



AGENDA

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH AND GAME COUNCIL

24th February 2024

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME

A Meeting of Council will be held at the Waikato Deer Stalkers Hall, Wairere Drive, Hamilton on Saturday 24 February 2024 commencing at 11.0 a.m.

AGENDA

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**N Juby
Chairman**

7/02/2024

AUCKLAND/WAIKATO FISH & GAME



Minutes of a Meeting of Council
held at the NZ Deerstalkers Hall, Wairere Dr, Hamilton
on Saturday 9th December 2023 commencing at 11:22am.

PRESENT:

Chairman: N. Juby.
Councillors: E. Williamson, D. Cocks, P. Shaw, C. Sherrard, M. Barker, T, Clark,
B. Barnes, G. Dickey, G. Annan.
Staff: B. Wilson, D. Klee, J. Dyer.
Visitor: P. Hardy (DOC).

1. APOLOGIES:

A. Daniel

It was moved;

that apologies be accepted.

Annan/Shaw – CARRIED

2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM MEETING AGENDA:

Nil.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF 14th October 2023:

Councillor Barnes tabled a revised draft of the Minutes for the Council meeting of 14th October that included substantial changes (attached). After discussion;

It was moved;

That the minutes of the previous meeting of 14th October 2023 meeting as amended be accepted as true and correct records:

Cocks/Barker – CARRIED

The Chairman enquired of Councillors whether they still wanted the Minutes recorded in a concise format. There was general agreement from Councillors that no change was required from the long-standing convention of having the Minutes in a concise format.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Nil.

5. INWARDS COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE:

The letter from Barrie Barnes, Chair, New Zealand Council regarding the 2023/24 Auckland/Waikato Levy was tabled.

The Chairman updated Councillors on the system for determining regional levies. That the levy was the difference between the budgeted expenditure (“the budget”) and predicated income. For example, if predicted income was \$1M and the budget \$900,000, then the levy would be \$100,000. If actual income was less than predicated, then the loss falls with the regional council. Conversely if actual income exceeded predictions, that the surplus income would be kept by the region. Regions whose reserves fell below 20% of budget would be topped up by NZC.

The Chairman explained that Auckland/Waikato had had two seasons where our region was more severely affected by lockdowns than others. This meant that Auckland/Waikato has depleted reserves because our sales were below forecast, but we still had to pay an inflated levy. Therefore, changing the system in a way that inflated our sales targets was unacceptable.

Councils’ concerns were that the predicted income for the 2023/24 year was based on licence sales as of January 2023 with a multiplier used to estimate sales at the end of the financial year (31st August). However, the multiplier used was the increase in sales that occurred the previous financial year and ignored the fact that this was also when the region come out of lockdown for Covid. Consequently, licence sales for 2022/23 had been considerably overestimated and this figure had been used to set the levy for 2023/24.

The Chairman considered that Council’s concerns had not been treated seriously by the NZ Council. Mr Wilson and himself raised the issue with both the NZC chair and NZC CEO prior to, and since the April budget meeting when forecasts were approved by NZC. In spite of knowing about the issue, no action has been taken by NZC to address the concerns. These concerns have been realised with license sales as the season progresses.

Councillor Barker agreed and recommended that Council requests an adjustment to the levy.

Councillor Barnes agreed with the Chairman concerns and advised that the Licence Working Party was not composed of Councillors but managers and NZ Council staff. Forecasting licence sales was difficult but there had to be a better way.

Councillor Dickey asked what was being done to promote licence sales.

Mr Wilson replied that an email newsletter had recently gone to all fish licence holders (previous year licence holders) while an additional email newsletter had gone to all lapsed participants. A new website for Fish & Game would be in place before the end of the year thanks to the considerable efforts of Roslyn Simmonds.

The Chairman reminded Councillors that the Auckland/Waikato fisheries were, until recently, considered to be at full angler capacity. However, due to a relatively recent decline in licence sales it was recognised that more publicity effort was required to boost licence sales back to their previous level.

The Chair suggested three options regarding the dispute over the levy:

1. That no further action is taken.
2. That we inform NZ council that our general reserves are below 20% of budget, and consequently we require a “bail out”.
3. That we write to NZ council seeking external mediation.

It was moved;

That Council writes to the NZ Council and recommends that external mediation is used to settle the dispute over the 2023/24 levy.

Williamson/Cocks – CARRIED

Councillor Barnes abstained from the vote

It was moved;

that inward and outward correspondence be accepted.

Annan/Cocks – CARRIED

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BI-MONTHLY REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:

Councillor Annan thanked David Klee for his assistance at the Sika show. Councillor Barnes reported the intention of the NZ Council to attend the Sika show annually.

Councillor Williamson asked if additional information can be derived from the Game bird harvest survey. Mr Klee replied that he was working on getting all the F&G regions to report in a standard format so that a single national report could be produced, which could be sent to the relevant ministers and would be publicly available.

The Chairman requested that the excellent spring fishing newsletter be sent out to all licence holders, including game licence holders. He also requested that the preseason fish and game magazines be sent to Councillors.

It was moved;

that the Chief Executive’s Bimonthly Report and Financial Statements be accepted.

Cocks/Annan– CARRIED

The meeting rose for lunch at 12:45pm and resumed at 1:10pm.

7. AOG CONTRACTS:

The Chairman noted that not all regions use AOG contracts. However, he considered that it was clear from the financial reports that there are considerable savings to be made

from AOG for purchases where available. He considered that using AOG contracts where available should be Council policy.

It was moved;

That all of Government (AOG) contracts should be considered by staff when making any purchasing decision.

Barker/Dickey– CARRIED

8. UPDATE:NZ COUNCIL MEETING OF NOVEMBER 2023:

Councillor Barnes gave a brief update on the 24th & 25th November 2023 meeting of the NZ Council. A summary of the meeting had previously been sent to all Councillors.

9. WHANGAMARINO WEIR UPDATE:

Section 128 review

Mr Klee advised that the only outstanding issue in regard to the section 128 review of the consents held for the weir, was the sedimentation issues. In particular, whether sedimentation was greater than anticipated at the time the consent was granted. He had not been advised by the WRC as to who were the affected parties.

Mr Klee suggested that a sensible approach to the consent issues would be to modify or replace the flood gates so that they had a dual role of flood control and maintaining water levels in the wetland.

Mr Klee advised that new consents for the weir had to be in place when the existing consents expired in 4 years' time. He emphasised that there could be opposition from adjacent landowners who had seen considerably land subsidence due to peat degradation and were thus more prone to flooding.

In reply to a question regarding the ongoing maintenance of the weir, Mr Klee agreed that there was considerable work required this summer on the weir, stopbank and access road. DOC had allocated \$60,000 for the project with contractors booked for February/March. However, he emphasized that there was no intention to increase the height of the weir, and that the height of the access road/stop bank would be kept at 3.8m mRL.

Mr Klee highlighted that it made no sense going to the Environment Courts over the Section 128 review, when the weir would need to be re-consented in 4 years' time at a potential cost of \$500,000.

10. COST OPTIMISATION PROJECT:

The letter from Barrie Barnes, Chair, NZ Council was tabled. A decision on the Cost Optimisation Project had been deferred from the 14th October 2023 meeting.

Councillor Barnes advised that the words “Resource Allocation Project” should not be in the letter’s subject line.

Councillor Williamson expressed his opposition to the project as he considered that:

- It was not in the operational work plan for staff who were already overstretched with national issues.
- Staff were already using AOG contracts.
- That there was minimal discretionary spending by the regions.

The Chairman acknowledged that Auckland/Waikato region operates more financially effectively than most other regions, including obtaining substantial external funding, and this information should be shared across the regions.

Councillor Williamson noted that the letter referred to revenue streams, resource allocation and optimisation.

Councillor Barnes advised that Fish and Game was considered by the Minister to be one organisation and not 12 regions. The New Zealand Council would also be reviewed as part of the project.

The Chairman noted that most regions had already been reviewed as part of the project.

Councillor Cocks stated that he required more information about the project before he could make a decision and was concerned at the level of consultation. Councillor Barnes replied that a decision was required.

It was moved:

That Council does not participate in the Cost Optimisation Project.

Cocks/Williamson – CARRIED

Councillor Barnes abstained from voting.

11. 2023 STERILE TROUT STOCKING REPORT:

Mr Wilson highlighted Dr Daniel’s conclusion that it would be premature to make any decision on the success of the project and thus it would be prudent to continue monitoring the fish for at least three years after the final trout release.

12. GOVERNANCE TRAINING:

Councillor Dickey expressed his enthusiasm for the governance course but emphasised that the course should be made available to councillors at the beginning of their term as councillors.

Councillor Barnes stressed the need for governance training throughout Fish and Game. He expressed his disappointment with the low uptake by councillors but acknowledged that some of the poor uptake could be attributed to the way that the project was

implemented by NZC. He advised that governance training was a legal requirement and a recommendation from the Ministerial Review.

In reply, Councillor Annan reported that he had tried to obtain access to the online training but that he had not received the link in time to participate.

GOVERNANCE EVALUTATIONS

The Chairman informed that Auckland/Waikato was one of the few F&G councils that did governance evaluations.

Councillor Barnes requested a copy of the template for the evaluation for the NZ Council. He noted that the NZ Council did not review itself.

The Chair recommended that the evaluation report should include the number of recipients.

13. 2023/24 Audit:

It was moved;

that Council had no intention in cutting down any forests on its properties.

Cocks/Annan - CARRIED

14. OSH UPDATE:

Councillors discussed the potential for liability for health and safety breaches, especially on council land. It was emphasised that as a consequence of the recent White Island prosecutions, liability could be much wider than previously thought.

Mr Wilson advised that OSH procedures for working bees and contractors would be updated.

It was moved;

that the OSH report for December 2023 is accepted.

Annan/Shaw – CARRIED

15. GENERAL BUSINESS:

Councillor Cocks advised that a defibrillator should be available at all working bees on Fish and Game properties. Mr Wilson agreed to investigate further.

Councillor Sherrard recommended that all online newsletters should go to all licence holders. The Chair agreed that this should be done at a regional level. Councillor Barnes supported this move and recommended that all licence holders should get all publicity material.

Councillor Barnes updated Councillors on the Golden Clam issue in the Eastern region.

Councillor Barnes expressed his opinion that the new Minister of Hunting and Fishing would have a much greater involvement in Fish and Game.

Councillor Williamson asked what contribution the Hunting and Fishing stores contributed to the magazine. Mr Wilson replied that the draft annual accounts from the NZ Council indicated that the magazine cost \$405,000 in 2023 with "contributions" totalling \$154,000.

Mr Klee advised Councillors of his recent discussions with MPI over the potential for high pathogen avian influenza to make its way to NZ and the potential consequences if it became established. The most likely pathway was from a border breach.

Mr Klee agreed with Councillors that it looked like it had been an excellent breeding season for waterfowl.

Councillor Dickey enquired whether Income Protection Insurance had been considered for Fish and Game to cover the potential loss of income due to adverse events such as avian influenza. Mr Wilson agreed to discuss this potential with Council's insurance broker at their annual meeting early next year.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 2:48pm. The next meeting of Council is scheduled for 24th February 2023.

Minutes of a Meeting of Council
held at the NZ Deerstalkers Hall, Wairere Dr, Hamilton
on Saturday 9th December 2023 commencing at 11:22am.

PRESENT:

Chairman: G. Annan
Councillors: E. Williamson, D. Cocks, P. Shaw, C. Sherrard, M. Barker, T, Clark, B. Barnes
Staff: B. Wilson, A. Daniel, D. Klee, J. Dyer.

1. APOLOGIES:

G. Dickey, N. Juby, M. Barker (lateness).

It was moved;

that apologies be accepted.

Shaw/Sherrard – CARRIED

The Chairman requested a moment of silence for the passing of ex-councillors David Syme and Dan Hartley.

The Chairman gave his personnel thanks to Dr Adam Daniel for his efforts as a member of the Raglan Coast Guard in the recent incident involving the Hamilton Fish & Game Club on a charter fishing vessel attempting to cross the Raglan bar. The Chairman also expressed his appreciation to Mr David Klee for his concerns expressed immediately after the incident.

Councillor Barnes offered reasons for his apologies for not having attended the previous two AK/WAI regional meetings.

2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM MEETING AGENDA:

Nil.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF 19th AUGUST 2023:

It was moved;

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the 19th of August 2023 be accepted as true and correct records.

Cocks/Sherrard – CARRIED

Councillor Barker joined the meeting (11.26am).

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Mr Wilson gave a brief update on the Healthy Rivers Hearing being held in the Environment Court in Auckland and Hamilton.

5. OUTWARDS COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE:

Letters to Mr Barrie Barnes, New Zealand Fish & Game Council Chair, regarding the 2023 Levy Payment and the 2023 Performance Management Strategy were tabled.

Mr Wilson expressed his concern that the current level of expenditure by the New Zealand Council was unsustainable in the long term. Councillor Barnes disagreed and stated that the current level of expenditure was sustainable and within budget.

Councillor Barnes then asked Mr Wilson for the term 'unsustainable' to be justified. No supporting facts were provided. Councillor Barnes said that if they existed, he needed to get to the bottom of this concern and follow it through as ongoing solvency was part of his responsibility. He stated that the Cost Optimisation Program would certainly highlight any issues. Mr Wilson made mention of the recent staff conference, NZC staff 'blowout' and 'too many' consultants, around which no facts in terms of consultants, people, numbers, or value/costs were provided to justify the voiced 'concern'. Councillor Barnes offered information to the meeting in this regard, to justify his counter view of this 'concern' supported by information provided to him also by the NZC CFO, staff numbers and consultant engagements.

Councillor Barnes ~~noted~~ advised that the ~~Governance~~ Review was "dead in the water" in regards to the recommendations ~~requiring~~ that required legislative change.

Councillor Barnes also stated that the Review was the IP of DOC and it was their decision to proceed with it or not. He further stated that it was their (DOC) senior policy persons/advisors, that have taken the position not to present to the minister concerned. Councillor Barnes elaborated on some of the reasons why, and that F&G has no influence in this area or with that document.

Also, it was stated by Mr Wilson that the NZC CE had informed (AK/WAI Manager) that the Review, 'legislative', was in fact proceeding, which was contrary to what Councillor Barnes had said. Councillor Barnes requested further detail from Mr Wilson of that being what the NZC CE had said, as he said he needed to follow this up. The detail requested was not provided by Mr Wilson.

Councillor Barnes confirmed that DOC had forwarded a list of the non-legislative changes and actions (schedule) and had asked NZC to provide confirmation that these were proceeding. When questioned on these he said most involved NZC reporting and

the governance training. Also, he stated that all regional managers were aware of the schedule referred to, as it had been provided to them by the NZC CE through the managers meetings.

Councillor Williamson stressed his concerns that the NZ Council was seeking more control over the regions and regional budgets.

Councillor Barnes requested any information that may validate this 'concern' as he would take note and follow up. No information supporting this concern was available at this time. Councillor Barnes reminded that the NZC is made up of individual councillors, volunteers, from each of the regions.

6. INWARDS COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE:

A letter from Mr Barrie Barnes, New Zealand Fish & Game Council Chair, regarding "Upcoming Cost Optimisation and Resource Allocation Project" was tabled.

Councillor Barnes advised that some regions, whilst not necessarily agreeing with it completely, have agreed to participate. He provided further information as to why, which included statutory reporting, some of which the new minister will be asking for, was provided. When Mr Wilson said '*the NZC CFO could accomplish this*', a counter position was provided by Councillor Barnes as to why this was not a valid or possible option including capacity and wider area of expertise. He further said that the CFO had been invited to participate.

Councillor Barnes also mentioned, that it was not unusual for an organisation to engage a third party, to look with fresh eyes, and that Gary Crawford's CV/profile and current engagements showed a high level of competence.

Mr Barnes informed Councillors that a contract for the Cost Optimisation and Resource Allocation Project had not yet been signed, and that regions, as autonomous entities, could ~~opt out~~ decide if they were going to participate or not.

It was agreed that the letter be reconsidered at the December Council meeting.

Councillor Cocks recommended that the NZ Council should revert to having council meetings in the regions so that they could get an appreciation of regional issues.

Councillor Barnes did make the point, that as long as he was Chair of NZC, he would continue to encourage NZC councillors to bring forward their regional positions, prior to considerations and deciding on issues nationally as consistent with the legislation.

Councillor Barnes did advise the Council, that currently in planning, was a triennial 'hui' of all regional councillors, nationwide, to be held probably in the February after the year of regional elections. This would coincide with the NZC meeting of that time. Estimated cost over the three-year period may be a little as \$0.30/licence fee/pa. This 'hui' would

provide greater contact and knowledge between regions and also encompass some initial governance training.

It was moved;

that inward and outward correspondence be accepted.

Cocks/Barker – CARRIED

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

The Chairman advised that Rangitoto Lands were still advertising accommodation and trout fishing on the Outdoor HQ website. Dr Daniel replied that he had expressed his concerns over advertising for access on the Outdoor HQ website to the nation office as this was a nation issue that required legal action.

Dr Daniel in reply to a question, stated that there had been three releases of 2-year old trout into Quarry Lake (Lake Pupuke) over the last year.

Dr Daniel advised that there had been no releases into Lake Tomarata for at least 10 years and that he was advising local iwi on lake restoration.

Councillor Cocks requested that a sign be placed on the Williamson Wetland. It was agreed that a sign similar to the one recently erected on the Murray Young Wetland be funded for the Williamson Wetland.

Councillor Barker requested a copy of Mr Dyer's tree report, Mr Wilson agreed to send a copy to all Councillors.

Financial Report

General discussion on the Whangamarino weir and potential short term (repairs) and long-term expenditure (re-consenting).

It was moved;

that the Chief Executive's Bimonthly Report and Financial Statements be accepted.

Cocks/Williamson – CARRIED

The meeting rose for lunch at 12:44pm and resumed at 1:20pm.

8. UPDATE: NZ COUNCIL MEETING OF AUGUST 2023:

The update from the NZ Council meeting was tabled.

9. MINUTES OF NZ COUNCIL MEETING OF APRIL 2023:

The minutes of the NZ Council meeting of April 2023 were tabled.

Councillor Barnes informed that there were now three NZ Councillors on the National Research sub-committee.

Councillor Barnes explained the positions and functions of the Future Finance Working Group (FFWG) and the Future Structure Working Group (FSWG). He indicated that both groups would conclude early 2024 with reports expected to be available to regional councils in April 2024.

10. 2024 MEETING SCHEDULE:

Mr Wilson asked whether Councillors agreed to approve the licence fees by email or would they prefer to have a council meeting in May.

In reply to an enquiry as to why the decision had to be made by May 31st, it was noted that the documentation had to be submitted to the Minister of Conservation by 20th June.

It was moved:

That the proposed 2024 meeting scheduled be accepted.

That the proposed licence fees be approved by Councillors in May by email.

Barker/Shaw – CARRIED

11. DRAFT POLICY ON SETTING NATIONAL POLICY:

Councillor Barnes informed Councillors that the original term was one meeting cycle, and there was some difficulty in determining when, and how, it changed to a two-meeting cycle. Also, in some cases a two-meeting cycle, due to whatever constraints, or requirements, may prove, at time, to be too long, given that it could take four months or more. ~~proposed changes were required to speed up the process of setting national policy.~~

Mr Wilson noted that the NZ Council would no longer require a majority of regions to agree to a proposed policy. Councillor Barnes stated that this change was required so that the policy was ~~compliant~~ **consistent** with the relevant provision of the Conservation Act.

Councillor Barnes informed the council that the term 'majority' was never part of the policy process. The legislation referred to consultation and not 'majority'. He further said that, for consideration, the NZC would be somewhat remiss, and stated as an example: ***'If eleven regional councils (majority) supported one direction it would be irresponsible for NZC to go in the direction of one.'***

It was moved:

That the NZ Council be informed that Council does not support the proposed changes to the Policy on setting National Policy.

Williamson/Barker – CARRIED

Councillor Barnes abstained from voting.

12. DRAFT CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY:

It was moved:

That the draft Conflict of Interest Policy be accepted by Council.

Barker/Sherrard – CARRIED

13. DRAFT STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT:

It was moved;

That the draft Staff Code of Conduct Policy be accepted by Council.

Cock/Sherrard – CARRIED

14. REMUNERATION POLICY (INFO ONLY):

Mr Wilson informed Councillors that existing staff contracts had a CPI provision included, but that regional funding in future would be based on market data. Consequently, there could be significant discrepancies between salary funding requirements and the actual funding agreed to by the NZ Council. However, Councillor Barnes disagreed and stated that this would not be a significant issue. **Councillor Barnes further stated that existing contracts that had CPI could not be changed as they were a legal and binding contract. It was acknowledged that this was a very valid question, in relation to what Mr Klee asked, and the concerns around the CPI issue and current contracts. It was further stated that AK/WAI was, to the best of Councillor Barnes' knowledge, the only region that still had existing contracts with CPI.**

Mr Wilson confirmed that new staff contracts would not include a CPI provision.

15. AUCKLAND/WAIKATO POLICY REVIEW:

Mr Wilson highlighted to Councillors the policy that: *“Council reaffirms accepted governance policy that the Executive Committee (comprising the Chair & Vice Chairs) is responsible for the appointment of the Chief Executive (ratified by Council) and subsequent dealings with the appointee.”*

After discussion:

It was moved;

That the following policies are revoked:

- **Policy 17/2/2006 (Council and other land issues), Issue Piggot Block.**
- **Policy 04/10/1997 (Administration/Finance), Issue Licence Commission**
- **Policy 11/05/1992 (Administration/Finance) Licence agents**
- **Policy 04/10/1997 (Administration/Finance) Staff clothing**

That the following policies are amended:

- **Policy 27/11/93 (game com) (special seasons).**
 - the minimum fee be raised to \$10.00.
- **Policy 14/06/1990 (Issues/Advocacy) Merit wards.**
 - **Should be “Merit Awards”.**
- **Policy 19/03/2022 (Council and other land issues) Access**
 - **The addition of the clause “(dependant on funding)”.**

16. 2023 DRIFT DIVE REPORT:

Dr Daniel's Drift Dive Survey report was tabled.

Councillor Barker enquired as to why there was such huge variations in juvenile trout numbers from year to year. Dr Daniel replied that floods during late winter/autumn affected spawning success. However huge changes in juvenile numbers were also observed in spring-fed rivers that rarely flooded. Mr Wilson suggested that this may be due to winter temperatures with poor recruitment in warm winters.

17. OSH UPDATE:

Dr Daniel introduced the new SeaFlux app for monitoring the Maritime Marine requirements for Fish & Game boats.

It was moved;

that the OSH report for October 2023 is accepted.

Barker/Shaw – CARRIED

18. GENERAL BUSINESS:

Nil

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 2:52pm.

The next meeting of Council is scheduled for 9th December 2023.

Bi-Monthly Chief Executive's Report

February 2024

OUTPUT 1: SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Project 1111 Drift Diving

Drift diving surveys were completed on the Awakino, Waihou, Waitawheta rivers with average to good numbers of fish spotted. The Mangatutu drift dive was attempted in December and January and was not completed due to poor water quality caused by earthworks upstream.

Project 1112 Banding

Numbers have been great at all banding sites this year and with Te Awamutu and Wellsford to go we have banded nearly 2500 birds already this summer so avoiding any major catastrophes we should hit our target of 3000 mallard and grey ducks. The catch of 650 ducks on the Hauraki Plains site was somewhat disappointing as there were approximately another 800-900 birds sitting on the pond that simply showed no inclination to go near, let alone into the traps. There are various reasons this may have been the case. We often find it more difficult to catch birds in years where there are abundant sources of alternative food available or heavy rain leading up to banding. Conversely during drought years, we tend to catch a large number of the birds at each site. In the case of the Hauraki plains this year there are several crops and an open maize stack in close proximity of the site so perhaps the birds just had other options. When setting the cages on the Friday staff also located a recently predated duck carcass near the cages and perhaps a feral cat, ferret or hawk had snaffled a bird the previous day making the remaining birds weary of the cages. This aforementioned reason is why total numbers captured in any given year is not an indication of population as there are simply too many variables that confound catch rates.

26 black swans were captured on the Manukau Harbour in their moulting phase. The first 3 were fitted with the only available radio trackers that were repurposed from already recovered birds. All 26 received leg bands. The DoC Banding Office records show that there are 2 peak periods that former Wildlife Service staff banded black swan back in the 1970's and thereabouts. The great majority of the birds in the Manukau Harbour this year in early January were still able to fly, suggesting that it is the earlier second historic peak banding period, in December, that adult swan are mostly flightless and early January is just too late. In hindsight, it may be that this latter banding effort peak is associated with maturing juvenile birds that are then becoming old enough to band. However, there are none of these on the saltwater Manukau near the airport. Any captured young bird has to be old enough that an enclosed band will remain on its foot and not fall off. John has asked the Banding Office if they could recheck their old files to see if these confirm this explanation for the 2 banding peaks. It's a case of having to reinvent the wheel using whatever clues are still around.

John's mallard/grey banding results below:

Parakai:

803 new birds and 36 recaptures of previously banded birds, (and 1 pre-banded pheasant recaptured).

MPI tested 320 birds on-site for Bird Flu.

Aka Aka:

751 new birds and 11 recaptures.

30 (by their appearance), grey ducks were also selected for the Lighthouse Station breeding programme for this species. From these they will select 20 to best meet their requirements.

Wellsford:

Pending.

Project 1114: Trend Counts

This year we were delighted to have Northland Field Officer Graham Gallagher along for both flights accompanying John Dyer. Pilot Tony Petch is our "go-to" guy for all these flights.

Declining trend counts of paradise shelduck over the King County this year fell well short of the threshold, (5,000 birds), needed to declare a special shelduck season. They will still be available to hunters in the main waterfowl season however.

2024 – 3,344 shelduck counted.

2023 – 4710

2022 – 5264

2021 – 8,245

2020 – 7,979

The "north of the Harbour Bridge" Special Paradise Shelduck Season is Gazetted in advance, so this is still on this year. Graham and Tony also do the "north of the Harbour Bridge" counts for us as well as the Northland F&G region sites. For our sites the trend is very healthy.

2024 – 9,359 shelduck counted.

2023 – 6,833

2022 – 7,495

2021 – 7,513

2020 – 4,846

Black swan numbers were well up in western harbours, including Taharoa lakes where access is private. It's suggested we promote these healthy black swan numbers particularly for Aotea and Kawhia Harbours in our pre-game communications.

2024 – 6,974 black swan counted.
2023 – 5032
2022 – 4226
2021 – 4702
2020 – 4977

The 2023 blip in Canada goose numbers seems to have corrected itself and the number counted this year is similar to the 2022 count.

2024 – 13,839 geese counted.
2023 – 6,301
2022 – 13,378
2021 – 12,166
2020 – 8,528

Project 1116: Botulism

Staff are currently dealing with a botulism outbreak on the Te Aroha Wetland, which is being controlled with the much valued assistance of members of the Te Aroha Fish and Game Association.

Elsewhere in the Waikato region, where we have successfully fought to have botulism management plans on WWTPS renewals, botulism outbreaks are being well managed. Almost all territorial authorities with pond based WWTPS (Hauraki, Thames/Coromandel, Waikato and Waitomo) have hired contractors that were trained by us. They are conducting checks at ponds 1-4 times a week depending on bird numbers and the botulism status at each site. Recoveries are being conducted prior to the carcass maggot cycle forming and we are getting at least weekly updates on the status of each pond.

Matarangi is the only pond this summer which has had significant mortalities that may in part be attributed to the lack of functional aerators leading into summer. Other plants that tend to have system outbreaks such as Huntly and Ngāruawāhia have had the odd dead bird but nothing significant. The pre-moult dispersal activities have also greatly reduced the incidence of moulting birds on these systems across the board, although on large ponds such as Te Kuiti it is more difficult to keep birds off.

Project 1151 Harvest Survey

Arapuni tags returns have slowed but and the last year of tagged fish were released. Fishing pressure on the lake is likely reduce due to algal blooms.

Project 1161 Trout Releases

The final Arapuni release including 1000 normal and 1000 sterile tagged fish were released December 1.

Project 1181: Control

We have received a lot of requests for permits to disturb and cull game birds this year. Chicory crops are proving particularly attractive to both mallards and paradise shelduck.

OUTPUT 2: HABITAT PROTECTION/MANAGEMENT

Project 1211 RMA

NBEA repealed: In December, the new government under urgency passed legislation to repeal the Natural Built Environment Act (NBEA) and Spatial Planning Act meaning a return to the Resource Management Act 1990 (RMA). The NBEA, which came into force in August last year, significantly reformed environmental law in New Zealand by repealing RMA. The reason for the repeal of the RMA in the first instance was that it has failed to prevent significant harm to the environment. As part of the recent repeal the government has also included amendments to allow for a fast-tracking consenting process, similar to that for the Covid-19 response, for specified activities including communication networks, energy, housing and transport. The next phase of the RMA reform will include amendments to allow for easier consenting for infrastructure, farming, housing primary industries.

NPS-FM to be replaced: As part of the recent repeal legislation the government has also extended the date that councils are required to notify their freshwater plan changes, as required by the National Policy Statement for Freshwater (NPS-FM), by three years to 31 December 2027. They have also announced intention to replace the NPS-FM and amend how councils apply Te Mana o te Wai to individual consent applications. These changes however are looking to take between 18-24 months.

Waikato District Plan appeals:

CLS and TDR - Middlemiss Farm Holdings Ltd appeal

We supported the appeal of Middlemiss Farm Holdings Ltd as they were seeking conservation lots or other forms of incentives to preserve and enhance SNA habitat. At this stage it is looking likely that some form of a Conservation Lot Subdivision (CLR) and Transferable Development Rights (TDR) framework will be inserted into the plan. Fish and Game's interest is primarily about wetlands and mechanisms we would like to see for our ongoing restoration and maintenance with CLS's being a tool to enable that.

SNA's – Federated Farmers appeal

We had joined Federated Farmers appeal as a s274 party opposing their request to delete all SNA's from the planning maps unless they had been ground truthed. An agreement has been reached through informal discussion that all SNA's will be deleted from the planning maps except for the below points:

- a. *Those that have been visited and verified (in terms of consistency with Appendix 2 criteria and spatial extent) by Ms Chibnall and Mr Turner;*
- b. *Submitters that have appeared at the hearing with clear photographs and evidence of their properties;*

- c. *Sites in public ownership such as Department of Conservation, WRC and Council; or d. QEII National Trust-covenanted sites.*

This means that those SNAs that have not been ground truthed (or don't meet the proposed mapping attributes listed above) will be removed from the planning maps. While this is not our most ideal outcome, as we consider in most instances we are aware of, habitats identified as SNAs from geo-spatial imaging are correctly categorised in the first instance, given the large expenditure on fighting the Healthy Rivers appeals we are not in a position to oppose this point any further.

SNA's - DOC appeal

We supported the appeal by the Department of Conservation seeking greater protection and scope for SNA's. We're expecting a further report on this by 29 February 2024. However, we haven't been directly involved in the mediation taking place.

Trout habitat: Waikato Regional Council has accepted and posted the updated new trout habitat layer and trout spawning habitat layers. Adam has been working on a similar project in the upper Whanganui catchment sampling previously surveyed stream. A total of 18 streams have been visited with a small number being electrofished and or sampled using eDNA. The results will be used to update the trout habitat and spawning habitat layer for Horizons Regional Council in conjunction with Wellington Region staff.

Adam filmed and reported significant earthworks on the Mangatutu that were reported by the public. The water clarity has now dropped from a historical high of 4.8m to 2.4m. The works were completed without erosion control and have significantly impacted water quality. Water clarity measurements taken above the earthworks were nearly a meter better than just below. The earthworks have been reported to the Waikato Regional Council by both staff and the public due to the noticeable reduction in water clarity.

Parkinson Lake: A fish kill on Parkinson Lake 14 January was documented by Adam and officially reported to the council. This is second fish kill in two years corresponding with deteriorating water quality. Adam issued a complaint to the Waikato Regional Council including a request for a catchment management plan to improve water quality and prevent fish kills. Council staff have responded unofficially that a catchment plan has been initiated.

Setting our Direction for improving freshwater in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland Consultation Document: Clare wrote a submission on the Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau Region Consultation Document. We are concerned that significant waterways within the region will not be appropriately managed and restored as they do not have individual visions. There are only three Freshwater Management Units (FMU's) included which we consider inappropriate. Land use is the primary driver of poor water quality; thus, setting visions that capture all significant waterways individually is critical for maintaining and restoring water quality. We're of the opinion that rivers, lakes, and wetlands must have appropriate contaminant reduction targets at the individual catchment scale; otherwise, water quality will likely continue to degrade. To prevent further declines in water quality with improvements over time, appropriate management is required, recognising the

specific functions of individual waterways. A follow up, individual meeting will be held with AWFG and the council to work through our concerns.

Matamata- Piako WWTP Consent Application: Matamata-Piako District Council has been running Hui's for a couple of years, leading up to the expiry of each of their town WWTP consents to include Matamata, Morrinsville, Te Aroha and Tahuna. Clare has attended these for the duration. Clare and Adam are currently working with GHD, working through the draft conditions and the Water Quality documents.

Clare and Adam have concerns about the approach taken for the lead up to the consent application as GHD are trying to rush through the draft conditions before the consent application and Assessment for Environmental Effects (AEE) have been provided. Clare and Adam are also concerned and frustrated with the lack of appropriate information provided which is required to determine the water contaminant reductions. To determine if the proposed improvements stack up, they have requested to see daily load limits and maximum concentrations so that this can be compared to the actual annual or daily load. Clare and Adam have a meeting to work through their concerns and the draft AEE is due mid-February.

Horizon Region Oranga Wai/Water quality targets document: Clare is currently working through the Wanganui Freshwater Management Unit (FMU) and water quality target discussion document and will prepare a submission. There are multiple FMU's for Horizons, however Auckland/Waikato Fish and Game will only cover Whanganui as this is the only FMU that falls within our region. Wellington Region Fish and Game have been working with Horizons and will cover the rest of the FMU's where there are concerns.

Project 1221: Council Land

Williamson Wetland. One pond has been relinquished and another pondholder is being asked to leave. So, it is expected that at least 2 ponds will be re-balloted shortly. A third pondholder group has been asked to pick their act up or there may be 3 ponds available to ballot. John has also been coordinating about getting another F&G staff supervised working bee onsite to address several maintenance issues there.

Te Aroha Wetland Restoration: We conducted phase 1 of the project just before Christmas. This replacing existing broken concrete culverts and creating an impermeable barrier of concrete and clay around and underneath water control structures to minimise subsurface flows. The overall aim of the project is to prevent the complete dewatering that occurred during recent dry summers which led to fish kills and large-scale botulism outbreaks. We will now monitor water levels to determine the efficacy of the remedial works to date and determine whether further management interventions such as pumping from the adjacent Waihou River will be required. David has prepared an article on the project for this year's game supplement.



Figure 1: broken concrete culverts being replaced.



Figure 2: The finished track

Project 1235: Trees

The 2024 tree order has been lodged with Native Awa and Appletons nurseries.

OUTPUT 3: PARTICIPATION

Project 1311: Access negotiation

Vandalism and theft have ramped up on the Mangatutu Stream, and Adam met with community police and local landowners who acknowledged that licenced anglers were not causing issues other than getting stuck on the muddy track. There was recently a hut removed from the river with a small dam and multiple reports of poaching. In a separated incident a car was burglarised above Wharepuhunga Road. Police have not yet taken action but have been asked by the neighbouring properties to close the area. Fish and Game staff have asked that a parking area is put in off the road to prevent opportunistic theft and the rest of the public land is retired and planted.

Adam Daniel and Grant Annan responded to a report of a poacher on Sunday the 16th January. The individual admitted to building the hut but was not fishing at the time he was

checked. The individual was informed that the poor behaviour that had been occurring could lead to the closure of the area for everyone.

Adam has been working with the Waiuku Pistol Club to replace a collapsed fishing platform at Parkinson Lake.

Project 1331: F&G Newspapers

Magazine Articles - David and I have drafted articles for the 2024 game supplement.

Project 1341: Other Publications

Facebook videos have been a very successful means of communicating our customers with drift diving posts attracting 4,000-8,000 views. We have had several requests from anglers to publish drift dive data but the reports are generally completed in July.

OUTPUT 4: PUBLIC INTERFACE

Project 1431: Liaison/Advocacy

John attended and spoke at the Tuakau funeral for Ian Bowning, who was John's hunting partner, President of EPCM from 1985 to 1999, and Councillor for the Auckland Acclimatisation Society in the 1970's. Ian was 93 years of age.

Adam conducted an electrofishing demonstration and lecture along side a cultural talk from iwi at Waikato Diocesan.

OUTPUT 5: LAW ENFORCEMENT

Project 1521: Ranger Training

David attended the one-day refresher course in Eastern.

OUTPUT 7: COUNCILS

Project 1721: Meeting Costs

Te Aroha F&G association meeting.

David attended the meeting prior to beginning with the Te Aroha wetland project to go over the plans and invite feedback from the club members.

UPWMA Meeting.

David attended and spoke at the meeting.

OUTPUT 8: PLANNING REPORTING

Project 1841: National Liaison

NZ Council has employed a consultant, Gerhard Uys, who will be developing a comprehensive report/document highlighting F&G's public good work and achievements over the past decade. The aim is to launch this document publicly in 2024 and utilise it in engagements with key stakeholders. We will be assisting by providing background info and reports.

National Game Committee Meeting.

David has facilitated an online meeting with other game staff across the country to update SOPS for game monitoring and had a subsequent meeting with Corina to discuss National Office staff assistance.

Adam continued to advocate for washdown facilities at lake Karapiro to prevent the spread of gold clam and invasive aquatic plants in addition to assisting DOC with a koi carp incursion in the Waikato. DOC have asked Adam to participate in a national hui on invasive species response starting in February.

OUTPUT 9: ADMINISTRATION

Project 1912: Administration

Maritime

Adam has reapplied for the Maritime NZ Part 35 (our ability issue skippers tickets internally) at the request of Maritime NZ staff. Adam met with Maritime staff to discuss the increased regulation and compliance requested by Maritime NZ despite our organization's risk profile remaining the same. Maritime staff acknowledged that they are being asked to "up the bar" on all commercial users. Some of the new requirements have included full medicals for all skippers and increased ongoing training. Adam has responded to Maritime NZ by asking for the justification for the increased compliance cost based on any improvements in safety they can prove will be achieved as there have been no changes in legislation or operating conditions.

B. Wilson
Chief Executive