

North Canterbury Fish and Game Council

Draft Statement of Purpose and Priorities for the period 2024-2025

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A. Introduction

This is the framework prepared by the Council to give direction to the preparation and implementation of the operational work plan and other plans (e.g. the Statutory Fish and Game management Plan).

This Statement was revised in February 2024.

In the 12 months since this Statement was last revised there have been changes to the organisation's operating environment which the Council must take account of. Of these the most significant was the change of government. As a result:

- There is now a Minister for Hunting and Fishing. It is unclear at present what servicing arrangements the Minister will have or what the future role of the Department of Conservation will be in respect of Fish & Game.
- The Minister is taking a close interest in Fish & Game and seems inclined to encourage or even promote change in the organisation. He is said to be particularly conscious of the declining financial sustainability of the organisation in its current organisational form but disinclined to approve increased licence fees in the current environment.
- Legislation affecting the management of the environment introduced by the previous government is being rolled back. The implications for continuing protection of valued introduced species is, as yet, unclear.

Trends that continue to pose a serious challenge to the interests of anglers and hunters in our region include:

- Cost inflation continues to be a challenge. The cost of going fishing and hunting given the geographic distribution of attractive opportunities in the North Canterbury region away from population centres is likely to further impact licence sales.
- There is likely to be a shift in angler pressure from salmon fishing to high country fishing with a range of implications for the trout fishery (including the stocking of lakes).
- Increasing staff costs in particular invite increasing questions about the current organisation structure. The new Minister has noted that they constitute too great a proportion of total expenditure, particularly at senior levels.
- After budget level gains in recent years NCFGC would be unwise to expect further gains from internal redistribution.
- Pressures on habitat relevant to both sports fish and game birds continue to increase but it is apparent relevant regulatory and environmental management authorities lack the resources and political will even to implement their own policies.
- Increasing consequences of climate change (eg, both drought and flood risk) which are also exacerbated by inadequate environmental regulation and industry pressures (eg, forestry, dairying)

B. Organisational Purpose

Consistent with the requirements of the Conservation Act 1987 the Council has determined that:

The North Canterbury Fish and Game Council exists so that anglers and hunters have access to sustainable sports fish and game resources in the North Canterbury Region.

C. Overarching strategic outcomes

These ‘unbundle’ our purpose statement and inform all our plans and operational activity. They are integral to the discharge of Fish & Game’s statutory duties.

1. Our Species Populations are Enhanced

Our species populations will be enhanced by:

- Priority habitat identification and restoration
- Applied available best-practice science and scientific methods to
 - Better understand our Species and their population status and
 - Monitor populations to ensure they are sustainable

The immediate success indicator in relation to the headline outcome will be:

- that Priority Habitats are identified
- that plans are in place to protect those priority habitats from further degradation
- that possible restoration projects and partners are identified
- that best practice science is applied
- that we understand population trends and sustainability

2. Key stakeholders are more engaged

Social, economic, and environmental changes that affect, or potentially affect, our licence holders’ ability to enjoy the activities that are central to our organisation’s purpose, constitute a growing threat to the principles and values that we promote. This underlines the importance of the organisation (at national as well as regional levels) developing channels of communication and relationships that will maintain stakeholders’ knowledge and acceptance of our sport and engender trust and confidence in the organisation.

The Council will focus on two priorities within this outcome.

1. Ensuring that stakeholders (particularly licensed and active anglers and hunters) receive communications from NCFGF that informs them about the steps the organisation is taking and why, and meet *their* information needs and expectations and keep them connected in a positive way to the organisation and its aims.

The use of social media is a central means to achieve this priority, but we must also recognise that some categories of stakeholder (particularly older age groups) are more difficult to reach than others.

2. That NCFGF has collaborative and respectful relationships with organisations that have interests in common and pursue objectives that confer mutual benefit.

We recognise that stakeholder organisations with these characteristics must deal with their own pressures and resource constraints. Strong, mutually respectful relationships are needed to steer through situations when full alignment is not possible to achieve.

Our limited resources mean that operationalising these two priorities will require further prioritisation between different categories of stakeholder.

Key stakeholders are defined as:

- Licence holders
- Those entitled to fish and hunt who are not required to be licenced holders (landowners or occupiers)
- The Department of Conservation
- Local authorities (particularly in respect of their environmental regulatory responsibilities)
- Future anglers and hunters (including those who have been but are not currently active)
- Next generation farmers
- Members of the general public interested in the values promoted by NCFGC

3. Participation in sports fishing and game bird hunting is increased

A continuing downward trend in licence sales and therefore participation has occurred over the last 8 years from a high in 2014. It is important to maintain participation to ensure that anglers and hunters continue to have a voice in decision making into the future.

It is considered important to encourage more diversity including more females into sports fishing and game bird hunting. It is also considered that game bird hunting participation could be increased in the North Canterbury Region by actively promoting the benefits to new groups like big game hunters.

The Council will focus on two priorities within this outcome.

1. Identify and develop a range of fishery opportunities close to the major population centre of Christchurch. The intent is to assist part time or learner fishermen find opportunities applicable to their current skill level and, in a broad sense, convert more of all ages into fishermen who can catch wild fish with reasonable success.
2. Promote and develop game bird shooting in our region particularly at Lake Ellesmere due to its close location to Christchurch.

4. The North Canterbury Fish and Game Council has a relationship with iwi in its region consistent with its obligations to give effect to the principles of the Treaty Of Waitangi.

North Canterbury Fish and Game Council has an obligation under S. 4 of the Conservation Act 1987 to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

There is no guidance within the Conservation Act as to how Fish and Game Councils should interpret and operationalise this obligation. In practice it is not a matter which, until recently has been actively pursued within the organisation except where Fish and Game interests have directly intersected with iwi interests. Historically Fish and Game has given iwi reason to see the organisation as an adversary rather than a partner. From a North Canterbury perspective, we are clear that we wish to invest in a mutually respectful and advantageous relationship with iwi and hapu in our region.

To better understand how they would want to engage with us we need to invest time in 'meeting and greeting' appropriate groups. This priority 'Outcome' description is necessarily broadly stated to avoid predetermining an outcome from what should be a collaborative approach. As the relationship

with mana whenua develops, the priority 'Outcome' can become progressively more focused to reflect the aspirations that emerge.

D. Ten-Year Plus Aspirations

To ensure that it takes a longer-term view the Council has determined the following components of its longer-term ambition.

- There is transparent resource allocation equity between Regional Fish and Game Councils that reflects angler and hunter activity.¹
- Regulators are held to account for carrying out their statutory responsibilities.
- The social licence of anglers and hunters to pursue their sport and put food on their table is protected.
- Licence holders accept their compliance obligations.
- Licence holders have opportunities to give back to the sport (eg, as sponsors, donors, volunteers).
- The physical and mental health benefits of fishing and hunting are widely acknowledged.
- Licence holders at all levels of ability and residential locations have access to opportunities to fish and hunt.
 - Information is available that assists them to find suitable opportunities
 - Marginal riparian strips are a legal requirement on all rivers
- There is an open relationship between the organisation and licence holders.
- The organisation is well respected and sought out by present and potential partner organisations.

E. Near-term priority results

With these aspirations in mind, the Council will focus on achieving or making measurable progress over the next 12-18 months on:

1. The development of a 'Trout Plan'

Having completed a 'Salmon Plan' and a 'Game Bird Plan' and given the increasing relative importance of the trout fishery in the region, the Council intends to work on developing a wide range of initiatives to protect and enhance the trout fishery and licence holders' enjoyment of it. Staff have been tasked with developing a programme of work to this end.

2. Advocate for access to the areas where people hunt and fish.

Access is fundamental to our license holders' ability to go hunting and fishing. Some landowners both public and private are attempting to lock up access to hunting and fishing resources for a variety of reasons. Staff are tasked with advocating on behalf of licence holders, ensuring that other agency's provide for public access to areas where our licences holders hunt and fish.

3. The further development of active, mutually advantageous relationships with key environment agencies

¹ 'equity' means relative to the distribution of licence holder revenue and activity

Habitat is central to the wellbeing of both the valued introduced species which are the focus of Fish & Game's statutory mandate and indigenous aquatic and avian species, but other agencies have the statutory mandate to regulate and in some respects impact directly on the quality of that habitat. The implications of that are obvious; Fish & Game must develop the kinds of working relationships that result in those agencies (eg, the Department of Conservation, the Ministry for the Environment, Environment Canterbury, and territorial local government) and industry bodies (e.g. Irrigation NZ, Federated farmers, dairy companies) acting in a manner that, so far as possible, is consistent with the achievement of Fish & Game objectives.

In this regard, the Council considers it important that regulatory bodies are held to account for evidence-based decision making and the active implementation of the policies and regulations that protect the habitats on which our species depend.

4. A boundary adjustment to encompass Lake Heron

Lake Heron is a significant contributor to salmon spawning in the Rakaia River catchment but, inexplicably sits in the territory of the Central South Island Fish & Game region. That would not necessarily be a problem but for the harvesting activities allowed for and supported by CSI. For that reason, we consider it essential for the regional boundaries to be adjusted to bring Lake Heron into the North Canterbury region.

5. Maintaining a high level of compliance with applicable fishing and hunting regulations

Significant progress was made during 2023 to increase the visibility of rangers and compliance related activity in respect of both angling and hunting. The Council acknowledges that pressure on staff resources may require some reduction in this activity but has directed the Chief Executive to find ways to maintain the visibility and impact of the compliance effort so that licence holders comply with the terms of their licences and those fishing or hunting without licences are also held to account.

6. Improve the effectiveness of communications with licence holders

While this is a continuing challenge the Council considers that the organisation could and should be more active in communicating with licence holders (particularly via social media) to ensure they have an accurate understanding of NCFGC's activities and the research and policies on which its activities are based.

F. Governance and management

The Council has determined that an essential foundation to the achievement of these outcomes is the establishment and continuation of good governance and management. The Council is committed to demonstrating good stewardship of the North Canterbury Fish and Game organisation and to ensuring there is continuing key stakeholder confidence in its leadership and operational effectiveness.

The way we work (added February 2023)

Our ambition is to be efficient and effective. To that end we will be:

- Outcome oriented
- Data driven

- Decisions are fully informed
- An active and collaborative partner with other entities, particularly when it will assist us to leverage our resources
- Creators a framework that enables staff to do their best work

Organisation Values

The Council acknowledges responsibility both moral and, in certain respects legal, for the culture of the organisation. To that end the Council has adopted the following expressions of the core values that should characterise the culture of the organisation. Members of the governing body, staff and volunteers will be expected to demonstrate these values both in the conduct of their NCFGC roles and responsibilities and in any other circumstance where their actions might be associated with the work of the wider Fish and Game organisation.

- Courageous
- Transparent
- Trustworthy
- Honest

Implementation

As is its practice, the Council will continue to monitor organisational performance and progress and, as necessary, refine this document to ensure, in particular, that:

- its intentions are clearly defined
- Its stated priorities remain relevant to the outcomes the Council wishes to achieve on behalf of stakeholders
- It acknowledges the challenges the Council faces in its operating environment, and the inevitable resource constraints.

All operational activity must, at all times, be justifiable in terms of the fulfilment of this purpose and consistent with the Council's priority outcomes, its stated values, and the spirit and intent of the authority delegated to Council committees and the Chief Executive.

Unless the Council explicitly resolves otherwise, in planning and conducting the Council's operations to fulfil the organisation's purpose, the Chief Executive and staff are expected to accord priority to the Council's interpretation of the interests of licence holders and the priorities it has set for the allocation of the organisation's resources.

Document status

First adopted as a working document 19 February 2019 and revised annually.