



# Manifesto 2026

## Fish & Game

Fish & Game New Zealand manages, maintains and enhances sports fish and game birds and their freshwater habitats in the best long-term interests of present and future generations of anglers and hunters.

FISH & GAME IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION THAT RECEIVES NO GOVERNMENT OR TAXPAYER MONEY.

# Why you should listen to us

From rural communities, to towns and cities around the country, Fish & Game's 175,000 licence holders represent a constituency the size of Hamilton City. These anglers and hunters are everyday New Zealanders who care deeply about freshwater fishing and game bird hunting, healthy habitats, and access to the outdoors. Fishing contributes around \$138 million annually to regional economies. When Fish & Game speaks, we speak for many passionate New Zealanders.

**51%** of New Zealanders believe it is important to protect and promote freshwater fishing, while **34%** believe the same for hunting.

This manifesto provides simple solutions to ensure a strong and healthy environment for all New Zealanders.

# Our vision

Our vision is a New Zealand where freshwater habitats and species flourish, where fishing and hunting traditions thrive and all Kiwis enjoy access to sustainable wild fish and game resources.

At Fish & Game, we know that what's good for anglers and hunters is good for all New Zealanders – clean and healthy waterways and thriving wetlands, sustainable sources of kai, and access to the great outdoors all contribute to our wellbeing.

We are New Zealand's primary freshwater guardian – we have an outstanding record of achievements in protecting and enhancing the environment, in particular:

- Creating, restoring and protecting wetlands
- Securing Water Conservation Orders which recognise and protect the outstanding values of our lakes and rivers
- Pushing for regional and national policy plans which protect the environment including setting robust bottom lines for healthy waters
- Working on the ground to restore habitats by revegetating wetlands and river sides
- Being an insights-driven organisation researching species, their habitat and people's values
- We not only focus on valued introduced species but also help protect indigenous species

## Fish & Game has unrivalled credibility and expertise in the sustainable management of species, land and water, and in conservation, policy and science.

We actively monitor species, including through drift diving and electric fishing, and the state of their habitats (freshwater health, physical form and function).

We work to protect and enhance hundreds of kilometres of waterways and wetlands that are home to both native and valued introduced species, maintaining habitats and funding restoration projects.

Nationally and regionally, we advocate and support central and local government to manage the environment in a way that provides for healthy habitats and species and public access to these.

We speak directly for our 175,000 angler and game bird licence holders.

Fishing contributes around \$138 million annually to regional economies.

Angling and game bird hunting are enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders, who value the wellbeing and recreation benefits the pursuits provide.

We value our relationship with government, policy-makers and iwi – a strong and enduring partnership is vital if we are to safeguard our freshwater habitats and species for future generations.

**16%** of Kiwis fish

**7%** of Kiwis hunt



### Dame Lynda Topp

Dame Lynda Topp is Fish & Game's patron, an entertainer and avid fly fisher and game bird hunter

“

If you've never felt the take of a healthy wild rainbow trout or the gentle slurp of a backcountry brown, then you haven't lived. The sun on your back, the breeze on your face, the fresh mountain air in your lungs – these make me understand what it is to be a Kiwi.”

# What we are seeking from Government

1

## Recognition of fishing and hunting

We want recognition for angling and hunting, recognition and protection of our species, including valued introduced species and protection of their habitats.

2

## Access to fishing and hunting areas

Enable New Zealanders to continue to get out in nature and enjoy their favourite fishing and hunting spots. You can do this by maintaining and improving access to our natural environment, and sports fish and game birds, alongside indigenous species.

3

## Strong protection for our rivers and lakes

Strong and effective measures put in place to protect our rivers and lakes from pollution, water overallocation and further degradation.

4

## Strong protection for wetlands

Strong protection for wetlands - maintaining and enhancing existing wetlands and supporting landowners to create new wetlands for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

5

## Strong and enduring organisation

Retain and strengthen Fish & Game to enable it to be a national and regionally cohesive organisation built with a culture of shared values, shared accountability and engagement. Maintaining the statutory mandates that enable effective service delivery.




### Mitchell Blackburn

Mitchell is aged 26 and works as a building apprentice in Auckland. He is a very keen angler, and a fly fishing content creator.

“

Without trout and salmon, many rivers and waterways would lose a powerful voice advocating for their protection. This is a pattern increasingly seen around the world. As freshwater habitats are degraded, fishing communities are forced to disengage – and as fewer people remain connected to these waterways, the loss of advocacy only accelerates their irreversible decline.”



# The key challenges, and how we can address them

## 1. Recognition of freshwater fishing and game bird hunting

### The issue

Freshwater anglers and game bird hunters are a significant constituency, yet the values they hold and the species they pursue are not consistently recognised in legislation and decision-making. Fishing and hunting should be recognised as an integral part of the Kiwi way of life that needs to be protected for current and future generations. Sports fish and game birds, and the habitats they rely on are vital to preserving our fishing and hunting traditions.

Valued introduced species like trout, salmon, and game birds are embedded in our ecosystems and central to the recreation, wellbeing, and food-gathering traditions of thousands of New Zealanders. It is vital they are explicitly recognised alongside indigenous species in legislation.

Recent proposed legislative changes do not recognise fishing and hunting values, sports fish, game birds, or their habitats, nor set environmental limits that protect trout and salmon habitat. Wetlands, critical for game birds, are inadequately recognised.

### Our solutions

#### We want to see Government:

- Explicitly recognise angling, hunting, and recreation as values to be provided for across all relevant legislation
- Ensure valued introduced species, including trout, salmon, and game birds, are recognised alongside indigenous species in legislation
- Protect and enhance the habitats of sports fish and game birds through national direction and regional plans
- Recognise the interests of anglers and hunters when considering reforms to the Conservation Act, Wildlife Act, and any other legislation affecting the species and habitats Fish & Game manages
- Require that Fish & Game is consulted in the development of national instruments, plans, and decisions that may affect freshwater, wetlands, or the habitat of sports fish and game birds
- Ensure Fish & Game's Sports Fish and Game Management Plans are recognised in statutory planning and consenting processes



## 2. Access to fishing and hunting areas

### The issue

Legal access to New Zealand's rivers, lakes, wetlands and their margins is valued by anglers and game bird hunters. The ability to gain access to these areas is integral to fishing, hunting and mahinga kai. Fish & Game maintains over 3000 access points around the country, working with private landowners who provide much of the access to angling and game bird hunting sites.

**However, access to public recreational resources is being quietly eroded through multiple pressures:**

- Access rules are particularly challenging for game bird hunting with restrictions on vehicle access, carrying firearms or bringing hunting dogs
- Unformed Legal Roads (paper roads) blocked by gates, locks, or fences, with a lack of consistency around enforcement by councils
- A 2024 ministerial directive changed access through overseas land purchases to a 'secondary' benefit, resulting in no new public access in the past year
- Much public access over private land is not digitised or visible on maps, with records still sitting in old paper survey files
- Resource management reform provisions for access and recreation have been reduced, with uncertain wetland provisions and options to not provide esplanade reserves as part of subdivisions

Once public access is gone, it's almost impossible to get back. Continued public access to New Zealand's lakes, rivers and wetlands is vital for the future of our fishing and hunting traditions.

### Our solutions

#### We want to see Government:

- Recognise and maintain Fish & Game's mandate to take a lead in processes that result in legal and physical access to fishing and hunting areas
- Restore provisions that provide for overseas land purchases to include new public access easements where waterbodies are located on site or adjacent
- Keep recreational values, access and protections of waterbody provisions in the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill in resource management reform
- Ensure public access is retained as part of Treaty Settlement conditions and through Crown Pastoral Lease processes
- Digitally map all public access over private land, prioritising digitisation of records currently in paper survey files
- Support Fish & Game's advocacy for public access and consult with Fish & Game before selling land, stopping a road, or approving projects that could affect fishing or hunting access
- Stop councils from closing unformed legal roads (paper roads) or banning vehicles or dogs without exceptional reason
- Amend the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F) so that items that provide for public access on wetlands (such as maimai, signs, boardwalks) are permitted activities

# 3. Strong protection for our rivers and lakes

## The issue

Despite improvements in some areas, New Zealand's rivers and lakes continue to face challenges.

Almost half of the country's lakes are in poor health and almost a fifth of the country's rivers are degraded by nutrient pollution. Overallocation of water in some rivers is causing the ecology to decline.

Fish & Game secured 12 of the 16 Water Conservation Orders currently in place across the country, protecting outstanding values of rivers and lakes for angling. However, more work is needed to ensure comprehensive protection.

Climate change is resulting in more weather variability. Reduced flows or water levels can cause increases in water temperature which can be detrimental to sports fish reproduction and survival. At the same time, renewable generation projects to dam rivers can have negative impacts on precious waterways.

Recent and proposed legislative changes weaken the protections for our rivers, lakes and wetlands which provide habitats for sports fish

and game birds. Whilst we support streamlining and improving efficiency, it's critical that policy and legislative frameworks ensure rivers, lakes and wetlands sustain healthy fish and game bird populations.

## Our solutions

### We want to see Government:

- Maintain and strengthen protections for rivers and lakes, including robust bottom lines for water quality and quantity that provide for angling
- Ensure legislative reforms continue protections for trout and salmon habitats, and focus on water quality and quantity issues, habitat enhancement and restoration
- Maintain and strengthen Water Conservation Order processes to protect outstanding freshwater values
- Ensure that hydro energy generation and electricity transmission is constructed and managed to deliver a 'win-win-win' for communities, the economy and river health. It should also consider species' needs, for example providing fish passage.

**Expenditure (direct spending by anglers):** Anglers spend between

**\$113 - \$138.6 million** annually on their trips

This represents the actual money spent by anglers at tackle shops, accommodation, food, transport, and other related purchases.



## 4. Strong protection for wetlands

### The issue

New Zealand only has around 10 per cent of its original wetland habitat remaining. Wetlands are critical ecosystems that support both native and valued introduced species, provide natural flood protection, filter water, and sequester carbon.

Fish & Game has invested approximately \$2.6 million, which increases to \$22 million considering the value of other contributions, in restoring wetlands, mainly on private rural land, in partnership between hunters and landowners. This work must continue and be expanded.

Climate change impacts are particularly acute for wetlands. More rainfall will result in flood events, whilst at other times drought and heat waves will cause lower water levels. Renewable generation developments, particularly wind and solar projects, can also impact wetland areas if not carefully planned. It's essential that climate change mitigation efforts recognise and protect the value of wetlands and recognise the vital severe weather attenuation role these ecosystems play.

### Our solutions

#### We want to see Government:

- Make it easier and cost effective for people to restore and create wetlands
- Take steps to ensure no more loss of wetlands, or deterioration of wetlands and provide permitted activities for wetland maintenance, restoration and creation
- Ensure regional policy, plans, and resource consents recognise and protect the maintenance and enhancement of wetland habitats
- Provide funding and support for continued wetland restoration and creation programmes
- Require constraints mapping to identify wetland and ecological areas to avoid when looking at project feasibility for wind, solar and other renewable developments
- Work with Fish & Game to identify wetland values when planning land use changes and renewable energy projects



### Anna Wallis

Anna is Treasurer of the Western Bay of Plenty Fish & Game Club, a life member of 13 years, and has held every committee position going. She was introduced to duck hunting by an elderly family member who has since died and she is now passing those same traditions on to her nine-year-old son (pictured).



My husband and I have raised our son with the club and we have taught him from a young age how to hunt and how to handle a gun safely - seeing his happy face when he catches a trout and when he shoots a duck, then teaching him how to fillet fish, how to deal with ducks – that is every parent's pride. Then, at the end of the day eating what you have caught or shot, priceless."



## 5. Strong and enduring organisation

### The issue

Fish & Game is undergoing significant organisational and legislative reform to ensure we can continue to effectively manage sports fish and game birds into the future. These reforms aim to modernise our operations, improve efficiency, and enhance our ability to respond to emerging challenges facing freshwater ecosystems and recreational hunting and fishing.

Legislative changes are being considered through resource management reform and potential changes to conservation legislation that will affect how Fish & Game operates and delivers on its statutory mandate. It's critical that any reforms strengthen rather than weaken our ability to protect freshwater habitats and advocate for anglers and hunters.

### Our solutions

#### We want to see Government:

- Maintain Fish & Game's statutory mandate to manage sports fish and game, and support organisational reforms that enhance our effectiveness
- Recognise the value of sports fish and game in our traditions and ecosystems alongside indigenous species in any legislative reforms
- Ensure any legislative changes support Fish & Game's advocacy role on freshwater protection
- Work collaboratively with Fish & Game through reform processes to ensure changes deliver better outcomes for anglers, hunters, and freshwater ecosystems



### Johan Kok

Johan is an Auckland-based fly fisher, bow hunter, entomologist, wildlife photographer, and father of two boys.

“

I am not a landowner. Like many New Zealanders, I am totally reliant on public land to connect with nature and teach my sons the values of conservation and self-reliance. This legislation (resource management reform) is a 'once in a generation' change, and I am deeply concerned that without specific tweaks, the things my family values most – access, habitat, and our valued introduced species – will be left behind.”



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