

Minutes of the Fish & Game NZ, Southland Region Council meeting held at the Southland Fish & Game Office, 17 Eye Street, Invercargill on Thursday 11th April 2019.

Present:

Graeme Watson (Chair)	Lindsay Withington
Chris Owen	Lyndon Norman
Paul Stenning	Craig Horrell
Dave Harris	Ken Cochrane
Mike Hartstonge	Cyril Gilroy (Te Runanga Ngai Tahu)
David MacGregor	Bevan McNaughton
Corey Carston	

In attendance:

Z Moss (Manager), C Stewart & E Garrick, W Jarvie, (F&G Officers) J Smyth (Resource Management Officer), Josh Tabak (CCD Contractor), C Mason (Minutes).

Members of the Public:

Gavin Roy

Welcome:

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

The Chairman noted that he was aware of the length of the last few meetings and the fact that some Councillors had long trips home after the meetings. With that in mind he suggested a target to end meetings at 9.30pm at the latest, with any unfinished business added to the next agenda.

Cr Owen asked that the agenda item under NZC in respect to Governance held at the Governor's forum be moved to General Business for discussion by Council on how it related to our meetings.

Resolved Owen/Hartstonge that the NZC agenda item on Governance be moved to General Business for further discussion. Carried.

Apologies:

Apologies were received & accepted from Maurice Rodway & Len Prentice.

Conflicts of Interest with items on the agenda:

The individual member declaration of conflicts of interest with any item on the agenda had been circulated to members for signature before the start of the meeting.

Any conflicts were noted.

Health & Safety:

The Council health & safety report for the period 1st February 2019 – 31st March 2019 was attached to the agenda for consideration.

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

The Manager reported that NZI Insurance had written off the Toyota Hi Lux vehicle LFH191, after a recent accident. The money for that had been received and a replacement vehicle was due to arrive next week.

Resolved Owen/Harris that the Health & Safety Report to 31st March 2019 be received.
Carried.

Minutes of the meeting held 14th February 2019.

Resolved McNaughton/Hartstonge that the minutes of the meeting held 14th February 2019 were taken as read and were a true and accurate record. Carried.

Matters arising from Minutes:

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

Administration Reports:

The accounts paid, direct credit/debit payments list & automatic payments since the last meeting, licence sales progress to 31st March 2019, budget to actual expenses to 31/03/2019 & correspondence reports were attached to the agenda for Councillors consideration.

Southland Fish licence sales were down -5.3% on the same time last year. Nationally Fish licence sales were down -3.9% on the same time last year. Councillors noted that the drop in licence sales was probably realistic, being weather driven with the great summer we had at the start of the last fishing season compared to the poor start of this season. However, there was concern about a general decline in participation of our sport nationally & that needed to be addressed.

Cr Cochrane noted that the non-resident adult anglers had not declined as the adult resident anglers had. The Chairman said that the prediction of the Tourism Board was that tourist numbers generally were expected to drop off over the next couple of years. It would be interesting to see how that affected non-resident angler sales if general tourist numbers did drop.

Correspondence Reports:

Pressure Sensitive Fisheries:

In January 2019 the Southland Council had written to all Regional Chairs & the NZC in respect to a Southland proposal to restrict the Non-Resident Licence to each specific region, as an alternative that would assist in reducing the overall impact of non-resident angling.

The Manager reported that the NZC & Otago had both agreed that a broader analysis of options to address pressure sensitive fisheries should be made. No other region had replied to date.

Cr Cochrane reported that he had talked to a North Canterbury Councillor who had misunderstood our proposal and wondered if others had as well.

The Chairman said both he & Otago Chair had spoken on this at the Governor's meeting and Governors' were all aware of the concerns of our regions on pressure sensitive fisheries.

The Manager noted that at the Managers & NZC meeting last week, there was support for the Southland OWP project to work with an external provider to develop broader options including a licence regime based on hierarchical classification of waters with a variable pricing structure & potential restriction on access for non-resident anglers. Other South Island regions supported that and would help contribute to it.

Councillor Owen agreed and said NZC did note the issue but wanted to see a range of options to use rather than focus on one option.

The Manager reported that at the recent Managers meeting the Auditor General gave a presentation on changing our annual reporting requirements (potentially reducing audit costs). The main change suggested was that the Statement of Performance would be appended to the financial statements therefore not requiring an audit of the Statement of Performance itself.

Resolved Hartstonge/ Stenning that the Administration Reports be received. Carried.

Staff Report:

The staff report was attached to the agenda.

Drift diving:

The Manager went over the lower Mararoa drift dive results. The river had recovered as a fishery compared to earlier years 2003-2007, which was pleasing.

Mallard counts:

Mallard aerial counts were the highest since the technique was initiated in 2012, indicating a very good game hunting season, dominated by juvenile birds that were easier to hunt, following a poor season last year. Despite traditional brood counts, which are usually the best indicator of overall breeding season productivity and are based around broods from peak hatch in late September, not indicating a good breeding season, the significant amount of rain received in late November & December would have increased the survival of later broods, or second broods where the first broods were lost, due to the initially dry conditions.

This robust monitoring programme will increase the ability to predict population changes as we are able to link abundance to climatic and environmental variables.

Proposed Southland Water & Land Plan:

Jacob updated the Council on the progress of the Water & Land Plan.

Evidence on ecological health, water quality & supplementary planning had been filed on behalf of Fish & Game for the first part of the Hearing – Topic A, to be held in July. Fish & Game had some success in terms of a pre-hearing application by ES to limit the scope of F&G's evidence that could be presented at the Hearing. They did not want to be drawn into an argument about whether over-allocation existed, at this point in time, in terms of water quality and quantity and if so, if it is was possible to set interim limits in relation to that. F&G evidence dealt with that in detail in terms of developing thresholds around ecological health and applying those to determine if there was over allocation, i.e. if water quality & quantity were meeting the required standards.

The Court's preliminary view did not agree with the ES view and basically said that our evidence was in the scope of our appeal. The Court raised three key issues in relation to the proposed Plan with ES. The premise of our argument was that the National Policy Statement (NPS) required Regional Councils to provide for ecosystem health and the fact that the Courts were asking the experts to discuss water quality parameters that reflected ecosystem health was a positive sign for Fish & Game's case.

Game Bird Habitat Trust wetlands: (GBHT):

Erin Garrick gave a photo presentation of the successful construction of two significant wetlands in Southland that staff had obtained GBHT funding for. The Manager asked Council to let staff know if they became aware of any significant wetland sites that staff could put forward an application to the GBHT for.

The first was 2.5ha of open water wetland at Waimumu, which cost \$18,500 with \$12,000 covered by the GBHT. The bund was ~250m long and was built using a digger to build the key and track roll as the dozer pushed material up.

The second wetland was built on the edge of a peat dome at Browns and cost \$14,000, with \$10,000 covered by the GBHT. Here Erin raised the water level by 500mm for a dam wall of 250m in length, creating ~2.0ha of open water habitat and to prevent the incursion of gorse and blackberry into the peat dome. Some of this area was also in a QEII covenant.

Te Anau Rental Cottage:

With the current tenants leaving the cottage staff wished to use the opportunity to upgrade the very aged bathroom before we rented it out again. The Manager explained why the upgrade was needed. Bill Jarvie gave a brief history of the rental house and why we had it for the benefit of new Councillors. It was vested in Fish & Game as part of the whole Wildlife Park, so we could not sell it, but we could rent it out. Cr Hartstonge had visited Te Anau recently and viewed the bathroom of the cottage and agreed it was not ideal and needed an upgrade.

Bill Jarvie reported Council was fully compliant with the new rental laws.

Public Interface:

The Chairman reported he had attended the Athol Hunting & Fishing Club presentations for the kids fishing competition. The competition had a great attendance and the very strong Club appreciated the support of Fish & Game.

New Zealand Council Issues:

Cr Owen reported that there had been two NZC meetings since this Council's last meeting. One meeting was held 15th & 16th February. The 15th February was a joint meeting with the regional Governors. Cr Watson attended the Governor's meeting.

Cr Watson reported that at the Governor's meeting he had brought up the concerns of a few Councillors on the anti-farming sentiment coming from NZC. Other Chairs from other regions also had the same feedback about the blanket criticism of all farmers, rather than targeting those that weren't performing as they should.

The other NZC meeting was held on the 5th & 6th April and the 5th was a combined Manager's meeting. Licence categories and customer value perceptions, after a survey of licence holders, was presented by Steve Dougherty. There was a good acceptance by licence holders of the range and numbers of licence categories and the recommendation was to keep the status quo. There was no single approach to stop the fall of licence sales. Raising the price of licences was not the answer, as the threshold was getting very close. A clear message was to communicate better with licence holders, and this would be a focus of NZC. Finding other income streams and adding value to the licence was highly recommended.

The Manager reported that there was good recognition from Managers over the contestable fund requests and external expenditure of regions' respective budgets. Scrutiny of that was very healthy. However, there was some pressure from Managers on the NZC budget. The NZC did not have a detailed operational work plan like the regions, but used a three-year business plan, which had less specifics than the regions were required to have. This made it very hard for Managers to tell if there was any rigour in the project expenditure of NZC. There was always pressure on regional budgets to cut external expenditure to try and stop putting licence prices up all the time. However, the system would be more robust if managers could look more equitably across the board at all budgets, including NZC.

The managers reiterated their desire for further investigation around getting additional external revenue through a suite of opportunities, as licence price increases could not continue.

Cr Owen said that the ranking process the managers used for the contestable fund bids at their earlier meeting and then presented & described to NZC, worked better than previous years, in his view. After the NZC review the result was a proposed licence fee increase with fish licences \$133 & game licences \$94, for consultation with regions, including a larger increase in the non-residence adult licence. The GBHT stamp fee would also be increased by a dollar to \$4.00 per licence.

Cr Owen said that the transparency of the NZC budget wasn't there in time because of the impact of the gun laws review taking up a lot of staff time. It was hoped that more transparency of the NZC budget would be available in two weeks-time.

A large discussion occurred with NZC on external funding for the organisation and this was an area that NZC would seriously work on as part of trying to address reduced revenue from declining licence sales.

The CSI Audit report would be available soon. The Hawkes Bay audit was not finalised yet. The North Canterbury audit report had been released and they were now working to get back on track.

The Chairman thanked Cr Owen for the work and time involved with his role on the NZC.

General Business:

SFGC Meeting times:

There was concern raised at the length and late finishing time of some Council meetings went on for as there was a lot of travelling time for some Councillors to get home afterwards. The last meeting was unusually long as we had two members of the public making presentations, which took extra time. Council would like to see the meetings worked to a time frame in the future.

There was also a suggestion to split the AGM and December meeting which were normally held together. The game season regulations confirmed at the December meeting often had contentious issues and with public input the December meeting was sometimes late finishing. However, some Councillors liked the two meetings together and saw the game regs debate as a draw card for people to attend the AGM. If the AGM & December meetings were still to be held around the province then the two together made it more likely that more people would attend. In the past it had worked well and could again. It was agreed there was time to discuss & decide that, at a later date.

It was also suggested that the normal bimonthly Council meetings could start earlier at 6.00pm instead of 6.30pm. Most liked the idea of an earlier start, however a couple of Councillors had work commitments that meant they would be unable to always make a 6.00pm start and would be late arriving.

Cr Cochrane questioned if it was necessary at each meeting to go over the staff report again when it was attached to the agenda and Councillors should have already read it. The staff report was very good, and it was a doubling up of time in his view going over it again.

However, some Councillors said they got a better understanding from staff powerpoint presentations at the meetings and would like that to continue. Cr Cochrane also suggested that if there was a subject in the agenda that could be identified as needing long discussion, then we could look at a special meeting or workshop to discuss that, as we had done in the past e.g. pressure sensitive fisheries.

Cr Stenning said that it would be much better if we could discuss game bird regs later than December. However, the Manager said that timelines at present to get regs to the Minister & gazetted did not allow a time later than early January.

After discussions:

Resolved Owen/Cochrane that from now on the bimonthly Council meetings should start at 6.00pm and finish no later than 9.30pm. Carried.

Any unfinished business would be carried over to the next meeting.

Cr Owen asked if the August Council meeting date could be changed to after the NZC meeting. Councillors agreed and a new date would be advised for that meeting, at a later time.

Environment Southland Awards:

With all the work Southland Fish and Game did in creating wetlands and habitat the Chairman suggested that it would be good PR for Fish & Game to sponsor a category of the ES Environment Awards. If Council agreed the Chairman & Manager would approach ES about that.

Councillors all agreed that was a very positive idea and we should target an area that reflected what Fish & Game had criticised in the past and mitigation around that e.g. water quality & intensive agriculture.

Game Bird Regulations 2019.

Cr Cochrane was scathing of the Council's decision with the game bird regulations 2019 and said we should all take responsibility for that. After brood counts the recommendation was that the season be shortened by two weeks and the bag limit lowered and yet when the transect counts came out there were more birds around than ever. He saw the decision as the worst Council had ever made. To move forward he suggested Council find a better way of making the decision on harvest. Why was the decision made before the transect counts? He suggested we approach the Minister to change the timeframe for harvest regulations so they could be done after the transect counts.

Council generally disagreed with his opinion and said the game regs decision was made on the best information available at the time. Feedback from our licence holders survey was also taken into account in the decision, along with brood counts. The data set of brood counts had been used for many years and was usually pretty close, the transect counts were not done until March which was too late for the gazette publication. The season this year had adjusted itself from being dry, where broods were lost, and became very wet in late spring, which enhanced the breeding ability of the mallards. If we had a dry late spring/summer as well this would not have even been raised. Even though the transect counts were higher than the brood counts it did not mean our decision at the time was wrong.

Cr Stenning said that we should be looking at other ways of doing it better. Perhaps we should talk to the Minister about our predicament and see if the date for regulations could be moved later. He noted that season length & bag limits had nothing to do with sustainability of the population. It didn't really matter what the population was as regs were based on sociological reasons and not biological reasons anyway.

The Manager suggested that it was always difficult with the timeframes required by the Minister, however we could approach the Department and get approval for regs based on our subsequent transect counts of a low to high range and have limits for those ranges, therefore effectively using a rating system automatically. As time went on the transect counts would give us valuable data to develop predictive harvest regs.

In the meantime, he would talk to Robert (NZC) and the Department to see how we could streamline the process to see if there was any opportunity to use the March mallard counts.

Cr Stenning suggested having a three-year review of other game regs, like the angler regs, with the bag limit set automatically each year by the subsequent transect counts.

After discussion

Resolved Cochrane/Owen that the Staff investigate further a range of options within the current legislation and ask the Minister if we could set our game bird harvest regulations after the transect counts each year. Carried.

Governance:

On the 15th February 2019, Cr's Owen & Watson attended the Governor's forum in Wellington. Sir Geoffrey Palmer was a guest speaker and spoke on the statute roles & responsibilities of NZC and the Regions. Another speaker, Graham Narkies spoke on Chairs and Governors responsibilities.

Cr Owen said that the responsibility of Council's decisions rested with them and this was not always highlighted enough. We had to remember it was public funds being spent and needed due diligence. This was particularly important during OWP & budget time.

Governance was important and Council should not be wasting time with Staff matters. Council should be setting outcomes and what they wanted to achieve as a Council & have more focus on high level objectives & being more visionary.

The Chairman suggested that the notes from the Governor's forum on governance be forwarded to the Councillors. Cr Owen would attend to that.

Pressure sensitive fisheries:

Cohen Stewart had circulated to Councillors the updated report on the Upper Oreti fishery. The report showed a high percentage of non-resident anglers were using the fishery at present.

At the end of the season there would be a survey conducted on angler perceptions.

Council had approved a project using the non-resident levy to engage an external party to develop a suite of options, looking at international models and how they could be adapted and what we

could do within the current legislation or if law changes were required to present any changes to the Tourism Industry and Dept. of Conservation etc.

The next step was for the angler perception survey to be conducted over the winter period. After that an external party would begin looking at options in the next financial year starting September 2019.

Magazine delay:

Cr Carston asked if there was anything in the delayed game magazine this year regarding Southland's shortened season length. He was concerned that many hunters would not realise the season had been shortened. The Manager said that staff were mindful of that and would use social media and emailed newsletters (Both Barrels etc) during the season to remind hunters of the shortened season.

There were no items requested for the next agenda.

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Chairman _____ Date _____