**Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Council Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 9th February 2017.**

**Present**: Graeme Watson (Chair) Chris Owen

Paul Stenning Russel Graham

Ken Cochrane Michael Hartstonge (7.40pm)

**Staff in attendance:**

Z Moss, C Stewart, J Smyth (6.45pm), E Garrick, W Jarvie.

C Mason (Minutes).

**Members of the Public:** Len Prentice, Ian Michelson and Dan Casey.

**Welcome:**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.30pm and welcomed those present.

The Chairman advised that with only five councillors in attendance and Cr Hartstonge to come later in the meeting, there was not enough for a quorum, which required 6 + 1 Councillors, so no resolutions would be able to be made at this meeting. Any business requiring a resolution would be deferred to the next meeting.

**Apologies:**

Apologies were received from Dave Harris, Cyril Gilroy, Ray Waghorn, Fred Inder, Corey Carston, Kevin Fiveash, and Mike Hartstonge for lateness (7.40pm) and Jacob Smyth for lateness (6.45pm).

Cr Chris Frisby was also absent.

**Conflicts of Interest with items on the agenda:**

There were no conflicts of interest advised.

If any conflicts should arise during the meeting Councillors were to let the Chairman know before discussions began.

**Health & Safety:**

The health & safety report for the period 1st December to 31st January 2017 was attached to the agenda for consideration.

All known hazards were listed in the Southland Health & Safety Plan.

**Matters arising from the Minutes:**

There were no matters arising from the minutes. Confirmation of the minutes dated 15th December 2016 were deferred to the next meeting.

**Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit list & automatic payments since the last meeting, budget to actual report to end of the 31st January 17, licence sales progress to 31st January 17, correspondence reports and Southland Cash Reserves position as at 31st August 2016, were attached to the agenda for Council’s consideration.

Cr Owen queried the McLay boat hire in respect to the Maritime Transport Operation Plan. While it was good to assist others with compatible work he questioned if the MT Operational Plan covered boat hire to other parties. He added it was important to have that written into the Plan.

Zane would check the Plan and make sure that it was added, if it was not already there.

**Licence sales progress**. An update was received today of national licence sales to the 8th February2017. Southland fish sales were 1.1% ahead of sales at the same time last year while nationally the sales were down 2.9%. Some regions were down significantly, the dire start to the salmon season would not have helped sales in those affected regions.

Cr Cochrane referred to the upward trend in the non-resident licences sold in Southland, which, he said was an ongoing trend since the licence was introduced. If that upward trend continued it was a clear signal of the pressure that the Southland fisheries were going to receive from overseas anglers.

The Chairman noted that the upward trend in overseas anglers correlated to the tourism seminar he attended in November, where it was predicted that visitor numbers to NZ over the next 15 yrs would be from 5.5 million to a potential of 7.5 million over the next 20 yrs. Every agency e.g. Conservation Boards, Tourism companies, DoC, F&G, MPI etc. would all have the same issues of how to control those large visitor numbers. Issues were already being seen e.g. freedom campers.

**Correspondence:**

Zane clarified the letter to DoC, which he said was to invite the Southern South Island Director to attend a Council meeting per annum to discuss items of mutual interest.

One of the three year council objectives was to try and improve relationships with DoC. Since then Zane & Cr Hartstonge had attended a Conservation Board meeting, which reminded the Board and DoC staff of the issues that overlapped with Fish & Game e.g. tourist numbers.

**Southland reserves:** An amended copy of the Southland Council cash reserves, with the income in advance liability removed, was circulated at the meeting. The Southland Council general reserve was $127,130. Under the NZC national policy Regions had to have at least 30% of their licence sales budget (Southland $377,719) as a general reserve. If not then it could be topped up during the budget rounds from the national contestable fund. Southland would require a top up of $250,000.

(However since the meeting it had been advised that NZC had since changed that policy to now being general reserves to be 30% of the bulk funding budget, not the licence sales budget, so Southland’s top up would be $70,992.)

The general reserves had been reduced in Southland by the mallard research funding over three years and the ATMCT Environment Court Appeal costs, plus the purchase of an Office building.

Zane noted that F&G costs from the cycleway E/C Appeal would be sought from the Court, however it was unknown at this stage if that could proceed, until the High Court Appeal was resolved.

**Around the Mountain Cycle Trail – update:**

Zane Moss & Graeme Watson had met with Gary Tong & Steve Ruru (Southland District Council) last Tuesday and discussed Fish & Game’s position, urging the SDC to further consider the Mararoa route as an alternative option to finish the trail. From media reports it appeared the SDC were under pressure and that pressure was building, both from MP’s (Todd Barclay) and concerned ratepayers. There would be a further discussion with Steve Ruru & Fish & Game next week. There was some ambiguity at the costs so far with the Mayor reporting in the media that $9.8 million had been spent to date.

However it was thought that in actual fact the cost for the work already completed on the trail, to the gravel pits was $14 million, but they had only paid $9.8 million of that with the further $4 million not paid yet. There would be further expense on top of that to finish the trail to where the consent finished.

F&G wanted to see the route completed down the Mararoa and not left unfinished where it was at present

The Chairman reported he had been liaising with the concerned ratepayers group whose prime focus was to stop all funding until they had some answers from the SDC. The Group were very concerned at the Roading reserve being used and they wanted people to be accountable for the huge blowout of spending. They had been lobbying the SDC Councillors hard on the issue.

The Chairman said there was also an online and email campaign starting soon from the ratepayers group.

Zane said the legal position on getting the F&G costs awarded was very strong. If that was to happen then he suggested we would need to reimburse the NZ Council top up fund.

**Staff Reports:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

**Shelduck Count:**

The annual shelduck count had been completed by Bill & Erin. Numbers were approx. 15% up on last year. More information on the count with graphs would be presented at the next meeting.

**Mallard monitoring:**

It was encouraging to hear from Darryl McKenzie, internationally recognised expert, that Southland’s aerial mallard population monitoring was being undertaken well.

Darryl was contracted through the national F&G research program to assist in the design of our monitoring.

**Mallard research:**

Blood sampling of mallards for heavy metal analysis would be undertaken in the next few weeks. Automatic feeders had been set up on four ponds at Lochiel to pre bait sites prior to trapping in late February. Katie Gibb would be down to take those samples. Previous blood analysis of birds captured for transmitter implantation during the earlier mallard research programme had found two birds in Southland with high levels of lead that actually died during the study.

**Periphyton monitoring:**

Seven periphyton monitoring surveys for NIWA had been completed since November 16.

Atypical weather conditions this year had meant sufficient water was available for Meridian to provide supplementary flows down the lower Waiau when the river status was Red (high periphyton SCI levels). Other years when the SCI levels were high there had not been sufficient water in the lakes to generate an adequate flow.

**Drone purchase:**

A drone had been purchased by Council, primarily to better communicate with landowners when demonstrating where potential wetlands would be built. This would make it a lot clearer for the landowner. However there would be many other uses as well, e.g. for public awareness, social media and newsworthy events.

The quality of the drone photos were excellent. A series of ponds constructed over time would be recorded by the drone and kept as a database for landowner information, i.e. different habitats, sizes, shapes etc. so they could actually visualise the potential of various ponds and have confidence in them.

**Proposed Southland Water & Land Plan:**

Approx. 900 written submissions had been received for the publicly notified proposed Southland Water & Land Plan. A detailed further submission was filed by Jacob Smyth, on behalf of Fish & Game, with ES on the 19th December 2016. (That submission was available for those who would like to see it). It was critical to F&G to further submit on the points they had an interest in and Jacob’s efforts in the submission were very thorough and appreciated.

**Regional Pest Management Strategy:**

Zane had attended a meeting to assist ES with the development of a regional pest management strategy, where Canada geese were discussed. F&G needed to be aware of Regional Council’s push to try and control Canada geese in some circumstances. He would bring this up at the Manager’s Meeting and would be keeping an eye on it, as even though they were no longer a game bird, it was in the interests of our licence holders that we try to maximise opportunity for Canada goose hunting still.

It was unknown if DoC were keeping a count of the populations or not since the status changed from a game bird status.

It was also unknown how many complaints ES had received from landowners about Canada geese.

**Angler Access:**

The beat signage for the Upper Oreti was nearly completed. High quality maps of the beats would be put on signage and linked to the website.

**Hunter Access:**

Zane had met with Rayonier Forestry staff with a view to increasing waterfowl hunting opportunities.

Discussions for waterfowl hunting would be ongoing.

Other hunting aspects (deer & pig hunting) that the Forestry staff were looking at was commented on by Cr Graham. Particularly that access would only be given to those clubs that had liability insurance and only at certain times and where clubs could be kicked off access if one member breached rules.

**Ettrick Burn:**

Angler interest in the Ettrick Burn, a Murchison Mountains tributary of Lake Te Anau had seen a minor resurgence, after a number of years following an extremely destructive flood event. The event had changed instream and mountain habitat significantly. Access to the Ettrick Burn was booked by a F&G booking system run by Eyede.

**Social Media:**

The Southland Facebook page had proved useful for engaging with licence holders as well as the wider public. Just over a thousand likes had been received.

A picture of a trout with seventeen mice in its gut was seen by over 164,000 people. It will be a great mechanism to use for articles with drone pictures and game camera photos to licence holders and the wider general public.

Chris Owen suggested putting up images of the new building and location on the Facebook page to let people know where we were.

Staff were pleasantly surprised at the number of people who were calling in to the new office building.

**Salmon Smolt – McGregor Pond:**

The Sanford salmon farming operation had donated 1500 chinook salmon smolt for the McGregor Pond children’s fishery, along with food for them, which was very generous. 1,000 smolt were released directly into McGregor’s Pond & 500 held at the Te Anau hatchery to be grown on. All MPI paperwork had been completed for the smolt. DoC approval was now being sought to release some more of the (500) smolt into other put & take fisheries. It was likely that Sanford would be willing to donate excess smolt again in coming years. This would be a big saving for F&G which in previous years had bought in farmed salmon from Twizel or North Canterbury at a cost per fish & transport costs for the TAK fishing competition, which was quite expensive.

A video taken by Bill during the TAK Fishing competition was shown to Sanford staff. Cr Owen suggested that this would be a great media event for the Facebook page where we could recognise Sanford and their donation.

**Compliance:**

Compliance was ongoing with quite a few people found this summer without licences. Those found covered a variety of people from all walks of life. While prosecutions were still occurring, the reparation option in some cases, was an excellent tool for staff and saved huge costs in time on prosecutions.

**Administration:**

The queries dealt with by the admin staff on the phone and at the counter were listed. This was good info for the Council and as time went on it would give them more info on what licence holders required.

It was noted that the list did not include phone queries to the Manager, Resource Management or field staff.

**Public Forum:**

**Senior Duck Hunting Licence for opening weekend - Mr Danny Casey, Gore:**

Mr Casey circulated a paper on his topic.

Mr Casey wanted the Southland Council to consider an opening weekend duck hunting licence for senior hunters, 70 years of age and over, at a cost of $20.00.

He said that most hunters of this age only hunted the opening weekend and did so to be with family members. It was a big family occasion for some of these hunters to hunt with children and grandchildren, but many could not afford the current full season licence fee and would give up because of that.

He suggested a printed plastic card be issued and reused every year, only requiring a stick on label with current season marks, which could be purchased from any retail store. He showed an example of that which the Gore Town & Country Club used and reused each year.

He said that in his barber shop business in Gore he met many hunters & anglers. From these people he had huge feedback on hunting.

He gave instances of older hunters (80 plus yrs) who took grandchildren out but were no longer able to afford it. Some of those kids were no longer able to go hunting, because grandad could not afford to go at the current cost. These older hunters would continue if a reduced opening weekend licence was available.

He asked Council to think about this and realised that it would have to be done nationally, but it had to start somewhere. He hoped other regions would take it on board as well.

Cr Cochrane said that Council would need more information to consider this. This included the number of 70yrs and over hunters there were in the region and the effect that the loss of licence revenue would have if we promoted a discounted senior hunting licence. He noted that F&G were funded by licence sales only and struggled from a year to year basis to stay effective in the management of Fish & Game.

There was also a cost to produce a category of licence and the costs to provide a senior licence would also have to be weighed up. So further information would be required for Council’s consideration of this proposal to see if it was even viable.

Currently the fish discounted licences being trialled for three years was not gaining extra revenues as was hoped for, so a change to the game licences with the current decline in fish sales nationally would be unlikely to be popular at this time.

Zane Moss said that many hunters had expressed a desire for a discounted opening weekend licence and explained why it could not be done across the board, because of the loss of revenue and the effect of that on the management of Fish & Game resources.

Also It was critical that licences could be checked in the field and that they were legitimate. With that in mind Fish & Game were heading towards a fully digital licensing system that could not be tampered with and were already looking at systems where licences did not have to be posted out each year.

In the meantime Zane suggested we could look at a local level at the figures to determine what proportion of our licence sales were 70 yrs and over and how it would affect us locally, and then see what support there would be nationally for a senior licence for duck hunting opening weekend.

**Future Management of NZ Trout Fisheries - Dr Ian Michelson.**

Dr Ian Michelson was a non-resident angler and an annual fish licence holder of 34 years, who he said felt like an endangered species, since the formation of the “Kiwi Anglers First” Group. (An independent Group formed to protect NZ Rivers from over fishing and abuse by non-resident anglers).  Dr Michelson was aware that there had been no formal approach as yet to the Council, by the Group, and that all the Council may not be aware of their proposals, but wanted the opportunity to address the Council on the matter. He wanted to put forward his thoughts on the future management of the NZ trout fishery personally. He said that the Group’s extreme views were very much in conflict with the welcoming NZ way.

He said he was involved in the maintenance of lowland fish habitat, as a contribution to NZ angling. He considered himself a useful and valued member of the NZ fly fishing community until the formation of this Group. He said the Group was prepared to trample on the rights of both visitors and NZ anglers alike in order to attain their aims. His contention was that primary consideration should be given to the preservation of the fishery and to the lot of the unguided local angler as best as possible within the constraints of the times in which we live.

He noted that Kiwi Anglers First were promoting a hierarchical system devised to put commercial interests ahead of recreational anglers.

That contravened the intentions of the founders of angling in NZ in that angling should not be commercialised, and public waters should not be privatised or syndicated for profit. He believed that unguided visiting anglers were being made scapegoats for the problems of the NZ fisheries. He was against the Group’s suggestion that all visiting anglers should always have to be guided, as this was in direct conflict with the experience of solitude and closeness to nature that fly fishing embodied.

Dr Michelson believed that guides and commercial interests were the main contributors to the plight of the local angler and the problems of overcrowding in NZ premier fisheries. He referred to the F&G magazine, while aware that Fish & Game had recently taken over the magazine, he noted that the articles were written by guides or ex guides and implied that they had expertise in fishery management, however he suggested that a commercial interest in the fishery was not a qualification for fisheries management.

He said that NZ would be worse off with the loss of financial & social benefits that unguided visiting anglers provided each year. Commercialisation of the fisheries increased the incidence of actions motivated by greed and had bigger impacts on the fisheries. He gave examples of that greed from guides using the rivers most days and some with many clients. Certain behaviour from some guides ruined the experience and the enjoyment of the local angler far more than it would from any non-resident unguided angler, who it had to be remembered were responsible for a significant proportion of the tourist dollar, while having minimal impact on the fishery.

However he did believe that resident NZ guides should have exclusive access to the available guiding dollar. Non-resident guides should not be allowed at all for various reasons - e.g. no work permits, GST & tax laws etc.

He would like to see Fish & Game formulate and implement a concrete fisheries management plan and regulate all guides. Without that there was very little chance of significant improvement for local anglers and the fishery in general. F&G Policies could include limiting the number of guided anglers in any one party, and the length of time guided parties could monopolise an area or DoC hut.

Guides should make a significant financial contribution to fisheries management for their commercial use and profit of a public fishery.

Guides should have to register intended helicopter trips some days prior to it occurring and that information should be available online so local anglers knew, before they walked in to fish the area.

Any changes to improve things for local anglers would need to be effective, worthwhile and simple to administer. He talked about extending booking systems to a greater number of waters, close some fisheries to all but local unguided anglers for periods of time and rotate the fisheries so only a couple of waters were closed at any one time.

He hoped that the matters he had raised tonight would be taken into account in future formulation of fisheries management policy and thanked the Council for the opportunity to address them.

Unfortunately not many Councillors were familiar with the proposals of the Kiwi Anglers First Group but Cr Stenning noted that it would require a legislation change for any changes to occur. We had the non-resident licence provision and the Guides licence was pretty much complete now, which would address a lot of Dr Michelson’s concerns. He could not see the government discriminating against the tourism dollar, under the Conservation Act.

Cr Cochrane said that there were concerns everywhere about the number of visitors to NZ and how they were to be managed. That included our fisheries, but it was early days and the Council would take Dr Michelson’s views on board, but could not offer any commitment at this stage until F&G had addressed the matter of pressure on the fisheries themselves.

Cr Stenning suggested it would be very beneficial to have Martin Unwin (National Angler Survey Coordinator) talk to the Council as he could interpret exactly what the trends were, the change of use and where pressure on fisheries was occurring. The survey information was very useful to F&G.

**NZ Council Issues:**

Cr Stenning advised that the first meeting of the NZC this year would be held in March in the CSI Region.

**General Business:**

**Angler Notice changes 2017-2019:**

Public submissions had been advertised for the Angler Notice 2017-2019 changes agreed to by Council.

No submissions on the changes had been received.

Therefore the changes to the angler notice 2017-2019 would be:

**Upper Oreti** – include as a back country fishery to identify & communicate with users.

**Aparima River** – reduce bag limit from Hamilton Burn confluence to Wreys Bush from 4 fish per day to 2 fish per day.

**McGregor’s Pond –** becomes a Junior/Child only fishery with the opening of the fishery coinciding with the “Take a Kid Fishing” event held in October each year.

**Policy reviews:**

Council policies needed to be reviewed from time to time and with this in mind staff would be putting forward a policy each meeting for Council to review. This meeting was the Fishing Competition Policy, but that review would be deferred to the next meeting to enable voting on the policy when a quorum was present.

**Otago/Southland combined meeting:**

Zane had been talking to Otago F&G and was assured that a range of dates for a combined Otago/Southland meeting would be made available after the Otago meeting this weekend.

Zane would email those dates out to Councillors when he received them.

**Council workshop progress report.**

Zane had attached to the agenda an update on objective settings from the Council workshop held in June 2016. He noted that most of the objectives were being addressed through the Operational Work Plan and went over the progress to date on those & others.

1. **Partnership programmes for Fish & Game:** Zane advised that to progress this further he would be giving a paper to the Managers meeting in February exploring the level of support for advancing a partnership program. F&G used to do more social science initiatives and he would like to see this as a research bid to fund an external party to work through the logistics, benefits and risks to see what options would be available for a whole range of approaches to generate more external revenue, including partnership programmes.
2. **Boats either moored or anchored on the Upper Waiau when fishing:** A survey would be completed on the Upper Waiau, recording views of shore based and boat based anglers. It was recognised that this issue would need to be covered in the Sports Fish & Game Management Plan.
3. **Fish Pass at the TLC:** Staff will raise the issue of fish passage at the TLC with Meridian prior to their process of renewing their resource consents for the Manapouri Power Scheme.
4. **Access to lowland rivers to encourage families:**  Zane had arranged a meeting next week with a landowner at Wyndham to look for opportunities on his land to try and create better access for anglers. He would also look for other opportunities with the Gore District Council and the local Community Board.
5. **Threats & opportunities/ Fish & Game perception:** Marketing staff in the national organisation as a whole recognised the need to further emphasise the value of the work F&G do for licence holders. Social media had helped with that communication to licence holders and the wider public and would be ongoing. Locally we would also be doing more social media articles etc. The web site once fully upgraded and running would also be a good mechanism for communication to licence holders.
6. **Professional development:** Zane had been working to identify the most appropriate training opportunities for himself and staff. This would need to be budgeted for in the next budget round, as money was not currently available for that.
7. **Relationships:** The Southern South Island Director of DoC had been written to and invited to attend a Council meeting on an annual basis to address the Council on issues of mutual interest.

Cyril Gilroy would be asked to address the next meeting on what was important to his Runanga.

Staff were mindful of finding a significant wetland development proposal that would fit the GBHT criteria.

Work on getting better cohesion between F&G and ES in identifying a predator control property for mutual promotion would be ongoing.

The Thomson Crossing study highlighted the issue of domestic cats as a predator. We may look at using GPS transmitters, this spring, on feral cats, rather than stoats, as it seems they were a bigger issue than stoats. This could be followed by a stoat study the next year.

1. **Participation in hunting & fishing – kids and juniors.**

A report on the efficacy of kids fishing events as a recruitment tool would be made at the next meeting.

Cr Owen referred to the April meeting where approval for the Operational Work Plan and budget was requested. He asked that it was sent out in plenty of time so Council had time to consider it fully before the next meeting. The Chairman said it would be sent out before the agenda to give Councillors more time to consider it.

Zane said that next year it could be given to Council at the Feb meeting for sign off at the April meeting if Council preferred.

There were no further items mentioned for discussion at the next meeting and the meeting was closed at 8.55pm.

Chairman\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_