

# Fish & Game reforms

## WHAT LICENCE HOLDERS NEED TO KNOW



### Introduction

**Fish & Game New Zealand has a long and proud history of managing freshwater sport fish and game bird resources on behalf of licence holders.**

The organisation traces its roots back to 19th-century Acclimatisation Societies that introduced trout, salmon and game birds to New Zealand.

These early groups eventually evolved into today's Fish & Game, established in 1990 under the Conservation Act 1987.

Since that time, Fish & Game has operated under the same structure for 35 years. While the organisation has successfully protected and enhanced fishing and hunting opportunities, independent reviews have recommended improvements to ensure it remains fit for purpose in a changing world.

The Minister for Hunting and Fishing, James Meager, has announced a package of reforms designed to modernise Fish & Game.

The goal is to make the organisation more efficient, accountable, and effective in delivering for licence holders, while retaining local knowledge into what matters most: your fishing and hunting.

These reforms are intended to ensure Fish & Game provides high-quality service at the best possible value, by reducing duplication and focusing effort where it has the most impact.

Streamlining the way Fish & Game works will help manage future licence fee increases, improve transparency and create better co-ordination across the organisation.

The proposals keep the foundations of the system intact:

- Local decision-making about fishing and hunting opportunities
- The user-pays, user-says principle
- Regional control over seasons, bag limits, and open areas

What's changing is largely behind the scenes - how the organisation operates, manages funds, and co-ordinates nationally - so Fish & Game can deliver more value to the people who fund it: you, the licence holders.

### What is changing

#### 1. Funding model and buying your licence

##### WHAT'S CHANGING:

All licences will be sold through one national system instead of each region selling their own.

##### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

You'll still buy your licence the same way - online or through our retail partners.

The difference is that the money will go to the New Zealand Fish & Game Council, which will then distribute funds to regional councils.

#### 2. Creation of national advocacy policy

##### WHAT'S CHANGING:

Establishment of a national advocacy direction to improve co-ordination and consistency across the organisation.

##### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Your regional council will still speak up for anglers and hunters locally, but a shared advocacy direction will ensure consistent priorities and focus on the most important issues.

##### EXAMPLE:

There will be more similar approaches across different regions about what Fish & Game wants to see for water quality, quantity and protection and restoration of wetlands.

##### NATIONWIDE POLICY CONSISTENCY:

NZC will create binding policies for things such as compliance, species monitoring and reporting and corporate policies and health and safety.

##### CONSIDERING THE NEEDS OF OTHER INTERESTS:

Alongside Treaty partners Fish & Game's work will be subject to:

- ensuring aviation safety is not compromised
- ensuring the conservation of isolated populations of threatened native fish is not impeded
- having regard to the impact of management on other natural resources and other users of the habitat

### 3. Who can vote

#### WHAT'S CHANGING:

Voting rights will be expanded.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Any adult who bought a licence in the past three years, will be able to vote in Fish & Game elections - not just holders of whole season licences.

#### EXAMPLE:

If you bought a one-day fishing licence two years ago, you can vote in your regional election. Both partners on a family licence can vote.

### 4. Fish & Game Regional Councils

#### WHAT'S CHANGING:

Regional Fish & Game Councils will have eight elected members instead of 12.

In some cases, the Minister can appoint up to two additional members with relevant expertise.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Councils will be smaller and may include skilled experts, for example, in governance or finance, to strengthen decision-making.

### 5. Reporting

#### WHAT'S CHANGING:

All regions will report in the same format, rolled into one national annual report to Parliament.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

There will be clearer, more consistent information on how licence fees are spent and what's being achieved for licence holders nationwide.

### 6. Shared experts

#### WHAT'S CHANGING:

The New Zealand Fish & Game Council will employ national experts, such as scientists, lawyers, planners, accountants or ecologists, who can support multiple regions.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

Regions will have better access to specialist advice and services without duplicating costs and ensuring a consistently high standard across the organisation.

### 7. Communication and meetings

#### WHAT'S CHANGING:

Fish & Game will be able to hold council meetings and engage with licence holders online, e.g. it would no longer be restricted to newspaper notices for some official communications and functions.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU:

You'll get updates more quickly about rule changes and elections, and there will be more flexible ways to take part in meetings and consultations.

### What stays the same

#### YOUR FISHING AND HUNTING RULES:

Local councils will still set seasons, bag limits and open areas.

#### YOUR LICENCE FEES:

No change to how or what you pay.

#### USER PAYS, USER SAYS:

Licence holders will continue to fund Fish & Game councils and elect its councillors.

#### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:

Regional councils continue to manage local species and habitats.

### What happens next

A Fish & Game Bill will be introduced to Parliament early next year.

A select committee will hear public submissions early 2026, before the Bill becomes law - possibly as early as next winter. As licence holders, you will get a chance to have a say on the proposals.

Fish & Game is committed to working constructively through this process.

### Our vision remains

*Healthy freshwater habitats and species, thriving hunting and fishing traditions and opportunities for all Kiwis to enjoy sustainable wild fish and game resources.*

#### Benefits for licence holders

- Better value for money: Efficiency savings and improved hunting and fishing opportunities.
- Greater representation: More licence holders will be able to vote and stand for election.
- Stronger local focus: Regional councils can focus on improving opportunities in your area.
- Higher standards: A more professional organisation with modern governance practices.
- More transparency: Clearer reporting on how licence fees are used and what's being achieved.

**Need more information?**

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