**Unconfirmed Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Council Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 8th February 2018.**

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

Paul Stenning Russel Graham

Dave Harris Chris Frisby

Corey Carston Cyril Gilroy (7.03pm)

Ken Cochrane Mike Hartstonge

Bevan McNaughton. (Co-opted).

**In attendance:**

Z Moss (Manager). E Garrick, W Jarvie (Officers).

C Mason (Minutes).

**Welcome:**

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

**Apologies:**

***Resolved Owen/Cochrane that apologies be received & sustained from Fred Inder, Ray Waghorn, Jacob Smyth, Cohen Stewart, Len Prentice & Cyril Gilroy for lateness (7.03pm)*** Carried.

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

There were no conflicts of interest advised to the Chairman.

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

**Health & Safety:**

The health & safety report for the period 1st December 2017 – 31st January 2018 was attached to the agenda for consideration.

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

***Resolved Cochrane/Hartstonge that the Health & Safety Report to 31st January 2018 be received***. Carried.

**Minutes of the meeting held 15th December 2017**

***Resolved Harris/Owen that the minutes of the meeting held 15th December 2017 were a true and accurate record.*** Carried.

**Matters arising from Minutes:**

There were no matters arising from the minutes that were not dealt with later in the agenda.

**Administration Reports:**

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit list & automatic payments since the last meeting, licence sales progress, actual to budget progress, Council Reserves position & Correspondence list were attached to the agenda for Council’s consideration.

**Correspondence Reports:**

Fiordland Trails Trust:

A letter (copy in agenda) had been received asking Council for a further contribution to the Fiordland Trails Trust, for the next section of the trail to be constructed between Manapouri & Supply Bay, or for regular annual contributions for maintenance costs of the existing trail. Fish & Game Southland had previously contributed $5,000 to the construction of the Yerex Reach section of the trail.

Council acknowledged the success of the existing new trail, and the better anglers access to the river that it now provided. Staff suggested they could assess the new section proposed to give Council an idea of the benefit of it to angler’s access, to help in their decision.

Council expressed a wish not to be tied in to any long-term maintenance of the trail as that would be the trails Trust’s responsibility. Cr Cochrane suggested money could be better spent on creating an entirely new access that did not have any current access, whereas this access would go ahead with or without us.

After discussion, generally Council agreed in principle that a further contribution be made, as it could provide more reasonable angler access to the river. Staff would assess the benefit to angler’s access of the new section proposed and this would be emailed to Councillors for their comment, before a decision was made by the executive committee on a contribution.

**Staff Report:**

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

**Literature review – phormidium (blue/green algae) effect on trout consumption:**

The manager reported that further to the staff report literature review he had spoken to Public Health South, Medical Officer of Health, Dr Marion Poore, about getting more advice on this issue. He said it was potentially a national issue and was of concern because Southland had a high concentration of anatoxins from the sampling that had conducted.

The recent fresh had flushed back the phormidium in our Southland rivers and hopefully conditions favouring its re-development would not re-occur before the duck hunting season. We needed to push for more national research on the issue, so we could be more specific with our advice.

Cr Owen said that although the rivers had been flushed with the recent rainfall there may be residues of the algae or other contaminants that make it unsafe to eat fish. It was not only algae, as there were other town & industry contaminants and heavy metals etc that could affect fish as well. The review says we don’t really know if they were safe to eat or not and he would like to see Southland F&G take the lead on the issue and then get other parties involved.

The manager noted that the safety of eating fish was a Public Health issue and we would be overstepping our responsibility. Other agencies, such as Public Health South, had those responsibilities and we needed to talk to them about it and get their reassurances.

Cr Stenning suggested the legislation should be looked at for F&G and Public Health as this would answer most of our questions as to who was responsible.

This summer phormidium was very widespread and it was an issue that needed closer monitoring by Environment Southland. Erin had drone footage of impressive phormidium growth in a reach of the Aparima River this summer. Drone footage could be a good tool for monitoring the rivers for phormidium growth and F&G had talked to ES about that. Phormidium was an emerging body of work, as it was not such an issue, or as apparent in past years. The research on phormidium blooms was very complex, it was not just driven by high nitrogen levels and it was blooming globally more than historically.

Cr Owen said that the agencies involved, Environment Southland & Public Health reactions to warning the public of phormidium this summer was very slow. (No signage at river camp sites where children and dogs were camped), which was very disappointing.

After discussions Council agreed that the right management of the issue was very important. Firstly, we needed to establish what the authority of Fish & Game and other agencies was, by looking at the legislation and secondly to keep up the consultation with Public Health and Environment Southland about the matter. Council would revisit the progress on that at a later time.

*Cyril Gilroy joined the meeting (7.03) pm*

**Low River Flows:**

Southland had experienced extremely low flows in our main rivers and tributaries very early on this summer than usual, with drier weather maybe still to come. Most rivers low flows usually occurred in late February/ March, so if the current weather patterns continued unprecedented low flows could cause serious damage to our fisheries.

Because of the low flows, very warm temperatures and rivers drying out in places, significant trout deaths had occurred at various sites, which was very unfortunate. While the general public expected Fish & Game to undertake fish salvage operations it was very difficult to achieve meaningful salvage of significant numbers of trout. Some fish salvage did occur, particularly at highly public locations. However, as rivers dried up trout were already extremely heat stressed and oxygen deprived, therefore their chance of survival after netting or electrofishing and being transported distances was very low. It was very hard to convey that to the public, but most spoken to did understand.

Superseding the earlier mortality event, weather conditions had meant long reaches of the Waituna Stream had dried up as well as various tributaries causing significant mortality of juvenile trout & some older fish. Fortunately, trout are relatively adept to migrating downstream in low flow events and this should have triggered a large exodus of juvenile trout to the lower reaches of the Waituna Stream & lagoon.

The early onset of low flows (December) had also prevented the usual drift dive programme, as it was reliant on comparisons between years, so rivers needed to be at comparable flows to ensure that detectability and trout behaviour were similar. After the recent small flood some rivers may be able to be dived yet.

**Paradise Shelduck counts:**

The annual paradise shelduck count was undertaken at the end of January. Several moult sites were completely dry this year, but overall numbers were slightly up on last season, which was encouraging. The paradise shelduck harvest mimicked the overall population trend well, meaning our monitoring methods had to be undertaken robustly to prevent over harvest of these important, but vulnerable game birds.

**Black Swan counts:**

The annual ground-based swan count was slightly down on previous seasons, but still in line with the long-term average. Interestingly our ground-based number count of Waituna matched closely Dr Phil Lyver’s aerial count, which was reassuring. Dr Lyver’s count was completed as part of the Landcare Research project on black swan.

**Lakes Study:**

Size and catch per unit effort data from Lake Manapouri & Lake Poteriteri had been analysed. Somewhat surprisingly the results showed no differences in length, weight and condition factor of brown trout caught in the two lakes. CPUE was highly variable and similar for each lake. Current gut analysis would soon give an insight into the diet of the trout in the two lakes.

**Mallard Research – Stoat diet:**

All stoat, weasel & cat samples had been prepared by Cohen and sent to the Otago isotope lab for analysis.

**Waituna stream fish mortality event:**

ES had sent samples of dead fish from the Waituna stream event away to NIWA but unfortunately, they were not prepared to undertake an analysis of them. While being no further ahead in identifying the cause of the mortality event we would continue to work with ES to ensure better lines of communication were established prior to any future events.

Staff conducted electrofishing in a side tributary and upstream & downstream of the tributary as well as taking macroinvertebrate samples. Results were pleasing, with no significant differences showing up. There were pleasing numbers of mayflies and juvenile trout present. The event appeared to be relatively isolated and did not have an enduring effect on the health of the stream.

**Proposed Southland Water & Land Plan:**

The decision by the Hearing Panel was expected late February. Once the decision was out staff would prepare recommendations to the Council.

**MFE & OAG meeting:**

The Manager had met with MFE representatives and discussed the risks and challenges of water quality in Southland.

The Manager had also met with OAG staff to discuss ES performance in respect to managing water quality. The visit was to inform a subsequent report which would address the progress or otherwise ES had made in managing water quality since the first OAG report in 2011.

**Regional Pest Management Strategy:**

A report commissioned by ES had suggested that the best way to manage Canada geese in Southland was to eradicate them, charging the general ratepayers for the cost to do that. After the report was reviewed by Fish & Game, it appeared the recommendations in the report were likely to be revisited.

Even though they were no longer a game bird the Manager suggested he would like to be more proactive in organising hunters to hunt Canada geese in Southland, or culling breeding birds, particularly in respect to the Mavora Lakes area, where high numbers of Canada’s were becoming very unsightly during the peak of the holiday season. Numbers were controlled by Fish & Game previously, before they were removed from the game bird list. Since the removal from the list numbers throughout the country were considered to have increased significantly and no one was monitoring them.

**Lake Monowai Boating Jetty:**

Images were shown of a wooden jetty structure Staff proposed for Lake Monowai to assist boaties to launch and retrieve their boats, after the upgrade to Pioneer’s dam face had made it hazardous disembarking vessels & people, due to large and unstable rocks.

Drone footage shown, taken when the lake was low, showed the area where the jetty would be built. The manager had discussions with Pioneer & SDC on the project and they were both keen to contribute to this community project. Discussions with SIT had also taken place and they were keen to assist with the planning & design, with their engineering and architecture departments.

SIT promotions were also keen to be involved. The next stage was to scope out the project to get firmer costs.

**Drones:**

The Manager reported that Richard Cosgrove was doing a drone operator course which when completed would allow him to be exempt from a number of conditions, such as not being able to fly over private land. Once he had completed that course we would approach Civil Aviation to customise a course that would be fit for Fish & Game work, which would then allow us greater freedom in the use of drones.

**NZ Council Issues:**

**Terms of Reference - NZ National Salmon Committee.**

A memo (attached to agenda) had been received from NZC to invite consultation and feedback from Regions on establishing terms of reference for a Fish & Game NZ National Salmon Committee.

The recommendations had been prepared by Matthew Hall, co-convenor of the Salmon Symposium Steering Committee. The Steering Committee had approved the recommendations.

Around the table Council had no changes for the recommendations for terms of reference and wished the Committee good luck.

**General Business:**

**Draft 2018-2019 Budget & Operational Work Plan:**

The draft budget & operational work plan for 2018/2019 were attached to the agenda for Council to consider. The budget was the amount of our bulk funding, $660,402.

$5,000 had been allocated for a student from Otago University to look at smelt in the Invercargill estuaries and their linkages as a keystone species to other species including trout. This would help us learn more about our lowland river fisheries. Little was known about smelt, where they spawned etc. yet they contributed tonnes of food to our rivers for a whole host of species. This study would be a first step in working with DoC in respect to native species.

$10,000 had also been allocated to Compliance prosecutions. Jacob’s time was not well utilised sitting all day in court waiting for prosecutions, sometimes having to make two or three appearances in court for one hearing. This time could be outsourced to various lawyers who tend to be in court daily. We would use one of them to appear on our behalf, hence saving Jacob some valuable time, although we would still undertake the background work.

Another project would be engaging a student to look at doing research on the pressures on our fisheries from non-resident anglers, looking at the social science that underpins decisions of coming to NZ to fish. How much does access have to be limited to iconic fisheries before they stopped coming, what were the tipping points etc. This would be a starting point in relation to back country management. Funding for the student would come from the non-resident licence levy.

Cr Harris noted one or two discrepancies between the draft budget and draft OWP and would talk to management about that.

The amended draft OWP & Budget would be given to the next meeting for final approval.

**Non-Resident Licence Fee:**

The Chairman referred to the non-resident licence fee. He would like to see the licence fee for non-residents increased. In his role as a guide he had asked many overseas anglers about the licence fee and the general response was that the licence fee was good value, very cheap and the majority would be happy to pay more.

Cr Cochrane agreed and said that when he was in the industry, there was never a concern from overseas anglers about the price of the licence, and many were happy to pay more. However, we get criticised by Tourism NZ if we want to charge more, which was very frustrating, as we know the licence price was not the issue that our fisheries in NZ were facing. The problem was pressure and hopefully a Guides licence would have the mechanisms within it to help with that. We needed to cap overseas anglers and find the social carrying capacity of our fragile rivers.

Other Councillors did not hold much faith in a Guides licence solving pressure problems as many overseas anglers were unguided. The Chairman gave an example of that, recently he had talked to unguided overseas anglers who had just done six weeks of fishing non-stop on the Oreti.

The Manager commented that the challenge to raise the non-resident licence fee was to justify what we required the extra money for. Some regions were struggling to spend the levy they received now.

Cr Stenning agreed & noted that this was only an issue for four regions. (Nelson/Marlborough, West Coast, Otago & Southland) The other regions did not have these issues. Also, there were many legal reasons why we couldn’t do a lot of things we wanted to solve our problems, particularly in the case of Australians, as there were agreements with their Government in place that stopped us doing that.

Cr Cochrane said that the Guides licence was the answer, through central government, to be able to control the pressure on our fisheries long-term. There would be a mechanism within the Guides licence to be able to convince central government that we needed to manage our fisheries.

His personal view was that if we tried to get an increase in the non-resident licence fee it would be counter productive long term in being able to manage them. The first step was to have a Guides licence.

**Wilding pine /conifer threat in the head waters of the Mataura:**

The Chairman noted his deep concern at the Douglas fir wilding spread in the Robert Creek area at the headwaters of the Mataura River. He had discussed the problem of wilding spread with ES, Land Sustainability staff in the local catchments and noted that some of the early forest plantations were non-consented and therefore they had no requirement to control the wildings and seed spread outside of the forestry. He was very concerned at the hydrological effects in the headwaters of the Mataura & other rivers.

The Chairman said he had some information available for Councillors on the water take of the wilding plantations in the upper Waitaki. It was important that those seed spreads in our catchments were monitored and sprayed as they were a potential time bomb and could have devastating effects on our river flows.

**Game magazine:**

Cr Cochrane expressed his disappointment that his suggestion, tabled at the December meeting, for an article to be included in the Southland section of the game magazine, discussing the concept of harvesting green heads instead of hen birds in the 2nd & 3rd month of the season using a points system, was missed.

General discussion around the table identified that the decision to add questions to the gamebird harvest survey was recorded, but not the suggested magazine article. However, after the gamebird harvest survey council would have more data on the concept which could be used for the next edition of the magazine.

**Proposed 1080 drop in Eyre Mountains:**

The Manager reported he had a meeting with DoC about the proposed 1080 drop in the Eyre Mountains area. DoC had not liaised particularly well with F&G on that. The proposal was to start the 1080 drop for possum control on 21st & 22nd April 2018, with pre-feeding first. We made the point that it would be better to wait until the end of April, so anglers would not be disturbed by the drop flights and this would also resolve any concerns around the operation from those with concern at the use of 1080. It is now likely that the drop of poison bait will be conducted after the end of the fishing season. They also discussed adjusting buffers back to the bush edge to avoid the likes of the Ashton Flats.

**Captive Reared Mallards**:

A further submission on captive reared mallards had been received by Fish & Game from Jeff Niblett, Hawkes Bay F&G Councillor. This submission had been emailed to all Councillors prior to the meeting.

Council acknowledged & had read the submission but agreed they did not need to change any of their decisions on the points replied to NZC at the last meeting.

There was no further business and the meeting was closed at 8.11pm.

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