

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME NEWSBRIEF

If you require further elaboration or clarification of items contained herein, or any other matters relating to F&G business, please don't hesitate to contact your local councillor or the office.

Matters arising from the Council Meeting of 24th February 2024

1. **Fish and Game levy:** Councillor Barnes reported that he had recused himself from the discussion by the NZ Council regarding the recent letter sent by the Chair regarding Auckland/Waikato's excessive levy for the 2023/24 year. Council will be informed in due course of NZ Council's decision.
2. **Budget reduction:** A letter was tabled by the Chair of the NZ Council, Mr Barrie Barnes, regarding Base Funding for 2024/25. The NZ Council had recommended that all regions make savings of 3% for the 2024/25 budget.
3. **Botulism Outbreaks:** Mr Klee updated the meeting on recent botulism outbreaks in the region. A contractor was currently removing large numbers of dead carp from the Maramarua River in the Whangamarino Wetland. Mr Klee had convened a meeting of the Botulism Response Group and reviewed recent data on oxygen levels in these waters but no reason for the deaths were readily apparent.
4. **Defibrillator purchase:** It was agreed that a defibrillator be purchased and made available at working bees on Council's wetlands.
5. **F&G Organisational Strategy:** The Organisational Strategy adopted by the NZ Council for the period 2023 to 2028 was tabled. The Chair reported that he had requested that the NZ Council amend the Strategy so that it included habitat restoration. The Chair had also advised that the Strategy should include a section on income and especially ways to increase revenue. The Chair suggested that section 4.5 of the Strategy be amended to state that Fish & Game will "*Advocate for, protect and enhance freshwater fish and game bird habitats*". And that a new section was required on revenue streams. It was agreed that Council adopts the Strategy with the proposed amendments.
6. **New Policies:** The following draft policies produced by the NZ Council were tabled for review:
 - Anti-bullying Policy.
 - Drug and Alcohol Policy.
 - Governance Code of Conduct.
7. **Land and Water Habitat Trust:** The Trustees for the Land and Water Habitat Trust sought the support of Council for the dissolving of the Trust. Justification for dissolving the Trust was that:
 - The Trust wasn't receiving any income other than interest.
 - Overhead expenses of the Trust were significant.
 - The Auditor-General had recently ruled that the Trust's accounts should be fully consolidated with Councils' accounts.

It was agreed that Council agrees to the dissolving of the Land and Water Habitat Trust and gratefully accepts the donation of the Trust's assets, with funds transferred into a restricted reserve for the purpose of maintenance of Council's wetlands.
8. **Donations:** The Chair informed the meeting of Councillor Cocks efforts in obtaining donations. It was agreed that Council records it's appreciation for the funding efforts of Councillor Cocks.
9. **.410 shotguns:** Councillor Dickey recommended that Council writes to the new Minister of Hunting and Fishing requesting his support for the retraction of the ban on lead shot for .410 shotguns. It was agreed that Council shall prepare a report on .410 use for NZ Council.

Matters Arising from the Chief Executive's Report

Drift Diving: Drift diving surveys were completed on the Awakino, Waihou, Waitawheta rivers with average to good numbers of fish spotted.

Banding: Numbers have been great at all banding sites this year and with Te Awamutu and Wellsford to go we have banded nearly 2500 birds already this summer so avoiding any major catastrophes we should hit our target of 3000 mallard and grey ducks.

Trend counts: Declining trend counts of paradise shelduck over the King County this year fell well short of the threshold (5,000 birds) required to declare a special shelduck season. However, the "north of the Harbour Bridge trend count was well up on previous years.

Botulism: Staff are currently dealing with a botulism outbreak on the Te Aroha Wetland, which is being controlled with the much-valued assistance of members of the Te Aroha Fish and Game Association.

Elsewhere in the Waikato region, where we have successfully fought to have botulism management plans on Wastewater Treatment Plants renewals, botulism outbreaks are being well managed. Almost all territorial authorities with pond based WWTPS (Hauraki, Thames/Coromandel, Waikato and Waitomo) have hired contractors that were trained by us. They are conducting checks at ponds 1-4 times a week depending on bird numbers and the botulism status at each site. Recoveries are being conducted prior to the carcass maggot cycle forming and we are getting at least weekly updates on the status of each pond.

Trout releases: The final Arapuni release including 1000 normal and 1000 sterile tagged fish were released December 1.

Control: We have received a lot of requests for permits to disturb and cull game birds this year. Chicory crops are proving particularly attractive to both mallards and paradise shelduck.

Trout habitat: Waikato Regional Council has accepted and posted the updated new trout habitat layer and trout spawning habitat layers, which provide guidance for applicants seeking resource consents.

Te Aroha Wetland Restoration: We conducted phase 1 of the project just before Christmas. This involved replacing existing broken concrete culverts and creating an impermeable barrier of concrete and clay around and underneath water control structures to minimise subsurface flows. The overall aim of the project is to prevent the complete dewatering that occurred during recent dry summers which led to fish kills and large-scale botulism outbreaks.

Access negotiation: Vandalism and theft have ramped up on the Mangatutu Stream, and Adam met with community police and local landowners who acknowledged that licenced anglers were not causing issues other than getting stuck on the muddy track. Fish and Game staff have asked that a parking area is put in off the road to prevent opportunistic theft and the rest of the public land is retired and planted.

Facebook: Facebook videos have been a very successful means of communicating our customers with drift diving posts attracting 4,000-8,000 views. We have had several requests from anglers to publish drift dive data but the reports are generally not till later in the year.

Parkinson Lake: A fish kill on Parkinson Lake in January was documented by Adam Daniel and reported to the Waikato Regional Council. This is second fish kill in two years corresponding with deteriorating water quality. Adam issued a complaint to the Waikato Regional Council including a request for a catchment management plan to improve water quality and prevent fish kills.