

**Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Council Office, 159 North Road, Invercargill on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2016.**

<b>Present</b>	Graeme Watson (Chair)	Chris Owen
	Dave Harris	Chris Frisby
	Fred Inder	Ken Cochrane
	Russel Graham	Corey Carston
	Michael Hartstonge	Paul Stenning
	Ray Waghorn	Cyril Gilroy (Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu)

**Staff in attendance:**

Z Moss, C Stewart, W Jarvie, E Garrick,  
C Mason (Minutes).

**Members of the Public:** 2 x members of the public attended.

**Welcome:**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.15pm and welcomed those present.

**Apologies:**

*Resolved Inder/Hartstonge that apologies be received and sustained from Jacob Smyth, Kevin Fiveash & Corey Carston for lateness.* Carried.

**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.

**Health & Safety:**

The health & safety accident report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015- 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016 was attached to the agenda and showed a nil return.

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

**Minutes of the meeting held 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015.**

*Resolved Hartstonge/Inder that the minutes of the meeting held 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 were taken as read and were confirmed as a true and correct record.* Carried.

**Matters arising from the minutes:**

The Chairman advised that the next Council meeting agenda (14<sup>th</sup> April 16) would include Councillor Protocols, Standing Orders & Governance for discussion and adoption.

### **Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit list, automatic payments, licence sales progress to date, & correspondence reports were attached to the agenda for Council's consideration.

Also tabled at the meeting was the budget to actual progress to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

#### ***Licence sales progress:***

Southland fish licence sales as at 8<sup>th</sup> February 16 were down compared to last years' sales by 1.9% (\$9,896). Zane Moss added that nationally the licence sales were also down by 3.9% (\$238,489), partly he believed due to a very poor salmon season and partly because of the new licence categories and the switching behaviour that had occurred with that.

Cr Cochrane referred the meeting to the increase in non-resident licences compared to last year (approx. 25%) which was very interesting. The increase was significant and would have benefits to the regions but it could also indicate an increase in pressure on the fisheries and should be monitored and watched in the future. Zane Moss suggested that it may also reflect better recognition of that licence category, as in the previous season the new non-resident licence was fairly rushed through at the time, due to late sign off by the Minister, and may not have been recognised as well then. However it was generally agreed that tourism had appeared to have increased significantly this year.

### **Staff Reports:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

#### **Fiordland Compliance: Hamish Angus.**

Hamish Angus went briefly over his report attached to the agenda. He reported a busy Xmas and January period, with good weather and many people about over the holidays. With the talk of increased tourism earlier, he noted the record number of people/camper vans visiting the Eglinton Valley campsite this year and suggested that a targeted approach to patrolling this area at both ends of the day would be worthwhile. The upper Oreti also had large numbers of anglers over the holiday period.

Game cameras had been set up at a few angler access sites to monitor usage of the accesses.

Pack rafting was another new enterprise that moved throughout the Fiordland area extensively, so it was important the didymo CCD message reached them as well.

Lake trolling had resulted in some good catches, but Lake Manapouri boat usage was low compared to Lake Te Anau, this could be due to the boat ramp situation there.

A negative sample result for didymo in the Grebe Valley was good news, which highlighted the importance of clean gear certificates & the CCD message.

#### **Drift diving:**

Zane Moss reported that the 2016 drift diving results with the exception of the Aparima had shown good numbers of fish, with the upper Mataura and upper Oreti showing an upward trend in the number of trout per kilometre.

Lower numbers of trout were recorded in the Aparima mid reaches with the average abundance of trout per kilometre showing a downward trend.

**Black Swan counts:**

Black swan counts completed showed numbers appeared to be relatively high compared to counts from 2010-2012. The bag limit this year had been raised to two swans per day to encourage hunters to harvest a swan or two during the game season.

**Paradise Shelduck counts:**

The paradise shelduck monitoring flight was carried out in late January. However counts of the photographs were not completed as yet.

**Mallard Research:**

While the main mallard research telemetry study was almost over, Cohen Stewart had been tracking the birds every 10 days or so, and would continue to do so until the end of February, primarily to locate the hens to see if there was any mortality post breeding and moulting. The most significant results were around predation of the hens and presumably the broods as well.

**Mallard camera study:**

Erin Garrick was currently going through hundreds of thousands of pond photos counting and recording the usage of ponds by mallard broods. Unfortunately software to help with that had not been successful.

There did appear to be differences in the use of ponds by mallard broods. But until the final results were completed, we would not know what pond variables were most important for the broods, however by glancing at the photos so far it appeared that shallow feeding margins as well as shelter were important. Shallow feeding margins seemed to attract good numbers of broods, which also spent a lot of time there.

Cr Frisby suggested heat sensing cameras may be more successful as a trigger as they had been very successful with other animals e.g. deer. Zane replied he had no experience of how those cameras worked and with not knowing how insulated broods were, there may be issues there as well.

Erin has also continued to research the science available on stoats, ferrets and cats with a view to designing an appropriate pilot study for Southland on predators.

All this research information would be invaluable when staff surveyed new ponds, and to provide existing ponds with better productivity.

**Lower Waiiau Flushing Flows:**

To help reduce the didymo biomass to below nuisance levels, as per the agreed protocol with Meridian, a supplementary flow to the Lower Waiiau was released by Meridian on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2015, with a peak of over 190 cumecs, unfortunately subsequent monitoring showed that the didymo biomass still exceeded the “Red” level. Another supplementary flushing flow was provided on the 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Bill Jarvie advised that further monitoring completed on the 9<sup>th</sup> February showed that the 2<sup>nd</sup> supplementary flow had reduced the status from “Red” to “Amber”. However some of the worst growth of didymo was still there, while flushing flows were always of value, a high sediment flow to help scour it out would be desirable at this time.

**Pond subsidy scheme:**

This year there had not been as high a take up for pond subsidies as other years. However we had been supplying carex secta plants to ponds under the scheme. It was comparatively cheaper and provided benefits for habitats along with approval by hunters/landowners for the scheme.

**Around the Mountain Cycle Trail: (ATMCT)**

Zane Moss referred to the report & spreadsheet tabled at the meeting on the costs of the cycleway Environment Court hearing to date. There was a total cost estimated shortfall of \$25,971.32 showing on the spreadsheet supplied after the projected costs to come (\$73,189) had been applied and the non-resident levy used to help fund the hearing.

The original estimates of the costs were not realistic as they were based on the assumption that the experts costs would be similar to those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commissioner hearing based in Invercargill. However the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hearing was in front of an Environment Court Judge and two other Commissioners, which was a lot more robust than the first hearing and had escalated associated costs.

The original legal estimate given to us was \$62,000 for the case, this had now gone to \$146,000 for various reasons as listed in the report. The case was a lot more complicated than first thought. Some of the cost overruns had been because of the applicants poorly managed case and amendments to their application causing more work by our legal team. Zane explained some of that extra work. The lawyer had also claimed they had written off many hours of costs as well.

Southland had already applied three times to the national legal fund which was now fully allocated. The chances of gaining more money from the legal fund for our shortfall were very slim. With this in mind we would like to use the non-resident licence levy to help fund the shortfall, as the levy was tagged to be used specifically on back country fisheries, as directed by the Minister at the time the levy was bought in. Zane would try to get agreement from the Managers’ for Southland to spend the NR levy dedicated reserve for 2015 & 2016 and the shortfall balance of \$25,971 from our general reserves, with the understanding that the funds could be replaced to the general reserve from the future non-resident levy.

The Hearing started on Monday, with site visits to the Upper Oreti. Zane would accompany the Southland District Council, the Commissioners & the Judge on the site visit. The Hearing would last a week then reconvene again on the 7<sup>th</sup> March.

The Chairman said there was a growing concern that the Southland District Council had not looked at the Mararoa option, particularly from the Te Anau basin area. Southland District Council ratepayers were starting to grumble and there was to be a full audit on the Southland District Council’s cycleway costs.

Cr Waghorn reported that he had received a letter in the mail from an anonymous person regarding the cycleway. Other Councillors had also received an anonymous letter.

Cr Frisby was concerned about the escalating costs, and asked where it would all stop. Zane replied that we could not pull out at this stage and whatever happened after the Hearing decision, was unknown at this time.

Cr Cochrane summarised to the Council that we were short \$25,971 at this stage of going to the Hearing after spending all the money we had for it. In simplistic terms for a shortfall of \$25,971 we could be saving a piece of special area in perpetuity, or we could lose, with a real cost of \$25,971 to the Council, which could be recovered from mechanisms not available two years ago, it was not a huge concern in his view.

Zane also added that we should not lose sight of the fact that from the first original proposal many concessions had already been made which advantaged Fish & Game. So even if we lost the case, we had made some good gains for the money spent.

The Chairman agreed and added that the original concept was for three concrete bridges to be built and boardwalks built right beside the river, so major concessions had been made to date. He was disappointed though that the overseas angler dollar contribution to the area had not been fully accounted for, as it was huge in his opinion and should not be dismissed lightly.

Cr Harris noted the amount of walkers he had encountered recently while at Mavora supposedly walking the Te Araroa Trail down the Mararoa. However their preference was to actually walk down the road, which we were told the cyclists did not want to do because it was too dusty. It was interesting that the walkers were happy to do that.

### **Southland Fish & Game General Reserves:**

A report was tabled on the reserve status for Councillors information. Also tabled was two spreadsheets showing how the reserves were made up to the end of financial years 2014 & 2015. As at the end of year Aug 2014 the general reserve was 86.5% of our annual budget.

During the following year Southland bought a building and spent \$100,000 on the third year of mallard research. With the fixed asset component taken out of the general reserve, our general reserves at end of year 2015 was 22.4% of our annual budget.

With the estimated shortfall of \$25,971 from the cycleway to come from general reserves our reserves would drop to 18.4%. National budget policy was that general reserves should not be less than 30% of the annual budget (Southlands annual budget being \$660,402). We would need to recover \$76,000 to bring our reserves up to national budget policy (30%). However, assuming licence sales remained healthy, we predicted that with prudent management and picking up some external income work, we should be able to achieve this.

In the meantime we would try to recover the reserve fund from the national contestable fund but with national licence sales down approx. \$240,000 we thought it was unlikely.

Cr Owen queried if we were able to sub lease the office space at 159 North Road, given that we can move to the new building in July 16, but our current lease did not expire until April 2017. Zane Moss replied that was something we had not looked into as yet.

**NZ Council Issues:**

Cr Stenning noted that there had not been a NZ Council meeting since Southland's last meeting. There was a governance course to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 16 and the first meeting of the new Council was to be held in Cromwell on the 18-20<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

The Chairman urged any Councillor who could to attend the NZC meeting in Cromwell. Cr Stenning would circulate the agenda when received.

**General Business:**

**2016/2017 Operational Work Plan & Budget:**

The draft 2016/2017 Budget and Operational Work Plan were attached to the agenda for Council's consideration. The Councils bulk funding for operation was \$660,402.

Zane Moss said there were no additions proposed to external expenditure this year apart from an additional two projects that we would like to fund from our angler education and waterfowl habitat dedicated reserve fund, received from reparations. Our bulk funding would not change.

Zane Moss explained the two new proposed projects:

**Project 1452: Fish in Schools \$6,500 required.**

10 x fish tanks, filters and refrigeration systems were required for 10 selected schools in Southland. The program aimed to provide opportunities for students and their parents to gain greater appreciation of the importance of water quality and other habitat variables, of salmonids and their lifecycle, fishing and the work that Fish & Game did. These systems would remain an asset for this work indefinitely and would be a good link to Fish & Game.

Information would be provided by Fish & Game that linked back to the curriculum. Nationally an education resource provider was going to align information linking units around these studies, which gave messages to the students on Fish & Game values and gave teachers more resources to work with.

Once tanks were set up staff time required would not be great.

**Project 1114: Mallard duck studies – research predators \$10,000.**

It was hoped to trial GPS transmitters for stoats/ferrets/cats (depending on preliminary studies) to identify relative home range with a view to identifying scale of predator control required to significantly reduce abundance, and therefore mallard mortality.

Two transmitters would be bought initially for the trial. These were reusable and rechargeable if able to be retrieved from the animals. To try and subsidise the project support funding would also be sought from ES & other sources. This was really a pilot study to see if the technology worked.

Cr Hartstonge noted that Southland had already spent \$300,000 on mallard research, should some other regions also be contributing for further study.

Zane said it would be unlikely, with the national drop in licence sales revenue there would not be much money going into research this year, however, we would still put a research bid in for it at the Managers meeting.

It was suggested that further research funding requests could also be a matter of discussion with Otago Council when Southland Council met with them.

The Chairman suggested that QE11 be approached for funding as well from their Environment Enhancement Fund. The old BCF fund could also be applied for.

Cr Frisby recommended we talk to the DoC expert on stoats involved at Tiwai, as he had huge knowledge on them.

Zane said he had spoken to DoC on the matter and would continue to do so to get as much info as we possible could.

Cr Cochrane said that the platform created by the \$300,000 on mallard research already spent provided the opportunity to take it a stage further to determine how to solve the problem. Key findings in that research were predators, which was of importance to every region and we now needed some assistance to help solve that problem.

Cr Inder also suggested the Waiau Trust be approached if funding was required in the Waiau Basin area.

Zane would talk to other regions about contributions towards the predator research and look for support funding from other sources as well.

At this stage we did not want hunters/landowners to do any predator control until studies were completed. Cr Cochrane asked if there were any interim steps we could take that were viable options to use as a management tool until studies were complete, e.g. looking at protecting hens further by shooting only drakes for part of the season etc. would that be beneficial?

Cr Frisby noted that some hunters were already hunting drakes only later in the season.

Cr Cochrane said that the hunters should know about these discussions, so they were aware of the issues before any hard decisions were made. The study gave us the data to incorporate management tools to protect the harvest of hens part season.

Cr Stenning said that overseas data showed that other influences, eg. habitat, climate etc. were more important, as studies showed populations trends were the same as other species that were not sex specific hunted. Studies had also shown that full coloured drakes shot later in the season would mean mature mallards, who were better at breeding, would not be available for that leaving young juveniles to breed, who had less productivity.

Zane then explained one or two other projects in the OWP. Project 1119 - Lake Research was a new area staff would be involved in, as there was a lot more pressure on lake fishing now and more work was needed to monitor the lakes productivity.

This would involve determination of age structure, growth rate, size & relative catch per unit effort of trout populations of our main lakes. To do comparisons of NIWA data from the late 90's and identify the most important spawning tributaries of the lakes. Also to advocate for research in the 15 year lead in to the renewal of Meridian's resource consent to operate the Manapouri Power Scheme.

Cr Inder referred to the TLC and his long time argument to have Meridian put a fish pass in there, particularly now as part of any new consent. His argument was why did the Upper Waiau have the highest fish population per kilometre and yet Lake Te Anau had the lowest number of all the southern lakes, could it be because there was no fish pass at the TLC to let them through. Zane replied that the otolith microchemistry study may help shed some light on that question, as it would tell which spawning tributaries the fish actually came from.

Cr Inder also referred to treble hooks and suggested that for the lakes a regulation to use single hooks only should be considered. With the bag limit only 2 fish per day on the lakes, more and more fish were being released by anglers and treble hooks made that more difficult and increased fish mortality in his view.

Zane replied that the debate on single hooks versus treble hooks and mortality rates and injuries to fish had been discussed in the past during angler notice discussions. Science had noted no significant differences in mortality rates between treble & single hooked fish. However eye injuries were higher with treble hooks. Some regions had the single hook rule for sociological reasons only and that would be a subject for the regulation review committee to discuss.

Cr Owen asked if the special \$10,000 restricted reserve for the Waituna area had been earmarked for any project. Could that be used for a lake study at Waituna? Zane replied not at this stage as Waituna was a very productive fishery, with a huge littoral zone, so was not really comparable to the main lakes in Southland with their smaller littoral zones. No project was identified for that reserve as yet.

Another new project was 1351: Hunter recruitment initiatives, Erin Garrick would be involved in trying to get more females involved in waterfowl hunting. Social media and other media sources would be used and any barriers to women identified.

Cr Owen asked if there was going to be any new ways of getting more positive licence holder and general public perceptions on what Fish & Game was all about, he liked the Fish in Schools project, but there was still other positive things that we did, that the public should know about. There had been problems with perceptions in the past so we needed for the future to try something new to get the good messages across.

Zane noted the difficulty in getting good news stories out to the public. However each project that we undertook staff would be asking if there was a story we could generate around that project. We needed to be realistic though, and perhaps make better use of the local community papers. It was challenging for Fish & Game to contact the public now with newspapers not popular & everything online, with people able to filter only the news they wanted, but we still



had to try. We had to use free media and TV news was another media avenue that people seemed to still watch. Social media needed to be used more, with this in mind we would be upgrading our site on the NZ Fish & Game Facebook page at some point.

Cr Cochrane referred to the ORC drop in sessions, where Councillors took a personal responsibility and made themselves available to the public, advertising that fact. This gave a significant benefit allowing people to vent their concerns, but also enabled misconceptions to be quashed early. It would be a very cost effective way for Fish & Game to raise their profile. Cr Hartstonge noted that the ICC stopped having drop in sessions as they were not very successful here.

Cr Owen suggested that Councillors could attend the duck hunting & fishing nights held by local retailers, to be able to talk to the public during the evenings and listen to their concerns.

Cr Stenning said Fish & Game had spent a lot of money, time and effort trying to communicate with anglers & hunters in the past. Magazines were sent out twice a year, Both Barrels and Reel Life were sent to all licence holder email addresses known. The public awareness staff were continually hunting out good news stories, but it was very hard to get the media to take up those stories. Cr Owen said it did not have to be done in front of the media. There were other ways to do it.

Cr Hartstonge asked if licence holders had actually been surveyed to see what their thoughts were in relation to Fish & Game.

Zane replied that nationally there had been surveys done in the past that assessed the general public's awareness of Fish & Game as an entity and what we did. Those surveys showed a dramatic increase in the awareness of Fish & Game. We had been more successful with our public awareness network, particularly with Andrew Currie getting more mainstream media involved with articles on fish salvage, didymo work & spawning surveys in the Upper Waiau and drone footage, which let the public see what we were doing.

After discussions:

***Resolved Harris/Hartstonge that the Council approved the 2016/2017 Budget & Operational Work Plan as presented to the meeting and the expenditure of \$16,500 from the Council restricted reserve reparation fund for the new 'Fish in Schools' and the 'Mallard predator research' projects. Carried.***

**Items for the next Council meeting discussion:**

- Date for the Otago & Southland joint Councillor meeting, and agenda topics for that.
- Future Council meeting locations.

There was no further discussion and the meeting was closed at 8.20pm.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_