

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME



Minutes of a Meeting of Council
held at the Deer Stalkers Hall Wairere Drive,
Saturday the 14th March 2026 commencing at 10.57 am

PRESENT:

Chairman: N. Juby
Councillor's present in person: S. Smith, E. Williamson, O. Kent, G. Annan, D. Cocks A. Brown
Staff: D. Klee, C. Robertson
Members of the Public: None

APOLOGIES:

J. Dickey, P. Dell, A. Sapich, T. Clarke, M. Barker, B. Jarvis-Child, D. Lelievre.

that apologies be accepted.

Smith/Williamson– CARRIED

1. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM MEETING AGENDA:

The Chair noted a potential perceived conflict of interest relating to the discussion around Plan Change 1 being a farmer in the Catchment to which the plan change relates.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE 14 February 2026:

Councillor Annan noted that the date recorded at the top of the February meeting minutes was incorrect. This was corrected during the meeting.

It was moved;

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the 14th February 2026 be accepted as true and correct record.

Annan /Kent – CARRIED

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Trout Tagging Signage: The Chair asked about signage on the Whakapapa River for the trout tagging programme. The Chief Executive advised that laminated signs had been installed. These were temporary in nature but fit for purpose. It was noted that permanent signage may be considered in future.

R3 Initiative Follow Up: The Chair asked whether there had been any update from Councillor Dell regarding the previous motion enabling engagement with National Office on R3 initiatives. The Chief Executive confirmed that no update had been received.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BI-MONTHLY REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:

4.1 Bi-monthly Chief Executives Report

Murray Young Wetland: The Chief Executive advised that weed control work had been completed following the conclusion of contracts with Natural Habitats. The maimai build had also been completed. These works were undertaken as part of the ongoing management obligations associated with the NZTA mitigation arrangement, with funding drawn from the restricted reserve established for that wetland.

It was moved;

That the Chief Executive be authorised to transfer up to \$15,000 from the Murray Young Wetland restricted reserve to fund maintenance and maimai build related activities.

Smith/Annan – CARRIED

Banding Programme: The Chair queried whether banding approximately 3,000 ducks was normal. The Chief Executive advised that this is within expected levels. It was noted that banding on the Hauraki Plains did not occur due to adverse weather conditions. Despite this, approximately 3,000 ducks were still banded, which was considered a strong result given one site was missed. Councillor Annan provided an update on the Te Awamutu banding site and noted that approximately nine cats were captured. Council discussed predator pressure at banding sites. It was also noted that there are issues at Lake Ngaroto adjacent to the banding site, where an individual has been releasing cats into the area. Despite being neutered, these animals are contributing to ongoing predation pressure and associated management issues.

Stone Jug Road Project: Council discussed progress on the Stone Jug Road project. The Chair suggested that once easements are registered on title, a formal opening should be held. It was suggested that the event be widely publicised and that invitations be extended to mana whenua, local councils, and potentially the Minister. The Chief Executive advised he would follow up with legal counsel regarding easement registration and report back to Council. Council also noted that the development of an access strategy would be beneficial and this has been included in the Operational Work Plan. The Chief Executive noted this would be progressed by the new Senior Field Officer once appointed, alongside existing staff.

Prosecutions: The Chief Executive updated Council on recent prosecutions, including a discharge without conviction relating to a Paradise Shelduck offence and a further Paradise Shelduck case in Northland, both of which have recently progressed through the courts.

Licence Sales and Financial Update: The Chief Executive advised that licence sales in the Auckland Waikato region continue to track well against budget. Council reviewed actual versus budget performance. It was noted that the prosecutions budget may be stretched due to the complexity of current cases. Council also discussed ongoing financial pressures associated with wetland maintenance. It was noted that the region manages a significant wetland estate and receives comparatively limited funding relative to other regions. As a result, restricted reserve funding is regularly used for operational maintenance, meaning the operational budget does not fully reflect the true cost of managing these assets.

It was moved;

That the bimonthly Chief Executive and financial reports be accepted.

Brown/Annan – CARRIED

5. OUTGOING COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE:

Nil

6. INCOMING COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE:

Two late Agenda items were tabled received just prior to meeting with very short turnaround times.

- National H&S Policy
- National H&S Committee

7. NATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY AND FORMATION OF A H&S COMMITTEE

Council discussed the draft National Health and Safety Policy and associated consultation process.

Council noted that the 16-day consultation timeframe provided by the New Zealand Council was not reasonable for a policy of this significance and does not align with expected policy development processes. Council reiterated that concerns regarding shortened consultation timeframes have been raised previously and should be reinforced in the current feedback.

Council further noted that the current approach effectively requires Councils to either provide limited feedback or convene extraordinary meetings, placing an unreasonable burden on volunteer governors. Council considers that, at a minimum, consultation material should be able to be considered through normal scheduled Council meetings.

There was discussion regarding the treatment of PCBU status within the draft policy. Council noted that regional councils and the New Zealand Council operate as separate PCBUs and that the draft policy does not adequately reflect this structure, potentially creating ambiguity around roles and responsibilities.

Council also discussed the proposed national Health and Safety Committee structure and noted that any national framework must be advisory in nature and not override or duplicate the responsibilities of regional PCBUs or legislative requirements.

Council supports the formation of a national Health and Safety advisory forum to facilitate information sharing and consistency and confirms it would contribute to such a forum, provided it respects regional governance responsibilities and existing PCBU structures.

The Chair identified that Councillor Brown had significant expertise in the H&S space and suggested that he and the CE may wish to work together to finalise council's feedback. Councillor Brown agreed and

It was moved;

That the CE works with Councillor Brown to prepare finalised consultation feedback to NZC in line with councils discussion and circulates to council prior to sending.

8. PLAN CHANGE 1

The Chief Executive took Council through the options assessment prepared by councils legal counsel and Planner. Council discussed the pros and cons of each option and agreed to support Option 2 subject to the following conditions:

- Full endorsement of the option by the NZC CEO and Council in writing, confirming that the option is consistent with national strategic direction.
- Full communications support is made available to Council by NZC should the decision generate negative publicity, such as occurred in the recent Southland case.
- Agreement that NZC will fund the case through to conclusion once the remaining existing budgets have been exhausted.
- That river iwi support the proposal.

It was moved;

That Auckland Waikato Fish and Game Council supports Option 2, provided the above conditions are met, and Option 3 if those conditions are not satisfied.

Cocks/Brown – CARRIED

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 12.40pm and reconvened at 1.15pm.

It was noted that C. Robertson left following the adjournment.

9. 2026/2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

Council worked through the draft Operational Work Plan and budget. It was agreed that an access strategy be included as a standalone component of the Operational Work Plan. It was also agreed that mapping work currently being undertaken by staff be included as a standalone workstream.

Council discussed the budget in detail. It was noted that both the new zero-based budget template and the existing template had been completed. The Chair thanked the CE and staff, noting the large increase in administrative burden this had placed on them.

Council noted that, despite requests for clarification, there has been no confirmation as to how the new zero-based budgeting template will be used in the annual reporting process. The template does not align with existing annual reporting formats, creating uncertainty around its application.

There were also issues identified with how the zero-based budgeting template accounts for external revenue. Council noted that the current approach is overly complex, requiring revenue to be recorded as incoming, then expensed into restricted reserves, and subsequently reintroduced through different GL codes as revenue. While this provides a workaround, it adds unnecessary complexity and reduces transparency.

Further issues were noted in relation to the treatment of depreciation versus the Asset Replacement Fund, and a general lack of clarity regarding what is required under the new budgeting framework. Council noted that no clear direction has been provided by National Office or the New Zealand Council on how these matters are to be addressed.

As a result, the Chief Executive prepared both the existing budget and the new zero based budget. These do not reconcile due to differences in treatment, particularly in relation to depreciation.

Councillors noted that the Minister's decision to decline the licence fee increase last year was influenced by a lack of robust financial information presented by New Zealand Council.

Councillors remain concerned that no policy changes have been implemented by the New Zealand Council to address issues relating to allocation, funding distribution and without improvements, the budgeting process is likely to remain unclear and ineffective and will potentially impact our ability to get a licence fee increase moving forward.

10. OSH Report

The Chief Executive presented the Health and Safety report, noting improvements following the national audit, updates to the TrackMe system, and ongoing development of standard operating procedures for equipment.

It was moved;

that the H&S&W report for March 2026 is accepted.

Annan/Cocks– CARRIED

11. GENERAL BUSINESS

NZC Update: Councillor Williamson provided an update from the New Zealand Council meeting. He noted that issues were raised regarding the family licence and associated loss of revenue. Regions had previously raised concerns prior to implementation and that the licence categories had not gone through the Licence Working Party. He noted that there are broader issues with licensing categories that require review.

Councillor Williamson also advised that the Allocation Committee has met on two occasions with the Department of Conservation.

The RMA budget was discussed, with Councillor Williamson noting that he had advocated for the RMA budget to be ringfenced specifically for RMA related matters and not used for other purposes, given previous concerns regarding its application.

Reserve Calculations: Council discussed concerns regarding reserve calculations that were presented to the New Zealand Council. It was noted that the reserve figures presented for the Auckland Waikato region were incorrect and had been derived from outdated information, specifically from the February 2024 report. Councillors expressed concern that it is unclear how such errors occurred.

Councillor Williamson advised that he raised these issues at the meeting and was advised that he did not understand how reserves were calculated. Council noted that other regions also raised concerns regarding the accuracy of their reserve calculations. It was further noted that agenda papers were circulated late, including variance reports that were provided the day before the meeting. Councillors considered that this did not allow sufficient time for proper review and scrutiny.

Council expressed concern that the reports presented to the New Zealand Council may overstate general reserve holdings. It was noted that, if relied upon externally, this could create the impression that reserves have increased despite the absence of a licence fee increase, which is unlikely to be the case.

Council agreed that updated and accurate reserve calculations, along with corrected variance reports, should be recirculated to the New Zealand Council and regional councils. Council also noted that, historically, there had been a strong collaborative process between the National Office CFO and regional managers, whereby issues such as these were worked through prior to information being presented to the New Zealand Council. The CE noted that it is unclear why the organisation has moved away from this collaborative approach, and that if such a process had been followed, these errors would likely have been avoided.

Stakeholder Engagement: The Chair suggested that Council may wish to invite Members of Parliament to participate in regional hunting and fishing activities as a means of strengthening relationships and increasing awareness of Fish and Game's work. The Chief Executive agreed to explore this further.

Inter-Regional Collaboration and Skills Register: The Chair suggested that, in the interests of improving collaboration between regions, a skills register be developed to better utilise internal capability across Fish and Game. The Chief Executive outlined that Auckland Waikato maintains a close working relationship with adjacent councils, with regular information sharing and collaboration. As an example, staff assisted Northland this year to establish their banding programme for the first time. The Chief Executive agreed to begin developing a skills register and to raise this with other regional managers to support a more coordinated approach across regions.

Delegations: Council reaffirmed its existing delegation framework and confirmed that the Chief Executive retains delegated authority to carry out operational and employment related functions on behalf of Council, consistent with previous Council resolutions and established practice. Councillor Brown requested an update regarding the IECs being used for the current recruitment process. The CE explained that he was working on the new IEC and JD for the role and would be submitting it for review with our employment lawyer next week.

It was moved that:

- 1. The Council is and shall remain the legal employer of all staff, and that the Chief Executive acts on behalf of the Council in the day to day management of staff and employment matters.***
- 2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive to recruit, appoint and manage staff on behalf of the Council, including negotiating and executing employment agreements and issuing job descriptions.***
- 3. Confirms that this authority applies to recruitment processes currently underway.***
- 4. Notes that the Chief Executive will keep Council informed of recruitment processes and appointments, and that this delegation remains subject to Council oversight and may be amended or revoked by Council resolution at any time.***
- 5. Confirms that the Chief Executive acts as the authorised agent of the Council in exercising these functions, including negotiating and executing employment agreements on behalf of the Council.***
- 6. Ratifies all previous employment related actions undertaken by the Chief Executive and staff acting under this longstanding operational practice, including recruitment, employment agreements and staff management decisions.***

Annan/Smith – CARRIED

The meeting closed at 3.17 pm