



AGENDA

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH AND GAME COUNCIL

25th February 2023

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME

A Meeting of Council will be held at the Waikato Deer Stalkers Hall, Wairere Drive, Hamilton on Saturday 25 February 2023 commencing at 11 a.m.

AGENDA

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N Juby
Chairman

12/02/23

AGENDA ITEM 3

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME



Minutes of a Meeting of Council
held at the NZ Deerstalkers Hall, Wairere Dr, Hamilton
on Saturday 10th December 2022 commencing at 11:11am.

PRESENT:

PRESENT:

Chairman: N. Juby

Councillors: E. Williamson, D. Cocks, P. Shaw, C. Sherrard, G. Annan, M. Barker,
B. Barnes

Staff: B. Wilson, J. Dyer, D. Klee

Visitors: I. Bailey (UPWM), P. Dell (NWWA), B. Street, K. Parker, A. Welch
(UPWM), P. Hardy (DOC)

1. APOLOGIES:

G. Dickey, T. Clark (for lateness), A. Daniel, C. Robertson, M. Davis

It was moved;

that apologies be accepted.

Sherrard/Annan – CARRIED

2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM MEETING AGENDA:

Nil.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF 15th October 2022:

It was moved;

that the minutes of the previous meetings of the 15th of October 2022 be accepted as true and correct records.

Annan/Cocks – CARRIED

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PUBLIC EXCLUDED MEETINGS OF 15th October 2022:

It was moved;

that the minutes of the public excluded meetings of the 15th October 2022 be accepted as true and correct records.

Annan/Cocks – CARRIED

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Nil.

5. GOVERNANCE REVIEW:

Councillor Barnes provided an update on the Governance Review emphasizing that the Review had been coordinated by DOC and thus the reports produced were DOC's rather than Fish & Game's. The review report was "*sitting on DOC's table*" and nothing was going to happen in a hurry as DOC had other priorities. He suggested that the Minister of Conservation was unlikely to force the review this close to the national elections. Therefore, it was up to individual Fish & Game regions to implement the recommended changes as they see fit.

The Chairman reminded Councillors that many of the review's recommendations would require legislative changes. He also understood that the Northland region was still interested in merging with Auckland/Waikato.

Mr Wilson sought advice from Councillors as to what level of engagement staff should undertake with iwi noting that he encouraged staff to engage with iwi at a local/hapu level. Councillor Barnes agreed that this was appropriate, and that Dr Daniel was doing an outstanding job working with iwi groups in the Whanganui catchment. Councillors agreed that staff should continue to work with iwi at a hapu/local level especially on RMA and habitat restoration projects.

Councillor Clark joined the meeting at 11:23am.

6. GAME REGULATION 3-YEARLY REVIEW:

Councillor Dickey's recommendations on the review were distributed to Councillors (previously distributed by email).

The Chairman invited visitors to speak on their remits.

Mr Ken Parker spoke on behalf of himself and Bruce Street. He recommended that:

- Game season be moved back by 3 weeks
- Sex based limits.
- More protection for Grey Duck.
- Separate limits for Shoveler.
- Reduction in the limit for Mallards.

Mr Parker emphasised the impacts of climate change on the game season.

Mr Klee observed that sex-based limits were desirable from a biological viewpoint but they would be difficult to enforce and hadn't worked in the Eastern region. Councillor Sherrard considered that sex-based limits wouldn't work in his area due to difficulties in identifying mallard hens.

Mr Ian Bailey spoke on the change in shooting hours implemented for the 2022 season. He considered that the change was well accepted by hunters.

Mr Bruce Street expressed his opinion that harvest would be reduced in a delayed season because the duck population would be spread out over more water. The Chairman stated that any change in the starting date would have to be decided at a national level. Most Fish & game regions were adamant that there should be a single national open day for the game season.

Councillors Cocks and Williamson spoke on the need for Council to develop a strategy to increase duck numbers with defined targets (e.g., 3% increase per year).

It was moved;

that staff prepare a plan to maximise the duck population for the April meeting.

Cocks/Williamson – Tabled but not voted on

Mr Ian Bailey spoke on behalf of the Upper Piako Wetland Management Association requesting that:

- The game bird season be extended by 2 weeks.
- The daily bag limits of grallards be 8 birds until the second Monday of the season and 6 birds from then until the end of the duck season.
- Any hunter who shoots a bird must immediately stop shooting until a significant attempt has been made to retrieve that bird.

Mr Klee emphasised that the staff recommendation had to balance the expectations of hunters against the need to maintain and indeed increase the duck population. Staff were keen shooters themselves and did not recommend changes to penalise hunters.

Mr Andrew Welch replied that hunters greatly appreciate the efforts of Councillors and staff.

Councillors discussed the advantages of giving shoveler a standalone limit.

Councillors considered the staff recommendation to ban drift shooting between Cambridge and Ngaruawahia given the recent construction of a cycleway alongside this stretch of river.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that it was Council policy to review the regulations only once every 3 years, and to accept the staff recommendations unless there were significant governance issues.

It was moved;

that the staff recommendations as given in the staff report be accepted.

Annan/Shaw – CARRIED

The changes to the game regulations for the 2023 season are:

- Every person who hunts or kills game shall make all reasonable efforts to retrieve game they have shot as soon as is practicable after shooting it.
- No person is allowed to shoot at game if they have no means of retrieving it.
- No person may shoot game from any unmoored boat on the Waikato River south of the boat ramp at the confluence of the Mangawara Stream and the Waikato River at Taupiri to the Shakespeare St bridge in Cambridge for the duration of the open season.
- The shooting hours shall be from 6.30am to 6.15pm, except the hunting of paradise shelduck and pukeko on 18 February to 19 February 2024 will be from 6.30am to 8.00pm.
- Shoveler duck have a separate limit and are no longer included in a combined limit with mallard and grey ducks.

The meeting rose for lunch at 1:15pm and resumed at 1:50pm. I. Bailey, B. Street and K. Parker left the meeting.

The motion by Councillor Cocks was withdrawn and it was agreed that this issue would be put on the agenda for the March meeting with previously relevant reports circulated to Councillors.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

An email from Mr Ian Hazlewood was tabled requesting that there should be limits placed on the number of shooters coming onto the Piggott Wetland during the first two weeks of the game season.

Councillors agreed that this was not advisable because:

- Council land was public land.
- Itinerant hunters could only shoot from fixed stands.
- Pond holders were subsidized by general licence income.

8. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BI-MONTHLY REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:

6.1 Bi-monthly Chief Executives Report

In reply to a question, Mr Hardy informed that the survey of the Whangamarino Weir had recently been completed after a delay due to the recent wet weather and the resulting high flows in the Whangamarino River. Remedial work, if required would be carried out in February.

It was moved;

that the Chief Executive's Bimonthly Report and Financial Statements be accepted.

Annan/Shaw – CARRIED

9. COUNCIL MEETING TIMETABLE 2023:

It was moved;

that the 2023 timetable be accepted.

Sherrard/Williamson – CARRIED

10. WILDLIFE ACT REVIEW:

Mr Wilson emphasised that the Wildlife Act review was a total rewrite of the legislation that could potentially have impact on F&G's management and hunter's right to hunt native game birds. Mr Klee informed Councillors of some potential outcomes of the review.

It was moved;

that the report from Mischa Davis is received.

Annan/Sherrard – CARRIED

The Chair expressed his thanks to Mischa Davis for the report.

11. NZ COUNCIL MEETING TIMETABLE 2022:

Councillor Barnes summarised the outcome of the recent NZC meeting. He reminded Councillors that the Chairman Ray Grubb had recently resigned. The Executive Committee was comprised of himself, Greg Duley and Dean Phibbs. Mr Wilson agreed to circulate to Councillors a summary of the meeting prepared by the CE of the NZC, Ms Corina Jordan.

12. OSH REPORT:

It was moved;

that the OSH report for December 2022 is accepted.

Shaw/Cocks – CARRIED

13. GENERAL BUSINESS:

Mr Wilson requested guidance from Councillors on the Ministerial exemption of .410 shotguns from the lead shot restrictions. This exemption was currently being reviewed.

It was moved;

that the NZC be advised that Council supported an extension to the exemption of .410 shotguns from the lead shot restrictions.

Cocks/Williamson – CARRIED

Mr Wilson informed Councillors of his preliminary results from analysing historical game licence sales. The analyse indicated that turnover (20% - 30%) was due to:

- Older hunters leaving the sport (68+ years)
- Long-term licence holders missing a year before returning to the sport.
- New licence holders not renewing licences after 1 – 2 years.

There was minimal evidence that long-term holders were leaving the sport other than thru natural causes (e.g. old age).

There were currently relatively few hunters in the 40-48 age group because of poor hunter recruitment for this cohort some 15 years ago. This may have been a consequence of the introduction of steel shot limiting the number of affordable shotguns available to new hunters at the time. Mr Wilson emphasised that more analysis was required but it was very time consuming.

Councillor Shaw informed Councillors that he was having issues with the DOC traps he was using as the trap arms were twisting on the plate. Mr Dyer advised that replacement parts were available. Mr Klee suggested that it could be due to the age and heavy use of the traps.

Councillors discussed Councillor Dickey's recommendation that licence holders would like to see who was voting for what in the minutes. It was noted that Councillors could request that their vote in opposition to a motion be recorded in the minutes. The Chairman considered it good governance practice, and indeed expected, that all Councillors publicly supported Councils decisions.

Councillor Williamson recommended that staff coordinate a restoration project on Lake Waikare with other agencies including iwi, DOC and other interested parties. Mr Klee replied that such a project was already well underway, and that he would provide an update at the next Council meeting.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 3:10pm.

AGENDA ITEM 5

10th January 2022

Attention Nigel Juby:

As remitters, both Bruce Street and I thank A/WF&GC for providing the opportunity to attend recently (10th December 2022) and speak directly to our Council, and Staff; and the lunch wasn't half bad either!

I made a point to you personally, that the specific nature of the date and time i.e. 11:30AM on Saturday 10th December 2022 (every three years only) should be relaxed somewhat – in that a remitter may have a perfectly legitimate social or business engagement (especially mid-December) that would of necessity take preference over this date. Some flexibility would seem to be a reasonable response. Six years at my age is a long time between drinks in a functioning democracy!

Nigel, I have directed this correspondence for your attention, as I believe you are the person best positioned to deal with the matters therein.

Firstly, you are a member of the New Zealand Council.

Secondly, you are chairperson of A/WF&G Council.

Thirdly, you have a direct relationship with both Councillors and Staff.

Our position at the moment is that **'doing something'** is incumbent upon our Fish & Game organisation. That **something**, at a minimum should be –

Set the 'limit' for mallard/grallards at three per gun per day (until the population recovers).

Defer the 'Opening Day' by three weeks to a date close to 22nd May in any year.

Other options and opinions are in the attached correspondence, that we would be happy to have circulated to Councillors and Staff.

Kind regards

Ken Parker and Bruce Street

20th December 2022

Arising from the Remit Meeting of 10th December 2022, several matters have stayed on my mind as key issues in the fight to protect mallard hens.

Regarding **delaying the opening of the 'Season'** one issue is the arrogance of the New Zealand Council in denying ALL independent Regions the option of change – demanding a standard Opening Date ignores a number of factors in a nation that stretches almost 1600 kilometres from north to south, and passes through 11 degrees of latitude.

The upper North Island, particularly from North to East Capes suffers from the effect of the Pacific Oscillation, an event that, under 'climate change' continues to become increasingly acute! Historically, this natural phenomenon brings tropical ocean water to our doorstep every year, and can last from 06th December right through to early June. The Oscillation in its most intense form sometimes reaches as far south as Bank's Peninsular, on the East Coast, and North Taranaki on the West.

As a result, and combined with 'La Nina' weather patterns, severe and prolonged droughts occur e.g. 2022. That in turn dries wetlands, and is the catalyst for *avian botulism* – the biggest single predator of mallard ducks. **No amount of denial by scientists, or administrators will change this annual occurrence.** Last 'Season' the problem of dry and stressed wetlands was widespread and disruptive.

Delaying the 'Opening Day' gets (to a large extent), around this problem!

Three Councils, **Northland, Auckland/Waikato and Eastern** are the most affected regions. It would be in the best interests of them all to combine some regulation settings, in order to deal with common issues. All of these regions have modest and declining mallard populations, wetland degradation and predator increase – together with a modest and declining hunter base. A delayed 'Opening' would be a good start!

'**Carpet-bagging**' is where hunters from other regions attempt to facilitate more than one 'Opening Day' in a single 'Season', and I will deal with that issue later in this correspondence.

The 'Limit' is the other key issue, in controlling human predation. There are several distinctive choices that follow the results of the circa. \$750,000 'Mallard Survey' led by Jen Sheppard and David Klee; a survey that highlighted the vital requirement to protect mallard hens. **It is incumbent upon Fish & Game to act upon this research/report.** Potential actions are -

A. Remove mallards from the A Schedule (effectively cancelling the Shooting 'Season'). The result would be 100% of mallard hens saved (36,000aprox.)

B. Set a sex-based 'Limit'. However, two problems here are –

(1). the inability of hunters to correctly identify their target – **a great deal of hunter education would be required.**

(2). the need to stop hunting mallards at dawn and or/dusk. **Hunting would have to take place in broad daylight, to best facilitate identification.**

C. A normal 'Limit' of just 3 birds (or less) per hunter, per day. At 3 birds per day, the saving of mallard hens would be in the order of 12,500 hens, or about 1/3rd of the usual harvest. The calculation for this came from the literature provided by David Klee to remitters.

'Carpet-bagging' will not occur where the 'Limit' is low, and particularly when it is substantially lower than ALL more southern Regions, from whence potential 'carpet-baggers' would emerge!

D. Is to continue on with the current situation, being an 8 bag 'Limit'; a 31 day 'Season'; and commence hunting on the first Saturday in May. **This leaves us, as the U.S. Federal Reserve would say "kicking the can down the road"!** As has occurred since the mid 1990's, gradually, less habitat, gradually less ducks, gradually less hunters!

Why change – it's always been done this way!

Lake Mangakaware: To hold a Stand at Lake Mangakaware (as I do), one must follow all the protocols and regulations set by A/WF&G Council or (so it seems) New Zealand. **Also, one must hold a Waipa D C permit and follow their rules including doing 20 hours work per annum in the Reserve.**

Note: Shooters' who do nothing but turn up somewhere with a shotgun, and a licence, pay far too little for a privilege towards which they contribute only a trifle. This, together with the landowner exemption contributes to a loss of cash-flow, and labour (effort) we cannot afford to allow to continue unchallenged.

Doing something tangible ought to be an expectation arising from the purchasing of a hunting licence.

Councillor Cocks and several others seem to be aware of **the advantages of trapping predators.** Setting and clearing traps is an onerous, but hugely rewarding endeavour. There should be an expectation that licence-holders who hunt on public land should have the same requirements to 'manage' their hunting territory, as those at Mangakaware (see above). Some premium should be added to licence fees, for those who do not make more than the minimum effort.

And **the huge issue of the loss of habitat (especially wetlands)** should be the area of supreme concern for Fish & Game. Our organisation should be as despised by landowners and 'developers' as the Green Party seems to be politically. When travelling (by way of example), I gain great sadness at the count of diggers on farms, visible from the road that presumably are operated free of the Regional Councils' consent process. Every year I wince when John Dyer reveals that another small (but significant) percentage has been nibbled off the remnants of once-upon-a-time important wetlands.

Bi-Monthly Chief Executive's Report

February 2023

OUTPUT 1: SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Project 1111: Drift Diving

Drift diving: Unfortunately drift diving has been delayed significantly due to constant rain. The Mangatutu has been at least double the base flow since May of 2022. Fortunately, there were no major rain events during the spawning and early rearing period for trout with the Awakino river peaking at 120 m³ in August.

Project 1112: Banding/Shoveler Counts

Mallard and Grey Duck banding programme. Frustrating is possibly the best word to sum up this year's banding efforts to date. After a great first up catch at Parakai the weather has really thrown some curveballs at us. We have literally had hundreds of birds eating up 7 bags of grain and then 24 hours of rain, subsequent flooding and the birds simply disappear to feed in flooded paddocks and swamps. This is why staff continue to reiterate that hunters should not infer that the numbers of ducks caught at a banding site has any bearing on population levels. In fact, quite the opposite can be true, where high catch rates can be achieved when populations are low, but the birds are hungry in a drought year and are therefore easier to catch. We have delayed banding more than once at multiple sites but this means we don't have enough cages at other sites so it's been a real juggling act. In the end we have had to make decisions which banding sites are likely to produce the most birds and have had to cancel some events. Previous studies have indicated that aging birds becomes unreliable from mid-February so unfortunately, we can't simply keep extending the timeframes out to try and wait for things to dry out.

Some savings have been made on duck-food this year. A one-off where some spoiled horse food was offered at ½ price. Ducks aren't fussy eaters. We also received some funding from MPI to help compensate for the increased grain prices. Their staff attend 3 of our banding sites to test for avian influenza.

Project 1117 Gamebird Research

Swan Research: 22 black swans have been caught and 20 banded on the Manukau Harbour. 10 of those were fitted with solar-powered tracking collars supplied by Auckland Airport as part of their ongoing study. These transmitters download the swan movements when they pass a cell phone tower. If any hunters shoot or come across a banded swan, or one with a black neck-mounted tracker, damaged or not, they should inform F&G so the tracker can be recovered. The band is theirs to keep. We just need the band number and location. More swan banding is proposed next New Year.

The technique for catching moulting swan is different to catching ducks. These are chased down using a power boat. A special crook is used to snag them by the neck and the boat immediately stopped to recover them, band them, weigh them and so on. Many thousands of swans are on the Manukau now, though airport staff shortages delayed the second catch effort several weeks. Most moulting birds had regained flight by then.

Project 1116 Trend Counts

The King Country and also Waikato lakes and East Coast Harbours counts appear to have already been circulated.

Swan numbers are the highest at Lake Waikare since our trend count first started back in 1984. In recent years...

2023 – 1,100

2022 – 593

2021 – 316

2020 – 302.

It's not hard to work out why one family of farmers are very upset on the particular property these swans keep coming back to no matter how much they try to scare them off.

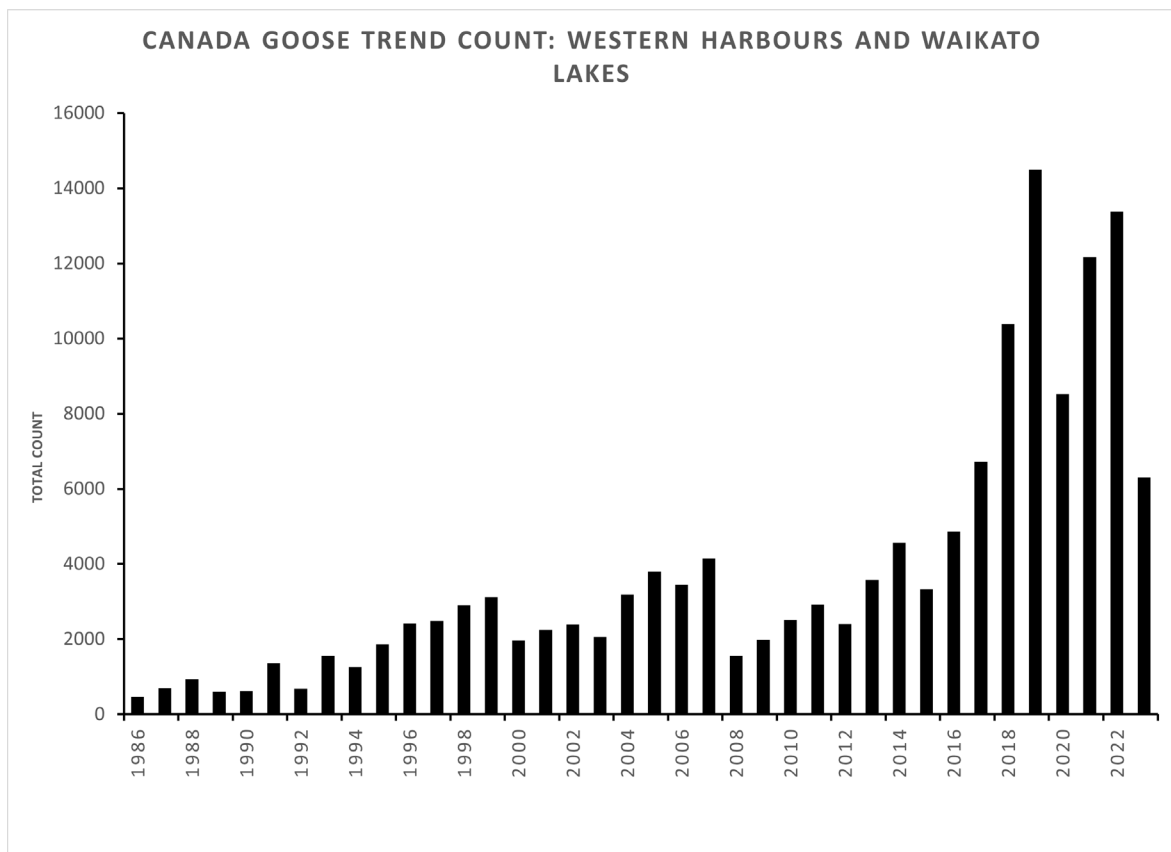


Figure 1: Canada Goose trend counts in the lower Waikato lakes and western harbours combined.

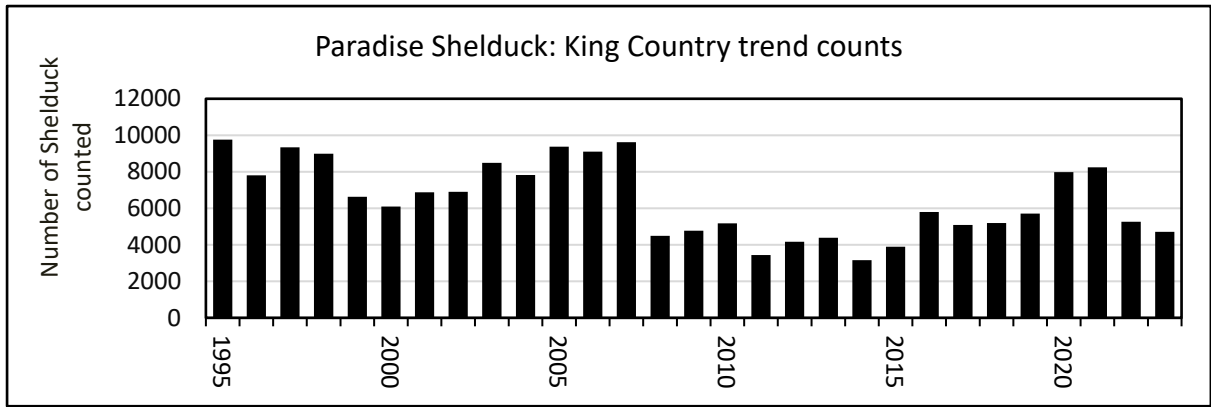


Figure 2: Paradise Shelduck, trend count data, King Country.

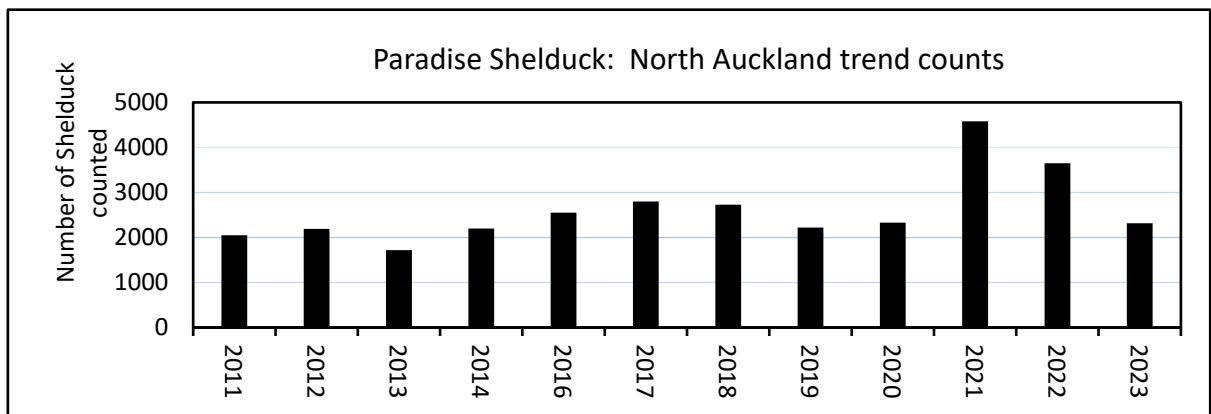


Figure 3: Paradise Shelduck, trend count data, North Auckland.

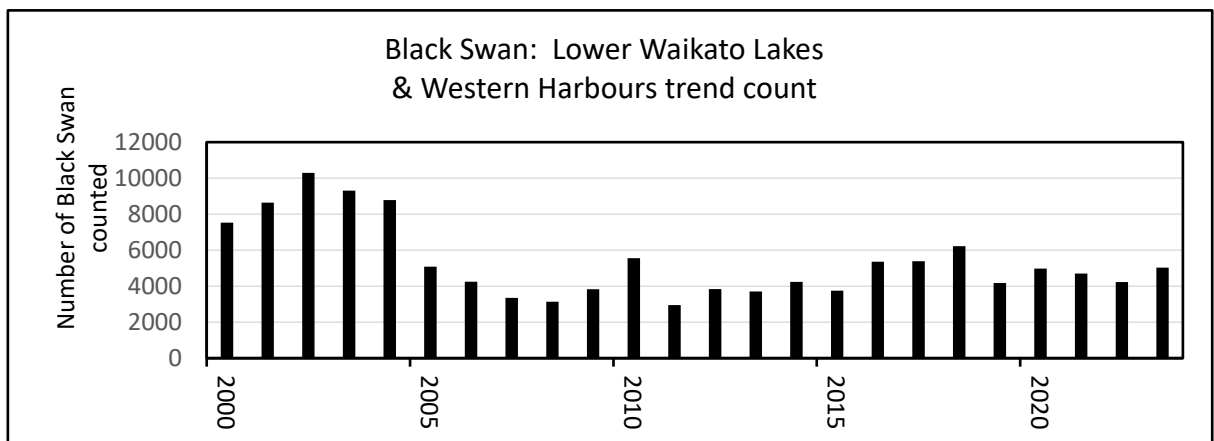


Figure 4: Swan trend counts in the lower Waikato lakes and western harbours combined.

Project 1121: Harvest Assessment: Fish

Arapuni fish returns: Although all river fisheries have been high with over 250% of the average January rainfall the Waikato River has been fishing well with cooler water temperatures. Fish returns from Lake Arapuni have been up. There have also been reports of Lake Arapuni fish recovered in Lake Karapiro due to large amounts of spill.

Project 1161: Fish Releases

Arapuni trout releases: We were informed that access to the Arapuni release location will be closed due to the installation of a bar gate. Details on the issue are discussed in the Access section.

Project 1181: Control

Hawks: Shooting problem birds is not always a safe option and an individual has approached ourselves and DOC to get a permit to use a trained hawk to control pukeko in such a situation. This might be a good option near urban areas. The delegated authority that we currently have from DOC for the disturbance/cull of game birds doesn't include the use of hawks, but we could seek an extension with the costs covered by the applicant.

OUTPUT 2: HABITAT PROTECTION/MANAGEMENT

Project 1211 RMA

Healthy Rivers: The mediation process started again in mid-January, but the process is very slow and not expected to finish until early May. I'm currently spending 1-5 days a week in mediation on Zoom from 9.30am to 5.30pm, followed by strategy meetings with our team. DOC are now much more heavily involved especially in regard to the Whangamarino Wetland. Adam Daniel has also been involved in 3 mediations days on water quality.

We have to provide a position statement in regard to the changes proposed by the initial mediation process by 15 March 2023.

Expert conferencing will occur during the weeks of 24 and 31 July 2023

All appeals are to be set down for a Hearing of 4 weeks, with a further 2 weeks held in reserve, on the soonest available dates after 14 August 2023.

Whangamarino Weir Section 128 Review; Weir and Whangamarino Gate site visit: Representatives from DOC, WRC, Stantec, Collaborations and F&G met to see the Whangamarino control gate in action. This gave engineers the opportunity to ask questions and assess the structure which will help feed back into the options assessment for potential outcomes of water level control in the wetland. The subsequent workshop had to be postponed due to flood events with WRC staff being required for emergency response work.

We also received the survey levels for the weir and whilst the actual structure has not changed much since the last survey in 2020, the causeway which has not been surveyed in recent years has slumped up to half a meter and is generally sitting below the consented level of 4.04RL. Water is currently flowing around the outside of the weir and is also flowing out of the North Shepherd wetland over the causeway leading down the river. There is also remedial work required on both

banks of the river upstream of the weir to prevent further erosion. A preliminary quote is being obtained to conduct the required remedial work to fix these issues.

In terms of repacking the weir to bring it back to its consented level, this could be an expensive exercise and it is not entirely clear if we could progress with that work given the current legal process. It was decided that the hydrologist working on the review would assess how the current weir height is impacting water levels and whether reinstating the consented levels would make a meaningful difference to the available habitat in the wetland. After this work has been completed an informed decision on how to proceed can be made.

Proposed Waitomo District Plan: We made a submission on the Proposed Waitomo District Plan on the 23rd of December 2022. Overall, we were pleased with the proposed plan and that a lot of our previous concerns were addressed in our initial submission on the draft version of the plan. We did however seek stricter rules for reverse sensitivity effects associated with housing development and subdivision to provide greater protection from conflict to game bird hunters in the Waitomo District. Game bird hunting activities can often become an affected ‘adjacent activity’ as residential subdivision expands in the Waikato Region. We also sought that all signs erected by Fish and Game Council be a permitted activity, as currently it is not clear whether our signs are “official signs”; “public information and sponsorship signs” or “interpretive signs”, and thus whether a resource consent is needed as Fish and Game signs are not specified. Further, we sought that the role of Benefit Lots (an entitlement to subdivide which is awarded by the Council for providing an environmental benefit to the District) be expanded so that they can be used to protect and maintain existing significant wetlands, and encourage restoration of historic wetlands which may have significant value in future. We also sought that Benefit Lots be expanded to include the Awakino River catchment, due to its national importance as a trout fishery. Currently the only specified area that Benefit Lots apply is the Upper Waipa catchment.

Review of the Wildlife Act: Mischa provided a summary outlining what the proposed changes to the Wildlife Act could entail and how they might affect Fish and Game. In December 2021 Conservation Minister Hon Kiri Allan announced a review of New Zealand’s conservation laws. The reason for the review is that conservation law is outdated. The reform will be staged over several years, starting with a review of the Wildlife Act 1953. Being part of this review will be paramount to Fish and Game as the Wildlife Act establishes Fish and Game’s role as managers of game species, the issuing of hunting licences and monitoring and enforcement of regulations under s38A of the Act. The review could fundamentally alter Fish and Game’s role and its ability to manage game species and their habitat going into the future. Part of the review will be centred around shifting the balance between protection of introduced and indigenous species. One of the concerns that’s been raised is Fish and Game’s advocacy role for introduced sports fish and game species within the conservation system which is generally seen as an “uneasy fit”, especially where current frameworks do not always provide a high level of protection for native species. It will be critical to consider how Fish & Game’s role could be enhanced both within our present statutory mandate and if the existing legal framework was adjusted to reflect any new likely obligations.

Draft Waikato Water Strategy: We have been contacted by the Waikato Regional Council to submit on the Draft Waikato Water Strategy. Mischa and David had a meeting on the 7th February to discuss the strategy and raise our concerns. We see this strategy as a good opportunity to address water allocation issues in the Waikato Region, however the strategy as drafted reads more as summary information DOCUMENT rather than a strategy. The council responded by saying that this strategy is more about setting a pathway with a greater plan to develop a Regional Water Security Management Plan. We responded requesting that we be part of any collaborative working groups in developing the future Regional Water Security Management Plan and that we would like to see some timeframes for the development of this plan.

NES-F wetlands regulations: The amendments to the NES-F (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) came into force on the 5th of January. Mischa has provided a summary of these amendments and how they affect Fish and Game. Of notable concern is that there have not been any changes to the regulations for wetland utility structures meaning a resource consent will be needed for building any new maimai, boardwalk or even an information sign. We are pleased however to see that *'wetland maintenance'* has been introduced to the regulations in addition to restoration, providing a wider meaning than restoration and in turn allowing for a broader range of activities to be conducted in natural wetlands. We are also pleased the amendments have included a new exemption where a local authority cannot charge to receive or review notifications of intended permitted activity work.

Waikato District Plan appeals: We are still awaiting news on whether the appeals to the Waikato District Plan will progress to mediation.

RMA reform update: The Resource Management Act 1991 is being replaced by the Natural Built Environment Act (NBEA). The NBEA bill was introduced last year and is now at the select committee stage. Submissions recently closed on the draft bill however Fish and Game has been granted an extension. The reason for the repeal of the RMA in the first instance is that it has created a lot of litigation over its 30 years, it is a slow and costly process, but mainly it has failed to prevent significant harm to the environment. The new NBEA is very similar to the RMA in the way it works as a regulatory statute in directing whether activities relating to the environment can or cannot go ahead and restricting certain activities. The main differences are more regarding how decisions are made and what they set to achieve. Whilst the bill has good bones and is an improvement on the RMA, Fish and Game have some serious concerns that will be important to address. Of key concern is that our ability to advocate for a healthy environment is essentially being removed through the introduction of the bill. There is a lack of recognition of fisheries and recreational fishing as key values to be protected. The NBEA fails to recognise valued introduced species such as the habitat of trout and salmon and instead adopts approaches based on indigenous fundamentalism such as 'Ecological Integrity'. These approaches fail to account for humans, and modified landscapes, along with novel species assemblages such as trout and salmon, introduced gamebirds, and big game etc. Further the NBA sets Limits based on current state rather than what would be required to achieve the values, in this way it will fail to provide a healthy environment that supports recreation and environment and human health. Fish and Game is currently drafting a submission on these points and will be presenting at the select committee hearings.

Thames Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) s127 Change to the Consent: In 2018, we made a submission on the Thames 20-year WWTP consent application requesting additional information to ensure the application will make appropriate improvements to its discharge for that term, and to ensure that there are no undue effects to gamebird populations and their habitats in receiving environments.

A s127 change to the consent was then lodged with WRC, seeking to delete the required UV upgrade (given its limited value vs significant cost). F&G indicated a level of comfort with this, subject to an adaptive management approach and WRC indicated Fish and Games agreement would be required, as a submitter to the original consent.

TCDC are now investigating alternate possible plant upgrades and are seeking to replace the UV upgrade with an adaptive management requirement. A meeting was held between the consultant for TCDC and David and Clare to see whether AWFG would support a change to the consent process that conditioned and alternate upgrade in replace of the UV upgrade, responding with an approval so long as significant nutrient reductions are written into the conditions.

Matarangi Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Consent Application: Clare made a submission on the Matarangi WWTP consent proposal. We are concerned that the Thames Coromandel District

Council (TCDC) intend on continuing to operate the Matarangi WWTP with no upgrades to the plant for the next five years. They then plan to install a Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) plant at the existing site in 2026. The progression and performance of the future WWTP is therefore unknown and the effects of the existing WWTP, in regard to freshwater and coastal environments and associated ecosystems, are our main concerns. The other key submission point was for TCDC to include a Botulism Management Plan.

Clare has been in touch with the consultant working on the consent who will be working with F&G to ensure the Avian Botulism Plan is in place following the same protocol that the Thames WWTP are following.

National RMA Officers: The National RMA Environmental Officers meet once a fortnight and now work more closely together on national matters. The idea is that submissions will be worked on together by the RMA staff and then the final DOCUMENT will be completed by Kahu Environmental with the intention of consistency on national and/or larger cases.

Current submission and consultation includes:

- Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBE Bill) which replaces the RMA.

The overriding concerns for F&G are:

- Fish and Games ability to advocate for a healthy environment is essentially removed.
- The limits framework being weak and failing to protect ecosystem health.
- Limits setting being confined to ecosystem integrity (rather than a broad ecosystem health concept).
- the definition of ecosystem integrity (which excludes valued introduced species).
- lack of recognition of fisheries and recreational fishing as key values to be protected.
- The Bill in its current form is not aligned with the process, concepts and outcomes set out in the NPS-FM, it's unlikely the NPS-FM could be carried across into the NPF in its current form under this framework, and it could easily be undermined by a future Minister.

Chief Executive, Corina Jordan has asked for an extension to the submission date along with other organisations as the time frame for the submission was too rushed. The RMA team are meeting to go over the draft submission to ensure all points of concerns are included.

Project 1231: Council Wetlands

Fish and Game Comprehensive consent application; David, Clare and I have put in a significant amount of time and effort addressing requirements of the S92 request for further information. An updated consent application, including management plans for fish, birds and bats has been submitted alongside some profred conditions.

A follow up meeting was held in December to go over our conditions. Both Gerry and Ryan were happy with the application, and we were advised that the consent would be issued before the end of the year. However, the Government announced a change to the legislation covering wetland restoration which comes into effect on the 5th of January. This change was at the request of F&G and other parties, where we put considerable effort into lobbying the Ministry of the Environment for this change and prepared an authoritative submission on behalf of F&G. With further delays, Clare requested a follow up on the status of the consent from the Waikato Regional Council. I am in the process of preparing a memo to send to you regarding the changes in legislation and how they

effect your application. In this case it means the rules are less onerous on F&G and will result in less conditions.

Te Aroha Wetland Restoration Project: Site meeting with Mark Naude from MPDC and we discussed restoration options and potential revenue streams. We will update our now expired MOU and outline the parties' management actions. We also have the preliminary hydrological model results, but we want to calibrate this to actual water levels in the wetland as some aspects such as groundwater seepage are difficult to estimate. David deployed water level logger on Christmas eve which will take 15-minute water level recordings in the wetland. This info coupled with historical photo records can then be used to ensure that the model is accurately predicting past events and therefore future water levels based on projected climatic conditions. Once we have this information we will be able to determine exactly what management interventions are necessary, for example, if we need to rehydrate the wetland with pumping infrastructure we can determine what flow rates we will need and how often we may need to pump water etc.

Piggott Wetland: A group of 16 Pacific Islanders with a special interest in biological control of weeds was invited to NZ by Landcare Research, paid for by MFAT, (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), and taken to the Piggott Wetland to show them the successful control of wandering willy, (*Tradescantia*). John offered to be on hand as a couple had expressed mobility issues and John's 4WD seemed like good insurance. However, it was a brilliant sunny day and they all elected to walk to the site inside the block! John's reassigned job was now to ferry their lunches. John soon found a so-called "shiny beetle", (with a name like *Neolema ogloblini*, it's a lot easy to call them "shinys"). These munch the leaf and were released on site several years back. Another Brazilian beetle, called the *Tradescantia* stem beetle, (*Lema basicostata*), was released not far away but found its way to the Piggott Wetland anyway. As well as these, a smut fungus was previously released on site and turns the plant yellow. Evidence of all 3 working to defeat *Tradescantia* on site was soon found. It can take up to 10 years for elimination of this plant this way.

There is a rookery of shags adjoining both sides of one of the old riverbeds we restored in this wetland. Their guano stimulates the *Tradescantia* which is especially tall beneath. This dense growth denies these areas to ground birds like pheasants. Also, *Tradescantia* irritates the skin of many dogs.

John also dropped down into Parker Creek and found an weed flea beetle, (*Agasciles*), as well as the leaves it was chomping on to also show the assembled.

The touring group had a great day but were unfortunately caught up at the flooded airport with all the issues from the following day's very heavy rain.



Kakahi Cabin: John removed copious leaves from the roof, repaired window glazing and also sprayed back blackberry that was blocking some of the upstream angler access. Adam subsequently dealt to a recently fallen tree over one access point and did more blackberry spraying.

Adam cleared a large fallen willow tree from the access at the Stone Jug property and repaired the fence that had been crushed by the tree. High water also swept logs into the fence so Adam and family removed debris and reinstated the fence. Adam also sprayed broom and blackberry on the property.



Project 1231: Other Land

Weir Consent Application: David had a further site meeting with the WRC processing officer and freshwater ecologist to discuss fish passage over proposed weirs. It has been somewhat frustrating in so much that we are willing to build whatever is reasonably practical to encourage fish passage but there appear to be few examples of what is considered best practice and hence we are guessing somewhat as to what the council ideally want us to construct.

Whangamarino Fish Kill and Botulism Outbreak. We were first alerted on the 12th of December by Simon at Titoki Island in the Waikato River who said there were hundreds of dead fish that were caught up in the log jams at the end of the island. Adam went to investigate and found the likely source to be in the Maramarua portion of the Whangamarino Wetland but extending up the Whangamarino River to the Cocks Wetland. The fish kills were caused by low oxygen event, and staff were concerned that as in the past these fish kills could lead to botulism outbreaks as fish provide the protein for botulism bacteria to form spores.

The issue whilst not unique to Whangamarino appears to be particularly pronounced in this catchment due to a combination of factors. Water draining into the wetland from surrounding catchments and pump stations have high organic and nutrient levels and therefore high BOD load. The Whangamarino gate was also shut for a few days leading up to the fish kill which means fish cannot escape the wetland as the plume of anoxic water hits them. Once flood levels reach 5RL or greater the wetland water levels are often tailwater controlled by Waikato River levels, meaning at that point even if the gates are open there is little flow through the wetland and water sits over thousands of Ha of vegetation causing further oxygen depletion.

John Dyer did several patrols over the holiday period but he did not find any dead birds and we had hoped that we may have dodged a bullet. Unfortunately, we have not been so lucky and we came

aware of bird deaths at the end of January. Staff and hunter volunteers have conducted several trips into the wetland in the past weeks and picked up over a two hundred dead birds to date. Unfortunately, a fair few were already in an advanced stage of decomposition and crawling with maggots meaning that the bacteria may already be spreading through the carcass maggot cycle. Species included mallards, grey and shoveler duck, grey teal, swan, geese and black shags.

There are thousands of hectares of flooded wetland and there are also thousands of ducks currently making the most of this habitat. With the recent flood events this situation could escalate rapidly especially given we are only now coming into the warmest months and water temperatures will likely increase. If that is the case, the entire wetland could go anoxic similar to the event of 2012/13 which led to a huge fish kill and subsequent epizootic botulism outbreak.

John checked all 25 Cocks Wetland ponds for botulism carcasses and removed all those found.

We have put a call out to our hunter user groups and on social media informing them of the current situation and seeking that when it is safe for them to do so, to please check their ponds and retrieve any sick birds and dead birds to remove them from the system.

At the time of writing other organisations are unwilling to send staff into the wetland due to safety concerns, although both DOC and WRC have pledged to assist once warnings are removed in the coming weeks. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done now apart from removing the carcasses to break the maggot cycle before the outbreak goes exponential. If the whole system goes anoxic and we end up with another mass fish kill then unfortunately our actions may be futile regardless but at the moment we may still have a chance of saving at least some of the wildlife in the wetland.

Elbow boat ramp: The Elbow Boat Ramp is actually finished!

Lake Kimihia: John delivered 21 traps, sourced from DOC, for the Friends of Lake Kimihia group. Also, a bittern recorder was at the same time put beside the lake as part of a DOC monitoring programme, which the locals were keen to help with.

F&G signs: John has installed a new F&G boundary sign just south of National Park to replace one missing there for some time. The Mokau boundary sign has also been given a check-up and facelift.

Project 1235: Trees

2023 Tree Order: We were again heavily oversubscribed for the 2023 order and have had to make some reductions to requests. It is unrealistic for us to supply thousands of plants free of charge to individual projects. In most cases we can supply a few hundred and supply extras at cost.

In the mid 1970's the Auckland Acclimatisation Society imported seeds from the USA that were of known value to wildlife but were rare or absent in NZ. One of those was shingle oak, (*Quercus imbricaria*). There is a forgotten stand of these very water tolerant trees now rediscovered in the Central Shepherd and seed will be collected this year. A species they apparently never succeeded to obtain was willow oak, (*Q. phellos*). The very few in NZ are all self-sterile if growing on their own. However, three willow oaks have been found growing together outside the Hamilton Central Library and are laden with acorns which will also be collected to grow-on this year. Another species was the Irish strawberry tree and several of these now grow beside the Mercer petrol station. They're also laden in seed. As far as we know there is only one mature water oak (*Q. nigra*), in NZ, (in Parnell), and seed is being annually collected each May to grow-on.

Project 1241: Assessment/Monitoring

Puketutu Stream: High temperatures in 2021 and 2022 prompted a survey of historic brown trout spawning streams. The survey was set back due to high water and other commitments. Adam electrofished the Puketutu Stream and found common bullies, short/long fin eels, torrent fish and Koura. One trout was spotted but was too large to capture.

OUTPUT 3: PARTICPATION

Project 1311: Access Negotiation

Arapuni boat ramp: A proposal to close access to the Arapuni boat ramp below Waipapa Dam has been put forward by Raukawa. The project would include installing a bar gate just below Waipapa Dam on the Waipapa Road. The gate would close access to the Arapuni Reserve managed by DOC and shut off access to the boat ramp that sits on LINZ land. The proposal would also block access to the trail into the Mangawhio that was recently improved to allow for construction of a new river trail bridge. Raukawa has asked that they be in control of all driving access through the gate and there would be no parking provided for walk in access although a bike squeeze gate would be installed. The gate would be installed to restrict access to a proposed cultural site next to the boat ramp on LINZ property that is planned to be built with WRA funding.

Adam met with Mercury energy staff Don Scarlet and Anaru Begbie of Raukawa in addition to contractor Zoe Thomas. Adam acknowledged that security and dumping had been a problem in the area and that Fish & Game supported the restoration of the boat ramp. If the plan goes ahead Fish & Game have asked for at least six keys for staff and the Te Awamutu Fish & Game club.

Project 1331: F&G Newspapers

John's article on pest control tips given to F&G publicity for the website.

Adam has compiled the media survey into a proposed updated media plan for A/W Fish & Game. The media report highlighted the lack of interest in printed media and escalating costs of the Magazine that are now far from cost neutral. National staff are in agreement with the reports finding and the report was requested by the CEO.

Project 1341: Other publications

John's article on raising gamebirds supplied to Ducks Unlimited Flight magazine.

John's article about historic use of swan crooks for capture/banding published in DOC's bird banding ezine.

Project 1361: User Group Costs

Adam received confirmation that CAF America had finally accepted the renewed Fish & Game application for funding.

OUTPUT 4: PUBLIC PROMOTIONS

Project 1431: Liaison Advocacy

Adam delivered a second lot of fishing equipment he received as donations from Okuma, Black Magic and Berkley New Zealand to Taumarunui Community Kokiri Trust. Adam will be running a kids fishing day with the trust staff February 10th.

John has liaised with Bird Care Aotearoa to sometimes, (as required), meet the Waiheke ferry, to collect orphaned ducklings from their helper on the island, Inga Muller. He then delivers these to the Green Bay centre. Bird Care have also been taking a small number of live waterfowl from John that have all the symptoms of botulism. John also introduced to Bird Care the MPI bird flu testing team. They have since signed a mutual contract to test birds recovered there, which of course, are of many different species from many parts of the Auckland region. Bird flu is a major issue for the UK gamebird industry and ongoing vigilance in NZ is in our best interests.

OUTPUT 5: LAW ENFORCEMENT

Project 1511 Ranging

Adam conducted ranging on the Whakapapa on Stone Jug Road and contacted an angler with a Taupō Licence that claimed he did not know a separate licence for Fishing the Whakapapa was needed. A check of the anglers history revealed he had held a Fish & Game licence but never in a year he had purchased a Taupo licence. The angler was issued a written warning and a sign indicating Taupo licences are not valid has been ordered for the Stone Jug property. Adam checked five anglers on the Waikato River (Karapiro dam and the Cambridge boat ramp) and all were licenced.

In between the flooding, several anglers have been checked on the Kaniwhaniwha and Whakapapa Rivers, with all being compliant and happy to see us. The Stone jug access still remains very popular with often multiple parties using it on a daily basis.

OUTPUT 8: PLANNING REPORTING

Project 1841: National liaison

Then Police Minister Chris Hipkins recently changed the rules around firearms licences, from 29/11/22, so that, if you apply on time and your licence then expires because Police have not done their job, your licenced status now continues while you wait. You can now buy guns or ammo and retailers can check online your “in renewal” licence status. You no longer become an illegal owner of your own guns and have to shift them. This is a huge improvement and John’s F&G submission, which included his personal gamebird hunter survey results, showing how many hunters had been seriously affected until then, must have surely helped.

Adam discussed biosecurity with Karapiro Rowing at the request of DOC and MPI staff in preparation for the National and North Island Rowing championships. Dozens of rowing clubs from all over the country will be coming to Karapiro with training vessels and potentially driving home with invasive plants or fish eggs.

B. Wilson,

Chief Executive