

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE 216th MEETING OF THE EASTERN FISH AND
GAME COUNCIL, HELD AT ROTORUA OFFICES OF FISH & GAME NEW
ZEALAND ON THURSDAY 7 AUGUST 2025 AT 11 AM.**

Present

Crs. Mark Sceats, Alec McIver, Lindsay Lyons, Scott, Nicol, Pat Swift, Kevin Coutts, and Murray Ferris (arrived 11.36am).

In attendance

Arash Alaeinia, Kate Thompson, Matt McDougall (present item 9 only), Eastern Fish & Game; Barry Roderick.

1.0 WELCOME

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

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 Apologies were received from Cr Mike Jarvie.

2.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the apologies for the 216th meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [25/08/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (29 MAY 2025)

3.1 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Pat Swift) that the minutes of the meeting held on 29th May 2025 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [25/08/3.1]*

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 29 May 2025.

3.3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held 29 May 2025.

4.0 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR GENERAL BUSINESS

Cr Pat Swift – Forms for recording fish

Cr Mark Sceats – Okataina update

Cr Kevin Coutts – Councillor numbers

5.0 RATIFICATION OF CHANGE OF BUDGET RE-SUBMISSION TO NZC

5.1 Arash Alaeinia explained to Council that the decision made via email communications for resubmission of the amended business case for a Compliance Officer needed to be formally resolved in the minutes of this meeting. Arash confirmed Cr Scott Nicol's understanding that the resubmitted case had since been declined.

5.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Alec McIver) that Council supports the resubmission of an amended business case for a part time Compliance Officer, which originally was submitted as a full time Officer and declined by the New Zealand Fish and Game Council, on the basis that the proposal would be funded by regional reserves for a two year fixed term contract at \$84,417 for the two years. [25/08/5.2]*

6.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST REGISTER

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

7.0 HEALTH & SAFETY

7.1 Arash Alaeinia had no further update to the Health and Safety report.

7.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Scott Nicol) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [25/08/7.2]*

8.0 2025-2026 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN

8.1 Arash Alaeinia spoke to the letter received from the Minister which advised that there would be no adjustment to licence fees for the 2025-26 year. He said the result of this was that the proposed final budget for the Eastern Region was currently unknown pending the New Zealand Council providing further information. Kate Thompson updated Council on the minimum draw on reserves resulting from no licence fee increase and with the assumption that the current budget was approved. Council questioned whether they could approve the OWP/Budget at this time? Arash Alaeinia suggested Council could approve the budget as submitted, but final approval with proposed draw on reserves could not be completed until further advice was given by the New Zealand Council.

8.2 Council discussion continued covering following points;

- Marketing and R3
- Juniors not taking up outdoor activities
- Other organisations also experiencing a decline in juniors
- In-depth review needed for operating costs and OWP projects
- Use of reserves

8.3 On conclusion of discussions Arash Alaeinia suggested that he add an item to the December Council meeting agenda to commence review of the 2026-27 Operation Work Plan, earlier than the scheduled timeline of February 2026.

8.4 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Alec McIver) that Council approves the proposed Operational Work Plan and budget for the 2025-2026 year. [25/08/8.4]*

8.5 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Alec McIver) that Council delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer to approve expenditure during the year as set out in the Council approved Operational Work Plan and budget. [25/08/8.5]*

9.0 NATIONAL POLICIES TO BE ADOPTED

9.1 Arash Alaeinia advised the proposed National Policies had been reviewed by this Council and feedback provided to the New Zealand Council as detailed. He said that these had since been updated and adopted by the New Zealand Council and that the Eastern Fish and Game Council now needs to formally adopt them.

9.2 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Lindsay Lyons) that Council adopts the following National Policies as Eastern Fish and Game Council Polices:*

- *Performance Management Policy*
- *REM Policy*
- *Conflict of Interest Policy*
- *Code of Conduct Policy*
- *Prevention of Bullying and Harassment Policy*
- *Drug and Alcohol Policy*
- *Governance Code of Conduct Policy [25/08/9.2]*

10.0 Mark Sceats suggested to Council that with the next agenda item being an in-depth discussion, Council could bring the discussion on Operational Reports forward prior to Council adjourning for lunch. Council supported this suggestion.

11.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

Finance Report

11.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons queried the purchase of chemicals for reserves work and asked if this was funded by the Ballot Holder Habitat Contribution fee? Kate Thompson advised that this purchase was funded by the Reserves budget and that the Ballot Holder Habitat Contribution fee was unlikely to be utilised this year. This was due to the RMA reform limiting work in wetlands currently and contributions from external organisations. The Ballot holder contribution would be held in a reserve, and this would enable more significant works to be carried out.

11.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Lindsay Lyons) that Council receives the finance report and approves the payments for April, May, and June 2025 totalling \$509,624.30. [25/08/11.2]*

Management Report

11.3 Arash Alaeinia provided a brief update to Council, acknowledging the Regional Council's assistance with clearance of fallen trees held up in the Ngongotaha fish trap. Cr Scott Nicol queried whether the Online Angler Diary was undertaken by all regions as he thought it was a great way of obtaining data from anglers, more specifically would be great to have an app for this. Kate Thompson advised that currently the data is collected through Survey Monkey, and she was not sure whether other regions were doing the same but would pass his comments on to the fisheries team.

11.4 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council receives the management report. [25/08/11.4]*

Licence Sales Report

11.5 A brief discussion occurred around licence sales and Eastern's positive results this year being more in line with the 2022/23 Season. Kate Thompson advised that nationally the Fish licence sales were up for the North Island and down for the South Island noting that last season the North Island experienced some very poor weather at the outset whereas this season the South Island had seen some significant weather events. Cr Alec McIver was aware of hunters coming from other regions for the extended Eastern season and questioned whether this contributed to Eastern's increase in Game Bird licence sales.

11.6 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Scott Nicol) that Council receives the licence sales report. [25/08/11.6]*

12.0 Council adjourned the meeting at 11.58am for lunch.

13.0 EASTERN GAME BIRD REGULATION SETTING

13.1 Arash Alaeinia informed Council that this paper was in response to discussion at previous Council meetings to bring forward the Game Bird Regulation setting processes. Ultimately the resolutions at the end are to reaffirm the current threshold policy or consider a different approach to setting Game Bird Regulations. Matt McDougall was present to provide guidance and answer questions.

13.2 The discussion was significant and included the following:

- Hunter Survey: Ongoing, but opening weekend saw 6th lowest harvest in 35 years.
- Population Estimation: Uses Lincoln-Petersen/mark-recapture via banding. Marble example provided.
- Key Factors: Previous population size, harvest numbers, winter rainfall/temperature.
- Longer Season Impact: Hens face more stress, poorer feeding, lower survival and fewer/smaller eggs.

- Habitat Loss (Bay of Plenty): Land use change, reduced ephemeral water; ducks forced into drains. Reserves provide good nesting habitat, but moved to drains for food.
- South Island Contrast: Longer seasons less harmful due to lower hunter density and better nesting habitat; botulism is a bigger threat in the North Island.
- Eastern Region: High hunter density, shrinking habitat and breeding areas.
- BOP vs Gisborne: Distinct regions; Gisborne has fewer ducks but also fewer hunters. Banding sites are limited and show duck movement between sites.
- Extra Two-Week Season impact on population: Depends on breeding success; 1.9 ducklings needed per hen to offset losses—last year averaged only 0.8.
- Pheasants: Discussion on population monitoring and forest management effects.
- Sensitive Species: Shoveler, grey duck, paradise shelduck discussed.
- Hunter Effort vs Harvest: Fewer hunting hours (down 8800 per year since 1993) linked to reduced harvest (down 7300 birds per year).
- Population Decline: Greylards dropping by 7000–7500 per year over 28 years; land use change is a major factor.
- Uncertainty: Weather variability makes predictions risky - mistakes can impact future seasons.
- Season History: Pre-1980 season was only two weeks, extended for crop damage control.
- Methodology Peer Review suggested: Phil Arnold (USA) reviewed and endorsed; Auckland-Waikato also using it, other FG regions not using Eastern's methods.
- Aerial Surveys: Ineffective in mid to upper North Island due to terrain and inability to get low to ground.
- Pond Feeding: Draws local populations in, suggested review current feeding levels.

13.3 Agreed (Mark Sceats/Kevin Coutts) resolutions b,c,e,g as follows:

- b. To agree to redefine what hunter opportunity means to this Council at the October 2025 meeting.**
- c. To decide if the Councils definition of hunter opportunity is policy or a guideline at the October 2025 meeting.**
- e. To review, alternative methods of setting mallard and grey duck regulations at the October 2025 meeting.**
- g. To list alternative mallard and grey duck regulations for consideration at the October 2025 meeting. [Motion was lost 3 in favour, 4 against]**

13.4 Cr Murray Ferris highlighted that this process had been reviewed on multiple occasions during his time on Council. It was acknowledged that previous Councils were unable to identify a more effective alternative. He said that attempting to revise it may result in unnecessary use of time and resources, ultimately leading back to the current approach.

13.5 Cr Kevin Coutts queried if Council reaffirmed the use of the threshold model would that mean the extra two weeks would go? Matt McDouagll advised no, it is the regulations that sit under each threshold that is the 6 weeks versus the 4 weeks, we have three levels of constraint under the threshold policy.

13.6 Agreed (Scott Nicol/Alec McIver) resolutions b,c,d,f as follows:

- b. To agree to redefine what hunter opportunity means to this Council at the October 2025 meeting.**
- c. To decide if the Councils definition of hunter opportunity is policy or a guideline at the October 2025 meeting.**

d. To reaffirm the use of a threshold model to set mallard and grey duck harvest regulations.

f. To reaffirm that the policy that applies to mallard and grey duck regulations under the respective current thresholds still applies. [25/08/13.6] Crs. Mark Sceats and Kevin Coutts wished to be recorded as opposing the motion.

14.0 FISH AND GAME REFORM CONSULTATION

14.1 Cr Mark Sceats suggested Council focus on important points today and advised that it would be appropriate to have a special meeting to provide a more specific and detailed submission to the proposed bill once it was released.

14.2 Licence collection and revenue distribution

- Council concerned about how the New Zealand Council propose to determine allocation of funding.
- Individual Regions have varying requirements for management of the resource. Eg some resources attract a high level of use but require little management effort and some are lower use but require more intense management.

14.3 National Policy framework

- While national coordination of policy is sensible, it is important to ensure that region-specific needs are also considered in policy development. E.g. how we monitor waterfowl

14.4 Advocacy and Court Action

- Clarification is needed regarding the expected level of Ministerial involvement in decisions that may affect Fish & Game's advocacy efforts and its autonomy.
- Concern over the continued protection and integrity of existing Water Conservation Orders.
- A fundamental role of Fish & Game is to question and challenge government actions when they conflict with its core values.
- Concern that national-level decisions may override local initiatives and perspectives.
- The advocacy effectiveness of Fish & Game may be impacted by the political leanings of the government in power.
- There is concern about the influence the sectors such as farming may have on government policy, especially when it comes to freshwater management and conservation efforts.

14.5 Governance Improvements

- A formal set of qualifications and experience should be defined to guide Ministerial appointments.
- Concern that paid Ministerial appointments may create inequities within governance structures.
- The cause for making Ministerial appointments needs clarification.
- Appointees should ideally fill knowledge or experience gaps that are not currently met within the council.
- Concern about the requirement that the Chair also serve as the NZC (National Council) representative as these are two distinct roles with different responsibilities and time commitments.
- NZC representatives are currently appointed for a national perspective and are not intended to represent regional interests.
- If someone is elected Chair, they should have the choice to either take on the NZC role or not, rather than being automatic or expected.

- Current governance allows NZC representatives to be removed relatively easily, consideration should be given to increasing the stability or tenure of this role.
- 14.6 **Enhanced transparency**
- Conducting thirteen separate audits annually incurs significant costs, as the current structure—where each Council operates as an independent entity—necessitates an audit of each Council.
- 14.7 **Specialist support**
- Currently, sharing of specialist expertise across regions is limited.
 - It is important not to replicate the DOC model, where regional specialists are removed from Regions and placed in a Head Office environment. E.g. Some of our staff coordinate national functions but also contribute significantly to a variety of regional functions.
 - Removing expertise from the region risks creating an "ivory tower" structure with less operational presence on the ground.
 - National should engage specialists from Regions to provide support as needed, on a cost recovery basis.
- 14.8 **Staffing and NZC resources.**
- Discussion around significant increase in staffing in NZC office over recent years.
 - Opportunity to utilise regional expertise.
- 14.9 **Local decision making retained** – agree, no further comment.
- 14.10 **Additional comments:**
- Clarification required on the proposed change to voting in elections where it is stated that individuals who have held a Season Licence in the three years leading up to the election are eligible to vote. Does this mean holders must have maintained a Season Licence consecutively for three years, or does it include anyone who held a Season Licence at any time during those three years?
 - Concern regarding potential to prohibit the transfer of sports fish to locations where they already exist. Fish & Game are currently required to work collaboratively with iwi to achieve better outcomes through negotiation.
 - The phrase “manage, maintain and enhance... subject to ensuring aviation safety, and conservation of isolated populations of threatened native fish” is problematic. The word “ensure” implies a guarantee which is not always possible. A better wording might be “having regard to” these factors.
- 14.11 On conclusion of the discussion Cr Mark Sceats suggested that further feedback could be emailed to Arash Alaeinia to summarise pending Council's special meeting.

15.0 LIAISON OFFICERS REPORTS

15.1 *Report from Bay of Plenty Conservation Board*

No Report

15.2 *Report from Department of Conservation*

No Report from DOC, however Arash Alaeinia had met with the DOC Taupo team recently and briefed Council on DOC's new licensing system which meant all sales would now be online. He had also had a conversation about issues with the composting toilet at Wairua hut, on Lake Tarawera. Measures to reduce use and direct people to the DOC toilets had been unsuccessful and its overuse is yet to be resolved.

15.3 *Report from New Zealand Council*

Cr Mark Sceats advised that a summary had been distributed to Council and that he had nothing further to add.

16.0 GENERAL BUSINESS

16.1 *Forms for recording fish*

Cr Pat Swift queried whether our trout fishing survey forms needed to be updated for the introduction and increased use of soft baits. He felt that soft baits are a product you are using, rather than a technique as you can use them in multiple methods. He also wondered whether it might be appropriate to record the use of electric and GPS motors for future statistical use from an environmental perspective. Arash Alaeinia suggested that he would ask Matt Osborne to give him a call to discuss further. Cr Murray Ferris highlighted the level of information currently required on surveys and the difficulties encountered when interviewing multiple people using multiple methods.

16.2 *Lake Okataina update*

Cr Mark Sceats requested the latest update on Lake Okataina access. Arash Alaeinia advised that the CAN order was still in place with no end date at this time. He said the process was working well although numbers of anglers visiting the lake were down due to the increased requirements. Council further discussed the incursion on the Waikato River, MPI's measures to try to contain, and issues for the power generators on the river.

16.3 *Councillor numbers*

Cr Kevin Coutts queried Council's position regarding replacing Cr Mike Jarvie following his resignation from Council. Arash Alaeinia read excerpts from the Conservation Act and Councillor Guide for this situation and Council briefly discussed options. Cr Mark Sceats suggested this item be placed on the next meeting agenda at which time Cr Mike Jarvie's resignation will have been officially confirmed.

17.0 PUBLIC EXCLUDED SESSION

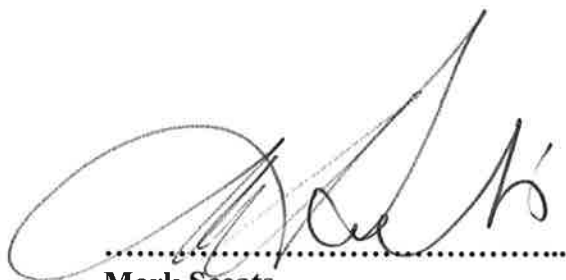
17.1 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Scott Nicol) that pursuant to Section 48 (1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, the public be excluded at 3.06pm from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely to discuss Council and the CE's Performance review. [25/08/17.1]*

17.2 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that Council moves out of public excluded at 3.15 pm. [25/08/17.2]*

17.3 *Agreed (Mark Sceats/Murray Ferris) that the public be readmitted to the meeting at 3.16 pm. [25/08/17.3]*

18.0 MEETING CLOSED

18.1 Cr Mark Sceats closed the meeting 3.16 pm.



Mark Sceats
Chairman

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

2.0 APOLOGIES

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