

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE 219th MEETING OF THE EASTERN FISH AND
GAME COUNCIL, HELD AT ROTORUA OFFICES OF FISH & GAME NEW
ZEALAND ON THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2026 AT 11 AM.**

Present

Crs. Lindsay Lyons, Alec McIver, Pat Swift, Kevin Coutts, Scott Nicol, Murray Ferris, and Mark Sceats (online via teams)

In attendance

Arash Alaeinia, Kate Thompson, Eben Herbert, Matt McDougall (for General business) Eastern Fish & Game; Barry Roderick and Bernie McDowell.

1.0 WELCOME

1.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons opened the meeting at 11.00am welcoming all including members of public Bernie McDowell and Barry Roderick.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 There were no apologies for the 219th meeting of the Eastern Fish & Game Council, however Cr Murray Ferris informed Council that he would need to leave early due to the significant delays in returning to Gisborne.

2.2 *Agreed (Lindsay Lyons/Kevin Coutts) that the apologies for the 219th meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [26/02/2.2]*

3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (11 DECEMBER 2025)

3.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2025 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [26/02/3.1]*

3.2 IDENTIFICATION OF RESOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSION IN COUNCIL POLICY

3.3 There were no items for inclusion in Council Policy.

3.4 MATTERS ARISING

3.4.1 Cr Kevin Coutts wished to raise that a discussion he had had with Matt McDougall during the meeting was not sufficiently reflected in the minutes. Cr Lindsay Lyons clarified that the minutes were not intended to be a verbatim record of discussions, but rather an overview. Arash Alaeinia suggested that the recording could be reviewed and the minutes updated if necessary. Kevin advised that this was not necessary but wanted to formally note his concern.

3.4.2 Cr Lindsay Lyons asked whether the communication had been sent to the New Zealand Council noting Council's concerns about the changes to the family licence. Arash Alaeinia confirmed that this had been actioned.

4.0 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR GENERAL BUSINESS

Cr Mark Sceats - Waikaremoana hut

Cr Alec McIver - Sale of hunting rights

Cr Lindsay Lyons - Okareka/Tarawera ramp closures

Bernie McDowell - Gamebird numbers

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.

- advised caution noting that the high catch rate was enjoyed by anglers, and the Lake Rotorua fishery supported the Lake Rotoiti fishery through the Oahu Channel.
- 8.3 Matt advised that, to date, only two responses had been received following advertising of the Anglers Notice process to the community. Neither response related to the Anglers Notice, both concerned licensing matters.
- 8.4 Cr Lindsay Lyons expressed thanks to Barry Roderick for his submission.
- 8.5 ***Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council agreed to the consultation process and time frame for considering changes to the 2026-2027 Anglers Notice. [26/02/8.5]***
- 8.6 ***Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council did not identify any additional issues for the 2026-2027 Anglers Notice and supports the dissemination to clubs and public the four submissions put forward for the 2026-2027 Anglers Notice at today's meeting. [26/02/8.6]***
- 9.0 GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE 2026-2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN**
- 9.1 Arash Alaeinia advised that full consultation with staff had not yet occurred due to significant workflows in January combined with annual leave. Moving forward, he suggested commencing the process in October of the prior year. Arash noted that last year the number of priorities had been reduced from five to four. Given that many objectives are business as usual and stipulated under the Conservation Act, he proposed reducing the number again to three core priorities.
The proposed priorities for Council consideration were:
- 1 Licence numbers and Revenue
 - 2 Access
 - 3 Increasing Opportunities for Fishers & Hunters
- Arash highlighted a very tight turnaround before the next meeting at which the draft budget and Operational Work Plan (OWP) would be presented to Council on 12 March for submission to the New Zealand Council by 14 March 2026. He added that Council needed to be aware that, if it wished to introduce new work programmes, it would need to consider what could be removed, given the limited time and resources available.
- 9.2 Cr Mark Sceats noted that the Zero-Based Budgeting approach is to be carried through for inclusion in the new Fish & Game Bill.
- 9.3 Cr Scott Nicol requested that “natural environment” be incorporated within the description for Priority 2 - Access, noting that the organisation not only supports the habitat of species within the river systems, for example, but also the protection of river systems more generally.
- 9.4 ***Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council reviewed its priorities and programmes for the 2025-2026 year and did not identify any changes it wished to see incorporated into its Draft Operational Work Plan for the 2026/2027 year. [26/02/9.4]***
- 10.0 FISH AND GAME REFORM DISCUSSION**
- 10.1 As the meeting was ahead of schedule the Chair suggested Council advanced item 13 “Fish & Game Reform Discussion” to fill 30-minute slot prior to breaking for lunch.
- 10.2 Arash Alaeinia distributed a draft summary of the submission points for the Eastern’s Council’s submission to the Fish & Game Reform. He noted the NZC’s “Preliminary Position” and “Rationale” was recorded in the corresponding columns, with Eastern Council’s comments to date outline below. He advised that Eastern’s feedback to date had been provided in a letter to the Minister.
- 10.3 Eben Herbert suggested that Council take the time to review the document. He requested that any further feedback be directed to the Chair for collation to avoid duplication. Eben also offered to speak directly to Councillors who needed further information or wished to discussed specific points.

14.0 R3 REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION – PILOT PROGRAMME

- 14.1 Arash Alaeinia felt that it is positive that attention is being given to R3 but felt that it would have been beneficial for the paper to go to the regions first so a more robust and practical plan could be developed. Once strengthened, it could then be submitted to Council for consideration.
- 14.2 Council’s discussion included questions about whether the Women and Junior Outreach programmes should be broadened to include initiatives aimed at encouraging men to participate in the sport. There were also queries regarding the cost of the “ReWild” campaign and whether its effectiveness is measurable.
- 14.3 Cr Lindsay Lyons asked whether the funds previously allocated to the “Fish for Gold” promotions could instead be directed toward R3 initiatives? Kate Thompson provided background on the establishment of the reserve, and Arash Alaeinia agreed that R3 initiatives would be consistent with the original purpose of the fund. Council expressed support for directing these funds to R3 initiatives and requested that management investigate this further.
- 14.4 Cr Pat Swift asked about progress on the development of an access app? Arash Alaeinia advised that NZC is exploring opportunities for a single-source management tool that would incorporate the website, CRM, licensing system, and access information. In the interim, Eastern has signed on to the access mapping system recently developed by the Auckland/Waikato Region.
- 14.5 Arash Alaeinia informed Council of the opportunity for one of our staff to attend an R3 workshop hosted by Otago Fish and Game, which was to be presented by a leading R3 expert from the United States.
- 14.6 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council supports the principle and acknowledges that operationally Eastern is already involved and participates. That NZC develops a more robust marketing and R3 plan that is both measurable and practical in consultation with the regions and specialist staff to help increase sales and revenue and requested that updates be provided on the measured results. [26/02/14.6]***

15.0 OPERATIONAL REPORTS

Finance Report

- 15.1 Cr Lindsay Lyons queried the audit costs of \$11,000, noting that many regions were paying more than \$15,000. Arash advised that some South Island regions were disputing the costs, as their auditor had charged each region individually for a particular process, rather than applying a single organisation charge. Kate Thompson added that some regions do not prepare their own financial statements which resulted in additional accountancy costs. Arash noted the audit costs nationally were significant and had been identified as an area where savings could be made. However, he advised little could be done while regions remained individual legal entities.
- 15.2 *Agreed (Alec McIver/Kevin Coutts) that the payments for November and December 2025 totalling \$507,768.70 be approved. [26/02/15.2]***

Bernie spoke to Council on behalf of hunters he knows questioning the rationale for reducing the Game Bird season back to four weeks this season, he felt that this was counterintuitive to Council's objective of increasing participation and licence sales.

Summary questions and answers:

- Q1 Bernie McDowell - How do we know what the population is, many birds recovered in the location Bernie hunts have been banded outside of this region?
- A1 Matt McDougall - 87% of Eastern banded birds are recovered within 50 kilometres of where they were banded and over 90% within the Eastern region. We do know that the birds move around, there is a track of birds between the Waikato and Kaituna/Coastal BOP however the number of birds that go out of the region is surprisingly small. We also assume that the number of birds that come in are offset by the number of birds that go out.
- Q2 Bernie McDowell - How do we always average virtually the same number of birds per season even though you say one year is a poor breeding season and the next is good.
- A2 Matt McDougall - We have banded birds in this region since 1998, since then the population has shown a steady decline more so in the last 10 years. This is consistent with land use changes with conversions to dairy, and kiwifruit. A lot of the small ephemeral wetlands are gone, and this really impacts the breeding season.
- Q3 Kevin Coutts - You mentioned that you won't know the results of last season's extended season until the end of the 2026 season. This year, we're not going to have a drought, and we appear to have had a decent breeding season, wouldn't it have been worth, with these favourable conditions, running with the extra two weeks for another season so you would know the impact of it?
- A3 Matt McDougall - We will never know the impact as we do not have a control. Council has two responsibilities the first is to manage the population on behalf of the Crown, the second is to ensure the harvest is sustainable. Our research shows that the population is declining. There are areas with large numbers of ducks from the Tarawera River to Orini, but we are managing 33,000 square kilometers. For example Reporoa, the East Coast, and Taupo numbers are low in comparison to BoP. It's these small areas with lots of ducks that support the rest of the region. Over 90% of original wetlands in the BoP have been drained, most of the breeding occurs in the drains, a lot of the little wetlands are not producing.
- Q4 Bernie McDowell - Have we considered surveying the impact of Weka's on ducklings?
- A4 Matt McDougall - No, as Weka are protected, however Pukeko also have significant impact on duckling survival. A special Pukeko season is underway now but unfortunately hunters do not always take up this opportunity.
- Q5 Cr Kevin Coutts - Were hunters at Orini and Awaiti reserves surveyed?
- A5 Matt McDougall - The annual Game Bird hunter survey randomly surveys 840 hunters from across the region. A high percentage (over 40%) of those surveyed last year shot zero or very few birds. He said that some hunters may be in a privileged position of being able to take a good number of birds due to their hunting location, however if hunters continue to shoot zero or very few birds he noted that this will also impact licence sales and participation.
- Q6 Cr Kevin Coutts - Does this reflect hunter skill more so than birds available.
- A6 Matt McDougall - Hunter skill not assessed.
- Q7 Cr Lindsay Lyons - Auckland Waikato region no longer allow feeding out, this seems to draw birds in?

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

- 2.0 APOLOGIES**
2.2 *Agreed (Lindsay Lyons/Kevin Coutts) that the apologies for the 219th meeting of the Eastern Region Fish and Game Council be sustained. [26/02/2.2]*
- 3.0 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (11 DECEMBER 2025)**
3.1 *Agreed (Murray Ferris/Alec McIver) that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2025 be confirmed as a true and correct record. [26/02/3.1]*
- 6.0 HEALTH & SAFETY**
6.2 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Scott Nicol) that Council receives the Health and Safety report. [26/02/6.2]*
- 7.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDIT**
7.5 *Agreed (Alec McIver/Scott Nicol) that Council acknowledges receipt of the Health and Safety Audit and receives an update on progress of implementation at successive Council meetings. [26/02/7.5]*
- 8.0 ANGLERS NOTICE REVIEW**
8.5 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council agreed to the consultation process and time frame for considering changes to the 2026 -2027 Anglers Notice. [26/02/8.5]*
8.6 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council did not identify any additional issues for the 2026-2027 Anglers Notice and supports the dissemination to clubs and public the four submissions put forward for the 2026-2027 Anglers Notice at today's meeting. [26/02/8.6]*
- 9.0 GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE 2026-2027 OPERATIONAL WORK PLAN**
9.4 *Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council reviewed its priorities and programmes for the 2025-2026 year and did not identify any changes it wished to see incorporated into its Draft Operational Work Plan for the 2026/2027 year. [26/02/9.4]*
- 12.0 DRAFT NZ CROP DEPREDATION POLICY**
12.2 *Agreed (Kevin Coutts/Murray Ferris) that Council requests that NZC engage and receive input from specialist staff around the Country to create a practical and workable policy and operational guidelines that meet the legislative requirement and is able to be used and implemented nationally. [26/02/12.2]*
- 13.0 STATISTICAL CONSIDERATION FOR GAME BIRD MONITORING AT A NATIONAL LEVEL – PROTEUS REPORT**
13.3 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council supports the findings of the Proteus Report and its recommendations and directs the Manager to write to the NZC expressing disappointment at the lack of engagement with regional staff prior to commissioning work of this nature, particularly given the cost involved, to ensure the work had not already been undertaken. Cr Mark Sceats abstained [26/02/13.3]*
- 14.0 R3 REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION – PILOT PROGRAMME**
14.6 *Agreed (Scott Nicol/Murray Ferris) that Council supports the principle and acknowledges that operationally Eastern is already involved and participates. That NZC develops a more robust marketing and R3 plan that is both measurable and practical in consultation with the regions and specialist staff to help increase sales and revenue and requested that updates be provided on the measured results. [26/02/14.6]*
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