

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE 221st MEETING OF THE EASTERN FISH AND
GAME COUNCIL, HELD AT ROTORUA OFFICES OF FISH & GAME NEW
ZEALAND ON THURSDAY 28 MAY 2026 AT 10.30 AM.**

Present

Crs. Lindsay Lyons, Kevin Coutts, Murray Ferris, Alec McIver, Mark Sceats, and Scott Nicol (online via TEAMS from 11am).

In attendance

Arash Alaeinia, Kate Thompson, Eben Herbert, Matt McDougall, (Eastern Fish and Game); and Barry Roderick.

1.0 WELCOME

1.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons opened the meeting at 10.37am and welcomed all present.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 Apologies were received from Cr Pat Swift, and Cr Scott Nicol advised that he would join the meeting via TEAMS within 30 minutes of commencement.

2.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the apologies for the 221st meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [26/05/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (12 MARCH 2026)

3.1 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Mark Sceats) that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2026 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [26/05/3.1]*

3.2 IDENTIFICATION OF RESOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSION IN COUNCIL POLICY

3.3 There were no items for inclusion in Council Policy.

3.4 MATTERS ARISING

3.4.1 There were no matters arising from the meeting minutes of 12 March 2026.

4.0 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR GENERAL BUSINESS

There were no items notified for general business.

5.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST REGISTER

5.1 Councillors were asked to inform the chair of any conflicts of interest. No conflicts of interest were recorded.

6.0 HEALTH & SAFETY

6.1 Arash Alaeinia advised Council that he had no further information to add to the report presented and asked if there were any questions. The only question was for clarification of staff initials included in the report.

6.2 *Agreed (Alec McIver/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [26/05/6.2]*

7.0 ANGLERS NOTICE REVIEW

7.1 Arash Alaeinia advised Council that no further feedback had been received from clubs or anglers regarding the 2026 27 Anglers' Notice. He asked Council to confirm the proposed amendments that had been discussed at the February and March meetings. Cr Lindsay Lyons acknowledge Barry Roderick's contribution regarding the Whirinaki River, and Horomanga, Mangamako, Waikokopu, and Waihua streams.

- Cr Mark Sceats requested clarification on the extent of additional winter shoreline that would be opened on Lake Rotoiti compared with the area currently open for winter angling. Eben Herbert confirmed that the existing winter shoreline area extended from Tapuaekura Bay to Hinehopu. Kate Thompson added that there were currently no winter shoreline opportunities on the northern side of the lake and that the jetty within the proposed new area would provide opportunity for anglers with disabilities.
- 7.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the Whirinaki River (downstream of Whirinaki Rd), the Horomanga Stream (downstream of Troutbeck Rd), the Mangamako, Waikokopu and Waihua Streams (downstream of Galatea Rd) are open all year round. [26/05/7.2]*
- 7.3 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the Lake Rotoiti Winter fishing area is extended to include "The 130m section of the SH33 shoreline from the Lake Rotoiti Control Gates at Okere Falls to the upstream end of the Public Jetty opposite the Okere Falls Store." This area will be open all year to shoreline angling. [26/05/7.3]*
- 7.4 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the following new rules 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 will be adopted to better classify softbaits within fly/ spin waters as below;*
- Rule 2.2 *Scented artificial lures (known as soft baits) may be used in all waters other than fly fishing only waters. "Softbait" means 'A soft-plastic, silicon-style lure that imitates a baitfish, or invertebrate, or koura'.*
- Rule 2.3 *No angler shall use any soft putty-type malleable material as a softbait except in bait fishing waters.*
- Rule 2.4 *No angler shall add any chemical additive as an attractant to lures except in bait fishing waters. [26/05/7.4]*
- 7.5 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the 'All other waters not listed' entry is more prominently displayed within Schedule 2. This will be at the beginning and at the end of the Eastern waters and displayed in Bold font. [26/05/7.5]*
- 7.6 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council concludes the Anglers Notice Process for the upcoming 2026-27 season. [26/05/7.6]*
- 8.0 **2026-2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN**
- 8.1 Arash Alaeinia advised that the Region's Operational Work Plan (OWP) had been amended to align with the budget confirmed following the recent New Zealand Council (NZC) budget meeting. Page 21 identified the reductions required to reflect NZC's decisions.
- 8.2 Council discussed proposed reductions to the Health and Safety budget, staff salaries, and vehicle expenses particularly given our strong commitment to Health and Safety. Arash advised that the Health and Safety reduction related to proactive tree removal work, which would instead be undertaken as required. Salary savings reflected staffing changes, a 1.5% CPI provision rather than the 2.5% increase advised by NZC, and reduced vehicle and fuel costs resulting from changes to staff and anticipation of some relief in the price of fuel in the coming year.
- 8.3 Cr Scott Nicol joined the meeting via Teams at 11:30am and was briefed by Cr Lindsay Lyons on the current discussion.
- 8.4 Arash expressed significant concern regarding the NZC budget-setting process, including the lack of transparency around budget adjustments, inconsistencies in the treatment of regional budgets, and the adequacy of information and support provided to NZC when considering budget proposals. He was concerned that NZC had not been provided with accurate information, sufficient time, or appropriate specialist advice to effectively scrutinise budgets. Council also noted that concerns previously raised by regions regarding budget figures and process had not been adequately addressed.
- 8.5 Council discussion covered;
- Eastern Council's commitment to operate responsibility for the greater good

- Fairness and transparency in the budget process
 - Financial challenges faced by the organisation
 - Declining sales and ageing participant base
 - Deterioration of communication between National Office and Regions
 - Current approach incentivises regions to seek higher funding requests
 - Alana Geddis letter re NZC Levy decisions
 - PWC review – conflict of interest a major contributor to disfunction
 - Growth in National Office staffing numbers
 - Governance capabilities to undertake these processes
 - Lack of review and scrutiny of budgets - previously undertaken by regional managers
- 8.6 Arash reiterated that elected NZC members rely on management for accurate information and professional advice and questioned whether sufficient support was currently being provided. He also noted that Eastern's previous recommendation to base budgets on the 2025–26 budget with a modest increase had not received a response.
- 8.7 Council received the draft 2026–27 OWP but agreed to defer approval pending receipt of further information and responses from NZC.
- 8.8 ***Agreed (Murray Ferris/Ales McIver) that the Chair draft a letter to the New Zealand Council outlining Council's concerns regarding the budget process and requesting a detailed response to the managers' previous correspondence regarding these concerns. Cr Mark Sceats abstained. [26/05/8.8]***
- 9.0 **2026-2027 LICENCE FEE RECOMMENDATION**
- 9.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons expressed concern that the licence fee paper and supporting information were not available in time for the agenda, despite repeated requests. Updated information was received only after the agenda had been circulated. Arash Alaeinia also noted within this document, changes since previous summaries were provided, and a lack of supporting information.
- 9.2 Kate Thompson explained how the LEQ targets were set and advised more recent estimates of the current seasons fish licence sales had been provided, resulting in a small increase to the 2026-27 Fish LEQ target. Kate also noted that she had raised the question of whether family licence sales would continue to decline into the 26-27 season, given most of the reduction in this category appeared to be the result of changes to licence terms and had already occurred during the current season. Further discussion on this was still required.
- 9.3 Discussion focused on the proposed \$5 licence fee increase and the broader financial position of Fish & Game. Arash Alaeinia noted that licence fees had increased by approximately 25% over the past ten years compared with CPI growth of around 38%, and that Fish & Game had limited ability to absorb increasing costs given that the majority of expenditure related to staffing and operational delivery.
- 9.4 Council discussion also covered:
- The view that some level of licence fee increase was likely necessary to maintain current service levels
 - Whether sufficient effort had been made to identify savings within NZC budgets, particularly in relation to staffing and national office expenditure
 - Concern that Council was being asked to endorse a recommendation without access to complete and accurate financial information
- 9.5 Cr Mark Sceats advised that a number of councils had not supported the proposed increase and suggested that rejection of the recommendation would require NZC to reconsider its budgeting assumptions.

- 9.6 Following discussion, Council agreed that while there was support in principle for a licence fee increase, Council was not in a position to formally endorse the recommendation due to the incomplete and inaccurate information provided.
- 9.7 ***Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the proposed licence fee increase in principle but is unable to provide a definitive conclusion due to inaccuracies and insufficient information contained within the material presented. [26/05/9.7]***
- 10.0 **MANAGEMENT OF HUNTING STANDS IN EASTERN REGION**
- 10.1 Cr Mark Sceats requested this discussion to better understand the hunting stand allocation process and was keen to see greater rotation of stands to provide more opportunities for new hunters.
- 10.2 Matt McDougall outlined the current system, leading to discussion on:
- Balancing fairness, complexity, and future management of the allocation process
 - Creating more opportunities for new hunters to encourage long term participation
 - Promoting the ballot through our licence agents
 - The number of stands available to new participants each year
 - Retaining the current three-year allocation period, which was previously considered a reasonable return for hunters who invest time and resources in stand maintenance
 - A suggestion to extend allocation to five years was considered previously but not pursued due to concerns about the staggered allocation cycle
 - Varying levels of hunter investment in stand maintenance, with poorly maintained stands often resulting in a poorer hunting experience
 - The impracticality of a two-tier allocation system
 - The current approach whereby hunters who have maintained stands can request them again, but another applicant may receive the stand if they request it and are drawn higher in the ballot
 - The possibility of a fully random allocation system, which would be simpler but could discourage stand maintenance and potentially drive committed hunters to private land
 - The significant cost that would arise if F & G were responsible for maintaining stands
 - Child/adult and mobility access stands allocated annually through a separate ballot – designed to encourage youth participation and improve accessibility
 - The requirement to purchase a licence before entering the ballot to demonstrate commitment and reduce the risk of stands remaining unused at the start of the season
- 10.3 Council agreed that no immediate changes to the ballot system were required. However, there was support for exploring opportunities to future-proof and simplify the allocation process while maintaining fairness and encouraging hunter investment in stand maintenance.
- 10.4 Cr Lindsay Lyons thanked Matt for preparing the report for Council and in administering the current process.

11.0 DRAFT PRIVACY POLICY

11.1 Arash Alaeinia suggested that the policy should clearly define the separation of responsibilities between Regions and National Office and provide more specific guidance on how beaches by both staff and Councillors are addressed.

11.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the Draft Privacy Policy in principle, subject to consideration of matters raise by Arash Alaeinia. [26/05/11.2]*

12.0 NATIONAL POLICY ON GAME BIRD CAUSING DAMAGE OR NUISANCE

12.1 Arash Alaeinia highlighted that, following feedback from the previous meeting, the New Zealand Council (NZC) had engaged with experts from within the regions in developing the revised policy.

12.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the Draft Policy and SOP and encourages NZC to continue working and engaging with suitably qualified staff from within the regions to help finalise the to help finalise the policy and operating procedures. [26/05/12.2]*

13.0 MOU BETWEEN AUCKLAND/WAIKATO AND EASTERN F & G REGIONS

13.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons noted that this idea of working together had been discussed for some time and made sense for both Regions. Arash Alaeinia advised that the MOU had also been approved at the most recent Auckland/Waikato Fish and Game Council meeting.

13.2 Cr Scott Nicol noted that the proposed MOU was a great initiative and asked how engagement would occur at a governance level. Lindsay Lyons advised that the intention was for greater interaction between the two Councils, including attendance by the respective Chairs at each other's meetings. He also suggested extending an invitation to any Auckland/Waikato Councillors to attend the Eastern Fish and Game Council meetings.

13.3 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the proposed MOU between the Auckland/Waikato and Eastern Fish & Game Councils and gives authorisation for it to be signed on behalf of the Eastern Council by the Chair. [26/05/13.3]*

14.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

14.1 *Finance Report*

14.2 A question was raised regarding customs charges on the datawatch fish tags. Kate Thompson clarified that this related to the duty/GST on the tags that were imported from Australia.

14.3 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Murray Ferris) that the payments for February and March 2026 totalling \$298,108.71 be approved. [26/05/14.3]*

14.4 *Management Report*

14.5 Arash Alaeinia noted that the past few months had been a very busy period with the opening of the game bird season and the transition into winter fishing. He advised that the trap programme commenced on 1 April, which created additional work for the fisheries team. No questions were raised.

14.6 Cr Lindsay Lyons commented on our social media posts about the great fish being caught on Lake Tarawera. Arash Alaeinia referred to the recent food web report for Lake Tarawera, noting that it is looking great for the season opening. He added it will be important to promote the fishery in the lead-up to the opening.

14.7 Licence Sales Report

14.8 Kate Thompson informed Council that game licence sales had not performed well this year, likely reflecting last year's strong sales, although volumes remain below the season before that. A similar trend is being observed nationally, with fuel cost pressures potentially contributing to reduced participation.

14.9 Council discussion noted the following:

- Looking ahead to October, Eastern's fisheries are predominantly lake-based and there are concerns that high fuel prices could negatively affect opening participation if costs do not ease.
- The importance of maintaining regional reserves was highlighted. It was noted that reserves help manage fluctuations in income and should be reinforced to the Minister as part of the case for retaining them, particularly given risks such as HPAI and ongoing international fuel cost volatility.
- A North Island EDM was delivered to approximately 5,000 lapsed Game Bird licence holders following opening weekend, aiming to encourage hunters to take advantage of improved hunting conditions the following weekend, when weather was more favourable. While open rates were positive, this did not translate into a significant increase in licence sales. Eastern also followed up with additional communications when day licences became available.
- There was support for undertaking a simple and concise survey of lapsed licence holders to better understand reasons for non-renewal and improve future engagement.
- Pre-season marketing opportunities were discussed, including encouraging moteliere to offer special accommodation rates to licence holders and broader destination marketing, including potential coordination with Rotorua NZ.
- Questions were raised regarding Taupō fishing conditions and whether any current sales data was available. Arash advised that he did not have that information presently and that the Taupō season was coming to an end. He advised that he would reach out to DoC for an update. It was also suggested that marketing should now commence to promote the trophy trout potential of Lake Tarawera and the trophy brown trout fishery on Rotorua.
- The potential for added-value benefits for licence holders was raised, such as discounts (e.g. accommodation, coffee, retail offers), similar to membership models used in other sectors. This had been considered previously at national level but had not progressed.
- The International Tag Fish competition was discussed, noting strong interest. However, it was noted that the initiative required significant effort to deliver. The Fish for Gold tag competition also required significant effort and did not deliver measurable growth in licence sales, despite positive feedback from participants.

15.0 LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS

15.1 *Report from Bay of Plenty Conservation Board*

No report.

15.2 *Report from Department of Conservation*

No report.

15.3 *Report from New Zealand Council*

Council had received all updated from the New Zealand Council.

15.4 *Report from the Chair*

Cr Lindsay Lyons reported that there was nothing to report from the Chair, as no Chair meetings had been held during the period.

16.0 GENERAL BUSINESS

16.1 There was no general business to report.

17.0 PUBLIC EXCLUDED SESSION

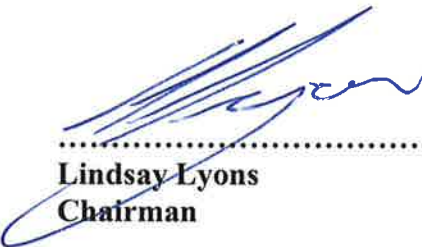
17.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that pursuant to Section 48 (1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the public be excluded at 1.52pm from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely, to discuss Confidential staff matters. [26/05/17.1]*

17.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council moves out of public excluded at 2.23pm. [26/05/17.2]*

17.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the public be re-admitted to the meeting at 2.24pm. [26/05/17.3]*

18.0 MEETING CLOSED

18.1 The meeting closed at 2.25 pm.



.....
Lindsay Lyons
Chairman

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

2.0 APOLOGIES

- 2.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the apologies for the 221st meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [26/05/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (12 MARCH 2026)

- 3.1 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Mark Sceats) that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2026 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [26/05/3.1]*

6.0 HEALTH & SAFETY

- 6.2 *Agreed (Alec McIver/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [26/05/6.2]*

7.0 ANGLERS NOTICE REVIEW

- 7.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the Whirinaki River (downstream of Whirinaki Rd), the Horomanga Stream (downstream of Troutbeck Rd), the Mangamako, Waikokopu and Waihua Streams (downstream of Galatea Rd) are open all year round. [26/05/7.2]*

- 7.3 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the Lake Rotoiti Winter fishing area is extended to include "The 130m section of the SH33 shoreline from the Lake Rotoiti Control Gates at Okere Falls to the upstream end of the Public Jetty opposite the Okere Falls Store." This area will be open all year to shoreline angling. [26/05/7.3]*

- 7.4 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the following new rules 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 will be adopted to better classify softbaits within fly/ spin waters as below;*

Rule 2.2 Scented artificial lures (known as soft baits) may be used in all waters other than fly fishing only waters. "Softbait" means 'A soft-plastic, silicon-style lure that imitates a baitfish, or invertebrate, or koura'.

Rule 2.3 No angler shall use any soft putty-type malleable material as a softbait except in bait fishing waters.

Rule 2.4 No angler shall add any chemical additive as an attractant to lures except in bait fishing waters. [26/05/7.4]

- 7.5 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the 'All other waters not listed' entry is more prominently displayed within Schedule 2. This will be at the beginning and at the end of the Eastern waters and displayed in Bold font. [26/05/7.5]*

- 7.6 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council concludes the Anglers Notice Process for the upcoming 2026-27 season. [26/05/7.6]*

8.0 2026-2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN

- 8.8 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the Chair draft a letter to the New Zealand Council outlining Council's concerns regarding the budget process and requesting a detailed response to the managers' previous correspondence regarding these concerns. Cr Mark Sceats abstained. [26/05/8.8]*

9.0 2026-2027 LICENCE FEE RECOMMENDATION

- 9.7 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the proposed licence fee increase in principle but is unable to provide a definitive conclusion due to inaccuracies and insufficient information contained within the material presented. [26/05/9.7]*

11.0 DRAFT PRIVACY POLICY

- 11.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the Draft Privacy Policy in principle, subject to consideration of matters raised by Arash Alaeinia. [26/05/11.2]*

12.0 NATIONAL POLICY ON GAME BIRD CAUSING DAMAGE OR NUISANCE

- 12.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the Draft Policy and SOP and encourages NZC to continue working and engaging with suitably qualified staff from within the regions to help finalise the to help finalise the policy and operating procedures. [26/05/12.2]*

13.0 MOU BETWEEN AUCKLAND/WAIKATO AND EASTERN F & G REGIONS

- 13.3 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council supports the proposed MOU between the Auckland/Waikato and Eastern Fish & Game Councils and gives authorisation for it to be signed on behalf of the Eastern Council by the Chair. [26/05/13.3]*

14.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

14.3 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Murray Ferris) that the payments for February and March 2026 totalling \$298,108.71 be approved. [26/05/14.3]*

17.0 PUBLIC EXCLUDED SESSION

17.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that pursuant to Section 48 (1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the public be excluded at 1.52pm from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely, to discuss Confidential staff matters. [26/05/17.1]*

17.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council moves out of public excluded at 2.23pm. [26/05/17.2]*

17.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the public be re-admitted to the meeting at 2.24pm. [26/05/17.3]*