



Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery Trial

Consultation Document

March 2026 | North Canterbury Fish & Game



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Purpose of this Document

As the 2-year trial period comes to a close, North Canterbury Fish & Game is seeking feedback on the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery. The diagram below summarises the different parts of this document.

Purpose

Sets out the intention of this document and the consulting process

Background

Provides context on the Designated Waters and trial Controlled Fishery regulations

Potential Changes

Identifies regulatory opportunities to improve angler experience with the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery

What Fish & Game is Seeking Feedback On

Fish & Game is seeking your feedback on a variety of aspects of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery, including:

- Your success with the online booking system
- Potential regulatory changes to the Controlled Fishery

Feedback from this consultation will be provided to the North Canterbury Fish & Game Council and the Minister for Hunting & Fishing to support decision making regarding the continuation of and/or changes to the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery.





Background

Designated Waters

Beginning in the early 2010s, Fish & Game received increasing reports of historically prime backcountry fisheries exhibiting overcrowding and a reduction in angler success. Fish & Game traced these reports to unsustainable angling pressure, which detrimentally affects both the angling experience (sense of wilderness feeling/solitude) and trout behaviour (visibility and catchability). Fish & Game have termed fisheries which are vulnerable to unsustainable angling pressure 'pressure sensitive fisheries'.

In most cases, pressure-sensitive fisheries share these common features:

- Clear rivers which provide excellent sight fishing
- Large average fish size
- High scenic value, often in a wilderness or backcountry setting
- High levels of non-resident angler use

Pressure sensitive fisheries are highly regarded by both resident and non-resident anglers for the unique angling opportunities they provide. However, research and monitoring of these fisheries have shown that both resident and non-resident anglers were being displaced from these fisheries because of overcrowding.

Resident anglers are being displaced from these fisheries to a greater degree than non-resident anglers, and for some fisheries, angler use has gone from a roughly 50/50 resident-to-non-resident split (in the early 2000s) to an 80/20 usage split favouring non-resident anglers.

To manage the angling pressure and experience in these pressure sensitive fisheries, it became necessary to implement fisheries management mechanisms to control crowding and disperse angling pressure. In 2023 Fish & Game introduced the Designated Waters Licence to reduce crowding on a select few pressure sensitive fisheries.

In North Canterbury, four river systems were selected as Designated Waters Fisheries: the Upper Waiau Uwha, the Lewis Pass, the Upper Hurunui North Branch, and the Upper Hurunui South Branch. These rivers were selected as they provide a high-quality angling and wilderness experience, but are sensitive to unsustainable angling pressure.



The Controlled Fishery Trial

Following the implementation of the Designated Waters licence, feedback from the angling community indicated that the intense angling pressure on the Upper Hurunui Fisheries had continued. In the years leading up to and following the implementation of the Designated Waters licence, high levels of use had resulted in conflicts between anglers, guides, and landowners, leading some anglers to feel dissatisfied with their angling experience.

The Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery was introduced as a 2-year trial to manage angling pressure on the Upper North and South Branch sections to maintain a high-quality angling and wilderness experience. The trial period allows Fish & Game to collect data to help determine whether these rivers need to continue as Controlled Fisheries and, if so, how to implement a Controlled Fishery in a way that most benefits anglers.

Scope of Regulations

The Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery includes the North Branch of the Hurunui River, upstream of Lake Sumner, and the South Branch of the Hurunui River, upstream of the confluence with the North Esk River (Figure 1). The lower 500 m of the North Branch bordering Lake Sumner, Lake Mason, and the North Esk River are not included in the Controlled Fishery or Designated Waters, and remain open to all licenced anglers.

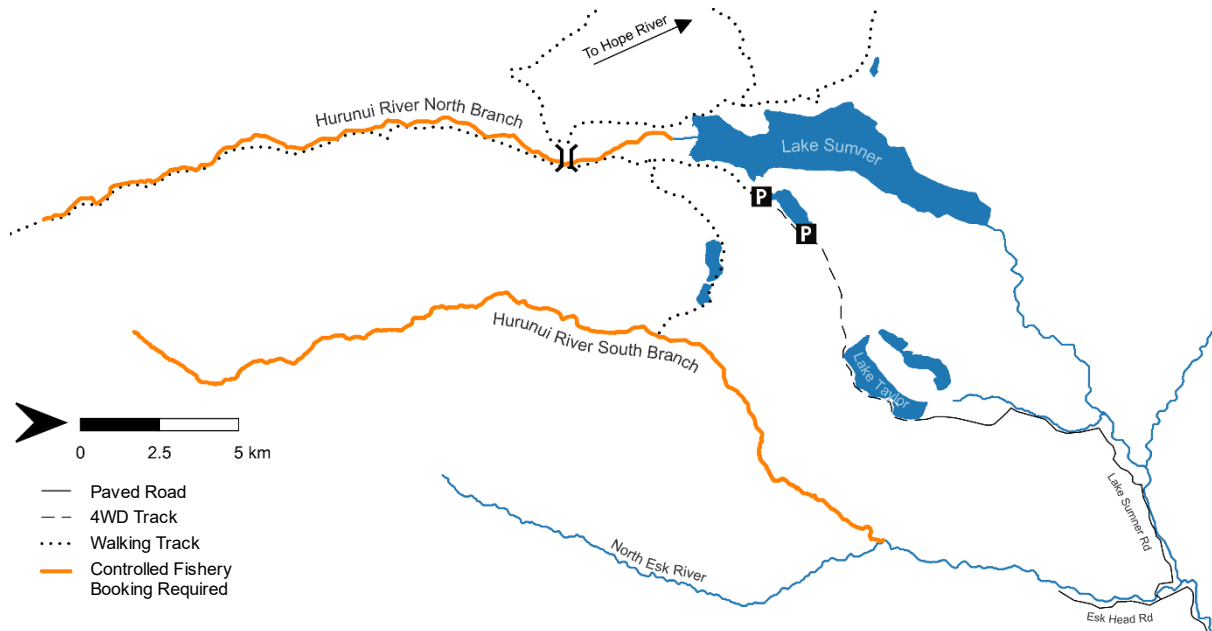


Figure 1. The location of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery, depicted in orange.

The Booking System

The Upper Hurunui Controlled Fishery is split into two sections: the North Branch and the South Branch. Each section is available on a first-come first-served basis.

Bookings are made via an online booking system, available through the Fish & Game licencing service provider. Bookings can be made up to five days before the start of the intended fishing trip. Depending on availability, anglers may select up to three consecutive days per booking.

A booking may include up to four anglers, and all anglers must hold a valid Whole Season Fishing Licence and a North Canterbury Designated Waters Licence. All anglers partaking in the booking, including fishing guides, must be included in the registered booking party.

Consultation Questions

1. Which angling category best describes you?
 - a. Resident Angler
 - b. Non Resident Angler
 - c. Guide

2. Have you fished either section of the Upper Hurunui River during the past 5 years?

3. Did you hold a North Canterbury Designated Waters Licence during the 2024/25 or 2025/26 fishing season?

4. Did you fish any of the North Canterbury Designated Waters during the 2024/25 or 2025/26 fishing season?

5. During the 2024/25 or 2025/26 fishing season, did you attempt to make a booking using the online booking system?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Yes, on multiple occasions
 - c. No

6. If yes, were you able to successfully book the dates you wanted?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. No, but I was able to book a suitable alternative

7. If yes, on multiple occasions, were you typically able to book the dates you wanted?
 - a. More often than not, I was able to book the dates I wanted or a suitable alternative
 - b. I was able to book the dates I wanted or a suitable alternative about half the time
 - c. More often than not, I was not able to book the dates I wanted



Potential Changes

As we approach the end of the 2-year trial period, North Canterbury Fish & Game is considering potential changes to the Upper Hurunui Controlled Fishery. This section outlines the potential changes being considered for the Controlled Fishery.

Please note: some of these options are not mutually exclusive. Depending on what best suits the needs of North Canterbury anglers and the fishery, a combination of changes may be implemented.

Bookings Only Required During Peak Months

One option for regulatory change is to reduce the portion of the year during which bookings are required. Under this proposed change, bookings would only be required during months with peak angler pressure. During other months, the Upper Hurunui would operate under the same regulations as all other Designated Waters.

Based on estimates from the National Angler Survey, peak angler pressure on the Upper Hurunui River occurs during December and January¹. During this period, anglers reported more than 3 times the angler pressure of October and November and nearly 5 times the angler pressure of February and March (Figure 2).

¹ Stoffels, R. & M. Unwin. 2023. Angler usage of New Zealand lake and river fisheries: Results from the 2021/22 National Angler Survey. National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research Ltd. Christchurch, New Zealand.

2021/22 Estimated Angler Days

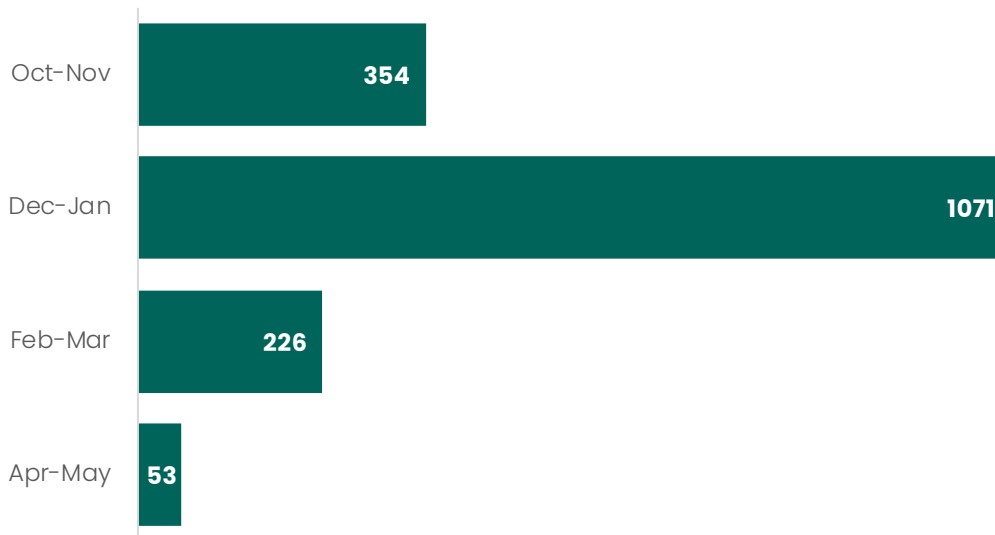


Figure 2. The estimated number of angler days that occurred on the Hurunui River upstream of the South and North Branch confluence during the 2021/22 fishing season¹.

Move Controlled Fishery Boundary

At present, the Controlled Fishery on the North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River begins 500m upstream of Lake Sumner. A number of local anglers have proposed moving the boundary to the swing bridge, which would allow anglers to fish the lower 4km of the North Branch without a booking. Anglers would still require a North Canterbury Designated Waters licence to fish the river up to the swing bridge. Moving the boundary of the Controlled Fishery would maintain opportunity for some anglers to book a stretch of the river with the assurance they will have that stretch to themselves, while simultaneously providing increased opportunity for anglers to fish near the lake.



Figure 3. The locations of the current and proposed boundaries for the Controlled Fishery on the Hurunui River North Branch.

Replace with a Ballot System

Another option is to replace the existing booking system with a ballot system. Under a ballot system, any angler with a valid whole season licence can submit applications to fish the Controlled Fishery on their preferred dates. Applications are then selected at random, and ballot winners are issued a controlled period licence valid for their balloted dates.

One benefit of a ballot system is that the system is operated by staff, rather than through the online licensing system. For this reason, a ballot system is more customisable. Some examples of flexibility provided by a ballot system include the opportunity to break bookings into weekday, weekend, and holiday slots, the possibility of weighting ballots to spread angling opportunity more evenly between anglers, and the possibility of designating certain dates for resident anglers only.

Removal of the Controlled Fishery

The final option is to remove the Controlled Fishery regulations from the Upper Hurunui River. Under this option, the Upper Hurunui River would revert to the standard Designated Waters regulations – all anglers fishing the Upper Hurunui River would be required to possess a North Canterbury Designated Waters licence but no booking would be required.

Prior to the implementation of a Controlled Fishery, North Canterbury Fish & Game received a number of complaints of angler conflict in the Upper Hurunui River Designated Waters. In particular, anglers who invested the time to hike in to fish the river reported frustration as helicopters dropped in anglers upstream of them, effectively stunting the stretch of river they would be able to successfully fish. The Controlled Fishery was implemented to provide anglers with the opportunity to fish a backcountry fishery with confidence they would have the river to themselves. Removal of the Controlled Fishery regulations would remove these protections.

Consultation Questions

8. Please select the statement that best describes your level of support for each of the following options for the **North Branch** of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery:

Potential Change to Controlled Fishery	Support	Neutral	Do Not Support
The North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery continues with the current regulations – the booking system will continue.			
The North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery only requires a booking during months with peak angling activity.			
The boundary of the North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery is moved upstream to the swing bridge. The booking system will remain in place upstream of the swing bridge. The section of river downstream of the swing bridge returns to standard Designated Waters regulations.			
The North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery is converted to a ballot system.			
The North Branch of the Upper Hurunui River returns to standard Designated Waters regulations.			

9. Please select the statement that best describes your level of support for each of the following options for the **South Branch** of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery:

Potential Change to Controlled Fishery	Support	Neutral	Do Not Support
The South Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery continues with the current regulations – the booking system will continue.			
The South Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery only requires a booking during months with peak angling activity.			
The South Branch of the Upper Hurunui River Controlled Fishery is converted to a ballot system.			
The South Branch of the Upper Hurunui River returns to standard Designated Waters regulations.			