

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE 212th MEETING OF THE EASTERN FISH AND
GAME COUNCIL, HELD AT ROTORUA OFFICES OF FISH & GAME NEW
ZEALAND ON THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER 2024 AT 11.00 AM**

Present

Crs. Mark Sceats, Murray Ferris, Lindsay Lyons, Kevin Coutts, Mike Jarvie, Pat Swift, Alec McIver.

In attendance

Arash Alaeinia, Kate Thompson (Eastern Fish & Game); Barry Roderick and Bernie McDowell.

1.0 WELCOME

1.1 Cr Mark Sceats opened the meeting at 11.00am welcoming all present.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 Apologies were received from Cr Scott Nicol.

2.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Mike Jarvie) that the apologies for the 212th meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [24/12/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (7 NOVEMBER 2024)

3.1 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [24/12/3.1]*

3.2 IDENTIFICATION OF RESOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSION IN COUNCIL POLICY

No items were identified for inclusion in Council policy from the minutes of the meeting held 7 November 2024.

3.3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held 7 November 2024.

4.0 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR GENERAL BUSINESS

Arash Alaeinia – HPAI update

5.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST REGISTER

5.1 Councillors were asked to inform the chair of any conflicts of interest. No conflicts of interest were recorded.

6.0 HEALTH & SAFETY

6.1 Arash Alaeinia updated Council on increased compliance issues in some closed season areas and that he had recently met with the Area Police Commander to discuss how the Police can provide support to staff where necessary.

6.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Kevin Coutts) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [24/12/6.2]*

7.0 2023-2024 PERFORMANCE REPORT

7.1 Arash Alaeinia confirmed that Council had been emailed a copy of the 2023-2024 Performance Report and audit management letter and a hard copy was provided at the meeting for addition to the Councillor Governance folders.

7.2 Arash Alaeinia acknowledged the work of the staff who operate within the correct processes and policies, and Kate Thompson who prepares the report and engages with the auditor throughout the audit process.

7.3 Cr Kevin Coutts queried the information reported on Club Meetings/Events (Pg 27 of Report) and asked where this is reported to Council. Arash Alaeinia advised that this is usually reported within the Management Report in the Council Meeting Agenda.

- 7.4 Cr Mark Sceats highlighted the Chairs Report and reiterated his acknowledgement of staff and particularly Council for the work they have done over the year and more recently the support afforded to him with his move into the role of Council Chair.
- 7.5 ***Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council adopts the Performance Report for the 2023-2024 year. [24/12/7.5]***
- 8.0 **PRESENTATION “REVIEW OF GAME SEASON CONDITIONS”**
- 8.1 Cr Mark Sceats advised that he had made a Chairmans call that a further presentation was not needed as Council had been supplied with information in the previous Council agenda and emails had been circulated relating to the matter.
- 9.0 **2025 GAME SEASON CONDITIONS**
- 9.1 After some initial confusion Cr Mark Sceats suggested that Council review the recommendations as presented on Page 32 of the agenda the first being 4.1 in relation to “mallard and grey duck population thresholds and associated regulations currently used i.e. the status quo (shown in Table 1) be noted”.
- 9.2 Cr Kevin Coutts believed that duck hunters in the Eastern Region were “getting a bad deal on the cost of the licence and what they were allowed to shoot” and felt that Council should be relaxing the regulations to enable more opportunity to hunters, noting that last season only two of the four weekends available were suitable for shooting. He said we are concerned about licence sales, and that this is a good reason for relaxing the regulations, his preference being a six-week season and eight bird limit.
- 9.3 Cr Lindsay Lyons agreed that we have concern over licence sales but highlighted that the current threshold policy had been reviewed and agreed to by Council in December last year. Lindsay had made his own enquiries with staff at Auckland/Waikato Region and was advised that they are also working on the same policy and that they too had concern over the decline in duck numbers. He believed that at this point in time we need to be careful of the resource as we are approaching a season with limited duck numbers for breeding and with a hot summer there is likely to be an increase in botulism and the possibility of HPAI. He reminded Council of the 1991 botulism events that had wiped out a lot of the duck populations in the Waikato and through Eastern as well from which he believed we have never really recovered. Lindsay also commented on the satisfaction survey where only 14% of respondents had been negative about their season, most were positive. He said that, as Councillors, we are charged with looking after the resources included within the Sports Fish & Game Management Plan, this is a policy Council agreed to, so he would be supporting the status quo, i.e. work to the policy.
- 9.4 Cr Pat Swift questioned whether it was possible to extend the season without increasing the bag limit to provide more opportunity? Cr Mark Sceats said that he would be happy to extend the season which he believed was essentially one week only dependant on when King’s Birthday falls.
- 9.5 Cr Alec McIver informed Council that he had spoken to several local hunters and in summary most were quite happy with the season length as it is, but they would like a larger limit. He agreed with the research that showed 10% of the hunters shoot 90% of the birds and said that these hunters would prefer a higher limit of drakes e.g. 10 bird limit including 8 drakes. Alec added that the stats showed that drakes did not matter as much as hens and acknowledged that there would be some mistakes as it is difficult to identify greylands in low light. Cr Mark Sceats felt that the extended season was a compromise to keep numbers as they are.
- 9.6 Cr Alec McIver advised that we also need to bear in mind if Auckland/Waikato have a shorter season than Eastern, we can expect more hunters taking advantage of the extra two weeks in the Eastern Region.

- 9.7 Bernie McDowell informed Council that over last three seasons his hunting group had averaged 500 birds per season. He said that regardless of the population they will only take a % of what's available e.g. if there is 100, they might shoot 50% and if there are 50 they will only get 25, their numbers will drop dependant on what's there.
- 9.8 ***Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Mark Sceats) that Council does not support the status quo for the policy relating to mallard and grey duck population thresholds and associated regulations, and instead agrees to increase the season length for mallard and grey duck by two weeks for the 2025 Game Bird Hunting Season to a total of six weeks (3 May 2025 – 15 June 2025) regardless of population size identified through summer monitoring programmes to create more opportunity for duck hunters. Five voted in favour and two against. Crs. Lindsay Lyons and Murray Ferris asked that their vote against this motion be recorded. [24/12/9.8]***
- 9.9 Council continued to discuss recommendations 4.2 to 4.9 and comments included;
- shoveler season should be extended in line with mallards to avoid confusion
 - non-toxic alternatives to lead shot for .410 Ga shotguns needed to be addressed at a national level
- 9.10 Cr Kevin Coutts wished to put a point to Council that “you are allowed to shoot five cock pheasants for four months, but we have been arguing about six ducks for four weeks” and questioned how our staff know how many cock pheasants are out there? Cr Murray Ferris advised that staff undertake crow counts every year and commented on the high numbers they have in the Gisborne area.
- 9.11 ***Agreed (Alec McIver/Kevin Coutts) that Council agrees to recommendation 4.6 “That a daily bag limit of 2 shoveler and a season length the same as the mallard apply for the 2025 Game Bird Season” i.e. six weeks (3 May 2025 – 15 June 2025) [24/12/9.11]***
- 9.12 ***Agreed (Mark Sceats/Kevin Coutts) that Council agrees to adopt the balance of recommendations as set out on page 32 of the agenda as follows:***
- 4.2 ***That the policy relating to paradise shelduck shown in Appendix 1 is noted.***
 - 4.3 ***That the policy relating to black swan shown in Appendix 1 is noted.***
 - 4.4 ***That there is a special black swan season in Management Area A1 coinciding with the same period for a proposed special pukeko season i.e. 6 February – 15 February 2026 (just over one week and two weekends).***
 - 4.5 ***That there is a special pukeko season 6 February – 15 February 2026 (i.e. one week and two weekends) for the Eastern Region.***
 - 4.7 ***That pheasant and California quail daily bag limit and season length remain the status quo.***
 - 4.8 ***That the season for brown quail in the Eastern Region remains closed for the 2025 season***
 - 4.9 ***That non-toxic alternatives to lead shot continue to be required for .410 Ga shotguns for waterfowl hunting over open water. [24/12/9.12]***
- 9.13 Cr Lindsay Lyons commented on the grey duck and its endangered species status and suggested that it would be good to get some awareness out to hunters to be prudent and if they recognise a grey duck, they leave it. Others commented on the difficulty in identifying grey ducks.
- 10.0 LETTER FROM THE MINISTER**
- 10.1 Some Councillors had provided feedback to the letter from the Minister via email and Council had been provided copies of those. The Chair suggested the best approach was to review and comment on each question from the Minister.
- 10.2 ***What opportunities are there to make efficiencies, reduce duplication and ensure economies of scale across Fish and Game (e.g. shared services) to improve value for money for licence holders? How could these be best achieved?***

Council supported the centralisation of payroll and some administrative functions highlighting the potential cost saving benefits. Sharing of equipment between regions was raised but would need careful consideration as this may not be financially or logistically practical. Council also supported regional licence revenues in excess of the 20% required to maintain reserves and cashflows being held centrally.

10.3 *What do you think about the Governance Review recommendation to merge regions, and on what basis would this be appropriate?*

Members of the 2021-2024 Council still sitting reiterated what had been submitted for the Ministerial Review in 2022 being that the Eastern Fish & Game Region was large enough both geographically and financially to stand alone, but if a merger was necessary the more suitable option would be with the Hawke's Bay Region. Following today's discussion Council supported three North Island Regions being:

- 1 Auckland Waikato and Northland
- 2 Eastern
- 3 Wellington, Taranaki, and Hawke's Bay

Cr Lindsay Lyons also suggested the South Island Region's boundaries could potentially be redefined and split into three regions laterally. He said that this would ensure that shared resources crossing into the West Coast for example would be managed by one region.

10.4 *What would better support you as councillors and as Fish and Game generally:*

10.4.1 *Would a reduced number of councillors on each council improve effectiveness and decision making?*

Council discussed potential pitfalls of reduced number of Councillors such as diversity of members and potential for Council to be made up of a majority of game hunters over anglers and vice versa, and the ability to meet a quorum. Cr Murray Ferris felt that it was more about how effectively the meetings are run rather than the number of people sitting around the table. Council had already reduced its numbers to eight this term and agreed that eight was a good number going forward.

10.4.2 *Would a modest honorarium for councillors recognise and support your voluntary role?*

Council acknowledged the significant contribution to this voluntary role and supported recognition of this through either a free licence, or a small meeting honorarium, or both.

10.4.3 *How can the relationship between your Council and the NZC be improved to support the organisation and licence holders? Is the current way of nominating your representative to the NZC working? How can there be stability for the NZC over the whole term?*

Council discussed the role of the NZ Council appointee and the difficulties experienced by members appointed to the position in past years. Council acknowledged that this position needed to represent anglers and gamebird hunters from a national perspective and if their position didn't align to the view of the Regional Council they were too easily stood down as a result. Council considered options to remedy this and in summary agreed that the security of tenure of the appointee to the New Zealand Council is important, and when the appointment is made it is for a three-year term unless the appointee needs to resign from the position for other reasons.

10.4.4 *What other measures would support your Council to be more effective and trusted (e.g. wider eligibility to stand and vote in elections, a fit and proper person test)?*

Council agreed that the right to vote in elections should be automatic for all Whole Season licence holders i.e. no need to tick a box to register for election. Council also agreed that a "fit and proper person test" was important and the current legislation which excludes candidates standing for Council if they have been convicted of an offence involving sports fish or game or protected wildlife, was too lenient. Council discussed types of criminal offences and minor convictions and supported a change to

the legislation to exclude any person with a conviction that carries/d a maximum sentence of one or more years imprisonment.

10.4.5 *Should the criteria under which the Minister currently has the power to remove elected members be reviewed?*

Council agreed that the power for the Minister to remove elected members should be reviewed and that the Minister should have the power to remove a councillor at a national or regional level.

10.5 Council discussed the difficulties in working under the umbrella of the Department of Conservation and supported the establishment of a new “Fish & Game Act” reporting directly to the Minister of Hunting and Fishing.

11.0 Council adjourned for lunch at 12.20pm reconvening at 1.09pm.

12.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

Finance Report

12.1 Kate Thompson informed Council that this meeting’s finance report included the Budgeted Financial Statements for the 2024-2025 financial year and summarised the adjustments needed after incorporating the OWP budget which was approved earlier in the year.

12.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Mike Jarvie) that Council receives the finance report approves payments for September and October totalling \$294,612.44. [24//12/12.2]*

12.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Mike Jarvie) that Council approves the proposed budget figures for the Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Financial Performance, and Cash flow for the 2024-2025 financial year. [24/12/12.3]*

Management Report

12.4 Arash Alaeinia briefly spoke of compliance around streams over the summer period. No other questions from Council

12.5 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Management Report. [24//12/12.5]*

Licence Sales Report

12.6 Kate Thompson advised that the updated age demographics report would be presented at the next meeting due to her being unable to complete it for this meeting having been sick in the past week. Cr Lindsay Lyons mentioned that it shows a very interesting picture of what’s happening and was keen to see an updated version. Arash Alaeinia noted the positive results achieved YTD with most of the North Island in the black compared to last season and highlighted the positive posts about the fisheries circulating on social media and in papers. Arash also provided some detail about the pre-Christmas EDM which was going to Eastern, Auckland Waikato and Northland lapsed licence holders. Barry Roderick congratulated the team on the positive results noting the regions performance compared with others and acknowledged that the excellent whether may have contributed.

12.7 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Licence Sales Report. [24/12/12.7]*

13.0 LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS

13.1 *Report from Bay of Plenty Conservation Board*
No Report

13.2 *Report from Department of Conservation*
No Report

13.3 *Report from New Zealand Council*
No Report as there had been no meeting of the NZ Council since Eastern’s last meeting.

14.0 GENERAL BUSINESS

14.1 HPAI update

Arash Alaeinia advised that work is in progress on the HPAI plan, but no further update had been given from the National Office. Managers are concerned the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) are implicating ducks/waterfowl as carriers, and this is likely due to these species being the only species monitored through Fish & Game's banding programmes, which have been carried out for the past 30 years. MPI have been actively testing waterfowl for avian influenza through F & G programmes over this time with low pathogenic varieties being detected for several years. It is likely that all species are at risk but more likely sparrows coming in to breeding sites. A decision is to be made about banding programmes going into new year as concern is raised about birds being brought together and if there are infected birds this will help it spread, but contrary to this these birds are known to mix anyway at moult/banding sites and the banding programmes assist MPI with their testing. Arash advised that the US and Australia are continuing a business-as-usual approach with increased education about good hygiene and appropriate PPE. Cr Lindsay Lyons questioned whether MPI was monitoring the bottom of the South Island and the likes of the Auckland and Campbell Islands given that the virus arrived in Australia via Antarctica and asked if we could highlight these concerns to MPI. Arash advised that Matthew McDougall has been involved from the outset and a draft Plan had been submitted to DOC and MPI via Corina Jordan and that further information was to come from DOC reflecting the current situation.

14.2 Golden clam update

Cr Pat Swift asked for an update on the Golden clam situation. Arash Alaeinia advised that the clam is still contained to Waikato River moving down stream and the Taupo leisure park which had been closed. He said that options to chemically cleanse the leisure park lake and infill it are being considered.

14.3 Okataina gate update

Arash Alaeinia advised that all parties had accepted the gate contractor, and the cost was to be shared between the Regional Council, Rotorua Lakes Council, MPI. The MOUs were yet to be finalised, but he understood that the gate would be in place mid to late January.

15.0 PUBLIC EXCLUDED SESSION

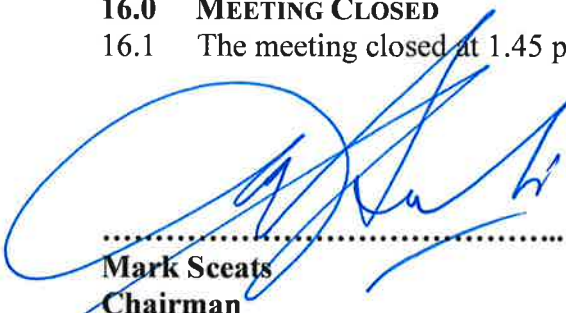
15.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Mike Jarvie) that pursuant to Section 48 (1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the public be excluded at 1.40 pm from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely, to approve the minutes of the August 2024 Special Meeting where the public were excluded. [24/12/15.1]*

15.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council moves out of public excluded at 1.43 pm. [24/12/15.2]*

15.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the public be re-admitted to the meeting at 1.43 pm. [24/12/15.3]*

16.0 MEETING CLOSED

16.1 The meeting closed at 1.45 pm.



.....
Mark Sceats
Chairman

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

2.0 APOLOGIES

- 2.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Mike Jarvie) that the apologies for the 212th meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [24/12/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (7 NOVEMBER 2024)

- 3.1 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [24/12/3.1]*

6.0 HEALTH & SAFETY

- 6.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Kevin Coutts) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [24/12/6.2]*

7.0 2023-2024 PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 7.5 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that Council adopts the Performance Report for the 2023-2024 year. [24/12/7.5]*

9.0 2025 GAME SEASON CONDITIONS

- 9.8 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Mark Sceats) that Council does not support the status quo for the policy relating to mallard and grey duck population thresholds and associated regulations, and instead agrees to increase the season length for mallard and grey duck by two weeks for the 2025 Game Bird Hunting Season to a total of six weeks (3 May 2025 – 15 June 2025) regardless of population size identified through summer monitoring programmes to create more opportunity for duck hunters. Five voted in favour and two against. Crs. Lindsay Lyons and Murray Ferris asked that their vote against this motion be recorded. [24/12/9.8]*
- 9.11 *Agreed (Alec McIver/Kevin Coutts) that Council agrees to recommendation 4.6 “That a daily bag limit of 2 shoveler and a season length the same as the mallard apply for the 2025 Game Bird Season” i.e. six weeks (3 May 2025 – 15 June 2025) [24/12/9.11]*
- 9.12 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Kevin Coutts) that Council agrees to adopt the balance of recommendations as set out on page 32 of the agenda as follows:*
- 4.2 *That the policy relating to paradise shelduck shown in Appendix 1 is noted.*
- 4.3 *That the policy relating to black swan shown in Appendix 1 is noted.*
- 4.4 *That there is a special black swan season in Management Area A1 coinciding with the same period for a proposed special pukeko season i.e. 6 February – 15 February 2026 (just over one week and two weekends).*
- 4.5 *That there is a special pukeko season 6 February – 15 February 2026 (i.e. one week and two weekends) for the Eastern Region.*
- 4.7 *That pheasant and California quail daily bag limit and season length remain the status quo.*
- 4.8 *That the season for brown quail in the Eastern Region remains closed for the 2025 season*
- 4.9 *That non-toxic alternatives to lead shot continue to be required for .410 Ga shotguns for waterfowl hunting over open water. [24/12/9.12]*

12.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

- 12.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Mike Jarvie) that Council receives the finance report approves payments for September and October totalling \$294,612.44. [24//12/12.2]*
- 12.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Mike Jarvie) that Council approves the proposed budget figures for the Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Financial Performance, and Cash flow for the 2024-2025 financial year. [24/12/12.3]*
- 12.5 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Management Report. [24//12/12.5]*
- 12.7 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the Licence Sales Report. [24/12/12.7]*

15.0 PUBLIC EXCLUDED SESSION

- 15.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Mike Jarvie) that pursuant to Section 48 (1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the public be excluded at 1.40 pm from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely, to approve the minutes of the August 2024 Special Meeting where the public were excluded. [24/12/15.1]*
- 15.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council moves out of public excluded at 1.43 pm. [24/12/15.2]*
- 15.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the public be re-admitted to the meeting at 1.43 pm. [24/12/15.3]*