NELSON MARLBOROUGH
FISH & GAME

ANNUAL FISHERIES REPORT 2024-25

TITLE PAGE

SUMMARY OF THE SEASON

Nau mai, welcome to the 2024-25 Annual Fisheries Report for the Nelson Marlborough Fish & Game region.

After a remarkably stable period the season before, this year will be characterised by the huge June and July floods that impacted many residents.

What has been outstanding is the work that individuals, agencies and organisations have undertaken to help affected landowners. Fish & Game and members of the Nelson Trout Fishing Club did some sterling work, helping on a dozen properties, totaling over 600 volunteer hours. Mostly, the work involved clearing flood debris from fences and other flood-related rubbish; however, the positive impact on the landowners we helped was apparent.

As far as trout goes, the effect of these floods is too early to know, but likely to be significant. It may seem counterintuitive to report on the state of the fisheries, considering what has happened since; however, understanding how our fisheries were in stable times before the floods is essential so that we can comprehend their impact, through the following years monitoring work.

We had another busy year of dives, completing 18 rivers and 33 individual sites. Anglers take an interest in this work because it provides valuable data on fish populations, which is directly relevant to their fishing. It remains an important tool for not only monitoring fish numbers but also assessing the health of our rivers and meeting our statutory responsibilities under Section 26Q of the Conservation Act. This information is also very useful when collaborating with agencies and catchment groups.

We had a big year on the R3 (Recruitment, Retention & Reactivation) front and ran a host of excellent educational workshops with help from skilled and passionate people.

We have had a busy year working on various positive community and environmental projects, such as maintaining trap lines in the Baton Valley and Rabbit Island, organising farm clean-up days, controlling weeds, and building over 200 traps for a local Motueka catchment group - an outstanding effort by the Nelson Trout Fishing Club.

It is vital that anglers and hunters are seen to participate in worthwhile causes like these; many local fishing and hunting groups (such as NZDA) are doing excellent work in the environmental field, and we must ensure our stories are shared with those outside our organisations.

Our valued local fishing clubs continue to progress well, offering numerous opportunities for learning, organised day or multi-day trips to favourite waterways, and providing an excellent platform for socialising.

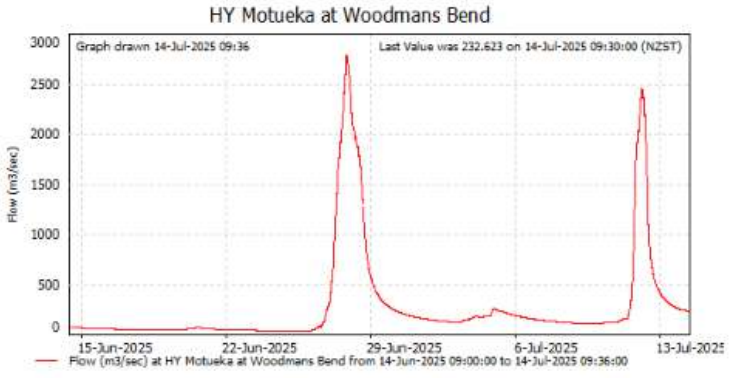
Finally, thanks again to our hard-working Fish & Game Councillors, Rangers and other volunteers who are striving for the best outcomes for our fishing and hunting resources and our organisation.

Ngā manaakitanga, your Fish & Game team.

THE FLOODS

The big talking point came at the end of the season. The stable 18 or so months the region had experienced came to an end on June 29 when consistent and heavy rain over a 48 hour period culminated in a record flood for the Motueka River. This atmospheric river, which was fuelled by warmer sub-tropical air, normally spells trouble for certain areas such as Golden Bay, Riwaka and the Mt Richmond Ranges. This event was no exception and the 200+ mm of rainfall hammered the Upper Motueka/Upper Waimea catchments, bringing record high flows for the mainstem Motueka. The river peaked at around 2,900 cumecs - the largest flood since 1877 at least, causing devastation to land and property along the way, with the areas of Motupiko, Tapawera, Wai-iti, and the main-stem Motueka hardest hit.

It was big news at the time, and as people started the recovery process, the region was dealt another blow two weeks later. Another rain event, another monster flood - this time possibly worse as saturated soils couldn't cope, the runoff was fast, and rivers rose quickly. Saturated hillsides caused more instances of mid-slope failure, and silt and debris from the surrounding hills covered flat areas.

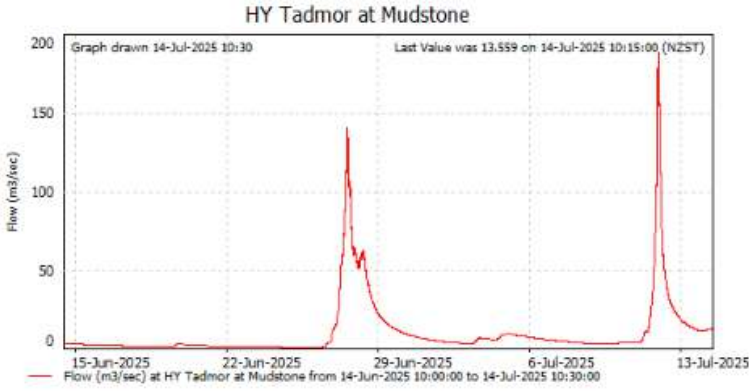


^ A double blow: 2900 cu and 2600cu floods within two weeks

As the region came to grips with the situation and tried to grasp the huge clean-up ahead, the community and other agencies rallied and immediately started helping affected farmers and landowners. Though the clean-up will be long for some people, good progress has been made, although it is clear the flood has taken it's toll on people and the environment.

The second flood in the Motupiko was worse, and tore productive land away, though there was less silt and less damage to structures. The Riuwaka experienced two huge floods in the vicinity of 170cu, and the people in low-lying areas were surrounded by water. Landslides during the second event in the hills around Riuwaka/Marahau brought significant damage.

The Wangapeka/Baton largely escaped the first flood, but the Wangapeka had the worst event in more than a decade during the second event, as land gave way in areas like the Dart. The Tadmor had a staggering amount of water running down it for the small nature of the stream.



There were, of course, many areas unaffected by the floods: many tributaries of the Buller were less impacted, as was the Maruia area and parts of Marlborough, which, this time, received lighter damage than they had in recent years.

Staff will have a busy season ahead, monitoring the impact of these floods, particularly focusing on the Motueka River and its tributaries.

It has been incredible to see the public get behind our farmers, including the Nelson Trout Fishing Club and Fish & Game - you can read more about this on page 26.

^ The Motueka River as it rose during the first flood - it peaked peaked later that night Photo: Jacob Lucas

SPECIES MONITORING

A significant proportion of our fieldwork program is directed towards species monitoring. The primary goal is monitoring the trout population and habitat health, which aligns with our National Fish & Game Organisational Strategy key objective of 'Healthy Species, Habitats, and Ecosystems'. Around 20 rivers per annum are drift-dived in this region along with winter spawning foot counts and electric fishing monitoring.

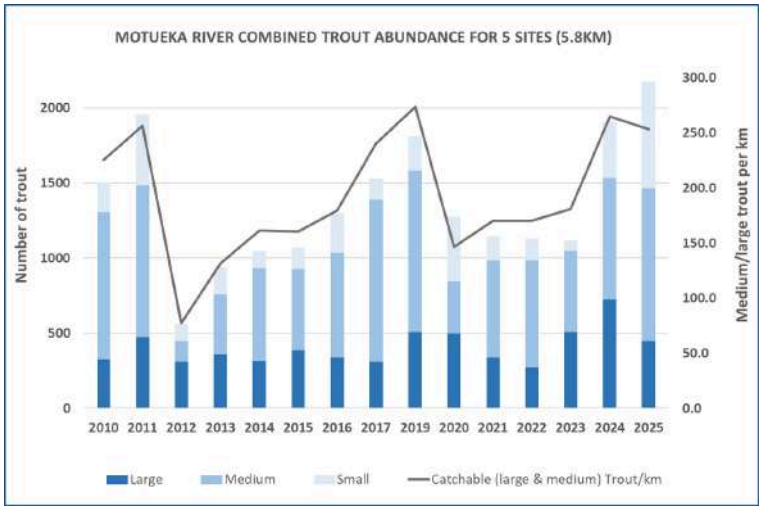
MOTUEKA CATCHMENT

Before the floods, the Motueka River trout fishery was looking outstanding after experiencing a remarkably stable 18 months or so. Angler feedback from the season was favourable, of note the high population of small-medium fish coming through, where large schools could often be seen at the tail outs of pools.

Anglers enjoyed a stable early winter period, making the most of the extended open area - a new regulation that permitted all-year fishing up to the Woodstock Bridge. All tributaries were firing, including the Wangapeka (which is a key driver of the Motueka), and Motupiko, which had partially recovered from some tough years due to successive 50 year flood events.

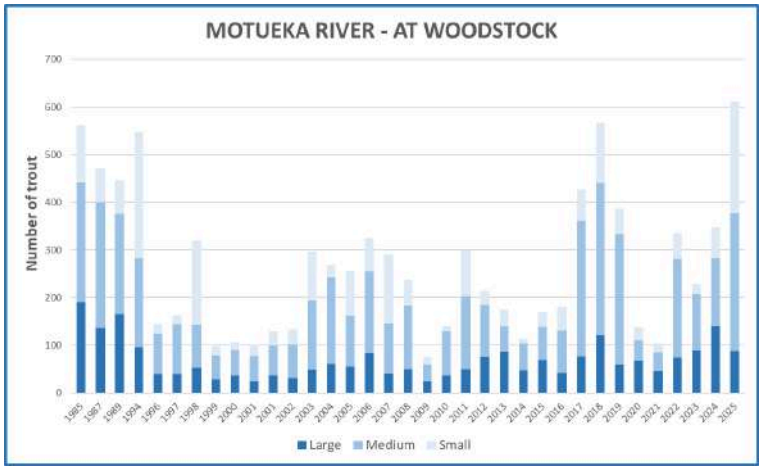
During the season the main-stem Motueka was dived, along with the Motupiko, Wangapeka and Upper Motueka - all providing a good snapshot of how the catchment fishery was looking.

The main-stem Motueka was dived at five sites in mid February, from near the Baton confluence down to the 'big white bluff'. As you can see by the graph, the fishery was in great shape, and showed an increase in overall fish numbers, with the highest number of trout in the entire monitoring period shown by the graph, though it held fewer large fish. All told, 451 large, 1018 medium and 702 small fish were counted over the 5.8kms, equating to 250 large/medium fish per kilometre.



^ *The 'Mot' had high numbers of fish this year, particularly in the medium and small cohorts.*

At the Woodstock drift dive site, which has the longest drift dive record dating back to 1985, results yielded similar fish composition to the combined total (shown in the graph above), with medium and small fish found in high numbers, rivalling the last peak seen during 2017-2019, and again in the late 1980's/early 1990's - see graph below. This year represents an exceptional peak in trout abundance across all size cohorts, the highest recorded in the entire 40-year dataset spanning from 1985 to 2025.



^ *Motueka River at Woodstock - the Motueka's longest dive site. Note: Woodstock is made up of part of the MacLeans and Dove sites.*

See Appendix for results of the five other Motueka drift dive sites. Staff commented that the 2025-26 season would have been one of the best in years, until the floods occurred, of course.

^ *Fish aplenty in the Motueka during the season. Photo: Don Clementson*

However, it has been excellent to hear of fish being caught in the main Motueka post-floods, with some anglers experiencing decent winter fishing (even rivalling previous years), noting the fish were found in reasonable condition, and hatches of mayflies have been occurring in the months that followed.

The fact that the Motueka held an abundance of small/medium fish should mean that the Motueka is in good standing for the recovery years that follow. Trout are incredibly resilient and have adapted to flood events and have recovered from flood events of this magnitude in the past. Added to this, the Motueka River has a large, diverse catchment, with fish residing and spawning in many waterways. Many larger fish would have been on spawning duties at the time of these floods, and while many spawning tributaries were badly affected (severely limiting trout recruitment this year), we expect there to be enough fish to still keep anglers happy this summer. On the plus side, overall fish size should increase due to less competition for food.

^ *Sophie Reed with a lower Motueka trout, caught after the floods. Photo: Don Clementson*

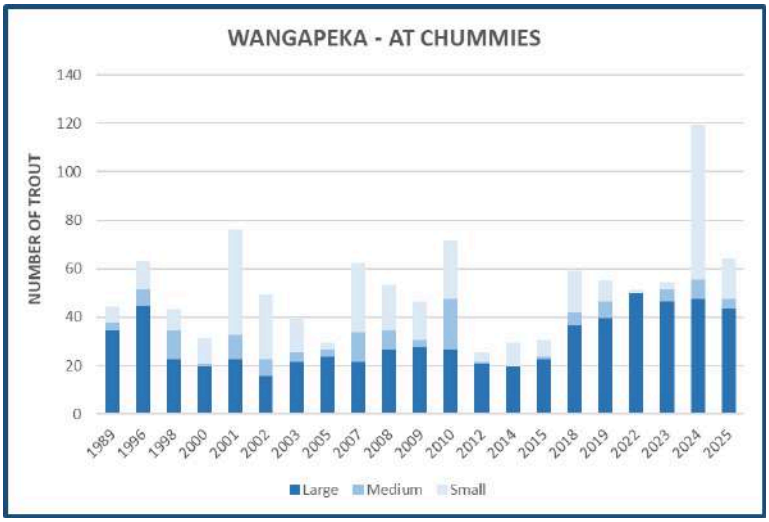
WANGAPEKA RIVER

The Wangapeka was another standout performer, as it has been over the past number of years. Year on year stable flow conditions has seen trout in this river thrive, along with the main-stem Motueka.

The Wangapeka was dived on 10 February at a time when the river was experiencing very low, warm flows. Some of the fish at the upper Chummies Creek site were showing signs of being caught, with line marks evident, and two dead fish were seen during the dive - possibly due to poor handling.

> *Jacob Lucas with a Wangapeka fish from 2025*

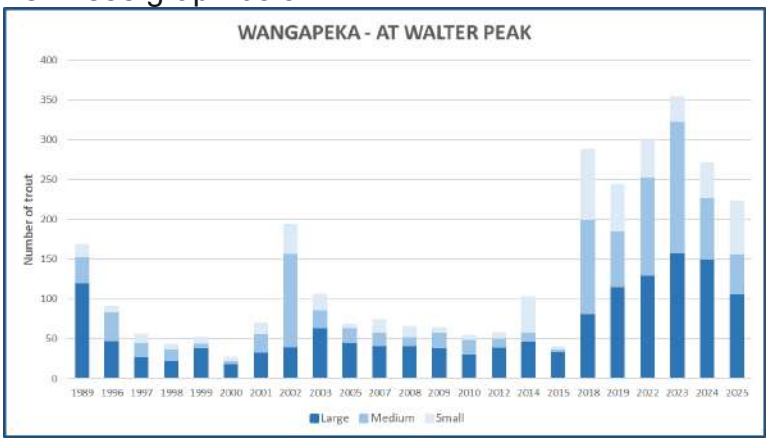
A total of 44 large fish were seen in the dive along with 4 mediums and 16 smalls - a healthy but typical number since 2018 - see graph below.



^ *Wangapeka drift dive site - at Chummies Creek*

The lower site at Walter Peak had been prolific in recent years, recording its highest total of 324 medium & large fish over the 1km site - this is more than what is found at most dive sites in the main-stem Motueka. Staff consider the Wangapeka to be the 'lifeblood' of the Water Conservation Order protected Motueka brown trout fishery.

While trout numbers were lower in 2025 compared to the previous five dives, the population in this reach is still exceptional with 107 large and 50 medium sized fish - see graph below.



^ *Wangapeka at Walter Peak. This site comprises of 1km of water above the bridge near the Motueka confluence.*

While the Wangapeka largely escaped the first June 29 flood, a weather bomb in the Sherry area added to already saturated soils, saw the Dart River blow out, causing the most significant flood in the lower Wangapeka for a decade at least.

However, we expect there to still be some reasonable fishing in this river, owing to the already high population of fish, and the fact that the upper part of the river (above the Dart) was likely less impacted due to most of it stemming from mature native forest catchment.

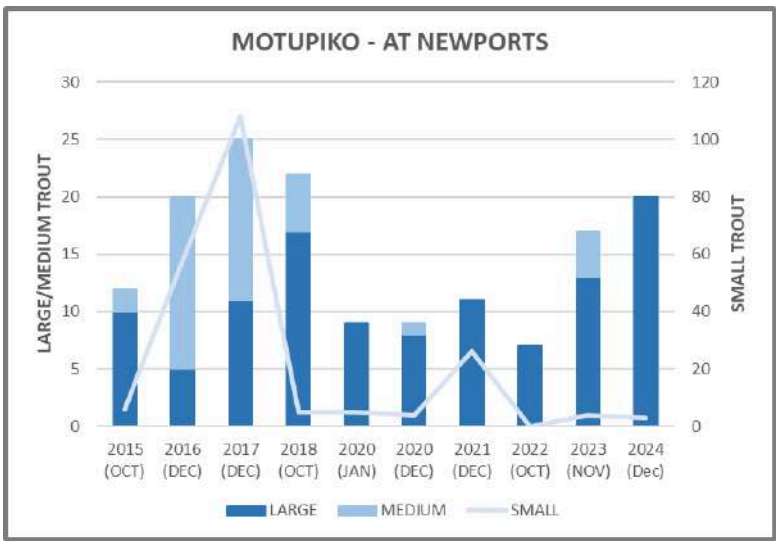
^ *Shona Kelly with a lower Wangapeka brown trout.*

MOTUPIKO

The Motupiko trout fishery above Korere bounced back from some poor years in 2021 & 2022 after a period of stability in the Motueka catchment.

The Motupiko was dived on 10 December 2024 with the flow at 430 litres/second at Christies. The river was looking healthy in this reach, with trout found mostly in pools with overhead willow cover.

A total of 20 large fish were counted on the 1km dive - the highest count since 2015 (see graph).



^ *Motupiko at Newports*

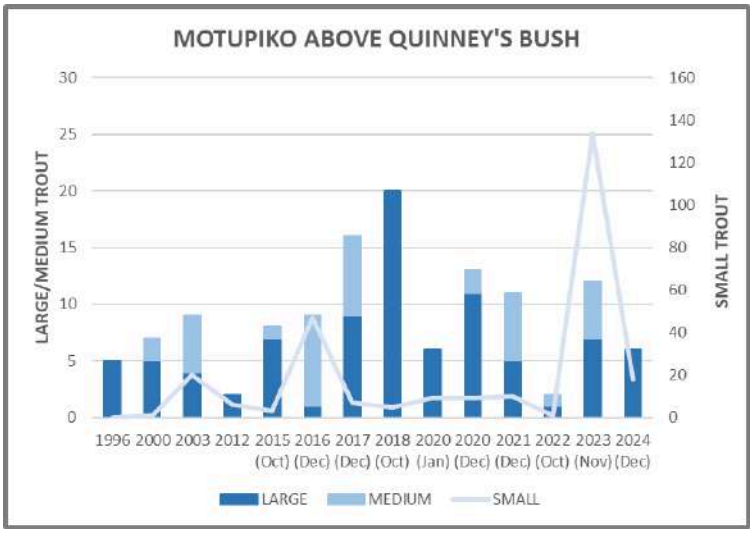
Three small fish were also observed, along with two long-finned eels, and dwarf galaxiid fry in backwaters and willow pockets.

The Motupiko is one of the key spawning tributaries for the Motueka catchment, so there is generally a lot of fish movement over winter as fish move into this area for spawning, and help repopulate the river as some fish choose to remain, post-spawning.

The highly modified lower site at Quinney's Bush had another reasonably poor result, and highlights how important stable channel morphology with good holding water is for supporting trout fisheries.

At this site, 6 large and 18 small trout were observed over the ~2km site. Previously seen holding water had since filled in with gravel, and the river was noticeably warmer than the upper Newport's site. Four of the large fish were associated with deep rock groyne pools.

Similar to the upper site, it was good to see numerous shoals of dwarf galaxiid fry in groundwater-fed backwaters that had willow cover, along with two large long-finned eels.



^ *Motupiko at Quinney's Bush*

MOTUPIKO SPAWNING COUNT

Fish & Game staff, along with four members of the Nelson Trout Fishing Club (Tony Entwistle, Don Clementson, Tim Sassella & Peter Warren), undertook a winter spawning count in the Motupiko and Rainy rivers on 9 June.

Few spawning fish were located in the lower reach of the Motupiko, from the Motueka confluence to the Korere Bridge, though higher than normal flows and clean gravels made spotting trout redds difficult, and most adult fish were found in feeding lies, rather

than holding on redds. In this reach, low numbers of redds and spawning fish were observed through the ~13km length, much fewer than the year prior. Although we know most fish spawn further up the catchment, we undertook this survey to better understand where spawning takes place within this lower part of the river, in order to inform TDC in relation to their annual river maintenance program, which include the likes of willow layering which was scheduled during winter.

A 3.2km stretch of the Motupiko was surveyed from Atapo Bridge to Christies Bridge (above and below the Rainy confluence). In this reach 8 redds and 6 spawning trout were observed. It was clear that this part of the river had been much more stable as redds were highly visible, so they were easier to identify throughout this reach as opposed to further downstream.

This part of the river, and indeed upstream to Tophouse, has an abundance of quality gravel for spawning, and it's no surprise that the Motupiko is one of the key spawning tributaries for the Motueka fishery.

The entire Rainy River from its confluence with the Motupiko to the top of the farmland at Big Bush, was also surveyed. The lower 8km of the river showed 15 redds and 13 spawning fish, and the upper 4km had 30 redds and 57 spawning fish, again highlighting the importance of this tributary as one of the Motueka's premier spawning tributaries. Mature native forest in the Rainy headwaters (low gradient) adds to its resilience.

Speaking with a local farmer in the mid-Rainy River, he observed a pod of 7 fish moving up the Rainy between the two big floods, likely on spawning duties, which was great to hear about.

^ A typical Motupiko redd (L); a dead fish found in the Motupiko, likely perishing from spawning duties (R). Photos: Jacob Lucas

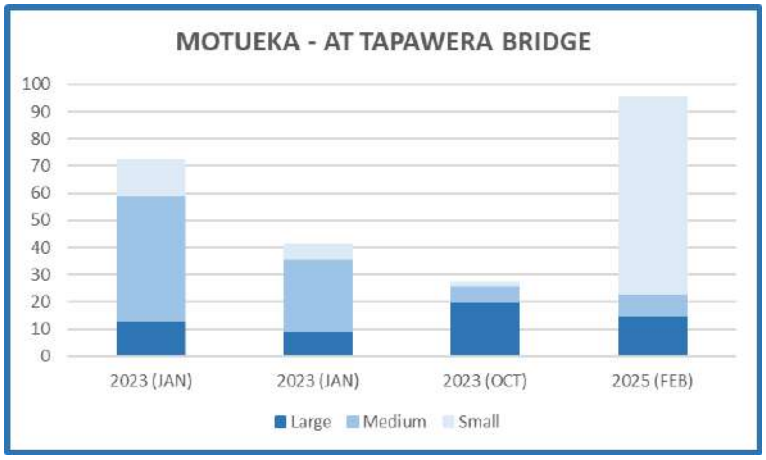
Thanks to the Nelson Trout Fishing Club, who made it possible to survey around 27kms of water in the Motupiko and Rainy - another excellent collaboration between Fish & Game and local anglers.

^ The team who made it possible to survey 27kms of spawning water in a day.

UPPER MOTUEKA

The Upper Motueka at Tapawera was dived on 10 February. This is a relatively new dive site that has been brought in to collect data on this part of the river in order to inform water allocation matters.

The graph below shows a decent count of 15 large, 8 medium and 72 smalls for the 1km site.



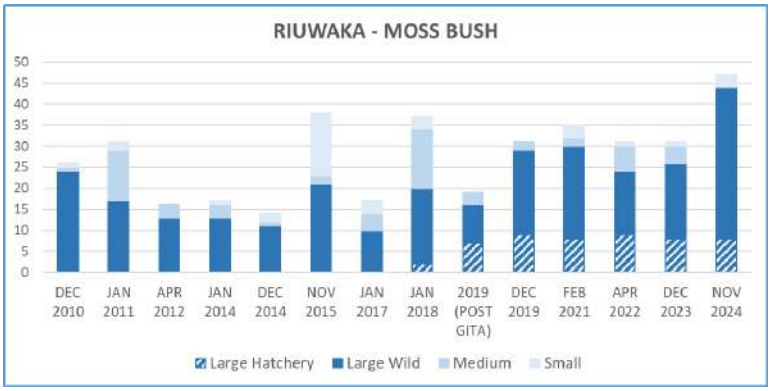
^ Motueka at Tapawera Bridge

It will be interesting to see how the trout fishery in the Upper Motueka recovers after the floods, as this area was particularly badly affected, with significant channel modifications both during the floods and afterwards through emergency river works.

RIUWAKA RIVER

The Riuwaka River was dived in mid-November at three sites. At the upper site below the confluence of the North and South Branch (Moss Bush), 44 large trout were in residence - one of the best counts in many years. Eight of these fish were fin-clipped from a release in 2017, showing these fish are around ten years of age. As is quite normal for this river, very few medium and small fish were observed - see graph below.

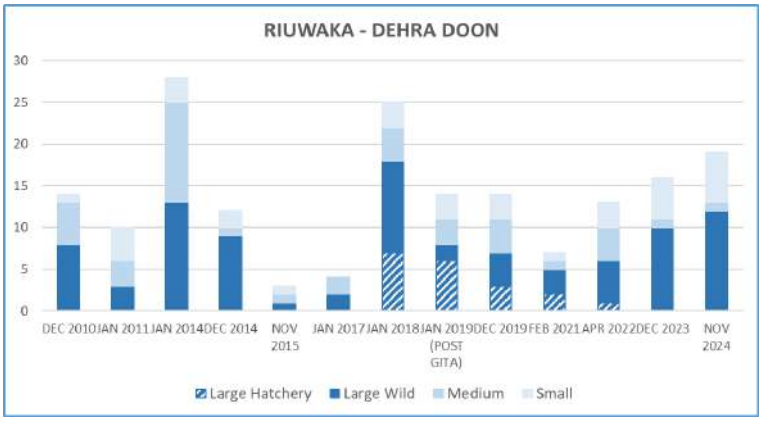
Note: drift dive records for this site go back to 1985, this graph is showing recent data back to 2010. Some of the earlier counts were staggering for a river of this size. In 1988, 122 large trout were counted during a dive conducted in January, however, the population plummeted soon after in 1994. The total of 44 large trout this season is the best total since 1992.



^ *Riuwaka at Moss Bush - note records for this site go back to 1985.*

The middle site at Dehra Doon was reasonable in terms of large fish observed, but lacked medium to small fish, which, historically, this part of the river was strong in.

The graph below shows 12 large fish over the 1km dive site above the SH6 bridge; however, only one medium and 8 small were seen.



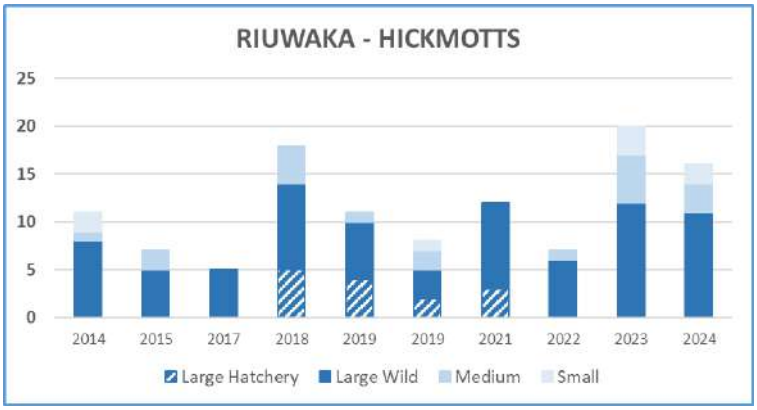
^ *Riuwaka at Dehra Doon*

> *Don Clementson enjoyed a good season on the Riuwaka. Photo: Don Clementson*

Though not as obvious during this dive, staff have observed poor water quality in this part of the river, notably fine sediment which covers the substrate.

As logging continues apace upstream, it will be interesting to see how this affects water quality in this small, but important river from a cultural and recreational sense. The 2025 floods caused significant mid-slope failures on recently harvested slopes, and staff will keenly note any changes during the coming drift dives.

In the 1km lower dive site, which finishes at the top of the tidal zone, a reasonable count of 11 large, 3 medium and 2 small fish were observed - see graph below. From a fish habitat perspective, this section of the river is improving over time as willows regrow and provide shade, and rocks from dislodged riprap fall into the main channel, creating depth and hydraulic diversity that adult trout need.

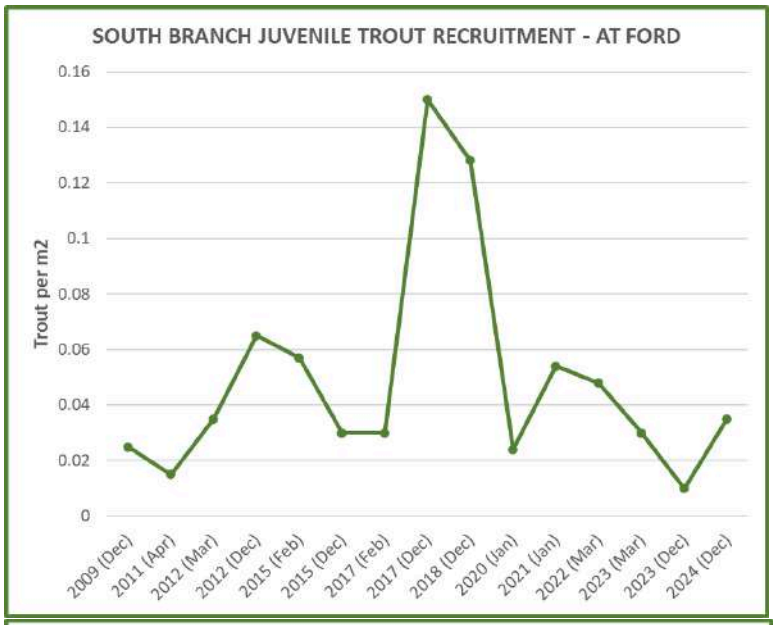


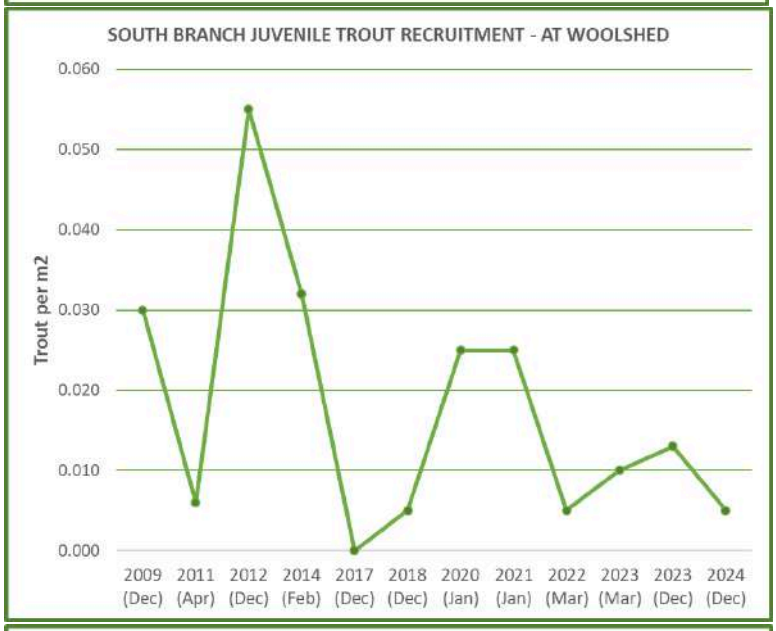
^ *Drift dive results at Hickmotts Recorder*

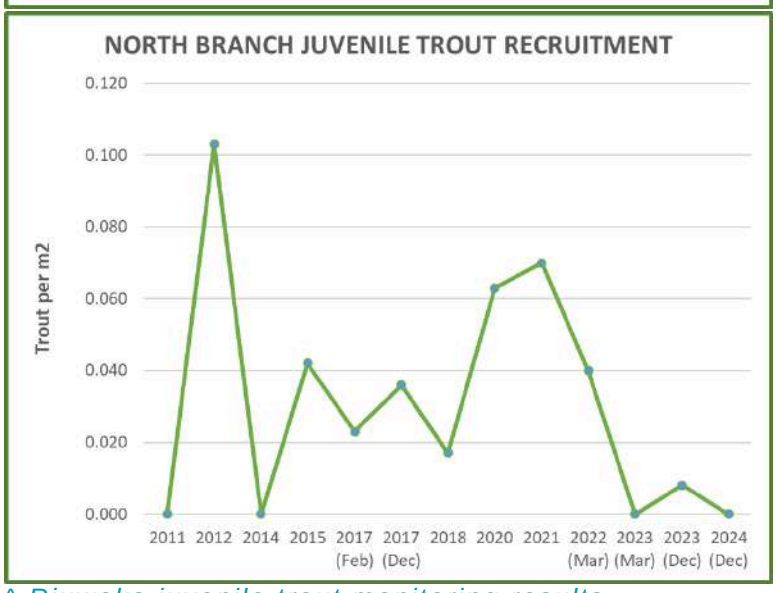
Angler reports had been favourable for this season in the Riuwaka, on some occasions, one long-time angler noted that fishing was as good as it had ever been, although it did receive plenty of pressure, and this affected angling success if water had been recently fished.

RIUWAKA ELECTRIC FISHING SURVEY

Electric fishing surveys were undertaken in the North and South Branch, with the aim to monitor juvenile trout and native fish abundance, key components of ecosystem health. A total of 7 juvenile trout were seen in the South Branch (at ford), however only 1 juvenile trout was seen at the upper South Branch site (at Woolshed) and zero seen at the North Branch site.







^ *Riuwaka juvenile trout monitoring results.*

WINTER SPAWNING COUNT

The Riuwaka South Branch was surveyed for spawning fish on 24 June - just before the huge floods that ripped through a while later.

There are fairly limited gravels at this site, however water quality is excellent, and trout do well to locate and make use of small patches of gravel on the edges to fulfil their spawning duties. Redds can be fairly hard to spot, often masked under bankside vegetation.

Seven redds and five spawning fish were observed over the 1km reach, as well as the usual few that were found in feeding lies, either having completed spawning or yet to commence.

There appeared to be even less available spawning gravels this year, which was surprising considering the erosion that had taken place on the surrounding slopes. Water clarity was also below par, possibly from upstream farming activities, where one or two small feeder streams are frequently disturbed by cattle, though, in general, water quality in the South Branch is usually very good.

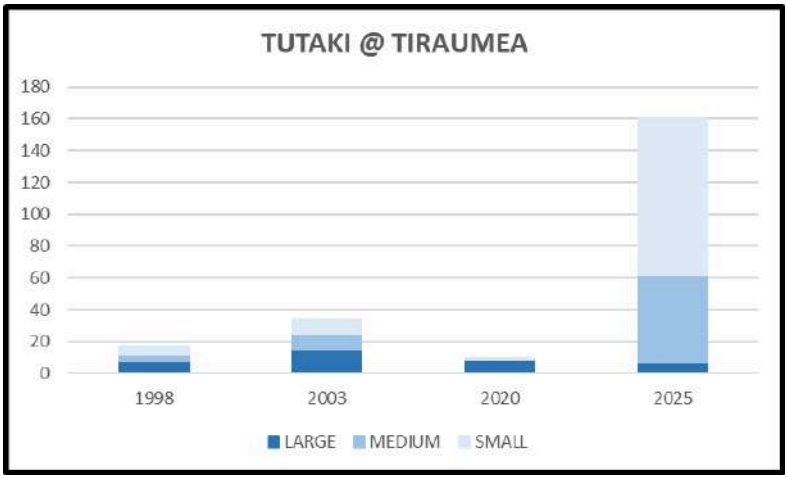
^ *South Branch redds - most of the fish spawn in edge water here. Photos: Jacob Lucas*
v Jacob Lucas with a decent end of season brown from the Riuwaka. Photo: Weesang Paaka

MURCHISON AREA

TUTAKI RIVER

The Tukaki River was dived in mid-February. It was last dived in 2020 when 9 large and 1 small fish were observed. It was a different story in 2025, with 7 large, 55 medium, and 98 small fish counted over the 1km dive from the Tiraumea confluence to the bridge - see the graph below, which indicates good stability in previous years and also showcases the Tutaki as a spawning ground.

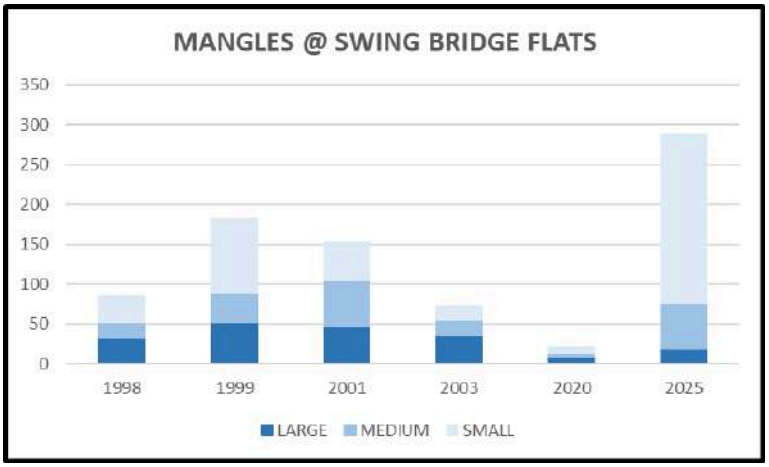
Staff noted good stability with abundant caddis and upland bullies at the margins; however, the adult fishery appears to be limited mainly by the amount of deep pool water available. High eel numbers were seen during the dive, which was fantastic to see, likely doing well on a juvenile trout diet.



^ *Tutaki at Tiraumea.*

MANGLES RIVER

The Mangles River was dived on the same day, and again painted a different picture to when last dived in 2020, notably because of the abundance of small fish in the system. 211 small fish were observed along with 57 mediums and 20 large - see graph below.



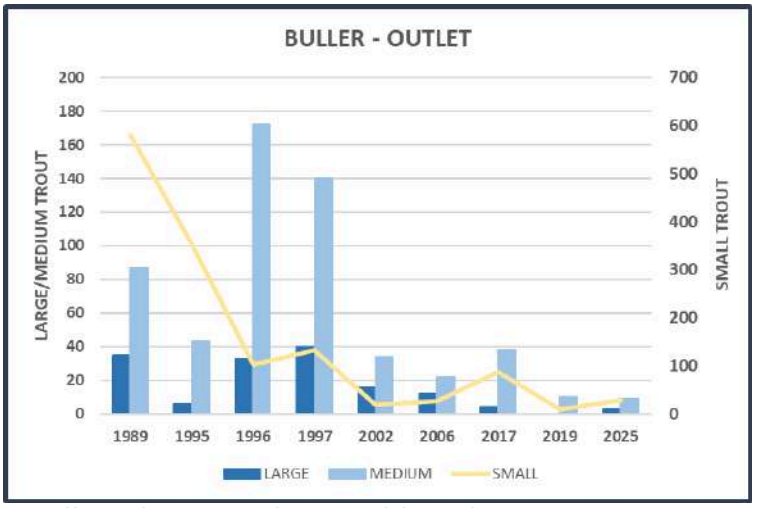
^ *Mangles River at Swingbridge Flats*

All told, this is a healthy fishery, which can again be attributed to a stable couple of years prior, which benefited trout recruitment. It was apparent during the dive that some adults were showing signs of thermal stress, and, like the Tutaki, this reach appears to be limited by available pool habitat which large trout require, and is likely why there was such an abundance of small/medium fish. Again, healthy eel numbers were noted, with undercut banks and willow debris favoured habitat.

BULLER RIVER

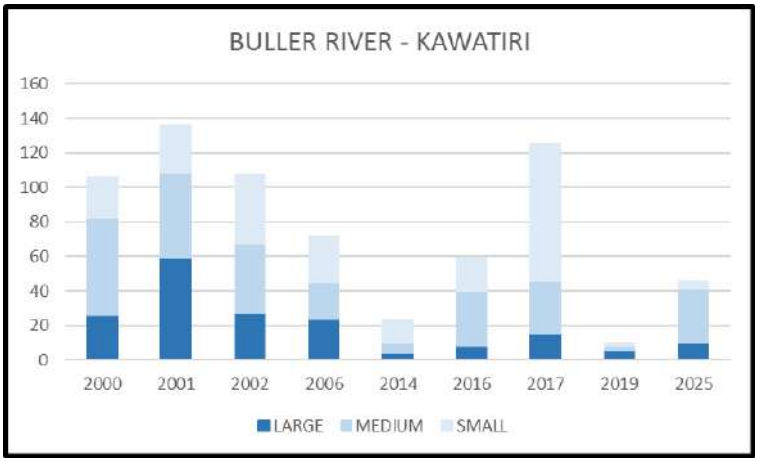
The Buller was dived in mid-March at three sites: historical sites at the outlet and Kawatiri, and a new site lower down below the Gowan River.

Despite high recruitment in the Mangles/Tutaki, it seems the Buller is still in reasonably poor shape, likely due to the ongoing effect of didymo. The Buller at the Lake Rotoiti Outlet only had 3 large, 9 medium and 29 smalls (note in 1989, 580 smalls were seen highlighting the historic importance of the stable upper river to support the lake and mainstem river fishery, prior to didymo arriving) - see graph below.



^ *Buller River at Lake Rotoiti Outlet.*

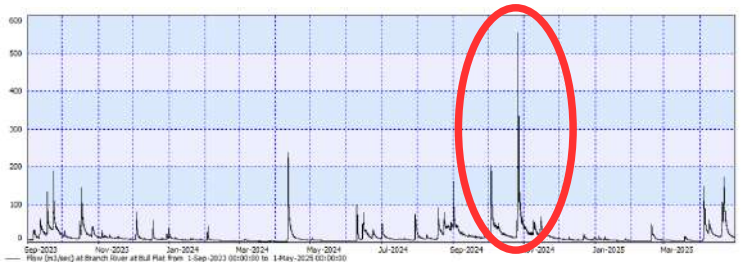
The Kawatiri site had a very patchy fish distribution, despite less didymo being present than usual and good-looking habitat. 10 large, 31 medium and 4 smalls were observed for this dive. A new lower site dived below Gowan also yielded a poor result with 2 large, 3 medium and 3 small over the 1km site.



^ *Buller River at Kawatiri*

BRANCH | LEATHAM

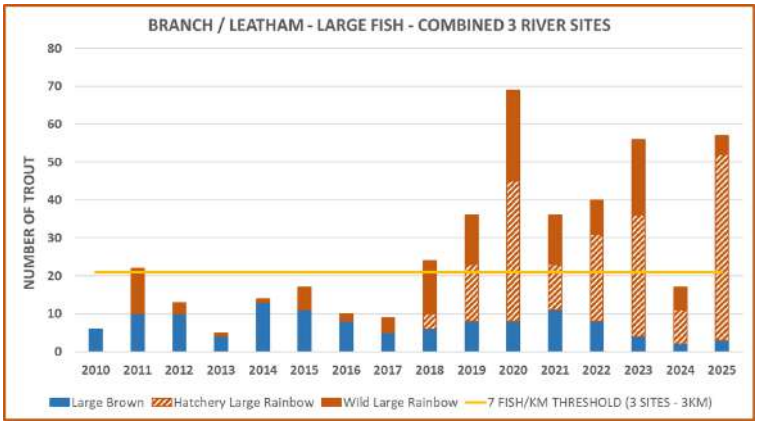
The popular Branch fishery enjoyed a relatively stable year leading up to the 2024-25 season, with just one flood event of note which came in at around 550 cumecs - see graph below. Though significant, this flood was relatively minor compared to larger events in 2022 and 2023.



^ *Only one large flood took place in October 2024.*

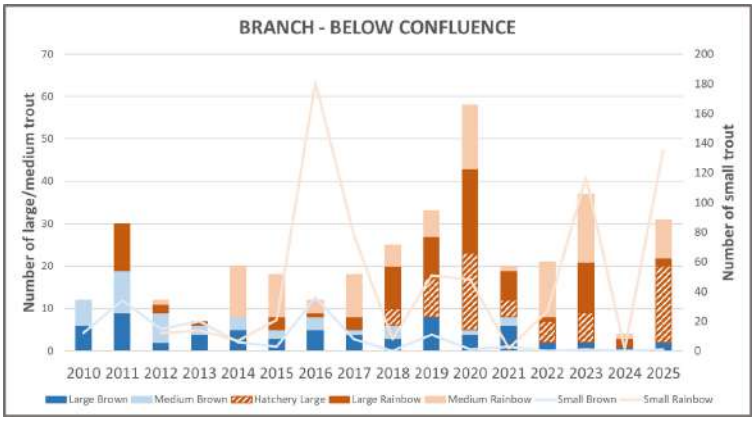
The Branch and Leatham rivers were dived at three sites in early February, following a successful heli-release that took place in November, which released 300 rainbows into the upper part of each river, with an additional 100 being released into the lower Leatham by vehicle early in the season (you can read about this release on page 17).

The total combined number of large fish for all three sites equated to 3 browns and 54 rainbows, of which 49 were of hatchery origin - see graph below. This meets the minimum number of 7 fish per kilometre as agreed by (at the time) Trustpower and Fish & Game. Note: fish releases for this river are funded by the energy company as mitigation for the Branch hydro dam, which collapsed the wild brown trout population.



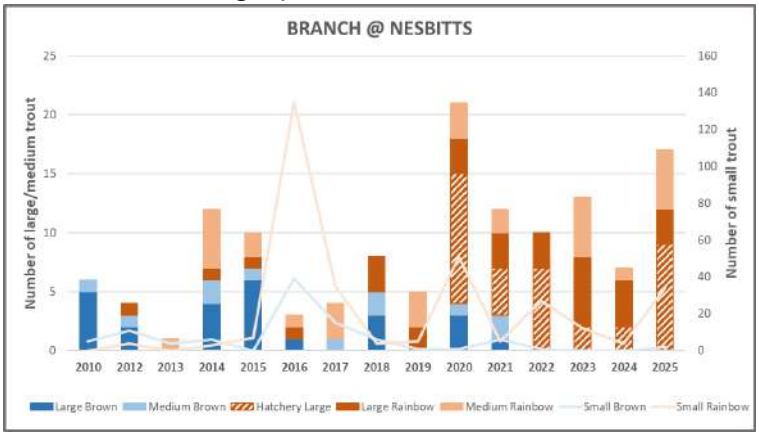
^ *Combined total of large fish across three sites.*

After a very poor result in 2024 due to a large flood in May, the usually productive run below the Branch/Leatham confluence bounced back with two large brown, 20 large rainbows (2 wild, 18 hatchery), 9 medium rainbows, and 135 small rainbows, which are normally prolific in the fast water below the confluence, and indicating a stable period prior to this drift dive - see graph below.



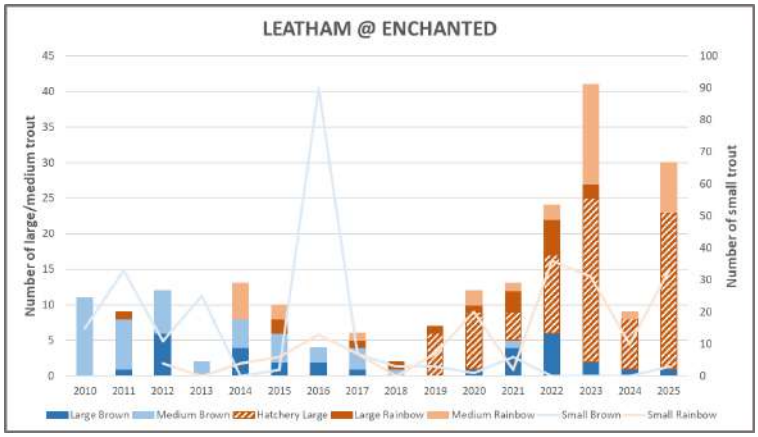
^ *Branch below Leatham confluence*

If a drift dive were to be undertaken in the upper part of the Branch, the result would be very favourable. The river is more stable up there, there are more pools, higher numbers of wild fish, and releases take place in the upper half of the river. However, the Branch at Nesbitt's site is continually changing, the bed is more mobile, and there are fewer pools throughout this steep dive site. For this dive, 12 large rainbows were seen (of which 3 were wild), 5 mediums and 34 smalls. Zero large browns were observed - see graph below.



^ *Branch at Nesbitt's Creek drift dive results.*

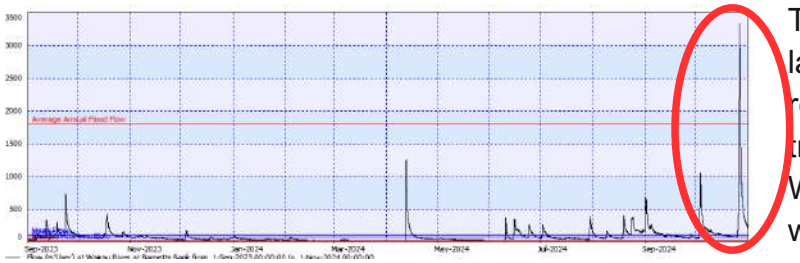
The Leatham River was dived at Enchanted Stream, and staff observed one large brown, 22 large rainbows (all hatchery), 7 medium rainbows and 33 small rainbows - see graph below.



^ *Leatham at Enchanted.*

WAIRAU RIVER

The Wairau River had a relatively benign 12 months leading up to the 2025-25 season, with no significant flood events recorded, until a 3,330 cumec flood was recorded in October - see graph below.



^ *A stable 12 month period was had leading up to the start of the 2024-25 fishing season.*

As a whole the Wairau fished well through the season, with fish carrying exceptional condition over from last winter, meaning lots of very nice fish around early season.

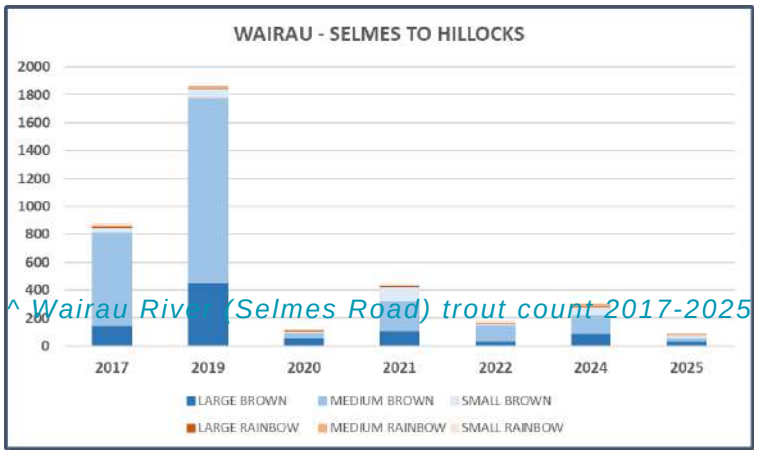
Fishing slowed during summer as the river got extremely low and warm, but picked up again as it cooled, and fish numbers were reported to have remained decent by anglers, despite the two large floods which had impacted on fish condition.

^ *Josh Ponder with a cracking early season trout from the Wairau*

While last season, when the upper, middle and lower Wairau were dived, this year we only managed to dive the lower site at Selmes Road in mid-February. On arrival, we were greeted by two seals that had taken up residence in the river chasing trout, and any remaining trout were extremely jumpy to diver presence.

The graph below shows brown trout numbering 37 large, 25 medium and 17 small throughout the 2km reach. While angler feedback informs us the rainbow trout population is building within the main-stem Wairau, at this site only two large and four mediums were observed.

720 salmon smolt were also counted, the highest at this site in the seven year period.



^ *Wairau River (Selmes Road) trout count 2017-2025*

We are unsure if the low count at this site is a result of the seals which pushed them out of this area, or reflective of a low Wairau trout population from successive large floods over recent years. Contrary to this drift dive result, anglers reported reasonable fishing throughout the season in the main-stem Wairau.

^ *Seals are a common sight in the lower Wairau.*

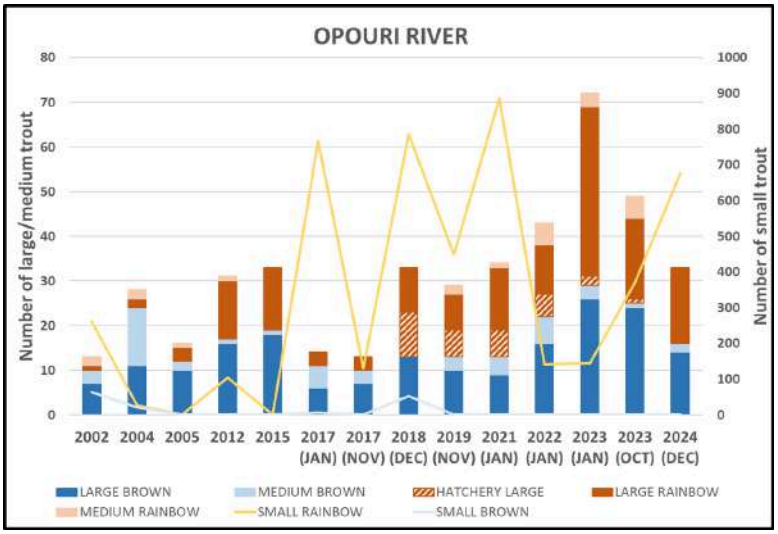
PELORUS | TE HOIERE CATCHMENT

The Pelorus catchment is a popular trout fishery, frequently accessed by people from either side of the Whangamoa's. This season, four rivers were dived in this area, the Opouri, Rai, Pelorus and Kaituna.

OPOURI RIVER

The Opouri River was dived in early December. This river has held good numbers of fish in recent years, despite some huge floods and an active seal that has been visiting the Opouri/Rai in recent years.

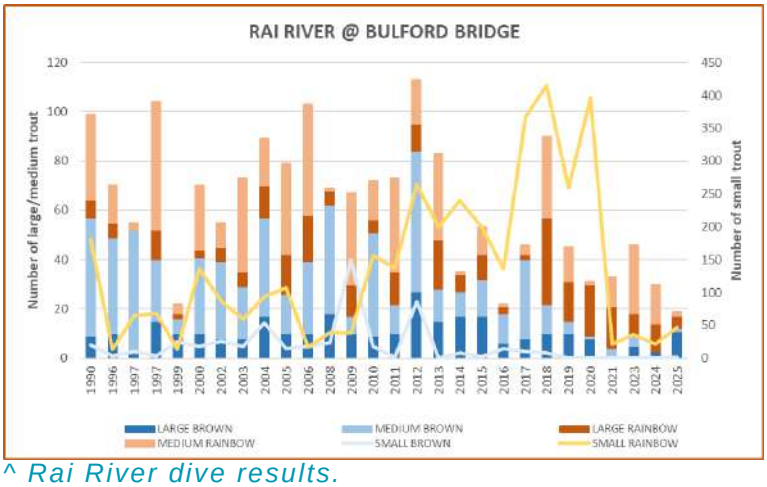
Fourteen large and two medium brown trout were counted, along with 17 large rainbow trout. This year was the first in which no hatchery fish had been seen since the releases that took place in 2018/19. A good count of 677 small rainbows were observed in the shallow, faster water. These are generally small fish that have hatched a few months prior, where it is common for rainbows to spawn in the excellent and abundant gravels at the tailout of most pools. In fact, one local angler encountered plenty of redds in the Opouri while on a scouting trip in August 2025. This area provides an ideal nursery environment for young trout before they out-migrate in late summer/autumn to the Pelorus River.



^ *Opouri River dive results.*

RAI RIVER

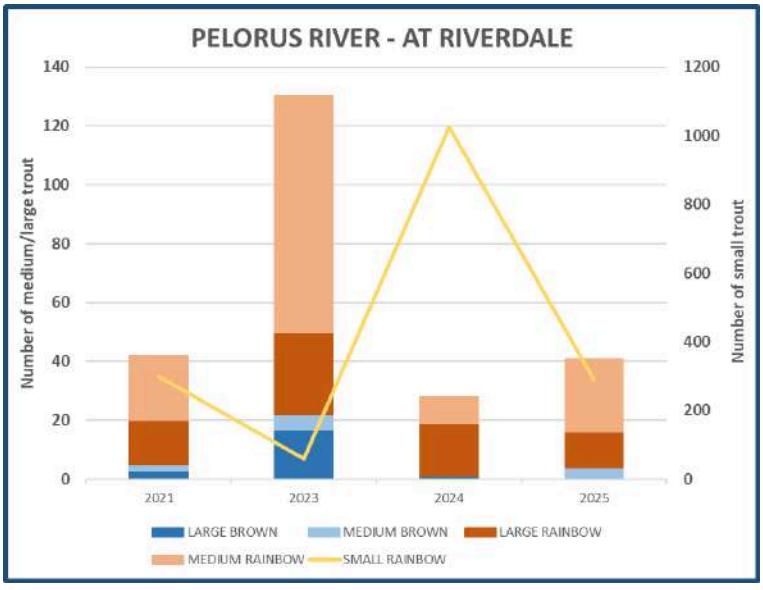
The Rai below Bulford Bridge has had some tough years of late and sadly, continues to be in decline. It's hard to say the reason for this, it is possibly a mix of deteriorating water quality, floods, and seals; however, it is disappointing to see what has happened to this once excellent lowland waterway. It may be useful in the future to bring in another dive site that offers a more diverse habitat than the Bulford Bridge site, which is characterised by slow moving water where sediment seems to accumulate. For the late February dive, brown trout numbers showed 11 large, 1 medium and 1 small in residence, and rainbow trout totaling 5 large, 2 medium and 47 smalls - see graph below.



^ *Rai River dive results.*

PELORUS RIVER

The Pelorus River was dived at Riverdale - the fourth year this site has been used. Like the Rai, this site was underwhelming, particularly for brown trout with zero large, 4 medium and one small observed. Rainbow trout fared somewhat better with 12 large, 25 medium and 291 smalls seen through the 1km dive site. This site was lacking in deep water making it more suitable for juvenile rearing. The stronger number of medium rainbows was likely a result of the previous year's successful recruitment, where over 1000 small rainbows were seen at the site.



^ *Pelorus River trout count - at Riverdale*

KAITUNA RIVER

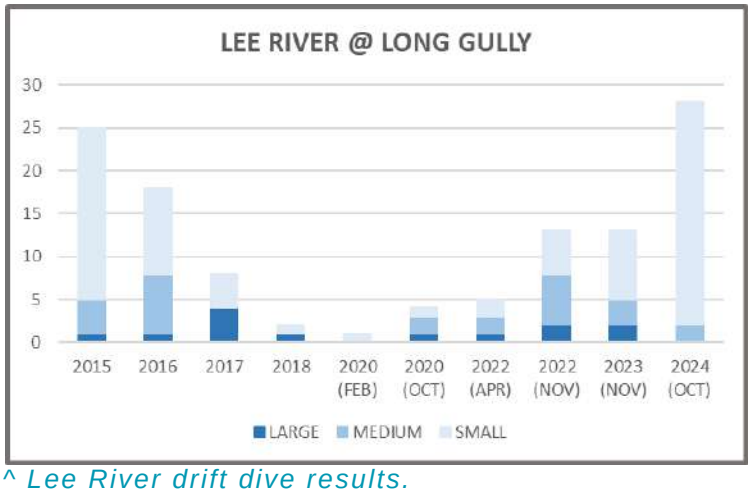
The Kaituna is also had one of the worst counts on record (8 dives from 2015 to present), with just four large brown trout seen. This is a stark contrast to the 2015 dive, which had 40 large fish (some of them of trophy calibre), prior to the arrival of a resident seal.

OTHER RIVERS

LEE RIVER

The Lee River was the first drift dive of the season and was completed on 2nd October. This was the second year a dive had been undertaken while the dam had been in place and operational, and the relatively poor visibility of 3.7m may have been attributed to dam-related activities.

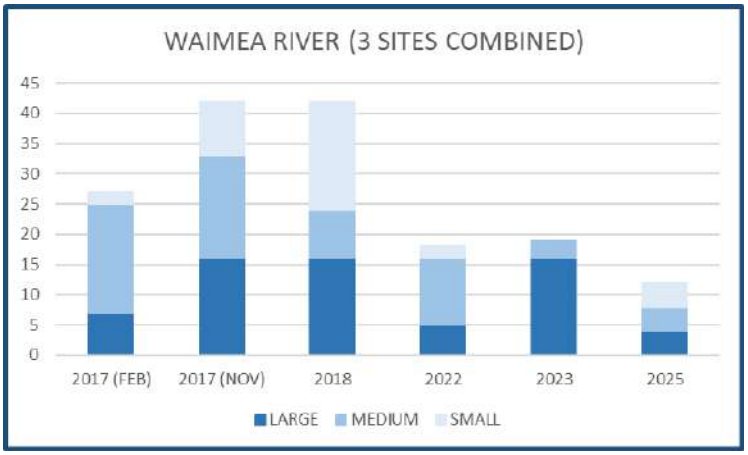
Divers observed a moderate number of sandy cased caddis/net-spinning caddis in the more stable riffle areas. It was good to see an increase in small-sized brown trout, with 26 observed - the highest tally in the 10 dives since 2015; however, a poor return of zero large and 2 medium fish was noted - see graph below.



^ *Lee River drift dive results.*

WAIMEA RIVER

Although thousands of smelt were seen and some healthy eels during the February dive, the trout population was poor, with four large, four medium and four small browns observed.

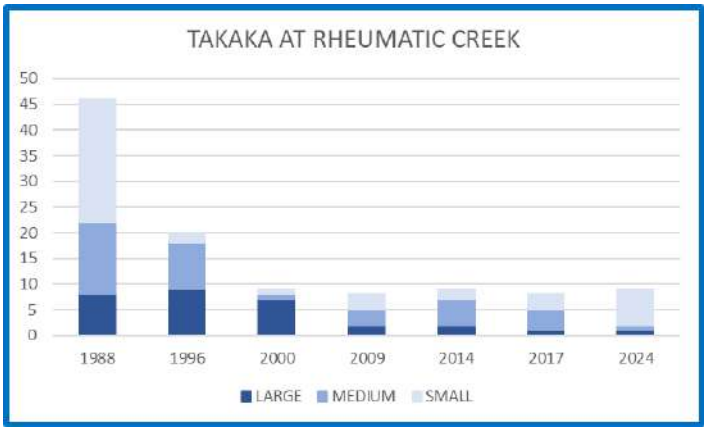


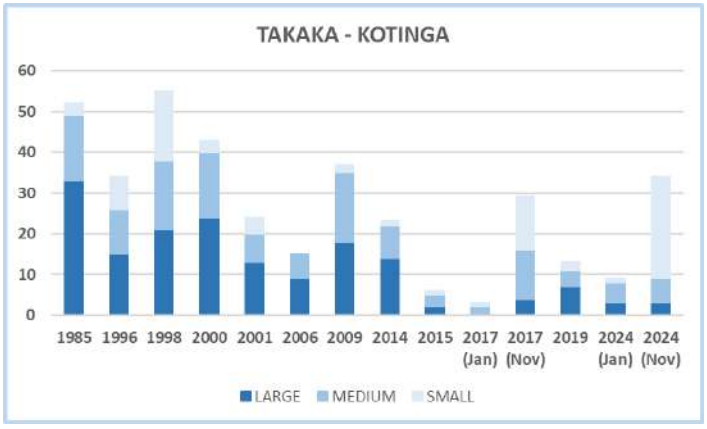
^ *Waimea River drift dive results.*

TAKAKA RIVER

The Takaka River was dived at two sites in mid-November. Due to didymo and the effect of seals in in the lower part of the river, the trout fishery here is not in great shape. Only one large, one medium and seven small brown trout were seen at this site, and the fish were found in fairly average condition. Didymo coverage appeared light from the top, but once the masks went on, there was 70-90% coverage on the substrate, which affects invertebrate drift and therefore the ability of trout to feed.

At the lower site at Kotinga, good numbers of smalls were found, however, poor numbers of large and medium fish were recorded, as has been the case in recent years - see graph below.

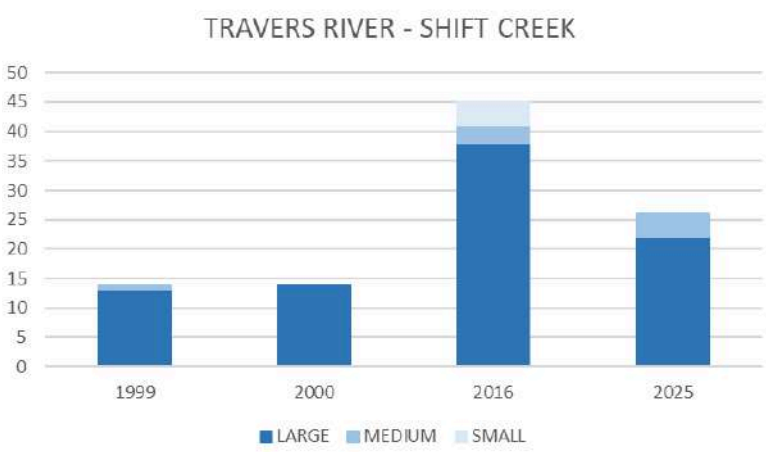




^ *Takaka River drift dive sites.*

TRAVERS RIVER

The Travers River was also dived at Shift Creek. For this lower site, staff took the boat to the head of the lake and carried dive gear to the start of the site. Fish numbers were decent with 22 large and four medium fish - the second highest count of the four drift dives undertaken since 1999.

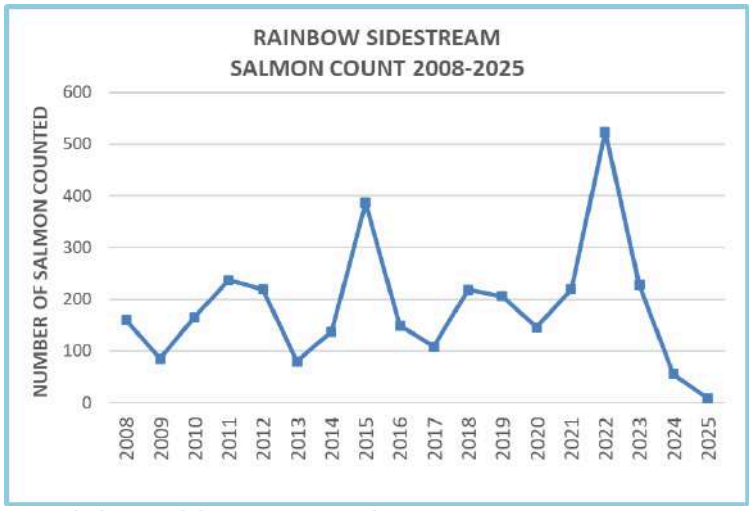


^ *Travers River at Shift Creek*

SALMON MONITORING

SALMON RUN CONTINUES TO DECLINE

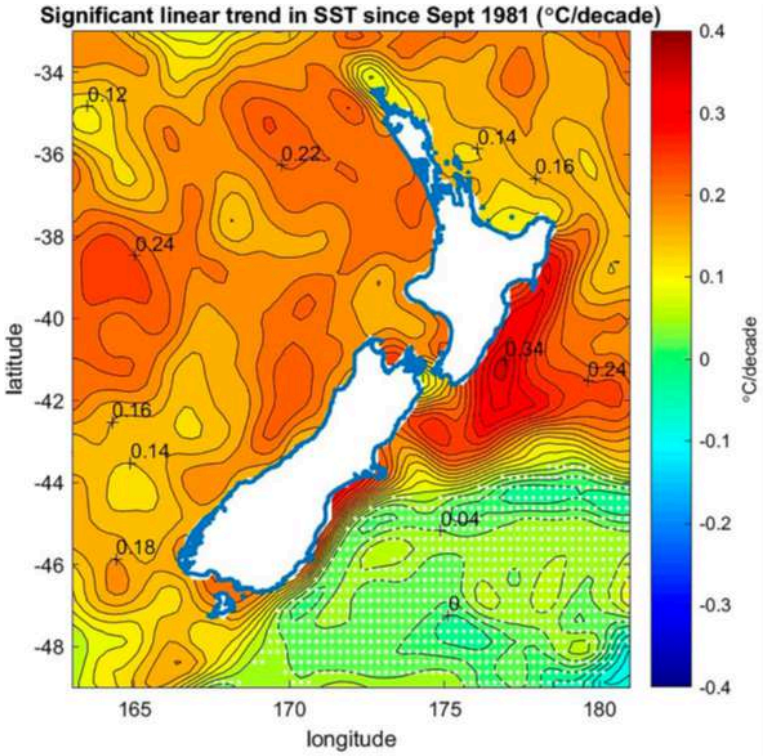
After 15-20 years of relatively high and consistent salmon spawning returns within the Wairau catchment, this year the Rainbow side spring count was one for the record books – sadly, for all the wrong reasons. A meagre tally of only 8 salmon were counted. Staff noted that these fish were also of a much smaller size and poorer condition than normal, indicating that sea conditions have been very unfavourable for salmon growth over the last few years. A recent NIWA report indicates that ocean water in the New Zealand region is significantly warmer than it was 30 years ago, and all indications are that this warming trend will continue (New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater; Ocean temperature change around New Zealand over the last 36 years). Last year's count of 55 spawning salmon was the next lowest total from the past 20 or so years of data collection. Unlike previous years, staff also didn't receive any reports of salmon seen or caught in the Wairau which correlates with the low counts observed by staff during spawning.



^ *Rainbow side stream salmon count 2008-2025*

Staff had hoped to carry out an aerial count salmon spawning count in the Clarence Catchment, however the weather didn't play ball and by the time conditions came right it was getting too late. Communication with Jim Ward (Molesworth Manager at the time) indicated there were also very few spawning salmon in the Clarence Catchment this year as well. Unfortunately, the situation was replicated in the salmon fisheries further south, which continued their trending demise in recent years.

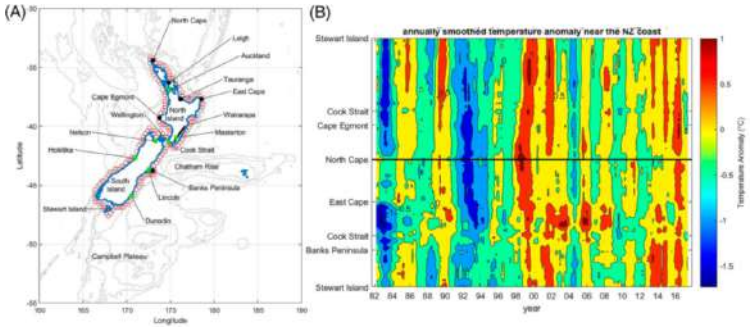
Neither the Clarence nor Wairau fisheries yet face the same human-induced challenges as salmon fisheries further south, which are subject to massive irrigation off-takes and potential salmon smolt output losses (although we have been spending significant advocacy efforts over the last few years to try and ensure water over-allocation does not occur in the Wairau as demand increases). In saying that, based on observations, salmon smolt are very dependent on secondary and tertiary river braids, which are significantly affected by low flows (whether caused by natural events or human influence). Recent droughts, lack of snow melt and low river flows have, without doubt, had a detrimental influence on salmon numbers – resident seals in the lower Wairau River also wouldn't have helped the situation (although not the main cause of the decline).



^ *The linear trend in SST 1981–2017 calculated from the NOAA OI SST V2 High Resolution Dataset (Reynolds et al. 2007; Banzon et al. 2016). Regions where the trends are not statistically significant are shaded in white. Contour intervals are 0.02°C/decade. Locations where anomalies are shown later are highlighted.*

Whether the poor Wairau spawning runs of the previous two salmon seasons are simply an aberration or symptomatic of warmer oceanic conditions now becoming much less favourable for salmon smolt survival and growth remains to be seen within the Nelson Marlborough region, which currently appears to have slightly cooler near shore summer coastal water temperatures than further south.

However, when one looks at overall sea surface temperature trends, it's hard not to conclude that warmer oceanic conditions are now no longer as favourable for this beloved sport fish species as they once were, and their future may be looking very bleak.



^ *(Left) The New Zealand Seven Station locations (green). The locations near the coast selected to build a near-coastal timeseries (red). (Right) Timeseries of annually smoothed temperature anomoly near the coast. The y axis begins at the southern-most location south of Stewart Island, the runs north along the east coast to North Cape (black line) before running south along the west coast.*

On the bright side, to put things into context, historically, the salmon spawning runs in the Wairau were very low, with very few salmon seen and caught by anglers and tended to be accidental catches. However, approximately 20 years ago, things changed (although at this stage, we are still not sure what). The salmon run dramatically increased, which resulted in anglers observing a lot more salmon and specifically targeting them. In 2022, a record-high number of salmon returning to spawn within the Rainbow River monitoring site of 524 was recorded. Based on aerial surveys of the Wairau River, this represents approximately 50% of the spawning run, which largely occurs upstream of the Wash Bridge.

To be a salmon angler, you have to be an eternal optimist, and the recent decline is back to what it historically was, like 25-30 years ago. We know that salmon have been evolving since their first introduction into New Zealand. Whether, they can adapt to the warming ocean temperatures and recover from their recent population collapse, remains to be seen however.

RAINBOW SIDE STREAM FENCING COMPLETED

Staff, with assistance from volunteers, have completed repair of the fence which surrounds the Rainbow side stream - the key stable salmon spawning tributary of the Wairau salmon run. The job involved repairs on around 2km of fence line, mostly tightening wires, putting in new posts/droppers and stapling wire to posts.

This work involved three separate trips over the course of a year, during the winter months. Thanks to Nick, John and Mark for their assistance.

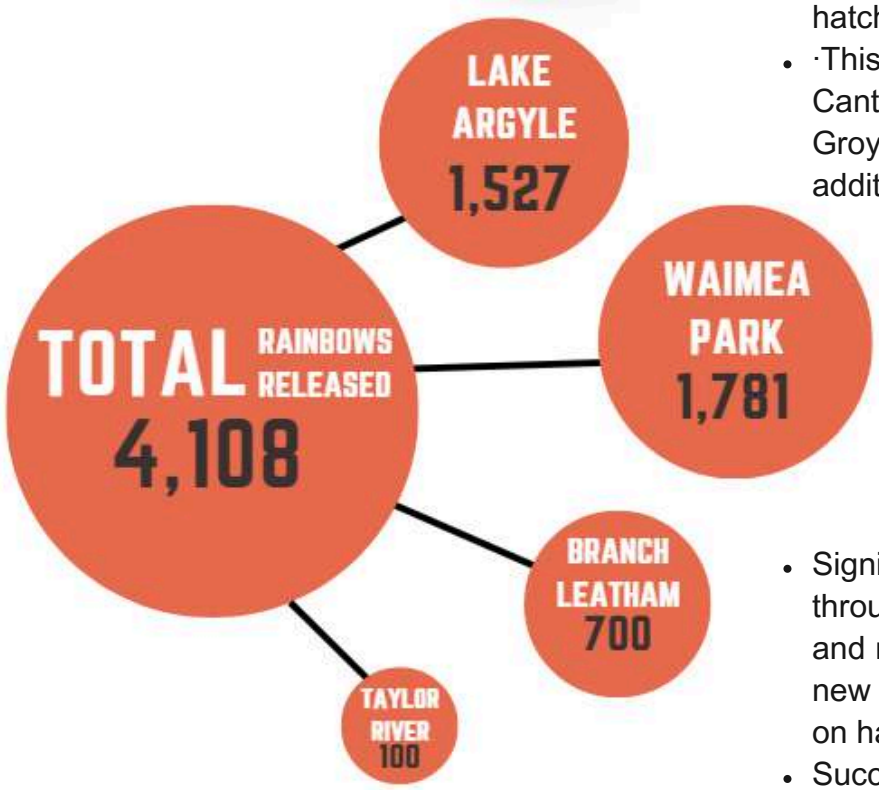
^ *Rainbow side-stream fence repairs. Photo: Jacob Lucas*

v *Aerial salmon count - touching down at Lake Tennyson. Photo: Jacob Lucas*

HATCHERY | RELEASES

RELEASE PROGRAMME

It was another decent year of fish releases, with a total of 4,908 1kg + rainbows released. The majority of these went to Lake Argyle (1,527) and Waimea Park (1,781). Two riverine releases were undertaken, one into the Branch/Leatham where 600 fish were liberated by helicopter as well as an additional release of 100 fish by vehicle (see more on the following page), and a smaller release into the Taylor River (100) for a whanau fishing event - see below graphic and tables. We also provided 800 fish to North Canterbury Fish & Game for kids fishing events at the Groynes.



^ Regional releases of rainbow trout (excluding 800 fish provided to North canterbury Fish & Game for a Take a Kid fishing event.

HATCHERY UPDATE

Amongst the normal hatchery routine of fish feeding, race cleaning, mowing, grounds maintenance and koura farm operations, listed below are some of the other outcomes progressed by our hard-working hatchery manager, supported by staff when required:

- Successful annual production of 5000 1kg+ rainbow trout - this included stripping fish, egg fertilisation and incubation, hatching/rearing fry, successfully transitioning smolt into adult fish, while maintaining a hygienic, disease-free hatchery. Weekly fish race cleaning is an ongoing, repetitive, and physically demanding task that the hatchery manager excels at.
- ·This September, we will again provide North Canterbury F&G 800 1kg fish for the annual Groynes Take a Kid Fishing event, plus an additional 200 fish for an urban lake release.
    - Maintenance of the Koura farm infrastructure for water quality treatment purposes.
    - Mechanical maintenance and repairs for bore pump engine.
    - Facilitation of hatchery house floor covering and deck replacement with Manawa Energy (now Contact).
- Significant upgrade of hydro generation turbine through turbine removal for shaft straightening and rewelding of new cogs, and reinstallation with new bearings, plus replacement of solar panels on hatchery power system.
- Successfully kept incubating eggs and adult fish alive through two successive large winter flood events

2024-25 TROUT RELEASES (EXCEPT WAIMEA PARK)

Date	Number	Size	Location
26/09/2024	255	1kg, +10@2-4kgs	Lake Argyle
5/11/2024	150	1.25 kg rts	Lake Argyle
19/11/2024	600	1.3kgs rts	Branch/Leatham (300 in each)
5/12/2024	150	1.35kgs rts	Lake Argyle
23/12/2024	200	1.45kgs rts	Lake Argyle-tagged
23/12/2024	40	5-10kg ex broodstod	Lake Argyle, 1 blue trout included
27/12/2024	100	1.45kgs rts	Leatham -enchanted-swing bridge
9/01/2025	60	1.5kgs rts	Taylor - whanau fishing day
29/01/2025	151	1.65kg rts	Lake Argyle
3/03/2025	125	1.8kg	Lake Argyle
10/04/2025	150	1.9kg	Lake Argyle
7/05/2025	125	2kg	Lake Argyle
18/07/2025	82	2-6kg	Lake Argyle
28/08/2025	99	3kg	Lake Argyle

TOTAL (LAKE ARGYLE)	1527
TOTAL (BRANCH/LEATHAM)	700
TOTAL	2287

2024-25 TROUT RELEASES AT WAIMEA PARK

Date	Number	Size	Location
26/09/2024	280	1kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
5/11/2024	152	1.2kg	Family/Adult pond
13/11/2024	161	1.25kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
22/11/2024	150	1.3kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
5/12/2024	153	1.35kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
23/12/2024	150	1.45kg	Family/Adult pond
29/01/2025	150	1.65kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
3/03/2025	123	1.8kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
10/04/2025	125	1.9kg	Family/Adult pond
23/04/2025	150	2kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
7/05/2025	127	2kg	Family/Aduly + Junior ponds
28/08/2025	60	3kg	Family/Adult pond

TOTAL (JUNIOR PONDS)	645
TOTAL (FAMILY/ADULT POND)	1136
TOTAL	1781

Hatchery update continued...

- Significant upgrade of paddle wheel pump through wheel removal, rust proofing, weld strengthening and reinstalment with new axle bearings.
- Fish food collection and unloading as required.
- Undertaking compliance duties at Lake Argyle and Nelson Lakes.
- Assisting Fish & Game with Branch/Leatham and Wairau drift dives.
- Water sampling and water use reporting as per hatchery resource consent requirements.
- Macrocarpa shelter belt removal/replacement with flax.
- Ongoing sediment and weed removal from largest fish rearing pond.
- Fish tanker maintenance/repairs and tanker fish loading for releases.
- Fish & Game tandem trailer and boat motor repairs
- Annual headrace weeding/flax trimming work.
- A contract audit of existing hatchery health & safety, post audit improvements ongoing.
- Hatchery manager completed a wasp control vespex course and back country first aid course.
- Staff hosted a koura farm visit for Ngai Tahu's Hokonui runanga.

BRANCH/LEATHAM HELI RELEASE

A heli-release into the Branch & Leatham rivers was undertaken in mid-November 2024. This release is very popular with anglers, offering sight fishing for very catchable fish in a riverine backcountry environment. 600 rainbows around the 1.3kg mark were flown into the top half of both rivers, each receiving an equal share.

We used a Squirrel helicopter with a 1000 litre bucket to carry the fish, 100 at a time, to the upper reaches of the river. Once there, we net out 50 then return to the helicopter to fly to another spot. For the second half, the pilot lowers the bucket so that it's just touching the water, then presses the button to eject the water. The fish take only a few seconds to exit the bucket into their new home.

Thanks to the crew at Helicopters Nelson for their professionalism in getting this operation completed safely and with no issues.

^ Pictures from the Branch/Leatham heli-release. Photos: Jacob Lucas

R3 | RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, REACTIVATION

R3 (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation) is important for Fish & Game to retain and grow our base of anglers. Fish & Game nationally now has this as one of its core strategic objectives to ensure future organisational strength and financial viability.

JIM AND FLEUR RING BEQUEST

Thanks to a generous bequest from the legendary angling duo, Jim and Fleur Ring, Fish & Game used funds to run a host of educational fishing opportunities across the region. We kicked off with four soft bait clinics in Marlborough with local guru, Josh Ponder. Two events were held at Lake Argyle and two on the Wairau. These were very well attended by anglers, and the feedback we received from these events was excellent.

^ *Josh Ponder delivering a soft bait clinic at Lake Argyle. Photo: Jacob Lucas*

Prior to Christmas we also held at Women on The Fly event at Saxton Field, under expert guidance from certified casting instructor and NMF&G Councillor, Kylie Sargeant, who ran a beginners casting session outside, and Tony Entwistle who delivered a couple of fantastic classroom sessions on 'where to find trout' The day was fully subscribed and it was great to see a high level of enthusiasm from this group.

^ *Women on The Fly event in Nelson. Photo: Gebhard Krewitt*

In the new year, we held two more soft bait clinics in Tasman, at McLeans Reserve on the Motueka River and at Waimea Park. Again, we had a great turnout for both events.

We held a Motueka River fly fishing workshop, where around 40 anglers came and learned tips from seasoned Mot River anglers, Weesang Paaka and Don Clementson. Time was spent teaching how to best rig rods, best conditions for fishing (temperature, weather etc), fly selection for the Motueka and reading the water.

The season was finished off with a fantastic practical Women on The Fly event, again at McLeans Reserve, with Tony Entwistle and Don Clementson. Here, the group went through basics such as setting up rods, knots, and flies, before a practical casting and fishing session.

^ *MacLeans Reserve workshops. Photos: Gebhard Krewitt, Jacob Lucas*

WAIMEA PARK

Waimea Park continues to impress in terms of recreational angling use and is a regional asset for the local community. It is now one of the region's most popular fisheries, and on most days of the year, you can find people fishing here, even during the winter months.

At the junior-only ponds, it has been a busy year of organised events, with multiple kids' fishing days run by the Sports Fishing for Youth Trust, as well as additional events hosted through either Fish & Game or the Trust (i.e., school groups and clubs). You can read the Trust's Annual Report on page 41.

Waimea Park remains a key R3 focus for Fish & Game, and regular releases will occur here, with fish being liberated monthly throughout the year.

^ *Parklands School Taumata Kahuki class at Waimea Park, Photo: Jacob Lucas*

LAKE ARGYLE

Lake Argyle remains the region's most popular trout fishery (NIWA National Angler Survey data), with its popularity due to its easy land-based fishing, ability to use small boats, and is suitable for anglers of all ages and abilities, and the regular releases that take place here. After a few initial years of media wrapped around Lake Argyle and what it offers, we have now reduced this and let the fishery speak for itself, only promoting releases at the start of the season and for the Christmas holiday season.

Our releases of double-digit trout always cause a huge stir. Prior to Christmas we released 40 trophy trout into the lake and word got around fast about these fish. Rangers often hear from anglers that its a better fishing experience than the twizel canals due to fish catchability at Argyle.

TAGGED FISH COMP

We continue to hold our Lake Argyle tagged fish comp, with ongoing sponsorship from Henderson's in Blenheim. This remains very popular with anglers, even though it has been running for eight years.

Thanks to Henderson's for their generous support of this iconic summer promotion.

^ *Shannon Mears, one of this years tag comp winners who walked away with a $500 Henderson's voucher.*

^ *One of the stonkers that got released into Lake Argyle (L); > Mike Ponder with a winner of a rod & reel set from 2025 (R)*

TAYLOR RIVER WHANAU FISHING DAY

A day to bring the community together and encourage whanau and their tamariki into healthy outdoor recreation was the focus of a family/whanau fishing day on the Taylor River over the summer.

A number of families and interested individuals attended the event, many of whom had never tried freshwater fishing before. Participants were supported by 'guides' from the Marlborough Freshwater Anglers Club, and Councillor Guy Gardiner. Fishing on the day was challenging, though it wasn't from a lack of trout in the river.

Plenty of trout were in plain view, though they had a lot of lures thrown at them and became hard to catch pretty quickly. Now that these potential new anglers have seen the fish on offer and have been taught new skills to catch them, we hope they will return to the Taylor River and other great waterways in the region, becoming future anglers.

The unique situation provided by the Taylor River makes fishing available on foot or cycle after school and over the weekends for our young folk. In a nutshell, we aim to encourage families, especially children, to spend time outdoors, be active, and reduce their screen time. Research now indicates that freshwater angling is beneficial for both physical and mental health.

We are hoping to run similar events in the future. Thanks to Marlborough Primary Health, Rangitane, Te Piki Oranga and Marlborough Hunting and Fishing, who generously donated fishing gear, including new rods, which participants could take home.

^ *Guy Gardiner with a young angler - photo Jacob Lucas.*

RANGERS - R3 LEGENDS

It has been fantastic to see Nelson Marlborough voluntary rangers, Weesang Paaka and Steve Ngatai, doing outstanding work on the R3 front.

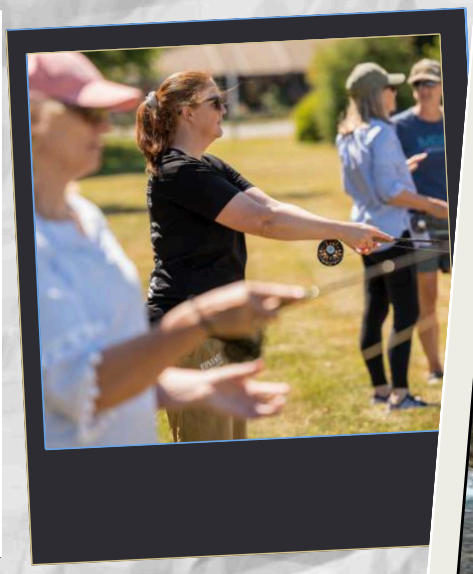
Steve Ngatai, known as the Sheriff of Argyle, is well known at the lake and always has on hand giveaways for kids and advice for other anglers. He frequently takes groups of young people to the lake, teaching them effective ways to catch trout here.

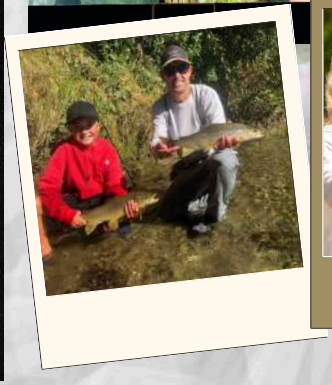
Weesang is a teacher by trade, and his communication skills and patience extend to the many first-time anglers he takes out fishing. Over the years, he has taken out dozens of new and learning anglers, mainly on the Motueka. As one of the region's expert anglers, particularly when it comes to the Mot River, his sessions with new anglers are filled with fun, learning and usually culminate in success for the angler.

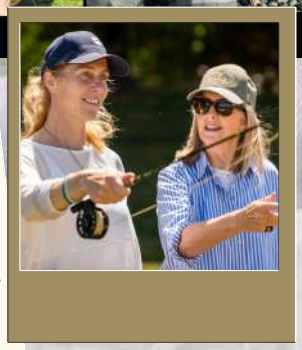
Last summer, he was in his element, taking a couple of families out fishing at the same time and catching fish too, providing great memories and kick starting an interest in trout fishiing for them.

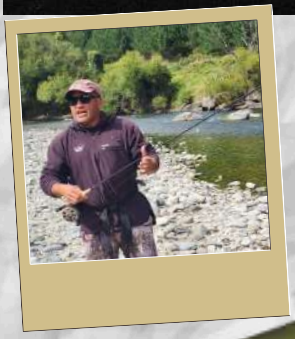
^ *Fun times on the Mot for these first time fly fishers, under expert guidance from local legend, Weesang Paaka. Photos: Weesang Paaka*

THE SEASON IN PICTURES









NATIVE FISH MONITORING

Monitoring of both native fish and juvenile trout using electric fishing is undertaken within the Branch/Leatham, Riuwaka, and Opouri Rivers. While the same locational sites are repeated annually, small local shifts in the exact river reach surveyed are often required due to flood induced changes to suitable habitat – it is essential when undertaking this monitoring work to survey the same instream habitat type as the previous season due to very specific habitat preferences of fish species in terms of depth, substrate size, and flow velocities. The same personnel are used each year, with good knowledge of each species' habitat preference, to ensure the results gathered are meaningful.

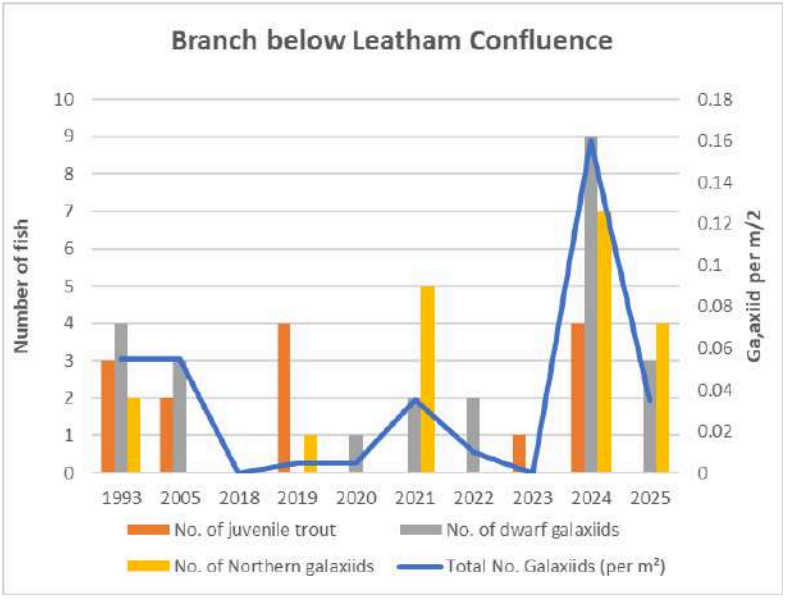
This monitoring work has two primary purposes: firstly, to assess any potential effects of current or past regional trout releases on native fish species (relative to the impacts of flooding or other factors), and secondly, to determine the specific salmonid population limiting factors within these fisheries. The work is also very helpful for Fish & Game staff in liaising with DOC, Council, Treaty partners, and the wider community when discussing trout interaction and predation on native fisheries.

It is considered crucial monitoring work to support the national Fish & Game strategy, specifically the strategic priority around public perception and legitimacy of Fish & Game. The Branch/Leatham above the hydro weir is currently the only catchment where regular riverine salmonid releases are undertaken annually within this region, as part of our contract agreement with Contact (formerly Manawa) Energy to address the impact of the Branch hydro weir on trout fishery health.

BRANCH/LEATHAM STUDY

An intensive multi-day sampling trip is undertaken within this fishery annually over 15 separate locations within the catchment, mainly utilising historic sites surveyed initially prior to the Trust Power (which became Manawa, and then Contact Energy), adult salmonid release program starting in 2010 as mitigation for the Branch hydro scheme weir salmonid fishery impacts. This work was set up to assess the health of both native fish and brown/rainbow trout recruitment following the commencement of the release program and has now been undertaken over the last 8 years by Fish & Game and will be repeated annually for the lifetime of the current Contact Energy hydro consent for as long as restocking continues. In the past, Department of Conservation and Marlborough District Council freshwater fisheries staff have assisted us with some of the monitoring work, as part of a wider DOC regional survey on the conservation status of non-migratory galaxiids within the Marlborough region (DOC Vulnerable species surveys 2023-24: alpine galaxias, dwarf galaxias and northern flathead galaxias).

As can be seen in the Appendix graphs, results of this year's March 2025 survey work revealed a significant decrease in the number of native fish and juvenile trout captured within 13 of the 15 sites compared to last year's high abundance results at nearly all sites. In contrast to the previous year, the catchment experienced some significant high-flow events over the prior 12 months. At many monitoring sites, the river had completely changed course, and abundance recovery of both native fish and trout was still underway.



^ Branch below the Leatham confluence – this year's decrease in fish species abundance was mirrored within 13 of the 15 monitoring sites.

Last year, the density of galaxiid species at monitoring sites surpassed the maximum galaxiid density encountered within the Leatham (0.138 m^2) prior to the hydro scheme construction and subsequent adult trout restocking program (see 2023-24 fisheries report). This year, 8 of the 15 monitoring sites recorded galaxiid densities above 0.138 fish/m2. The variation in galaxiid densities recorded each year within our 15 monitoring sites reinforces the importance of monitoring multiple sites for a number of years before any conclusions on fish population trends can be reached. In addition to yearly variation, there is also a significant difference in stability within all sites, with the most stable tributaries supporting far higher fish densities than the more unstable mainstem sites. This is addressed through surveying 50-100m2 within more stable tributary sites, and at least 100-200m2 within less stable mainstem sites, so sufficient density estimates can be obtained. After 8 years of monitoring within the Branch Leatham, it appears that the density of galaxiids within this catchment is driven primarily by the frequency and size of floods, not salmonid predation. Indeed, improving the number of catchable trout

available to anglers through annual restocking to address the impact of the hydro weir on the salmonid fishery has not had any discernible effect on native fish that can be detected through our monitoring program at a population density level. What is apparent from the monitoring data, however, is a shift from a brown trout-dominated to a rainbow trout-dominated fishery within this mixed species fishery, due to the use of hatchery rainbows. Brown trout still exist within the catchment, but at very low numbers compared to rainbows (see drift dive section of fisheries report). Eel numbers within the catchment also remain depressed compared to pre-hydro scheme data, presumably due to the impact of the hydro scheme on elver migration into the catchment.

The goal of the monitoring program is simply to ensure both Northern and dwarf galaxiids within the entire catchment retain healthy population levels, and no long-term declines potentially attributable to trout restocking are detected over time. So far, there is no evidence that annual restocking is causing population biomass reductions of the native fish species present within this catchment, relative to densities present prior to the restocking program being initiated.

OPOURI RIVER | DWARF GALAXIAS

A healthy, abundant population of native fish continues to function within the Opouri River; however, there appears to be a gradual decline in population density of dwarf galaxiids at the lower site above the Ronga confluence - see table below. This may be linked to flood-induced channel erosion and instability at this site, but possibly also the impact of lower summer flows at this site compared to the Tunakino Bridge (Opouri can dry up above the Ronga while irrigation continues). Ongoing advocacy for better low flow management within this catchment through the Marlborough District Council freshwater planning and resource consent processes continues (see RMA chapter).

OPOURI RIVER ELECTRIC FISH MONITORING

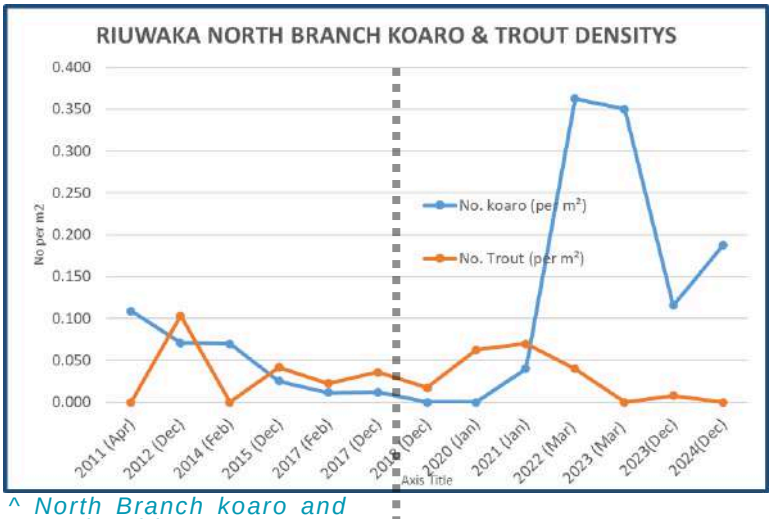
Year	Location	Area Sampled (m2)	No. of juvenile trout	No. of trout (per m2)	No. of dwarf galaxiids	No. galaxiids (per m2)	Other fish
Dec-18	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	75	5	0.07	68	0.91	5 upland bully
Nov-19	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	100	4	0.04	100	1.00	28 upland bully; 1 SF eel
Jan-21	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	130	0	0.00	142	1.09	150 upland bully; 1 LF eel
Mar-22	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	75	0	0.00	54	0.72	11 upland bullies
Feb-24	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	100	1	0.01	61	0.61	73 upland bullies
Jan-25	Opouri at Tunakino Bridge	184	0	0.00	258	1.40	62 upland bullies
Dec-18	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	56	1	0.02	108	1.93	3 upland bully
Nov-19	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	100	4	0.04	144	1.44	66 upland bully
Jan-21	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	120	3	0.03	109	0.91	70 upland bully; 2 LF eel
Mar-22	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	80	0	0.00	57	0.71	11 upland bullies
Feb-24	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	100	0	0.00	37	0.37	38 upland bullies
Jan-25	Opouri at Ronga Confluence	177	2	0.01	90	0.51	49 upland bullies

RIUWAKA RIVER

The Riuwaka River has long suffered from poor juvenile brown trout recruitment, likely due to a lack of small stable side streams for both spawning and juvenile trout rearing (all spawning occurs in the larger North and South Branches, which also support adult fish).

Trout spawning foot counts also indicate peak brown trout spawning in this catchment occurs a month later than most other systems in the region, perhaps due to colder average water temperatures, meaning the timing of spawning is delayed as it takes longer for winter water temperature drop to occur in this system. While moderate numbers of trout fry can be encountered through electric fishing, survival of these fish through to yearling size appears to be challenging based on drift dive and electric fishing data – normally yearling brown trout tend to grow within smaller tributary streams and migrate to larger systems with adult salmonids when they are a better size to cope with flooding and predation pressures exerted by shags, longfin eels, and adult trout within these larger systems. The river has been the subject of significant monitoring effort for over a decade, with annual electric fishing surveys in the North & South Branches to monitor recruitment of juvenile trout and, along with this, native fish numbers. It has also been the recipient of one adult brown trout release back in 2017. While this release was successful in boosting the adult brown trout population (some of these fin-clipped adult fish are still recorded in drift dives over 7 years later), further Riuwaka releases have been discontinued due to Treaty Partner concerns expressed following the 2017 release – future adult trout population enhancement effort for this system will instead focus on trying to improve habitat within the lower river for both adult salmonids and longfin eels as required erosion protection works are carried out.

The density of both koaro and juvenile trout remains low across all three monitoring sites, with the exception of koaro density in the North Branch - see graph below. It is encouraging to see the high level of koaro (good numbers of mature adults also) encountered within the North Branch site in recent years. It will be interesting to see how the koaro fared after the recent large floods.



^ North Branch koaro and trout densities

CYCLONE GITA

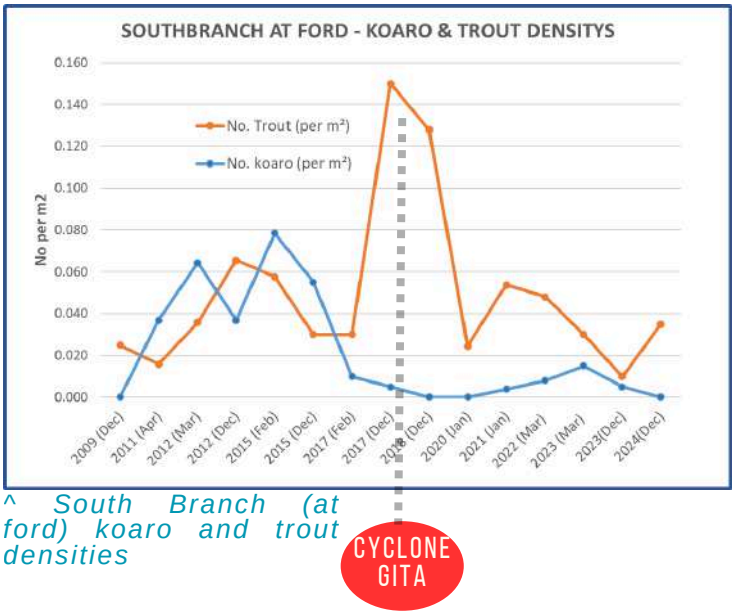
The two South Branch sites have still not yet reached the previous monitoring peaks encountered. The high number of adult koaro present within the North Branch site could be related to most of the upstream catchment emerging from the Takaka Hill marble aquifer, meaning flood impacts are relatively more buffered than the South Branch.

There are adult brown trout living in pools above and below the North Branch monitoring site, so the difference in koaro abundance may be more related to instream habitat and catchment hydrology conditions than the presence of adult trout.

Due to the limited number of monitoring sites, however (3), it is difficult to tease out population biomass drivers for both native fish and trout within this system, although it appears that the koaro population may have taken longer to recover after Cyclone Gita

The big unknown with monitoring koaro population health compared to non-migratory galaxiid population health in the presence of salmonid fisheries is the influence of the annual whitebait migration success or otherwise.

Fish & Game intend to continue our annual monitoring within this Awa-Tapu waterway, which is of great cultural significance to Iwi, as it gives us useful information on the likely future challenges that increased flooding may bring to both native fish and trout population health within Aotearoa.



^ *South Branch (at ford) koaro and trout densities*

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In the current age, having a favourable public perception is very important for any organisation. Pursuant to one of our key national strategic priorities, this region gets involved in a number of positive community projects to enhance Fish & Game's public perception and legitimacy, in the eyes of the wider New Zealand population.

TRAP BUILDING

An initiative between Fish & Game and the Nelson Trout Fishing Club saw over 200 predator control traps built for a local catchment group. Traps will be provided to residents of the Motueka catchment at a heavily subsidied rate, with the aim to get as many people involved in backyard trapping, which will benefit native biodiversity.

In early June, 16 members of the trout club met at the Nelson College woodwork room to build around 100 traps. They have since met as a smaller group on numerous occasions to help fulfil the order of DOC200 traps and rat tunnels, with the total number of traps built in the hundreds.

When not in his first happy place on the river, Club President Don Clementson can be found in his workshop, his next best happy place. Don says, "Jacob from Fish & Game wanted a hand to get into stoat and rat trap manufacturing to supply farms and residents in the Motueka catchment, so the club decided to get involved."

"We came up with a cunning plan (so cunning that you could put a tail on it and call it a stoat), and over a few weeks, our Club members made close to 200 traps".

Don adds that it's a great social opportunity to get to know other club members with whom you may not usually mix with.

"Because local farmers have kindly given access through their property to go fishing, it's our way of thanking them and putting something back into the community".

It was fantastic to see their work in this space, alongside Fish & Game, being recognised by local environmental groups, and it is a shining example of anglers giving back to conservation.

^ *(Top) Don Clementson and Paul Taylor planning the trap building day. (Lower) Members of the Nelson Trout Club building traps at Nelson College.*

O.M.B CONTROL

Fish & Game and the Nelson Trout Club continue to assist with Old Man's Beard control in the Motueka. The work is being carried out at Haycocks Bush - one of the few pieces of lowland remnant native forest in the valley, and a favoured spot for angling.

^ *Club members Don Clementson and Jean Willis helping control O.M B Photo: Jacob Lucas*

FLOOD CLEAN UP - HELPING FARMERS

In the wake of the catastrophic floods that tore through the region, it was incredible to see the community rally around affected people and help them get back on track. Many groups and individuals have been assisting in the aftermath, including the Nelson Trout Fishing Club and Fish & Game.

In the months that followed, we visited a dozen properties and provided over 600 volunteer hours of help, most of which involved clearing fences of flood debris. The Club had been well practiced in this from previous flood recovery efforts in 2021 and 2022. Our efforts concentrated on a mix of primary producers to smaller lifestyle blocks, from Motupiko down to the lower Motueka.

It was an outstanding effort from the Club, with some members helping on one or two occasions and others there at every single event. While the recovery will be long for some, the effect of our work meant a great deal to the people we helped. This work gets positive recognition by the community and other agencies, and helps forge positive relationships between the farming sector, the angling community and Fish & Game.

Thanks to everyone who helped, including a few fishing guides, and others who travelled from as far as Takaka, Murchison and Blenheim to assist.

^ *The flood clean-up effort. Photos: Gebhard Krewitt*

FARMERS 4 WHIO TRAPPING

It's now over two years since Fish & Game started maintaining the Skeet trap line as part of the Farmers 4 Whio trapping network. Farmers 4 Whio are doing great work in the Motueka catchment, with an aim to see whio flourish within farm environments, mostly in the Western tributaries of the Motueka.

To date, we have caught 36 mustelids (stoats and weasels) and 174 rats on this line, helping native birdlife.

Getting involved in conservation projects like this is excellent for positive public recognition and perception and helps achieve one of the key national strategy objectives, especially when Fish & Game (and licence-holders) undertake great work for the benefit of conservation or the public good, which may not relate specifically to game or sportsfish, e.g., Motueka Water Conservation Order protects values other than just trout, including whio (blue duck) - Fish & Game led this process

The Skeet trap line has 59 traps on it (nearly 6kms) and heads through farmland and into native forest, and is checked each month.

It has been great to have buy-in from the Nelson Trout Fishing Club, who are now running another trapline in the Baton Valley, with management assistance from Fish & Game.

It is worth mentioning that Fish & Game, with help from gamebird hunters, has also been running a trapline for the past 8 years at Rabbit Island. This project ties in with the Battle for the Banded Rail trapping network.

^ A Farmers 4 Whio trap alongside the Skeet River. Photo: Jacob Lucas

COOKING FOR CHARITY - A THOUSAND MEALS MADE

While not entirely related to trout fishing, Fish & Game and local hunters/anglers have been helping people in need. The wild taste of duck, goose and swan cooked up in a casserole is a recipe Richmond chef Phil Hazeldine and his team have used to deliver nearly 1,000 meals to families needing a bit of help to put food on the table.

As the owner of Phil's Place at Club Waimea and a keen hunter and angler himself, he says it is a way for hunters to provide food for people who do not get to taste game meat and an opportunity for him to create nutritional meals for people who need it.

Game bird hunters cannot shoot and sell the meat, but they can give it to Nelson Marlborough Fish and Game which freezes it until there is enough for Phil to put into a casserole with vegetables for a wholesome meal.

Volunteers bag the trays of casserole and local Māori health provider Te Piki Oranga distributes the meals across the community.

He has now cooked close to 1,000 charity meals since 2023 and as long as there is game bird meat to cook, he will keep churning them out.

"It is a milestone," he says. "It's helping Fish and Game get game bird meat out into the community and it's a chance for people to see how tasty it can be. "And I feel good because it's a really healthy meal and people will do well off it."

Nelson Marlborough Fish and Game officer Jacob Lucas says it's a great way for hunters to give back to the community and it is free-range meat cooked by a chef who is also a hunter and trout angler.

"He's really good at showcasing the culinary quality of game birds. One of the reasons hunters go out is to provide food for people and if there's an excess of meat, they drop it into Fish and Game and we pass it on to Phil. It's a win-win all round."

Jacob says that after meat is removed, the carcases of the birds are given to the Marlborough Falcon Trust, which makes the venture a triple win.

^ Volunteers cook up gamebird meat to be made into casserole which is given to people in need: Jacob Lucas

GENERAL

MOTUEKA CATCHMENT COLLECTIVE

It's been a busy year for Fish & Game's involvement with the Motueka Catchment Collective. Fish & Game officer, Jacob Lucas, has an active role on the Pest Management thematic group, where he is chair, and also sits on the Recreation and Access group.

The Pest Management group has had a productive year, rolling out traps to locals to encourage backyard trapping (the traps have been built by the Nelson Trout Club and F&G), helping organise weed work in Haycocks Bush, and assisting other groups set up predator control trap networks, including at the Motueka delta, Motueka sandspit, and at Shedwood Bush in Tapawera. The group has instigated a town trapping programme in Tapawera and will be doing the same in Motueka township.

We also arranged the installation of picnic tables in the Motueka catchment, which the public can enjoy using while swimming and fishing.

Fish & Game staff have also been on hand providing electric fishing demonstrations to school groups, organised through the MCC.

The three-year funding period has now concluded, however the foundations have been well built for the continuation of grassroots environmental initiatives by local landowners and others.

^ Some of the picnic tables installed by Fish & Game staff. Photos: Jacob Lucas

^ Trap painting with help from the Nelson Trout Fishing Club. Photo: Jacob Lucas

^ Working with DOC and local group, Shedwood Bush Betterers, to install a predator trapline. Dan Chisnall (L) and Mark Soper (R). Photo: Jacob Lucas

ROTOITI TROUT SAMPLE COLLECTION

Fish & Game staff have been assisting with an MBIE Endeavour program, Our Lakes Our Future, where, with the help of Cawthron, they are developing new lake health indicators, using a lot of emerging eDNA techniques.

One of our study sites is Rotoiti, where seasonal food web monitoring is conducted. We are assisting this group to obtaining trout head/gut samples, using anglers to provide the samples. Local anglers have been contacted to drop off fish samples, and the Nelson Trout Club will also be organising Club days at the lake to obtain samples.

ACCESS UPDATE

Staff have been engaged on a number of access matters over the past year, including:

- Attending stakeholder meetings with OneFortyOne forests over Public Access Easements (PAE's). Staff would like to acknowledge and congratulate OFO for the improvements they have made regarding public access along the PAE's. This issue was raised with the new Hunting and Fishing Minister at a catch-up, amongst other matters.
- The manager met with Ange van der Laan from the Walking Access Commission over a range of matters. It would appear that the recent FSC certification audit received a large amount of feedback from disgruntled recreational interests over a change in policy to forest access from One-Forty-One, resulting in positive changes moving forward, including ensuring Public Access Easements remain open during non-harvest/low fire risk periods.
- Physical access maintenance completed in the Pelorus, Motueka, Buller, Golden Bay, and the middle-lower reaches of the Wairau. This involves replacing signage, clearing tracks to the river, spray work, installing steps and stiles where needed. Note: there are over 200 formal access points in this region that Fish & Game maintain.
- Ongoing consultation with DOC and the forestry company in relation to the Branch River access, which has mid-week closures due to active logging.
- Responding to regular requests for information access from anglers about the Branch River and elsewhere.

It is worth noting that the floods in the Motueka Valley have caused significant damage to formal access tracks, with many access signs being taken by the flood water. We will replace signage over the season and undertake any track work as required (some of the access points have had considerable damage and may take some time to reinstate) . It is also a good opportunity to take a look at the access points here and modify accordingly.

It is also a good time to bring in any new points as thick riparian vegetation has been supressed by the flood, so we will be keeping an eye out for new entry points to the river, as long as they meet guielines around safety and parking.

JEAN WILLIS OBITUARY

Long-serving Fish and Game Councillor, Jean (John) Willis, sadly passed away on Sunday, 11 May.

Jean served as a Fish & Game Councillor from 2009, both on the West Coast and Nelson Marlborough region, and was the West Coast appointee to the National Fish & Game Council during this time. Jean was passionate about the environment and was a staunch advocate for water quality, wetlands and trout habitat.

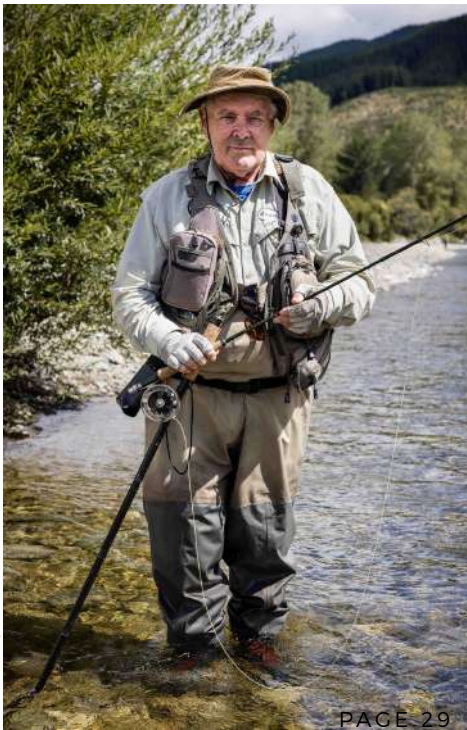
He was a very dedicated Councillor, diligently attending Fish & Game meetings, and always on hand when the call went out for assistance.

Besides being a Councillor, Jean was a voluntary ranger for many years, was the current Secretary of the Nelson Trout Fishing Club until his passing and was made a Life Member of this Club – one of only four people. He was a regular guide at local Kids Fishing Days held in Waimea.

Jean always had great pride in the Fish & Game organisation, showing great faith in the advocacy function that Fish & Game holds and believing this to be one of the most effective environmental groups in New Zealand.

In his own words, Jean says, "I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside such dedicated individuals who share a passion for the sustainability and stewardship of our fisheries".

Rest in Peace, Jean.



> Jean Willis on his beloved Motueka River. Photo: Gebhard Krewitt

D.O.C/CONSERVATION GROUP LIAISON

Ongoing liaison takes place with Marlborough and Tasman D.O.C offices over various matters, including:

- Predator control operations - this mostly relates to access disruptions that arise from aerial operations
- Access related matters
- Conservation projects, such as Shedwood Bush birdsong

The manager has also had several lengthy conversations with Conservation groups wanting to eradicate trout from parts of the Motueka catchment to ostensibly enhance native fisheries.

So far, these conversations have hopefully been steered into a more practical/positive direction such as wetland creations and/or potential shortjawed kokopu population expansion, but there is certainly a public perception from some quarters that trout are universally bad for all native fish species which is simply not the case according to current food-web science and our existing regional monitoring, verified by a Tasman District Council report on native fish distribution.

It demonstrates how valuable our existing regional native fish monitoring work is and staff are thinking of expanding this through some additional survey work in the future to demonstrate that attempting to eradicate trout from part of the Motueka Catchment will achieve zero conservation gains for native fish but in the process likely alienate most of our 5000 fishing licence holders, some of whom currently contribute to existing catchment enhancement projects, including the Skeet/Baton blue duck enhancement project, river clean-ups, old man beard eradication etc.

DEVELOPING IWI RELATIONSHIPS

One of the key objectives of Fish & Game NZs organisational national strategy is: *Mana Whenua Connected - Māori values are understood and reflected within Fish & Game with aligned advocacy and a positive collaborative approach that builds upon Te Tiriti obligations defined in the Conservation Act.*

With nine Iwi within our region, and relationships required before progress can be made, this is a challenging and ongoing aspirational objective for our region. By default, relationship development tends to happen mainly where the interests of Fish & Game and Iwi align within the environmental space, although Councillor Guy Gardiner has also made progress within this area with Rangitāne in relation to Wairau Lagoons swan population management and an organised whanau fishing day on the Taylor River, due to existing relationships developed though his time as a practicing GP in Marlborough.

Modest achievements in this space to date include development of a Pataka (feather storage freezer) for gamebird skins for weaving uses and liaison with Ngai Tahu staff over a potential future Kaikoura freshwater project facilitated by our Ngai Tahu representative on the Nelson Marlborough Fish & Game Council; Councillor Gardeners whanau fishing day initiative of the Taylor River and more recently liaison work over black swan population management within the Wairau Lagoons; extensive and ongoing staff liaison with Ngati Kuia environmental Taiao over the risk of water over allocation within the Kaituna, Rai and Pelorus rivers; and attempted engagement with Ngati Rarua, Rangitane and Ngati Toa in relation to Wairau River water overallocation risks.

This type of work is ongoing, and it will take years to develop enduring relationships with all nine Iwi, given the workloads their staff face. The region will continue to progress any opportunities in this space as they arise.

COMPLIANCE

A total of 436 licence checks were achieved over the 2024-25 season, and our target of making contact with 10% of licence-holders was again achieved this year.

The table below shows our key put and take fisheries had the most compliance effort, with over half the angler contacts at Lake Argyle and 15% from Waimea park. Other lowland fisheries such as the Motueka River and Nelson Lakes made up for 20% of licence checks.

COMPLIANCE SUMMARY 2024-25

Total licence checks		%
Total on DW/backcountry fisheries	26	6.0%
Total lowland fisheries (except Lake Argyle)	88	20.2%
Total Argyle	256	58.9%
Total Waimea Park	66	15.1%
TOTAL	**436**	

Due to the focus being mostly on lowland, stocked fisheries, the number of non-resident anglers encountered was far lower than normal.

DESIGNATED WATERS

Due to staff workload in other areas, we didn't manage to undertake much compliance in backcountry or Designated Waters fisheries for the 2024-25 season.

NON-COMPLIANCE

We again had a quiet year on the non-compliance front, which was great to see. A few minor issues arose, such as fishing with two rods or adults fishing in the junior-only ponds, which were dealt with. No anglers were found fishing without a licence.

RANGER TRAINING COMPLETED

Staff and our team of voluntary rangers met in September 2025 for a Situational Safety and Tactical Communications course. We hold this course every three years, and the training is helpful in the event that our staff and voluntary rangers have to deal with difficult or aggressive people. Thankfully, this is a rare occurrence in this region, and for the most part, anglers enjoy having contact with our rangers.

> Ranger satety training course, held in Richmond September 2025

COMMUNICATION

Communication with licence-holders, the general public and stakeholders is an ongoing and important part of Fish & Game's work.

This region has been involved in plenty of positive media opportunities over the year, most of these showcasing to the general public the good work the organisation and its licence-holders do, and promoting the recreational opportunities we are responsible for. This includes:

- At least 28 newspaper articles, highlighting news items including season prospects, the floods and clean-up efforts, and conservation-related activities, among others
- Monthly columns in the Top of the South Farming News, a great chance to inform the rural sector of the good work we do, and hopefully gain some licence-holders through promoting fishing and hunting as recreation
- Working with New Zealand Fish & Game on national media releases, for example, Cooking for Charity, Grovetown Lagoon access, and others.
- TV1 News item about World Wetlands Day showcasing the small-scale wetlands that regional officer, Lawson Davey, has been assisting with alongside landowners and Annette Litherland from Landcare Trust.
- Presentation to Forest and Bird by Fish & Game officer, Vaughan Lynn on Para Wetland enhancement
- Appearance on Radio New Zealand's show 'Country Life', where Fish & Game officer, Jacob Lucas, was interviewed about the impact of the floods and the voluntary clean-up effort that followed.
- Ongoing use of social media to keep licence-holders and the public informed and promote Fish & Game
- A presentation to the Nelson Rotary Club by Lawson Davey about the work that Fish & Game does
- A presentation at the Birds NZ National Conference by Lawson Davey
- Annual presentations to the Marlborough Freshwater Anglers Club and Nelson Trout Fishing Club
- 3 x EDM's (electronic direct mail) sent to licence-holders each year, highlighting news, tips, educational opportunities and what activities Fish & Game are engaged with.
- Producing an Annual Fisheries Report to summarise the work that staff get up to over the year.

RMA ADVOCACY

Resource Management advocacy remains one of our key avenues to achieve improved Local Authority management and retention of the 'natural capital' that supports fish and gamebird resources, pursuant to our statutory advocacy functions. This advocacy directly supports one of the five key strategic priorities within Fish & Games new national organisational strategy - Healthy Species, Habitats, and Ecosystems, both through the retention/restoration of healthy habitats, and retention and improvement of angler and hunter access to habitats supporting sports fish and gamebird species.

While Fish & Game are directly responsible for the population health of the fish and gamebird species we are required to manage, Local Authorities are responsible for the health of their habitat and access to that habitat. Much resource management work within the Nelson Marlborough Region often focuses on water quality and quantity issues, which tend to affect salmonids more than gamebirds; however, we sometimes also engage in planning activity within the hunting space, usually around retention of hunting access to public areas. Unfortunately, resource management advocacy is often an adversarial and lengthy process, costing licence holders considerable staff time and funding resources for legal assistance and the like.

Nationally, the current Government has forced a legislative pause on all Local Authorities in advancing new environmental plan reviews until a national government review of both the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPSFM 2020), and the Resource Management legislation has been completed. Of significant concern to this region, is recent government lobbying from freshwater users, to attempt to convince Government that the rewrite of the Resource Management Act should not have to give effect to Water Conservation Orders (WCO's), meaning the current WCO's in place within this region for the nationally outstanding brown trout fisheries within the Buller and Motueka catchments, would be significantly weakened, if not nullified as part of this legislative review.

On behalf of licence holders, our New Zealand Fish and Game planning staff with support from regional planning staff, will be submitting on changes proposed for both the NPSFM 2020, and the Resource Management Act rewrite. Licence holders interested in this area will also be given a 'heads-up' via our normal communication channels on when these proposed changes are open for public scrutiny/submissions.

MARLBOROUGH ENVIRONMENT PLAN (MEP) APPEAL RESOLUTION PROCESS

NM F&G have one outstanding appeal point yet to be resolved within the Marlborough Environment Plan around permitted activity status for hunter maimai within the Grovetown Lagoon, which we hope to resolve through the outcome of the local Grovetown Lagoon management plan hearings process. We have a number of residual concerns around water overallocation within the Wairau, Kaituna, and Rai River systems. As part of our appeals resolution process it was agreed these issues would be better resolved through the new MDC freshwater plan which was on track to be notified by the end of 2024 under existing legislation, however following an election, this timeframe was pushed out by the new Government until the end of 2028, to make way for their national review of the NPSFM 2020 and Resource Management Act occurring first. In the meantime, we are doing our best to try and ensure significant overallocation within these waterways does not now occur, including having commissioned independent science reviews of minimum flow and water allocation settings within these waterways, to inform the development of a new freshwater plan for Marlborough, and provide a strong evidenced based position in the interim regarding our concerns of water overallocation risk within the fisheries mentioned above.

MARLBOROUGH RESOURCE CONSENTS

We continue to try and submit where appropriate on Marlborough resource consents, using the two recent technical reviews of the Wairau and Kaituna/Rai/Pelorus water allocation and minimum flow settings. Despite a meeting with the Mayor and Environment Committee Chair of Marlborough District Council on these reviews, currently MDC have taken a position that Fish and Game are not an affected party to these matters due to our MeP appeal concerns being deferred into the next freshwater planning process, something we fundamentally disagree with, supported by our own legal advice, however a High Court judicial review is currently the only avenue open for us to test this position in relation to individual consents for new water allocation. It remains to be seen whether this drastic step will be required, it is a last resort option for the region due to costs of this approach. Fortunately for licence holders, some of Te Tau Ihu Iwi share similar concerns around the shortsighted approach of over-allocating water between now and the new freshwater plan development, when a process to claw this water back would then be required. We hope common sense will prevail within Council decision making on these matters. A number of non-water allocation related Marlborough resource consents were also monitored, and a few were inputted to by staff where necessary, >

including a Department of Conservation application for instream river works in the Upper Clarence to protect black fronted tern nesting islands.

TASMAN DISTRICT COUNCIL PLANNING AND CONSENTS

Tasman District Council have sought an exemption from the Government pause on regional planning reviews to give effect to the new Water Conservation Order for Waikoropupu Springs within the Tasman Resource Management plan. Ongoing staff engagement with the Waimea River Park Management Plan, and Waimea Inlet Forum (hunting access retention) and Motueka Catchment Collective group (recognition of trout fishery values) continued. Staff submitted on the TDC dog control bylaw review on behalf of hunters. Engagement on a private plan change for the Waimea water management zone occurred, along with input to Councils review of its draft river management plan. A number of Tasman resource consents were monitored, and a few were inputted to where necessary, including installation of temporary forest harvest crossings within spawning streams, gravel extraction, and alluvial mining consents.

PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Nationally, advocacy on a range of fronts on behalf of licence holders continues by NZ fish and game council staff in an attempt to get the habitat of trout and salmon specifically recognised and provided for within proposed government legislation changes looming. Staff provided assistance to NZC planning staff regarding a national FG submission on PF Olsens recreational forest access policy.

Regionally, a hui at Te Awhina marae was attended by the manager regarding the planned future relocation of the Motueka sewage treatment scheme. The manager also attended a meeting with Fertiliser NZ representative John Barnes regarding details of a current large scale farm trial at Lincoln dairy unit comparing conventional verses regenerative dairy farming operations side by side – this potentially holds significant promise for reducing the nitrate footprint of dairying within NZ. Staff met with the Cawthron Institute to outline our concerns over current low flow management within the Upper Motueka and Motupiko. Staff and some of the Nelson anglers club, undertook spawning activity assessments within the Wai-iti and Motupiko in response to requests for winter willow management within these spawning systems prior to the 100 year floods the region received. The two 100-year return flood events incurred widespread damage across the region, requiring extensive instream works at many sites just to even get the river back into its pre-flood channel. The superior performance of intact riparian crack willow forest, compared to hard rock protection, has hopefully become very evident to all parties following these life-changing events and we hope some 'lessons have been learned' in terms of the amazing cost-effective performance of extensive Crack willow riparian zones for bank protection within larger rivers.

^ *Damage to the Westbank Road below the Pearse confluence. Photo: Rhys Barrier.*

^ *Groynes in the Dove River, seen during a winter spawning survey. Photo: Rhys Barrier.*

NELSON CITY COUNCIL FRESHWATER REGIONAL PLAN DEVELOPMENT

No activity here due to the current legislative pause on all Local Authorities in advancing new environmental plan reviews.

ECAN REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT

No activity here due to the current legislative pause on all Local Authorities in advancing new environmental plan reviews.

NELSON TROUT FISHING CLUB

NELSON TROUT FISHING CLUB 2024-25 SEASON - BY TONY ENTWISTLE

The Nelson Trout Fishing Club is for anyone who has a passion for trout fishing and is dedicated to fostering a community of anglers who share a passion for trout fishing. The club promotes conservation and education, while ensuring a welcoming environment for sports anglers of all skill levels.

The Club has continued to grow to over 120 members and it is encouraging to see an increasing number of younger and female anglers. There has also been a concerted effort to recruit women and younger members onto the committee, and to actively involve committee members in making contributions that will make membership more valuable.

The Nelson Trout Fishing Club again featured a full calendar with members involved in a wide range of activities, beyond their core trout fishing.

Activities throughout the year included regular events like the early season casting clinics, interesting guest speakers, a special cooking evening, the annual mid-winter dinner, AGM quiz night, club auction, and Christmas BBQ. Members were also active in making over 200 stoat and rat traps for the Motueka Catchment Collective and put over 600 hours into helping clean-up properties alongside the Motueka River after the recent devastating mid-winter floods.

The Club donated funds to help Nelson-Marlborough Fish & Game erect two picnic tables on the Motueka River for public use, and contributed financially to the Sport Fishing for Youth Trust, as well as providing helpers/guides for their many well-attended junior and community fishing days at the Waimea Park educational fishing ponds.

The trout fishing on local rivers was productive throughout most of the season, although drought conditions in the height of summer made for challenging fishing at times when afternoon water temperatures regularly rose to above 20°C. In addition to the many days where club members arranged personal fishing with other club members, the Club organised several well attended 'mentoring days' on the Motueka River, pairing members with more experienced members to help build fishing skills. There was also a successful winter Club trip to Lake Brunner.

Club members helped out with some very successful on-river fishing clinics organised and run by Nelson-Marlborough Fish and Game for members of the public, which included clinics on soft-baiting, fly-fishing and a special women's event.

The Nelson Trout Fishing Club welcomes new members who want to connect with fellow anglers and participate in a range of events, whether you are new to sport fishing or are already experienced.

For more information check out our website at:
Nelson Trout Fishing Club or contact The Secretary: secretary@nelsontroutfishingclub.com.

^ Tony Entwistle providing tuuition to one of 40 people at the annual NTFC casting day, held at Saxton Field. Photo: Jacob Lucas

A Club fishing day at Lake Rotoiti in August. This was run to help provide some samples for a food web study. Photo: Jacob Lucas

MARL ANGLERS CLUB UPDATE

The year has been a mixed bag, mainly due to several weather events that have impacted our rivers and waterways in the region. Several events have been cancelled because of this; others have been postponed until water clears.

But we've also had successes, with members new to angling having caught their first fishes. More experienced members have also landed some good ones over the season.

Prior to Christmas, the early season fishery was at its optimum with water temperatures near perfect and safe wading. For those able to put in the time, successful missions were the order of those days. Later, a very hot summer saw the fishing time reduced to 7 to 8 am before the trout headed off to deeper water as water temperatures rose. The winter fishery was a non-event as the region experienced its wettest June /July in 42 years, providing very few opportunities to get out. However, the successful seasons following the 2020/21 high magnitude flood events have proved that the Wairau River fishery is very resilient and expectations are high for the new season.

Let's look at what we've done in the last year. We've had some great events and excellent speakers…

WHAT WE DID IN 2024/25

We kicked off the year with our regular casting clinic down at the Taylor. This gives us a chance to introduce anglers to the club and help people new to fishing to learn how to improve their cast. We advertise it locally and, this time, even got some takers from the Nelson region.

Then, in November, we had the casting Olympics, an amazingly successful evening for club members out here in the park, with great spring weather. Accolades to Guy Gardiner for suggesting this. We'd like to hold this again this spring, so get out there and practice to take away the recognition and the winner's prize.

We held our regular Christmas dinner in December at the local Redwoodtown Tavern. Lots of people with partners turned up and it was a lot of fun. We'll do that again this coming December and we're actively looking for a new venue. Let me know if you have ideas we can use.

In January the club supported a family day on the Taylor, organised by Guy Gardiner. Fish and Game provided day licenses, Hendersons provided gear, we provided coaching. Marlborough Primary Health, Te Piki Oranga and the Catching Trout WhatsApp Group all got involved. How popular was it? Jude kept the spreadsheet – over seventy people wandered in to have a go, or about twenty families. Only one fish was caught despite Fish and Game's earlier release of trout into the river. But the smiles, the energy and the mood made up for that.

In March we held a 30th celebration lunch. Catering for this wasn't covered by our subs, so people had to pay separately for it. But it was very successful – about twenty people turned up. Thanks to Chris for cooking the goat, Graham for smoking the trout, Jo and Jude for preparing food, and Lou for setting an elegant table.

We hosted our regular quiz and pizza night recently. The question setter is learning that setting challenging questions just because they're interesting really doesn't cut the mustard, so members' level of achievement in the quiz should pick up over the next couple of years. Kudos to Guy Gardiner who, once again, won the quiz. And kudos, too, to the group of people who navigated the questions to score in the high twenties.

In May, Paul Watts hosted a fly tying workshop here. About a dozen members got down and dirty with some hands-on efforts. Another great exhibition from Paul.

SPEAKERS

Andy White from the Marlborough District Council Rivers Team addressed us just twelve months ago, Carey Cudby told us about fishing for tarpon on the fly, Chris Flaherty spoke about fly fishing on Christmas Island, Josh Ponder on soft bait techniques for local waters and Nev Gane gave a really well thought out and researched talk on what turned out to be a less than successful salmon season. And Vaughan Lynn gave us an in-depth presentation on the current work being undertaken by Fish and Game on behalf of anglers.

DAYS ON THE WATER

Most of our days on the water are held at Lake Argyle which, thanks to Fish and Game and Contact Energy, are well-stocked and provide opportunities for fishing the lake from the shore or from the boat, or fishing the canals, where some good-sized fish can be caught. It's a great venue to instruct members of all levels of experience and the chance to catch a fish or two as well.

Graham, Carey and I are usually there providing support to the anglers, and we invite you guys to join us. There's always spare seats if you want a lift. This year, Carey's boat was set adrift – but it was a momentary setback, giving time for another cup of tea. As well as Argyle, we paid a couple of visits to the Wairau Diversion in the pursuit of Kahawai, both spinning and fly.

Bruce Kean - President

LICENCE INFORMATION

REGIONAL INSIGHTS

A total of 4,170 LEQs (full licence equivalents) were sold over the 2023-24 season, which was lower than the previous two seasons, with 4,359 and 4,356 LEQs sold - see the table below. This -4.3% reduction may be a symptom of the ongoing economic downturn the region is experiencing.

Most licence categories dipped for the past season, with the exception being a modest increase in local area licences and a healthy increase in junior whole season licences, jumping from 297 to 407 licences - a 37% increase and a fantastic result.

With the Designated Waters Licence system in place for this season, resident anglers were required to buy a $5 licence to fish any of our three DW fisheries. 1,705 resident DW licences were sold in this region (slightly down on last year), and 662 DW day licences were sold to non-resident anglers over the season, an increase of 72 licences from last year.

Non-resident licences typically account for around 25% of our regional fishing licence income. This is a considerable amount and likely the highest percentage of any region in the country. There was a reduction in non-resident whole-season licences sold this season, from 551 the previous year to 490 this season; however, there was an increase in day licences issued, from 589 in 2023-24 to 780 issued this year.

Overall, since our hatchery-supported put and take fishery program was initiated around 7 years ago, the region has now transitioned from needing an annual grant from the national Fish & Game funding system, to this year paying a ~$100k levy to support the wider organisation's funding needs.

NATIONAL INSIGHTS

Nationally, Fish LEQs were up 0.3% overall, mostly thanks to strong performance for most North Island Fish & Game regions, which were all up on the previous season, with the exception of the Wellington Region. Although there was only a small growth in overall licence sales, there was an increase in revenue of $225,000.

Regarding Designated Waters licences, there was a reduction in the number of resident DW licences sold; however, this was to be expected in the second year of the DW system. The first year had heightened media attention around the new DW fisheries, and many anglers likely purchased licences even though they were unlikely to fish any of these waters. 11,568 resident season DW licences were sold in 2023-24, which dropped to 10,484. There was an increase in non-resident DW licences sold this year, from 2,771 to 3,111.

There was a minor increase in non-resident whole-season licences sold, as well as an increase in non-resident day licences.

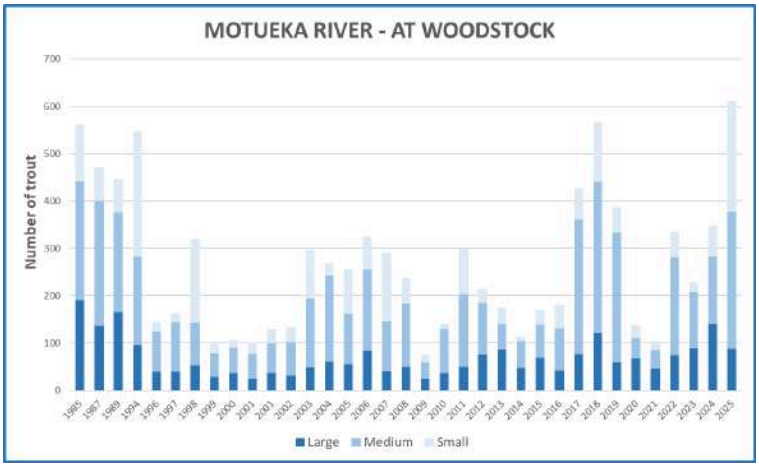
It was again pleasing to note that, as was the case with Nelson Marlborough, national junior licence sales showed a significant increase, rising by around 25%.

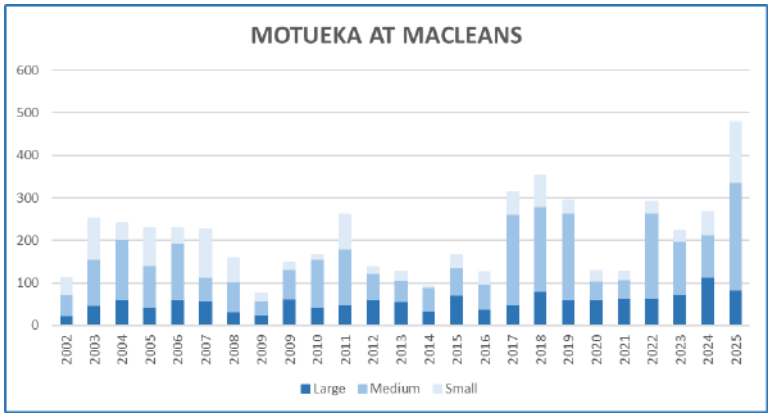
There are changes on the way for how licence income is distributed. As of next year, anglers who purchase a licence will not be required to select a region for support; the money will be allocated to a central pot and then distributed to regions based on their needs.

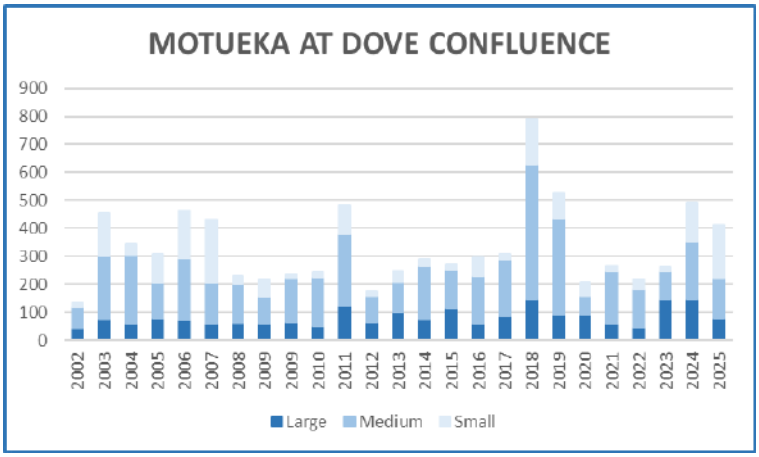
	RESIDENT CATEGORIES										NON-RESIDENT CATEGORIES				
	Family	Whole season Adult	Loyal Senior	Local Area	Winter	Long Break	Short Break	Day	Junior Whole Season	Junior Day	Whole Seaon NR	Day NR	Junior NR Whole Season	Junior NR Day	Fish LEQ
2022-23	769	1530	332	173	131	10	105	746	269	152	580	580	13	3	4,356
2023-24	736	1485	363	222	132	16	132	825	297	203	551	589	9	9	4,359
2024-25	684	1410	361	230	118	13	143	677	407	203	490	780	19	8	4,170

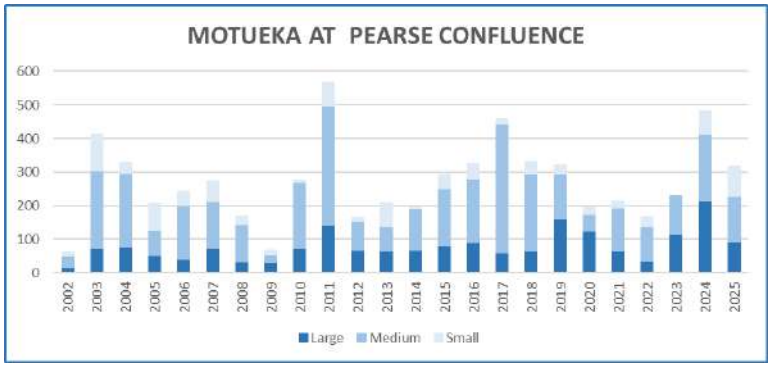
APPENDIX

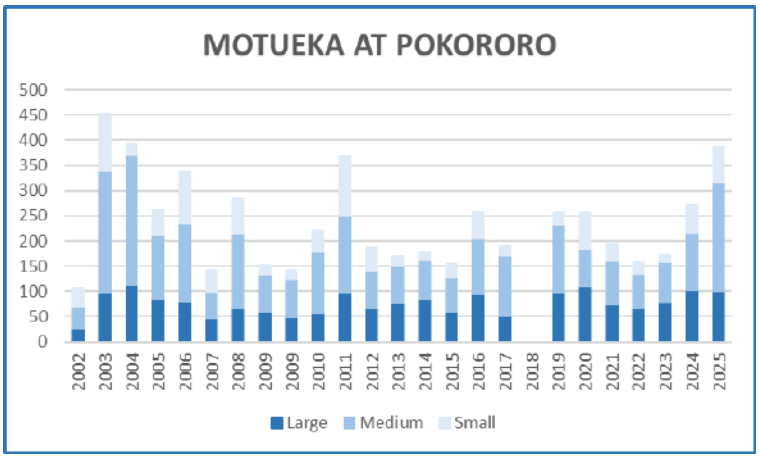
MOTUEKA DRIFT DIVE RESULTS- INDIVIDUAL SITES

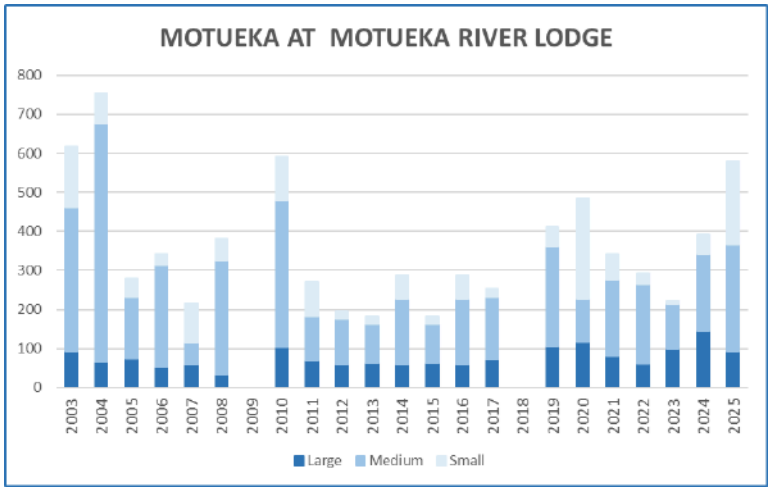




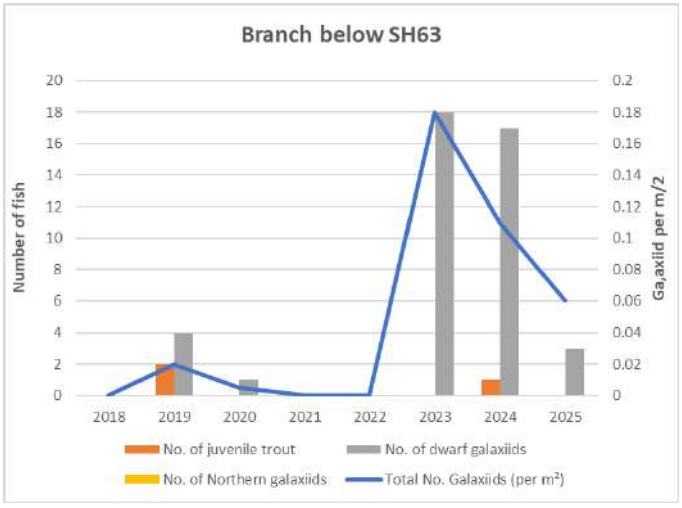


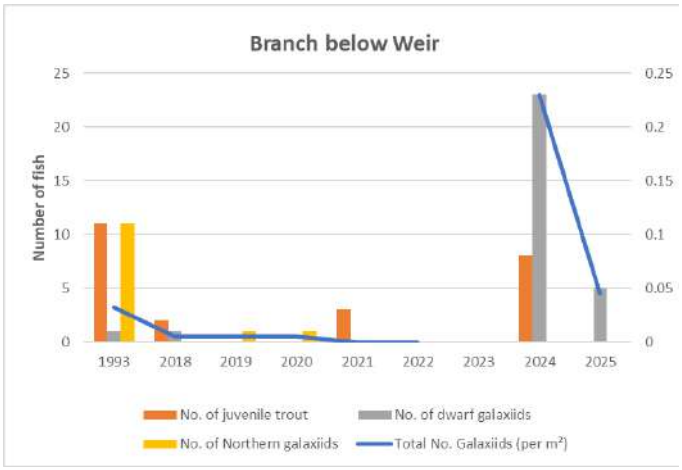


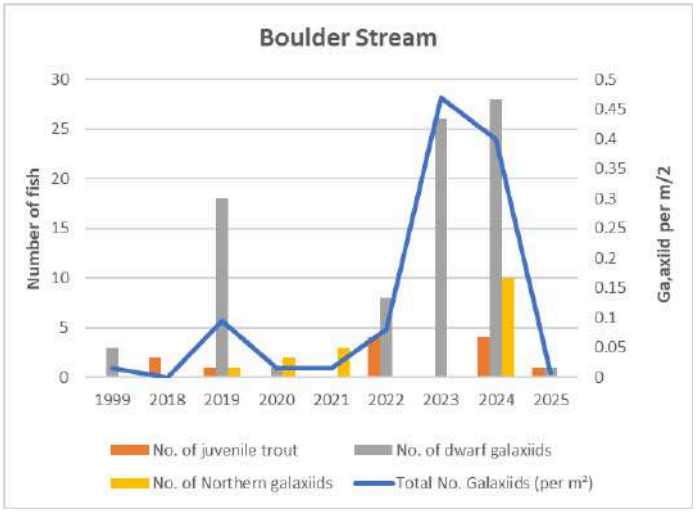


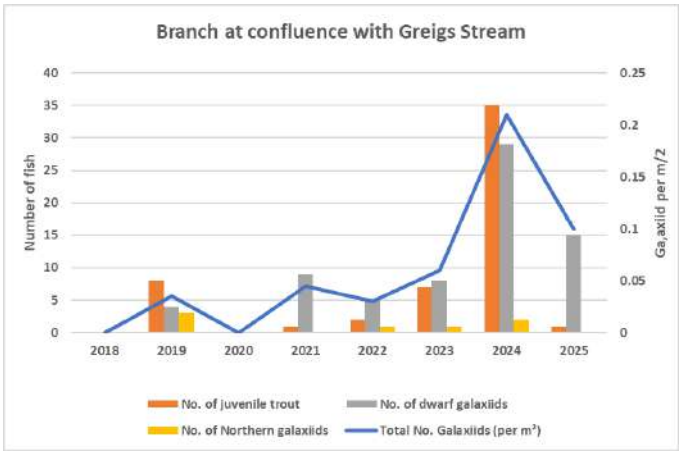


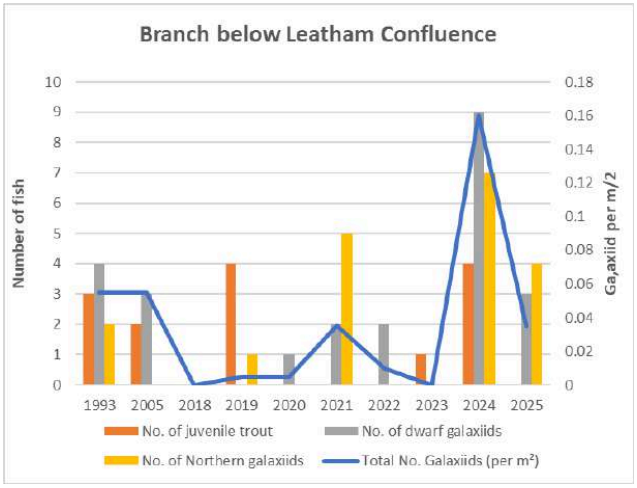
BRANCH/LEATHAM NATIVE FISH GRAPHS - TRIBUTARY SITES

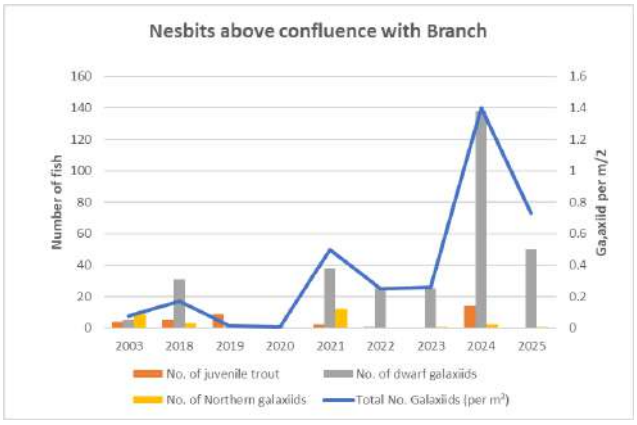


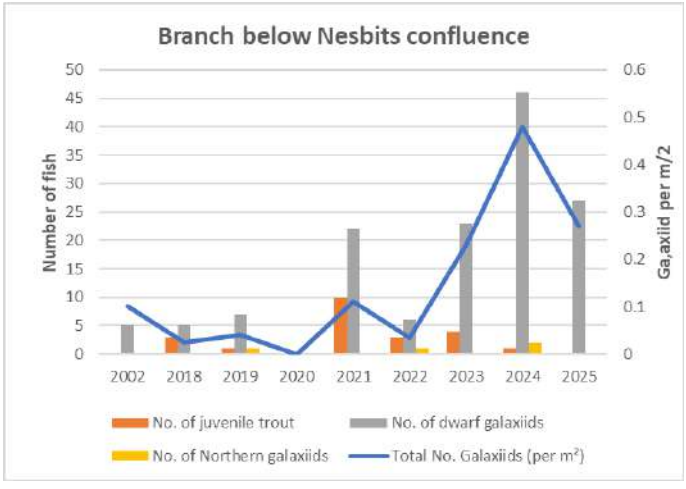


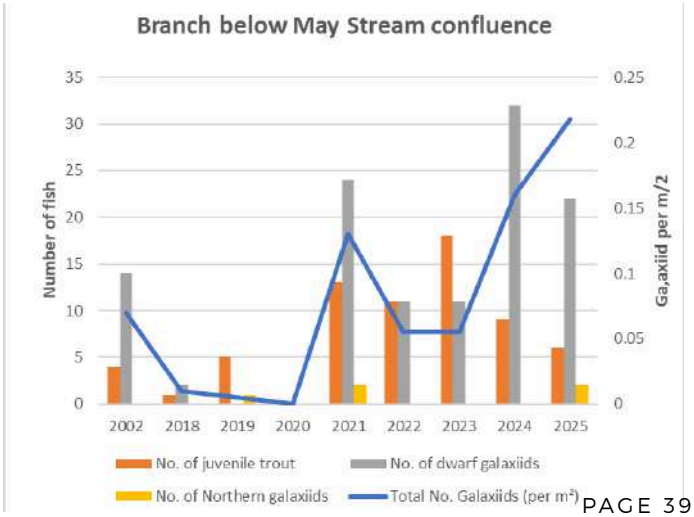




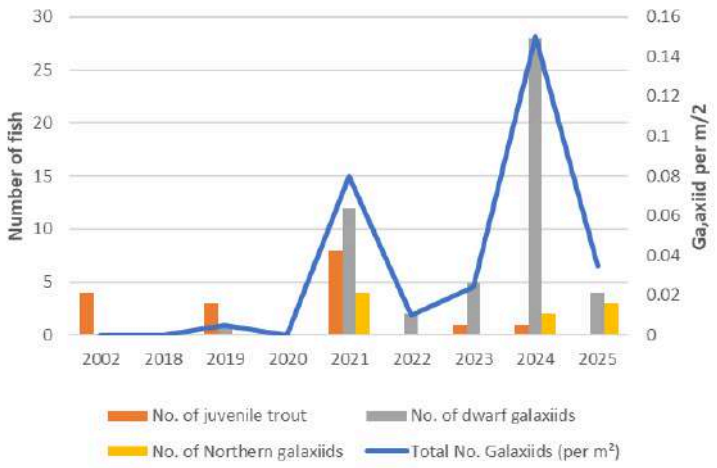




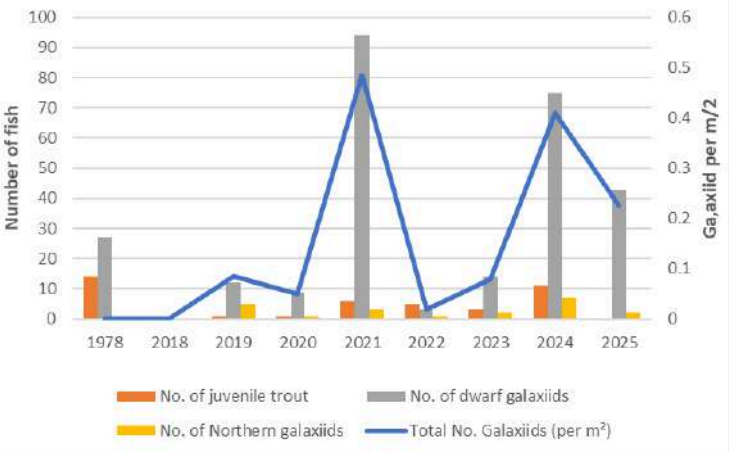




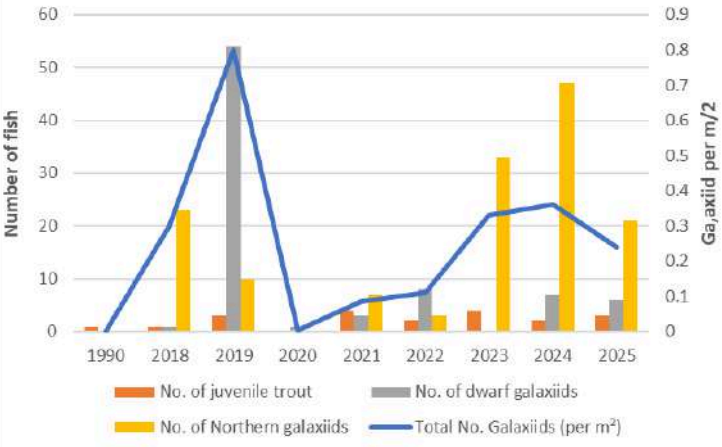
Leatham below Caves Swingbridge



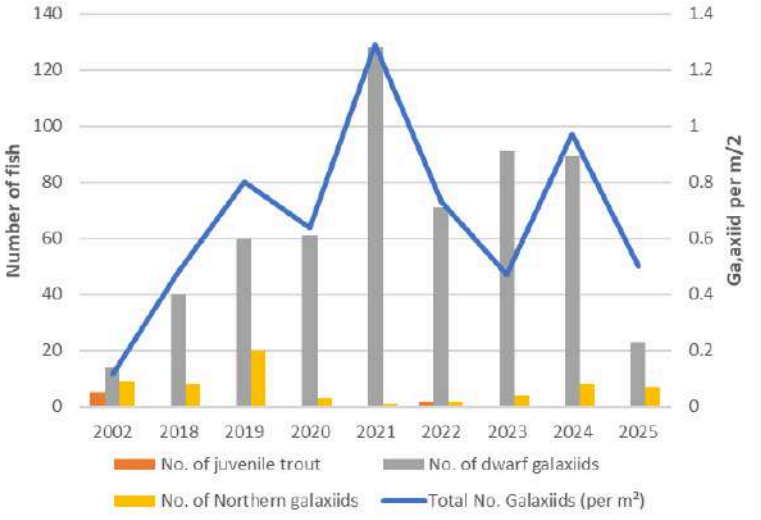
Leatham at Cave's Bluffs



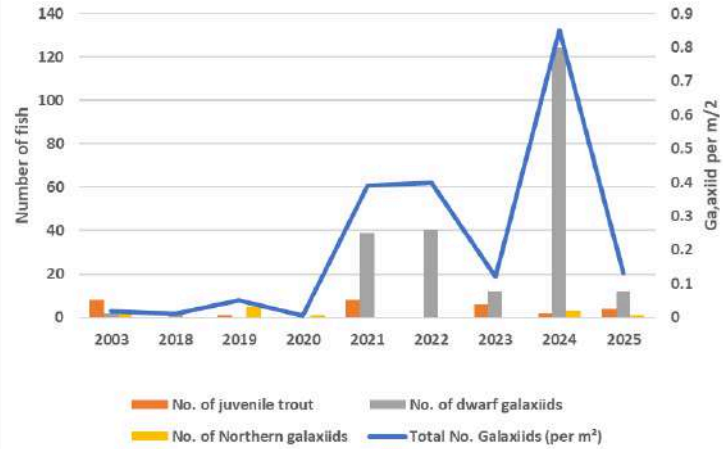
Alan Stream above confluence with Branch



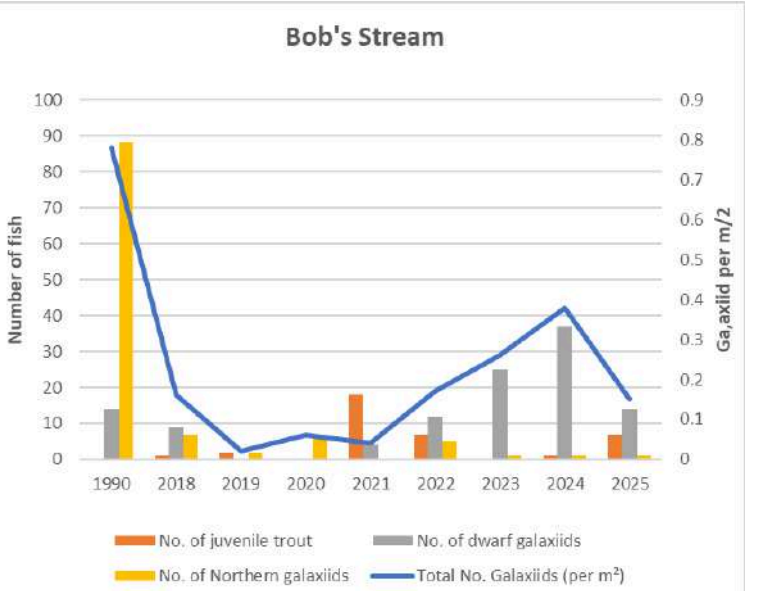
Leatham Trib. opposite Caves Bluffs



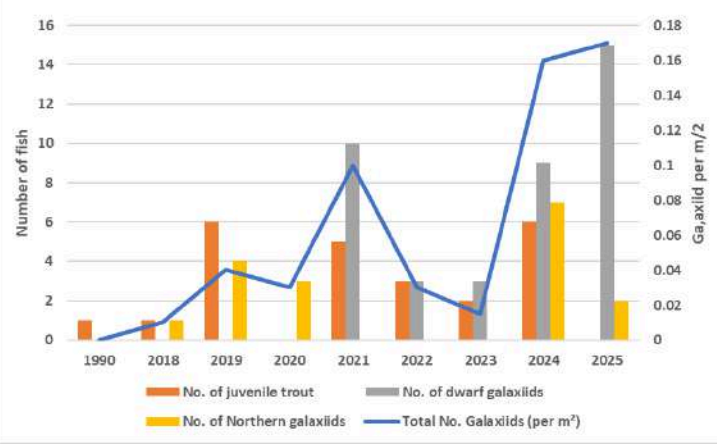
Silverstream above confluence with Branch



Bob's Stream



Greigs above confluence with Branch



SPORTS FISHING FOR YOUTH CHARITABLE TRUST - ANNUAL REPORT - BY IAN KEARNEY

"This is such an awesome community asset that you guys have set up for kids. My kids love going there and catching a trout. I have also taken their friends there as well to catch their first fish. The amount of joy I seen on my kids, their friends and other kids faces fishing there is immense. Thanks to everyone involved in putting this asset together for our communities' kids and making it easy for families to take kids fishing".
Facebook , Seamus Van Lent

The Trust's original objective was to provide youth with the opportunity to go fishing, enjoy the outdoors, and hopefully develop an appreciation of the outdoor environment. We provide youth with the opportunity to learn how to fish with the assistance of an experienced fisher and with good equipment being provided. We also wanted children to be able to see the fish in the water in a natural environment and have a good chance of catching the fish they saw.

Last year our usual guided fish out days were limited due to the impact of Covid however we regularly stocked the ponds and encouraged young fishers to attend with their families. Over the last year the ponds have had heavy patronage during the periods of the year they are open for family use and all of the guided fish out days were booked out well in advance. The above quotation, together with the regular increase in youth and family licences issued by Fish and Game, indicates that we are achieving our original objective.

We thank our supporters and sponsors for enabling us to provide this well used community facility.

THIS SEASON

This was the Trust's thirteenth fishing season. We stocked the ponds throughout the winter and spring of 2024 as well as over the summer. Fishing at the ponds has become a popular family activity year-round. There are also individual youth who became very regular fishers during holiday breaks and at weekends. It is also noticeable how popular the ponds are on sunny winter Sunday afternoons for fathers and grandparents with their off spring.

Youth participation in fishing continues to rise. Fish and Game advise that youth and family licence sales are strong. The ponds were very popular for family groups over the summer as well as on sunny winter days.

We were able to offer guided fish out days in April/May 2024 and in November/December 2024 We were also able to offer guided fishing opportunities to groups such as scout and cub groups, casting for recovery, several school groups, special needs groups, youth groups and groups of elderly fishers.

^ *Elderly fishers at the pond*

We anticipate continuing to have fish out days to introduce youth to trout fishing with the next fish out days being in November December 2025. We are planning a number of guided fishing days for various groups in May and June 2025, including school groups, the casting for recovery ladies and other fishing days for either supporter or special needs groups. In providing these guided fish out days we believe we are achieving our objectives and, as one parent said:

"the opportunity to attend free kids fishing events has not only given us another great family time activity but it is something that kids can endeavour to do for a long time, if not a lifetime, we hope"

We had a good reliable fish supply during the season. We were able to stock the ponds every few weeks with rainbow trout generally around 1.5kg in weight with a few larger fish up to 3kgs. The ponds are now well-stocked with trout and will provide excellent fishing for family groups over the winter. >>

It appears that the fish are thriving in the ponds and the supply of cold groundwater during the summer ensures a healthy environment for the fish. We were particularly pleased to see how well the fish thrived during the summer drought conditions We believe the regular influx of cold ground water creates a good growing environment for the fish and for the invertebrates which the trout feed on.

^ *"Thanks for yesterday, you guys had a stunner! Kids loved it, made memories for hopefully engaged fisho's when older – there's a couple that are hooked already" Weesang Paaka - Parkland School*

We are confident of the fish supply for the coming season. We are grateful to the support of the Rata Foundation which enables the Trust to purchase suitable fish. Nelson Marlborough Fish and Game deliver the fish from the hatchery and assist us in lots of other ways. This year Fish and Game included in the stock a number of fish that had been their breeding stock. These fish, up to 5 kg in weight , provided a great thrill for the fortunate young fishers who hooked one.

Each year we have a number of community groups who use the ponds . One of these groups is Fostering Kids NZ whose regional coordinator has written:

"The sports fishing for youth team are incredible with their kindness and support in the event is made very easy for our families. We have some very traumatized and challenging children in care and to see them beaming with pride and achievement after their catch is something special to witness"

Denise Green, Upper South Island regional coordinator, Fostering Kids NZ

We have had strong support from sponsors such as Hunting and Fishing who provide us with equipment, Kilwell who donated our fishing rods, as well as supporters who have donated fishing gear over the year. The Nelson trout fishing club have been great supporters of the ponds over the years and most of our guides are members of the club. The club also supports the Trust with donations and equipment from time to time.

^ *Volunteers installing a BBQ*

We get considerable assistance from Nelson Fish and Game staff who assist with administration and organizational matters on fish out days and other matters relating to the management of the ponds and from Marina at Beon Numeri Limited who provide accounting services.

The pond surrounds are maintained by Community Services workers who are supervised by Corrections Department staff. They do a great job in caring for and maintaining the access road edges, the fishing ponds and the car park area. They also keep the picnic areas and the banks well mowed. Many of the parents attending fish out days make complimentary comments on the state of the grounds and pond surrounds.

We are also fortunate to have Jimmy's Bait Company provide us with pellets to use as bait. The availability of these bait pellets makes the managing of fish out occasions easier and safer. Jimmy has also been one of our most regular supporters and a guide since the ponds were first constructed.

This year we also received a donation from the Nelson Trout Fishing Club. This donation enabled us pay for Trustee insurance and public liability insurance as well as assist with operating costs.

Hi, I just wanted to say a HUGE thanks to the amazing group of guys you had at the kid's fishing ponds today (05/05/24). Our son (13) and daughter (5) had a blast and kept chatting about it at home as we ate our delicious trout. Our son has autism and if the guide noticed any difference with him he certainly didn't let it phase him as he showed patience and kindness teaching him plenty of tips and techniques which finally led to the triumph of catching his own trout. Then the man gutting our fish basically gave our kids an awesome science lesson as he explained the process and the anatomy of the fish. This all meant a great deal to us, a fantastic experience, cheers! Dave and Sam.

THE SITE AND FACILITIES

The site and facilities are now well-established. The planting which was carried out by the NMIT horticulture students seven years ago is now well-established. The walking tracks and access around the ponds which have been improved with support from Pub Charity and the Network Tasman Trust provide easy and safe access for young fishers. New tables have also been added with the assistance off Egypt Construction.

The access to the ponds via Challies road is working well. It was however noticeable that the access road along the edge of the ponds, which is shared by anglers visiting the nearby Fish and Game Pond, experiences considerable use and can develop potholes over time. The track now requires regular regrading. With support from Lion Foundation and the Network Tasman Trust we were able to form a new entry to our ponds. This new entry greatly reduces the distance traveled on the old track and provides additional carparking on site. Eygpt Construction did a great job on this entry.

We have had an increasing problem with weed growth in the ponds over the years. With support from Pub Charity, we have a regular weed management program. The ponds are fed by groundwater and unfortunately the groundwater in this location has a very high nitrogen level. This does appear to be stimulating weed growth and over past summers weed became a significant inhibitor to the use of the ponds inspite of the weed removal program. We were experiencing significant weed growth within six weeks of the contractor removing the weed from the ponds. Over the last two years our contractor used a new method of weed removal using two people which has proved to be very successful and enabled good fishing to be provided in the big pond over the summer. We will continue with this method even though it is somewhat more expensive than our previous method.

^ *Weed removal is an ongoing problem*

The water supply to the ponds as from groundwater which flows through the surrounding gravel in the river berm. The level of the water in an individual ponds varies depending on the water level in the nearby Waimea River.

The culvert system between the ponds is designed to function when the ponds have a reasonable level of water over the winter and through until October/November. The water level then drops over the summer and can be up to 1 m below the culvert level in a dry February. However, the fact that the water is supplied underground through the gravels means that the incoming water remains cool and fishing over the summer is not unduly affected by warmer water. It was noticeable that there has been no fish mortality or signs of stress during the extended summer drought that we are having.

That said during floods in the river the water level will rise to a level which makes the ponds difficult to fish. This happens every 2 to 3 years. Below is a photo of the ponds following a flood in the river in July 2021. As you will note the water level is well above the level of the disabled fishing platforms and the three ponds become one. The ponds were at a similar level on May 10th 2023 following a week of heavy rain and caused the cancellation of at least one event. It takes 4 to 5 days for the water level to drop down to a safe fishing level.

^ *Ponds flooded with water level above the disabled fishing platforms*

Our toilet facilities which are provided with assistance from Tasman District Council are used by fishers and also popular with walkers and cyclists using the river berm park. With the opening of the nearby Fish and Game Pond these facilities had been experiencing increased demand however the Tasman District Council have now built some public toilets at the end of Challies Road , about 100 meters from the ponds. These are a welcome public amenity.

^ *New entry to the ponds*

THE FUTURE

The Trust's original objective was to provide youth with an opportunity to partake in the outdoor activity that would encourage then to develop a knowledge and an understanding of the outdoor environment. We believe the ponds and supporting infrastructure provide an excellent facility, suitable and safe for family and children's fishing activities. Over the twelve years we have provided almost 4000 children with the challenge and the thrill of catching trout in an outdoor environment. The ponds are also used for special needs groups, the disabled, and now the elderly who otherwise would not have the opportunity to have the experience of "going fishing".

It is also pleasing to see the ponds so well used by both families and by groups of youngsters fishing on their own during the holiday periods and on weekends. We believe we have developed a good understanding of the fish management and how to extend the family fishing opportunities. We believe that the use of the ponds for family fishing experiences has increased with the improved access via Challies Road and the availability of opportunities for parents to fish at the nearby Fish and Game pond.

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Report by Ian Kearney, Chair of Sports Fishing for Youth Charitable Trust

"Just wanted to say thanks for all that you do with the ponds. Myself and a mate have taken our 3,3,5 and 6yo girls to the ponds over the last few days. There were varying levels of enthusiasm from the girls, until today when both our oldest managed to land a bloody decent trout each. Now they both want to know when we are going fishing again! A father's dream. Thanks again,"

> A happy angler with a late-season Waimea Park fish. Photo: Rhys Barrier - September 2025