

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE 223rd MEETING OF THE EASTERN FISH AND GAME COUNCIL, HELD AT ROTORUA OFFICES OF FISH & GAME NEW ZEALAND AND VIA TEAMS ON THURSDAY 30 JULY 2026 AT 11.00 AM.

Present

Crs. Lindsay Lyons, Pat Swift, Mark Sceats, Alec McIver, Murray Ferris, Kevin Coutts, and Scott Nicol.

In attendance

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

1.0 WELCOME

1.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons opened the meeting at 11.00 and welcomed all present.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 There were no apologies for the 223rd meeting of the Eastern Fish and Game Council.

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (28 MAY 2026)

3.1 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Alec McIver) that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th May 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 Mark Sceats requested that Council revisit the management of hunting stands. Arash Alaeinia advised that staff are currently reviewing the process and requested that Mark email his concerns to himself and Matt McDougall for consideration as part of the review. Arash advised that he would look to include this review on the agenda for a future meeting.

3.5 MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING (25 JUNE 2026)

3.6 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Pat Swift) that the minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2026 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [26/07/3.6]*

3.7 IDENTIFICATION OF RESOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSION IN COUNCIL POLICY

3.8 There were no items for inclusion in Council Policy.

3.9 MATTERS ARISING

3.9.1 Mark Sceats again raised his concerns about employment of staff and advised that he would raise the matter at a future time.

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 spoke to the Health & Safety report, noting the minor injury that had been reported, and asked whether Council had any questions. No questions were raised.

6.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [26/07/6.2]*

7.0 RE-CONFIRMATION 2026-2027 LICENCE FEE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 Arash Alaeinia advised that this item was a reconfirmation of matters discussed at the June Extraordinary Council meeting, bringing the decisions made at that meeting to the full Council for reconfirmation. Council noted that the Minister had already approved the \$2 licence fee increase, which formed part of those decisions.
- 7.2 Kate Thompson queried whether Mark Sceats was aware if NZC had considered the resolution from the Extraordinary Council meeting which noted that Council acknowledged NZC may amend the reduction percentage based on final figures. Mark advised that he had not yet seen final figures and therefore this item would still be pending.
- 7.3 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Alec McIver) that Council reconfirms resolutions [26/06/5.13], [26/06/5.14], [26/06/5.15], [26/06/5.16], as recorded in the minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 25 June 2026. [26/07/7.3]*

8.0 LETTER TO MINISTER JAMES MEAGER

- 8.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons noted that the letter previously proposed to be sent to the Minister had been superseded by recent events. Council discussed whether a letter should now be sent.
- 8.2 Cr Kevin Coutts expressed strong concern that we should not be following Auckland Waikato in sending a letter to the Minister as it will just be a similar complaint. NZC is a part of F&G and will be here as it is in legislation, so just because we disagree with them, we should not be running to the Minister each time. We have to find ways to work together and communicate more.
- 8.3 Kevin continued to raise concern that if we continue to complain to the Minister because we cannot get on, then it highlights that our system is broken and can support the Minister in handing F&G to DOC and or iwi. Which both organisation would happily take us as they both want F&G.
- 8.4 Council considered that the primary issue was the breakdown in communication between the New Zealand Council (NZC) and its management and staff. It was noted that this Council has an NZC Council appointee who provides an appropriate governance pathway for raising concerns with NZC.
- 8.5 Cr Mark Sceats added that no one had raised issues with him as the NZC appointee and was enjoying seeing the letters to the Minister as it highlights the broken system of F&G. He himself had written a letter to the Minister April last year expressing his concerns that our budget system is broken and fiscally we are broken. He will be pushing for a complete restructure of the organisation, with licence sales declining, HPAI on the horizon we cannot continue this way.
- 8.6 Cr Lindsay Lyons stated that the primary issue with NZC has been the lack of communication in responding to emails and follow ups. He continued to state that there needs to be better engagement and communication between himself our NZC appointee. This was supported by Kevin who highlighted these two positions are the most important roles and they need to have more engagement with each other. Mark supported the idea and stated that he will take Eastern's Council's concerns back to NZC and in the future, if responses from NZC are not forthcoming to let him know and he will follow it up and raise to the National office.
- 8.7 Arash Alaeinia noted that there is general agreement that change is required, with aspects of the current governance structure no longer considered fit for purpose. He noted significant challenges ahead with declining licence sales and the organisation's ability to meet all of its responsibilities under the Conservation Act. Concern had been expressed among Regions regarding what was perceived to be an increasing appetite within NZC and its senior management for a more command-and-control approach. Arash noted that, if future reforms result in financial control being centralised through

- NZC, there is a concern that Regions could lose their ability to have meaningful input into decision-making. These concerns were reinforced by experiences over the past year regarding NZC management at both governance and operational levels, including shortcomings in communication, transparency, and the quality of information and work produced by NZC. It was noted that these issues did not give the Regions confidence that they would retain an appropriate level of influence following any future reforms.
- 8.8 Arash also noted that, while Mark had raised questions with NZC, there was concern that NZC may not always be receiving the full narrative from the Regions. The budget process was noted as an example where the information provided to NZC was not considered to fully reflect the information and position provided by the Regions. Council noted that the ongoing concerns regarding communication had been consistently raised and documented by Council and that this documentation itself provided a record of these concerns for NZC.
- 8.9 Cr Mark Sceats acknowledged that there were issues with communication and the quality of information provided, and noted that some information and issues also arose from regional inputs and the timing of updates.
- 8.10 It was reiterated that the Council's NZC appointee provides an appropriate avenue to raise these matters with NZC and seek further clarification and responses. Council suggested that the Chair, NZC Representative, and CEO should work more closely together as a channel for identifying, raising, and resolving issues. Cr Alec McIver asked that communications between the group should be via email, with Council members copied in, to ensure there is a clear record of matters being raised.
- 8.11 Council supported making better use of Cr Mark Sceats (NZC appointee) by clearly identifying matters it wishes to have raised with NZC and was suggested that a standing item could be included on Council agendas to identify actions required of the NZC appointee and for him to report back on progress.
- 8.12 ***Agreed [Murray Ferris/Kevin Coutts] that Council does not send a letter to the Minister at this time and instead seeks to address the identified communication and governance issues through the NZC appointee and appropriate NZC governance channels, with the matters to be monitored and reviewed. [26/07/8.12]***
- 9.0 **2026-2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN**
- 9.1 Arash Alaeinia informed Council that this agenda item related to the finalisation of the 2026-27 OWP and budget process. He advised that the papers had gone to print just prior to the recent announcement of the Minister's approval of the licence fee increase of \$2.
- 9.2 Arash advised that the OWP and budget had been updated to incorporate the changes proposed and confirmed at the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 25 June. He noted that the agenda item detailed the amendments made to the budget to bring the total back to 2025-26 levels and that the proposed funding from reserves was outlined on page 28 of the agenda.
- 9.3 ***Agreed [Scott Nicol/Pat Swift] that Council approves the proposed Operational Work Plan and Budget for the 2026-27 year. [26/07/9.3]***
- 9.4 ***Agreed [Scott Nicol/Pat Swift] that Council approves the proposed drawdown from reserves of \$61,002 as detailed. [26/07/9.4]***
- 9.5 ***Agreed [Scott Nicol Pat Swift] that Council delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer to approve expenditure during the financial year in accordance with Council-approved Operational Work Plan & Budget. [26/07/9.5]***
- 10.0 Council briefly discussed the possibility of Councillors attending meetings remotely. Concerns were raised about difficulties with technology and the ability to join meetings on time. Some Councillors agreed that online attendance could be appropriate for short,

targeted meetings and on occasions when a Councillor was unable to attend in person due to a one-off event or circumstances such as poor weather affecting travel. It was also noted that difficulties can arise when some participants attend in person while others join remotely, and that it may be preferable for meetings to be conducted either entirely in person or entirely online.

11.0 Council adjourned for lunch at 12.00pm and reconvened at 12.23pm.

12.0 GAME SEASON CONDITIONS – INITIAL CONSIDERATION

12.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons informed Council that the purpose of the discussion was to provide additional time for deliberations ahead of the October meeting's consideration of the 2027 Game Season Conditions. Arash Alaeinia asked whether there were any specific matters that Council would like staff to investigate, noting that early direction would provide sufficient time for due diligence and preparation an appropriate paper for Council's consideration.

12.2 Points of discussion included:

- **Hen pheasant harvest opening weekend only:** Previous unsuccessful proposals to include hen pheasants on the schedule for opening weekend were discussed. The proposal was intended to support youth participation and provide opportunities for dog training but was not supported.
- **Grey teal:** Nelson-Marlborough Council has submitted a paper to NZC proposing that grey teal be added to the game bird schedule. Council discussed difficulties in distinguishing grey teal from brown teal, the low numbers of brown teal, differences in behaviour between the species and the locations of regional populations. It was noted that the proposal will be considered at the next NZC meeting, following which feedback is expected to be sought from regions.
- **Season length / MOU with Auckland/Waikato:** Council discussed whether Eastern Region should align its game season with the Auckland/Waikato Region under the MOU. Staff clarified that the MOU was established to enable the regions to support and work more closely with each other, but each region remains responsible for determining its own game bird season length. Cr Kevin Coutts pushed for a straight answer if our Duck season would be taken as to be the same as Auckland Waikato. Arash Alaeinia responded that we will follow our process and make decisions based on our data for our region. There is practicality in sharing of resources and working collaboratively with our neighbouring region.
- **Duck populations:** It was noted that duck populations in the Auckland/Waikato Region differ substantially from areas of the Eastern Region, such as the East Coast, Taupo, and Bay of Plenty. The Bay of Plenty also has a high density of hunters. The Eastern Region relies, in part on the movement of birds from the Auckland/Waikato Region to supplement local populations.
- **Sex-specific bag limits:** A suggestion was made to reconsider a sex based bag limit for opening weekend, limiting the harvest of hens.
- **Game Season Conditions Policy:** Matt McDougall highlighted that the Game Season Conditions Policy is reviewed every three to five years and has been reviewed twice in the past three years. He advised that the policy provides an established framework for decision-making and suggested that any proposal to amend the policy needed to follow the process prescribed under the Standing Orders. This included a requirement for three-fifths of Council to agree to an investigation before a formal policy change can be considered. Any proposed amendments therefore need to be progressed through the appropriate process rather than being reconsidered on an ad hoc basis.

- **HPAI and duck banding:** Questions were raised regarding the implications HPAI for duck banding operations. Current advice from MPI/NZC indicates banding would need to cease once HPAI arrives in New Zealand but could potentially resume once HPAI is well established. However, operational staff within both organisations have reportedly identified the value of continuing banding as an important surveillance tool. Clarification on this matter is being sought.
- **Communication/coordination concerns:** Concerns were raised regarding a disconnect between MPI senior management and operational teams, as well as similar communication issues between NZC and Fish & Game operations staff. NZC has now established an operational HPAI team involving experts from across the organisation to consider these matters and provide input into the HPAI response plan.
- **Pond feeding and grain:** Council discussed the implications of HPAI restrictions for pond feeding. If duck banding is prohibited, Council will also need to consider the implications for pond feeding. Grain and bands need to be ordered well in advance, so urgent discussion needs to occur.

13.0 BIOSECURITY HPAI H5 & GOLD CLAMS

13.1 **HPAI A5** - Arash Alacinia provided an update on the national and regional response to HPAI. He advised that there is a national HPAI response plan, alongside a regional plan which is continually being updated. The Eastern Region has benefited from proactive engagement from territorial local authorities (TLAs), including Regional and District Councils. Meetings, which were previously held monthly, are now occurring weekly to discuss operational processes and coordination. He advised that the Regional Council has secured funding for personal protective equipment (PPE), some of which has been shared with Fish & Game. NZC has also received PPE and distributed it to regions. The Eastern Region is considered to be relatively proactive and well advanced in its planning and has shared its approach with other regions to assist them in developing their own processes.

13.2 The following points were discussed:

- **Roles and responsibilities:** Fish & Game is not considered a first responder for HPAI incidents. Birds found in public places will generally be managed by the relevant Regional or District Council, while birds found on private land will be the responsibility of the landowner. If birds are found in Fish & Game hunting areas and require removal, the relevant local authority will be contacted. Removal will generally only occur where the birds present a public health risk.
- **Disposal of dead birds:** A key outstanding issue is the disposal of birds following a mass mortality event. BoP Regional Council is investigating potential disposal sites, including a farm it has purchased, to provide capacity for disposal following a potential mass cull. The option of using the GDC crematorium was discussed; however, this is not considered suitable because birds would be collected in plastic bags and the crematorium is unable to burn plastic. Opening the bags would also create additional handling and health risks.
- **Leaving birds in situ:** Council discussed whether allowing dead birds to naturally deteriorate could contribute to further disease transmission, particularly through scavenging birds. It was noted that dead birds may include infected birds, while surviving birds may develop immunity and contribute to population-level immunity. Removing birds also presents risks, as handling and disturbance can cause additional stress to sick birds and increase risks to people involved in collection. While the risk of transmission to humans is considered low, the consequences of infection can be severe.

- **Potential spread and migratory species:** Discussion included the potential spread of HPAI and the role of migratory bird species. It was noted that pelagic species that feed in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic environments are potential vectors for introduction and spread.
 - **PPE and operational readiness:** Our region has appropriate PPE supplies for staff undertaking field activities, with equipment to be kept in vehicles to enable staff to safely investigate incidents involving dead birds. Larger response kits have also been provided for situations where Fish & Game may be called upon to support other agencies.
 - **Biosecurity procedures:** Processes are being implemented for managing people entering our site who might arrive with dead birds.
 - **Testing and surveillance:** Council discussed whether MPI intends to increase testing. Matt McDougall noted that MPI is considering the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) to identify species from environmental samples and suggested that consideration could also be given to using this approach to detect the virus. However, the instability of the virus presents challenges for applying current eDNA techniques. Work is continuing to investigate whether these challenges can be overcome. A potential advantage of this approach would be the ability to retrospectively analyse existing samples.
- 13.3 **Gold Clam Update** - Arash Alaeinia provided an update on the Gold Clam response, noting that he had followed up with the Regional Council due to concerns that Gold Clam tends to become a heightened issue with local communities and stakeholders immediately before the opening of the fishing season or other high-profile holiday weekends.
- Arash advised that Greg Corbett (Bay of Plenty Regional Council) is leading the Gold Clam response and had provided the presentation included in the agenda. He has also offered to present the information directly to Council if required. The presentation had been prepared for the Te Arawa Lakes Trust Committee meeting. Arash understood that there is ongoing work underway and a longer-term management plan has also been developed, which is expected to require significant funding and take several years to implement.
- 13.4 The following points were discussed:
- **Long-term management:** The proposed long-term response is expected to require significant financial investment and several years to implement. The Regional Council currently has approximately **\$250,000** available for preliminary investigations.
 - **Boat and trailer decontamination:** Questions were raised about the proposed electronic system for managing boat and trailer movements, including who would be responsible for funding and management of the system. It was acknowledged that these matters have not yet been resolved.
 - **Eradication:** Murray Ferris questioned whether there is currently any work focused on eradicating Gold Clam, noting previous efforts undertaken for didymo. It was noted that a PhD student may be undertaking research, through the Regional Council or Te Arawa Lakes Trust, into whether eradication is possible.
 - **Scale of the issue and restrictions:** Questions were raised about the justification for the current level of restrictions given the limited number of known locations affected. It appears that great emphasis is being placed on preventing gold clam from entering other waters ways, rather than containing and managing its spread from waterways already affected. It was noted that Gold Clam has been identified in the Waikato and at Taupō, with a further incident reported in New Plymouth, but that no other lake in New Zealand currently has the same level of restrictions.

14.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

14.1 Finance Report

- 14.2 Cr Lindsay Lyons questioned whether Zon guns remain necessary and whether their effectiveness justifies the ongoing cost of maintaining them. Matt McDougall advised that they can be effective when used in conjunction with a shotgun but needed to be moved regularly to prevent birds becoming accustomed to them. Eben Herbert noted that Zon guns can be a useful tool in the right circumstances but questioned whether the purchase and maintenance of Zon guns should be the responsibility of individual landowners.

14.3 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the payments for April and May 2026 totalling \$399,168.47 be approved. [26/07/14.3]*

14.4 Management Report

- 14.5 Arash Alaeinia advised that the Management Report was limited due to staff leave and bereavement. Cr Murray Ferris asked whether the Waioeka and Motu rivers were scheduled for drift dives, noting previous attempts were curtailed by poor weather. Arash Alaeinia to follow up.
- 14.6 Cr Mark Sceats asked about funding which had been approved for navigation markers at Waikaremoana. Cr Murray Ferris advised that he would contact the Waikaremoana Boating & Fishing Association to ask them to send Council an update and confirm whether the funding is still required or should be withdrawn for the time being.
- 14.7 Cr Lindsay Lyons highlighted the importance of advocating for the Ngongotaha trout hatchery through the Fish & Game Reform Bill process, noting its significance not only to the Eastern Region lakes fisheries, but to anglers across the New Zealand and international tourism. Council discussed the high cost of an economic impact assessment and opportunities to fund this through organisations such as Lotto. Arash Alaeinia to follow up.
- 14.8 Council discussed the distribution of media releases and highlighted inaccuracies in a recent release. Arash Alaeinia advised that the article had been reviewed by F & G prior to release and despite amendments having been provided the article was still published with these inaccuracies.
- 14.9 Arash Alaeinia noted that Eastern Fish & Game staff continue to provide operational support to the New Zealand Council and other Fish & Game Regions.

14.10 Licence Sales Report

- 14.11 Cr Mark Sceats raised concerns about the potential impact of HPAI on Fish & Game revenue, including the risk of negative public perception around bird flu. Kate Thompson noted that there was certainly a need for some discussion and planning around this potential fall in revenue. Cr Kevin Coutts queried the decline in family licences and whether this related to the change in its conditions. Kate Thompson confirmed that this was likely. Mark Sceats noted that these changes had been driven by the Minister.

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*

Mark Sceats noted that Council had received the June meeting communique which focussed largely on the budget process. He advised that the CEO's part-time secondment contract had been extended to end of December and that the position had been advertised, with Mark serving on the selection committee. The new role will be full-time position and is based on the previous job description.

Mark also noted that the CFO and Office Manager at the New Zealand Council had recently resigned and that the Council would be reviewing its staffing structure. Cr Murray Ferris asked whether this review would also consider the overall health of the organisation and reasons for recent staff departures.

15.4 Report from the Chair

Cr Lindsay Lyons' written report had been pre-circulated and Council discussion covered the following items:

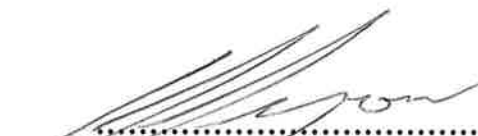
- Staff representation and PSA union.
- Employer support through the Employers and Manufacturers Association
- Size of NZC agenda papers, legal requirement to publicly notify agendas at least eight working days before meetings
- Band returns through Auckland Waikato staff texting hunters on opening day asking whether they had banded birds, with a good response rate.
- Stone Jug Road access opening by Hon. James Meager
- Bequests and current FG policy
- Meeting with Rotorua NZ and local fishing guides

16.0 GENERAL BUSINESS

Cr Scott Nicol raised the potential to develop Fish and Game merchandise featuring artwork such as the paintings displayed in the meeting room or more generally the species we manage. Arash noted that NZ Fish & Game already provides items for sale such as hats, water bottles, etc and there should be potential to expand the range.

17.0 MEETING CLOSED

17.1 The meeting closed at 2.10pm.



.....
Lindsay Lyons
Chairman

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (28 MAY 2026)

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