that contain clean gravels and cool, well-oxygenated water. These streams are frequently among the healthiest parts of a catchment. Consent conditions often restrict earthworks, gravel extraction, stream modifications, or forestry operations during spawning periods because disturbance of these habitats can destroy eggs and degrade water quality.

Protecting these streams benefits more than trout and salmon. Healthy headwater streams contribute to the ecological health of entire river systems. They support aquatic insects, provide habitat for native fish, and help maintain downstream water quality. Protecting spawning habitat therefore often protects some of the most ecologically valuable freshwater environments in a catchment.

This is where an important question arises. What happens if environmental management frameworks recognise only indigenous biodiversity values and no longer explicitly recognise trout and salmon habitat?

Many environmental protections would undoubtedly remain. Indigenous biodiversity values are important and deserve strong protection. Fish passage requirements, water

quality controls, wetland protections, and many ecological safeguards would continue because they provide direct benefits to native species and ecosystems.

However, there is a real possibility that some protections currently applied to rivers would become more difficult to justify or maintain.

Many of New Zealand's trout and salmon habitats do not necessarily coincide with areas identified as having the highest indigenous biodiversity values. A spring-fed stream may be critically important for brown trout spawning while containing relatively common indigenous species. A river reach might support a nationally important salmon fishery but contain no rare native fish populations. Under an indigenous-biodiversity-only approach, decision-makers may have less ability to apply conditions specifically aimed at maintaining these fisheries habitats.

For example, minimum flow regimes have historically been influenced by fisheries requirements because trout and salmon often need cooler water, deeper pools, and greater habitat availability than would be required simply to avoid catastrophic ecological decline. If trout and salmon values are no longer recognised, there may be pressure to manage rivers closer to minimum ecological thresholds rather than maintaining flows that support high-quality fisheries and recreation.

Similarly, seasonal conditions on gravel extraction or in-river works have often been justified to protect spawning trout and salmon. If these habitats lose formal recognition, some of these restrictions may become harder to defend where there is no equivalent indigenous biodiversity trigger.

The same issue may arise with sediment controls. Trout and salmon eggs are particularly sensitive to fine sediment accumulating within spawning gravels. Protecting spawning habitat has often driven detailed sediment management requirements. If consent decisions focus solely on indigenous biodiversity outcomes, some trout-specific concerns may receive less attention, particularly where adverse effects on native species are considered minor.

Perhaps the greatest risk lies in the gradual loss of what might be called a "high environmental quality benchmark." Trout and salmon generally require very good water quality and habitat conditions. Managing rivers to support these species often results in more ambitious environmental outcomes than would be required merely to prevent serious ecological degradation.

In practice, protecting trout and salmon habitat has frequently helped deliver cleaner water, healthier aquatic ecosystems, greater public access to recreation, and stronger protections for swimming and boating environments. These species have often acted as a driver for maintaining higher environmental standards across entire catchments.

The relationship between trout and salmon protection and indigenous biodiversity therefore should not be viewed as an either-or choice. In many rivers, both sets of values benefit from the same management actions. Maintaining adequate flows, reducing sediment, protecting spawning streams, restoring riparian areas, and ensuring fish passage create advantages for native species, recreational users, and fisheries alike.

Ultimately, healthy rivers support many values simultaneously. They provide habitat for indigenous fish and birds, opportunities for swimming and recreation, sources of community identity and wellbeing, and productive fisheries that connect people with the natural environment. The historical recognition of trout and salmon habitat has helped secure many of the protections that make those outcomes possible. If future management frameworks focus exclusively on indigenous biodiversity, important environmental safeguards may remain, but there is a risk that some of the protections that have historically maintained high-quality rivers for all users could gradually weaken. The result would not simply affect anglers. It could affect everyone who values clean, healthy, and enjoyable freshwater environments.

Appendix 6 - General Policy Additions

This submission doesn't aim to rewrite the NPD, which suggested. This is a job for government officials. This appendix provides additional policy mainly for the Public Values section relating to those most relevant to anglers and game bird hunters, and some particular pointers to incorporate into activities that can adversely impact trout and salmon.

Provide for Fish and Game Values

Regional spatial plans and land use plans must recognise and provide protections for game bird hunting and sports fishing habitat as regionally and nationally significant public values.

We suggest amending the requirements for biodiversity strategies so that both indigenous and introduced species such as sports fish and game birds are identified and recognised for their value in the natural environment.

Although the discussion document states there is no hierarchy, the wording implies one, prioritising resource use over enjoyment in their natural state for access, recreation, and enjoyment. We expect our regionally and nationally significant game bird hunting and angling resources to be protected and aim for no net loss of these resources.

Policy needs to protect freshwater in its natural state for its intrinsic value and recreational values. Freshwater is not just a production resource which allows for intensification of other activities and these activities should only be consented when the health and wellbeing of the water body will be maintained (or if already degraded, enhanced).

To recognise and provide for recreational freshwater fisheries, game bird resources and associated public values, land use plans and natural environment plans must:

- a) maintain or improve the quality and extent of habitat supporting sports fish and game bird populations;
- b) maintain or improve public access to locations that support recreational fishing and hunting;
- c) avoid significant adverse effects on nationally and regionally significant fisheries and hunting opportunities;
- d) ensure water quality, water quantity and ecological processes remain sufficient to sustain healthy fisheries and game bird populations;
- e) require adverse effects that cannot be avoided to be remedied, mitigated, offset or compensated so that no net loss of recreational fishery and hunting opportunities occurs.

Water Storage

In managing water storage activities, decision-makers shall:

- a) recognise the benefits of water storage for communities, economic development and climate resilience;
- b) ensure sufficient water is retained within water bodies to protect the habitat, abundance, diversity and life-supporting capacity of salmonid fisheries;
- c) provide for the flow, water quality and habitat conditions required for salmonid spawning, migration, juvenile recruitment and adult survival; and
- d) avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects arising from the storage, abstraction or release of water that would compromise the long-term sustainability of salmonid fisheries and associated recreational values.

Water storage schemes shall be managed to achieve and maintain salmonid fishery outcomes, including sufficient habitat availability, suitable spawning and rearing conditions, fish passage, water temperature regimes and flow variability, recognising the contribution of healthy fisheries to recreation, regional communities and freshwater ecosystem health.

Forestry

When providing for plantation forestry activities, decision-makers shall:

- a) recognise the economic, climate and land management benefits of forestry;
- b) maintain or enhance freshwater ecosystem health and the habitat requirements of salmonid fisheries;
- c) avoid significant adverse effects on spawning habitat, migration corridors and fish passage;
- d) minimise sediment generation and delivery to water bodies during harvesting, roading and earthworks;
- e) maintain riparian vegetation and stream shading sufficient to support appropriate water temperatures and habitat quality; and
- f) require measures to prevent, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on water quality, aquatic habitat and recreational fisheries.

New Hydro-Electric Generation

Renewable electricity generation from hydropower is enabled where it can be demonstrated that the activity maintains or enhances the long-term health and functioning of freshwater ecosystems, protects fish habitat and migration pathways, and maintains the form and function of rivers. Preference shall be given to

hydropower developments that avoid significant impoundment and retain natural flow characteristics, including run-of-river designs.

New hydroelectric generation activities should preferentially utilise run-of-river or similarly low-impact technologies where practicable. Where storage or diversion structures are proposed, applicants shall demonstrate that:

- a) no reasonably practicable lower-impact alternative exists;
- b) sufficient flow remains within the river to maintain ecosystem health and fishery values;
- c) natural flow variability and river processes are maintained to the greatest extent practicable;
- d) effective fish passage is provided for all relevant life stages of fish; and
- e) adverse effects on salmonid fisheries, indigenous biodiversity and recreational values are avoided, mitigated (for example creating alternative fisheries in storage canals) and appropriately compensated for where residual effects remain.

Limits Framework

We need limits to be limits and not guidelines. There should be no exceptions for breaching limits, and action plans to achieve them on time. There needs to be consequences for breaching limits; otherwise, it will not be cost-effective to try to meet them.

From a Fish & Game perspective, environmental limits should include attributes directly linked to fisheries and hunting outcomes, such as spawning habitat quality, sediment levels, water temperature limits, dissolved oxygen limits, Nitrogen limits, Phosphorus limits, fish passage, minimum and flushing flows, allocation limits, habitat connectivity, wetland extent, waterfowl habitat condition, trout and salmon population indicators, and measures of recreational fishery quality.

Wetland Extent

Decision-makers shall maintain the extent and function of existing natural wetlands and support opportunities to restore, enhance and establish wetlands where this will improve freshwater ecosystem health, habitat diversity, water quality and community well-being. Preference shall be given to actions that achieve a net gain in wetland extent, condition and connectivity.

Decision-makers shall:

- a) protect the extent and functioning of existing wetlands;
- b) promote the restoration and enhancement of degraded wetlands;
- c) enable the creation of new wetlands where they contribute to environmental, recreational, cultural or climate resilience outcomes;

- d) improve the connectivity of wetlands with rivers, lakes, groundwater systems and floodplains; and
- e) support activities that deliver a net increase in wetland extent, habitat quality and ecosystem function over time.

Public Access

Provision of public access should be an important consideration in the design and mitigation of infrastructure, energy, quarrying, and mining projects. Where development affects existing recreational opportunities, proponents should be required to maintain, enhance, or create alternative access arrangements to ensure the public continues to enjoy rivers, lakes, wetlands, coastal areas, and other recreational resources.

Theme 5 should be expanded to include directives supporting public access to rivers, lakes and the coastal marine area, rather than just maintaining existing access.

Decision-makers shall require subdivision, use and development to contribute to the maintenance, improvement or creation of public access to rivers, lakes, wetlands and the coastal marine area where such access is practicable, safe and consistent with environmental protection objectives. There should be an expectation that new development contributes to expanding public access opportunities over time.

Decision-makers shall identify and prioritise opportunities to improve public access networks that:

- a) connect communities with rivers, lakes and the coast;
- b) address gaps in existing access networks;
- c) improve access to regionally and nationally important recreation areas;
- d) support recreational fishing, hunting, boating, swimming and walking opportunities; and
- e) enhance connections between public conservation land, parks, reserves and water bodies.

Recreation Values Provided For

Recreational values should be provided for as an important and priority use of natural resources. Recreation and access directives need to work together to enhance opportunities both to the natural environment and around the built environment, for example, to provide access through a hydroelectric power station to the river for recreation such as fishing, kayaking and rafting.

Regional spatial plans and natural environment plans must recognise recreation, including angling, hunting, swimming, boating and associated public access, as significant public values that contribute directly to community wellbeing and quality of life.

Regional Spatial Plans and regional plans shall map national significant trout fisheries, salmon fisheries, game bird wetlands, important access corridors, major recreational waterbodies.

Development and resource use activities must achieve no net loss of recreational fisheries, hunting opportunities, associated habitat, and public access at a catchment or regional scale.

Public access provisions should be supported by policies that maintain or improve the environmental and habitat conditions that support recreational use.

Environmental limits should also include fishery quality indicators, spawning habitat quality, fish abundance indicators, recreational opportunity indicators as well as ecosystem health indicators.

Recreational fisheries and hunting opportunities contribute to environmental stewardship and restoration outcomes and should be maintained and supported.

Recreation is one of the principal ways New Zealanders experience and value the natural environment. Angling, game bird hunting, swimming, boating and other outdoor pursuits connect people to rivers, lakes, wetlands and coastal environments and create strong incentives for environmental stewardship.

Freshwater recreation values comprise the use and enjoyment of rivers, lakes, wetlands and their margins for swimming, boating, paddling, angling, game bird hunting, wildlife observation, walking, camping and related outdoor recreation activities. Environmental limits must maintain or improve water quality, water quantity, habitat condition, ecological health, public access and natural character to ensure these values are sustained for present and future generations.

Decision-makers shall recognise recreation as a fundamental benefit derived from healthy natural environments and shall maintain and enhance recreational opportunities when managing natural and physical resources. Management decisions shall provide for recreational fishing, game bird hunting, swimming, walking, boating, paddling, cycling, wildlife appreciation and other outdoor recreation activities by maintaining healthy ecosystems, improving public access, protecting environmental quality and ensuring the long-term availability of recreational resources.

Reverse Sensitivity and Existing Uses

We would also like to see the term Reverse Sensitivity applied to the following activities: clay target facilities, fish hatcheries, wetland restoration projects including predator control, existing hunting access corridors and water management infrastructure serving wetlands.

Indicative setbacks from existing lawfully established (non commercial) activities:

- 100 - 300 m from established game bird hunting areas;
- 500 m from clay target shooting facilities and consideration of direction of firing in relation to neighbouring properties and uses.
- 50 m from fish hatcheries depending on noise, vehicle movements and water infrastructure.

- 200-500 m from wetland restoration areas;
- 500 m management areas around predator control programmes;
- 100 m either side of recognised hunting access corridors; and
- 200-300 m from wetland water management infrastructure.

These distances should be refined through local planning processes but should provide a clear national expectation that lawful established activities are protected from reverse sensitivity effects.