

ANGLING NEWS



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WELLINGTON AND TARANAKI FISH & GAME REGIONS

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Willy Pepper with a cracker lower North Island brownie - the condition of the fish this season is amazing!

INVEST IN YOUR WELLBEING

It's official – fishing is positively good for you!

A significant study by Fish & Game and Otago University of nearly 1900 anglers – the largest of its kind globally – has shown that fishing can significantly boost wellbeing and mental health.

Even better news, there is compelling evidence that the more you fish, the better it is for you. Given the uncertain economic times and financial worries many Kiwis are facing now, there's no better way to look after yourself than by spending some time decompressing on your favourite river, stream or lake.

Fishing can be as therapeutic or adventurous as you choose but, whichever way you look at it, a fishing licence is a seriously good investment in your wellbeing. It is also exceptional value compared to the likes of a gym or golf membership, ski passes or seasonal fees for mainstream sporting activities. A Whole Season Licence is a steal, offering quality angling throughout the country (except Taupo) that is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world.

While everyone else is putting prices up, Fish & Game has kept the cost of your licence unchanged. Getting licensed is quick and easy, and it helps support conservation efforts and sustainable fisheries for everyone to enjoy. Scan the code to grab your licence, reset and rewild yourself this season!

SEASON OFF TO A FLYING START!

Despite a blustery October and some rainy spells, the 2025-26 fishing season is off to a flying start in the Wellington and Taranaki Fish & Game regions and the weather is finally improving. Our annual photo competition (see page 3) is also up and running again – judging by some of the pics you've been sending through there are amazing fish being caught.

Our drift diving activity last summer showed exceptionally healthy fisheries in all the main catchments in terms of trout numbers, and several anglers shared with us photos of trout coming very close to 'trophy' weight. Overall, we were impressed by the condition of the fish seen and being caught. So, could 2025-26 be the season someone cracks that magic 10lb mark?

Earlier this season we noted that both regions have been lucky to avoid any major floods over winter; this is a critical time of year because large weather events can have a negative impact on recruitment in our fisheries as well as trout recovery after the rigours of spawning. The catches we're seeing early on this season are proof that they had a good spawning season and have been able to put condition back on quickly.

Regular minor freshes over winter were enough to keep the algae growth knocked back and remove sediment build up, so most waterways in our regions are heading into summer with a clean slate and in a good state for invertebrate populations to help fuel trout growth.

All the ranges – including the Tararuas, Ruahines and Kaimanawas – as well as mounts Taranaki and Ruapehu, received regular doses of snow too, which is important for sustaining river flows and fishery health when the weather heats up. While a few reasonable spring floods went through some parts of the lower North Island in mid-late October, trout fry and mature fish appear to have survived with no noticeable impact on the fish populations that were subject to these rain events.

What makes 2025-26 exciting is that many anglers regard the previous season as one of the best they've experienced in years, and the stars seem aligned to keep building on that – expect some sensational fishing in the months ahead! The new season may have got off to a temperamental start in terms of the weather, however, there's plenty to be excited about in the months ahead. Grab your licence and we'll see you on the water!



Andrew Harding sending a 6lb Hutt River brown back home. Photo: Daniel Thomas

CRACK THE HUTT RIVER CODE



Since we published the results of our Hutt River drift dives from last summer there's been a bit of a buzz around local anglers, and from those further afield too. The level of interest is hardly surprising given the exceptional number of large trout in this easily accessible urban fishery. During our dives we recorded the highest number of large browns in a decade and were astounded by the quality and condition of the resident browns – the best we've seen in years! Plenty of anglers sent in photos of their Hutt River catches from last season as part of our photo competition (see details below) and several of these comprised fish coming very close to the 10lb mark.

This season there's every chance that there'll be fish pushing that trophy benchmark, but the overall number of mature trout is impressive. In the Birchville drift-dive reach, for example, we counted 164 large browns in just 1.4km of river length. Even in sections of the Hutt that have been subject to some extensive flood-protection work the trout numbers were very high. This demonstrates the resilience of the fish and the fishery to adapt to human intervention.

Many locals will have noticed extensive engineering activity in the lower reaches of the river (part of the Riverlink project). While this section upstream and downstream of the Melling Bridge will be closed for at least a year, the fishery remains in superb shape. Despite their abundance, the large Hutt River browns can be challenging though. That's why we've produced a dedicated guide to help you crack the code – scan the QR above to download the brochure.

The Hutt may not be the most scenic trout fishery in the country, but it is up there with the best. Beyond the urban reaches, anglers can still find backcountry-like solitude and surrounds, gin-clear water and very large trout... all just minutes from the Capital. If you haven't fished the Hutt, it should be on your angling bucket list for 2025-26.

Large Brown Trout – Total Per Drift Dive Reach

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Avalon	38	18	22	36	65
Birchville	49	29	23	44	164
Heretaunga	78	52	18	19	27
Kaitoke	28	24	14	38	33
Melling	15	17	15	36	45
Taita	29	20	24	45	31
Te Marua	13	17	15	7	31
Whakatikei	24	15	9	11	17
TOTAL	274	192	140	236	413

* Large brown – fish length greater than 450mm

NEW HIGHWAY, NEW ANGLING HORIZONS

The new highway between Palmerston North and Woodville has opened up new horizons for Manawatu-based anglers. Cutting some time off the previously winding and traffic-congested trip over the hill, fishing missions into the Tararua district, Wairarapa or southern Hawke's Bay have got a whole lot easier.

Often the rivers in these eastern regions remain fishable when westerly weather renders Manawatu waters out of action. The new highway makes exploring new water and finding fishable conditions a breeze by cutting down commute time and fuel costs.

There are plenty of exciting angling options available less than an hour's drive from Palmerston North. Check out our interactive access maps (scan the QR code) or spend a little time exploring any of the waterways you cross on SH2 – you might be surprised by the fishing gems you find!



A beautiful early-season rainbow from a small southern Hawke's Bay stream



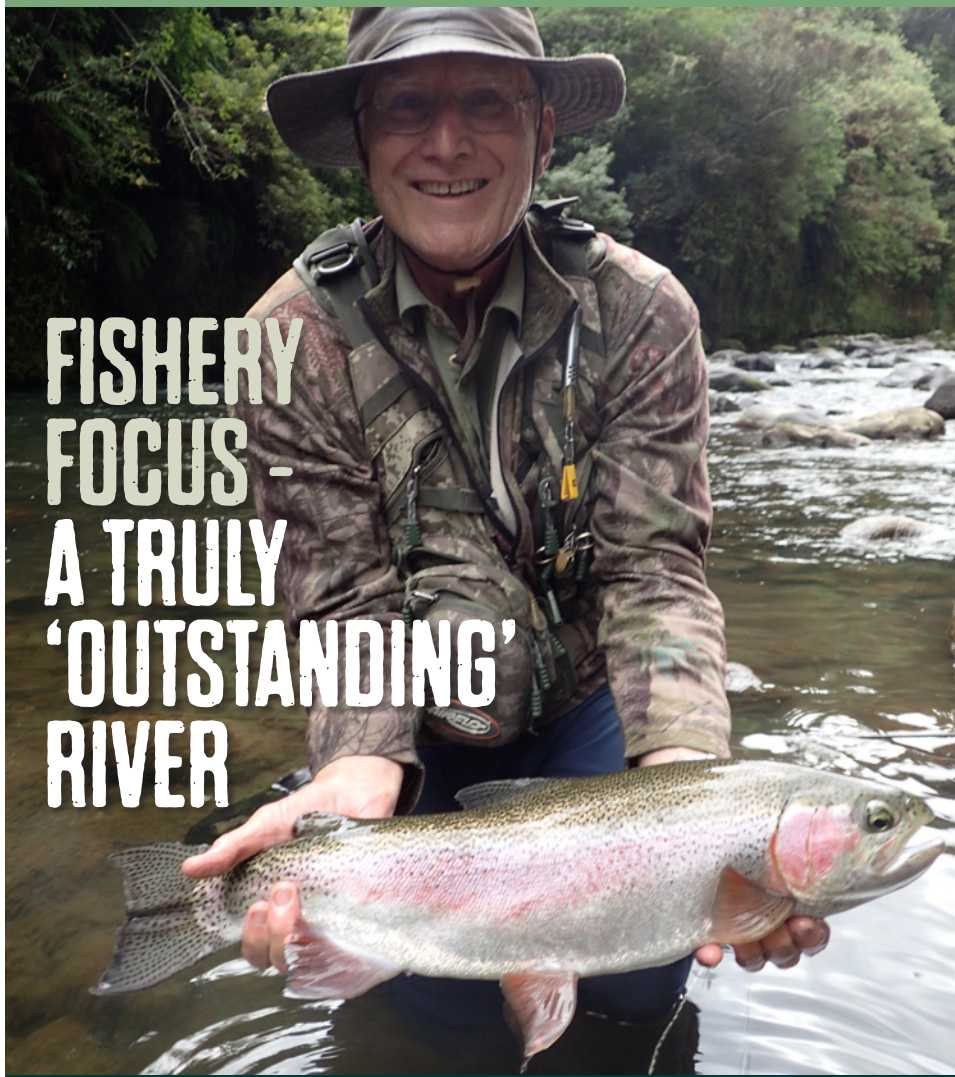
SNAP AND WIN! \$300 VOUCHER UP FOR GRABS!

Once again we're running our photo competition, generously sponsored by Wairarapa Hunting & Fishing who have put up a \$300 voucher.

To find out how to win, make sure you're signed up to our weekly fishing report – 'The Lower North Lowdown' (scan the code).



FISHERY FOCUS - A TRULY 'OUTSTANDING' RIVER



Guy Gardiner with a Manganuioteao River rainbow. Photo: Dave Arnst

A Water Conservation Order (WCO) is the highest level of protection that can be afforded to any water body in the country – the river, lake, wetland or spring must have 'outstanding' characteristics to achieve this status. There are only 13 rivers with WCO designation in New Zealand and the Wellington and Taranaki Fish & Game regions are lucky to have two of these – the Rangitikei and Manganuioteao rivers.

Here we're focusing on the Manganuioteao which is sourced high on the western flanks of Mount Ruapehu and flows through the Taranaki Fish & Game region to join the Whanganui River. The Manganuioteao WCO was granted in 1989 in recognition of its outstanding wild and scenic characteristics, its outstanding habitat for the endangered blue duck, and its outstanding recreational fishery.

The river supports a good population of both brown and rainbow trout, and the main access points north-east of Raetihi in Central North Island (scan QR for access details) offer a scenically stunning place to fish, whether you're catching or not. There is also a fantastic camping ground at Ruatiti Domain, right beside the river, offering good access upstream and downstream for angling.

Taranaki Fish & Game liaises with landowners in the area to allow access but the number of entry points to the main river is somewhat limited by nature of its relative isolation and rugged topography.

More adventurous anglers may wish to scout around the numerous tributaries that feed the mainstem Manganuioteao River, some of which are quality fisheries. Access is achievable, but not always easy, though those who make the effort to get into these feeder streams are often rewarded with seemingly untouched angling. The Manganuioteao River, along with its associated streams, is not the easiest place to catch trout, but it is truly an outstanding fishery that should be on every Kiwi angler's bucket list.

There is extreme pressure being put on Government from some industry lobby groups to quash all WCOs as part of the wider Resource Management Act reforms. There will need to be significant support for their retention. We'll keep you informed about how you can have a say on the future of these outstanding water bodies.



KOURARAU DAM ACCESS RE-OPENS



Fish & Game officer Hamish Carnachan and former Carterton Mayor Ron Mark at the re-opening of access to the dam

After seven years, Kourarau Dam has finally re-opened to the public. This popular fishing spot in Wairarapa was closed for safety reasons after a significant localised flood event undermined the bridge that provided access to the lake.

Wellington Fish & Game advocated for years to have the bridge reinstated because Kourarau Dam provides one of the few still water fishing options in the lower North Island.

Owned by Trust House, Masterton, initially the remediation work was put in the "too hard basket" owing to excessive safety restrictions imposed by local councils which made the repair cost prohibitive. Several years on, with staff changes at Trust House and a new council providing impetus to re-open this community asset, the access bridge has been reinstated. The successful outcome is the result of collaboration between Trust House, Carterton District Council, adjacent landowners and Wellington Fish & Game.

Korarau Dam provides idyllic fishing on a small hydro lake surrounded by gently rolling farmland. It holds rainbows up to 3lb, with the occasional larger fish. For anglers in the lower part of the North Island, this fishery is a great fallback option when rivers are blown out after rain.



FISH & GAME ADVOCATING FOR MORE FLOW

Fish pass on the Waiwhakaiho River



A stunning 7lb Lower Waiwhakaiho brown caught early this season. Photo: Nik Hannam



Taranaki Fish & Game has attended pre-hearing meetings for Manawa Energy's Mangorei and Motukawa hydro schemes in Taranaki and some progress has been made. The Mangorei scheme diverts water from the Waiwhakaiho River near New Plymouth into Lake Mangamahoe and returns it to the lower river in a fluctuating flow regime. At the meetings, and after much discussion, there was acceptance of Fish & Game's request for an increase in the residual flow in December for both temperature and habitat reasons.

December is the third warmest month after January and February. Manawa Energy has proposed the release of an additional 100l/s in the 6km residual reach when water temperatures reach 24degC as well as a flushing flow. The Motukawa hydro scheme diverts water from the Manganui River at Tariki Road in central Taranaki into Lake Rataipiko, before discharging water into Makara Stream and the Waitara River. A significant issue is with the annual lowering of the level of Lake Rataipiko for weed control in March/April, which results in de-watering of the eastern (water ski) arm for two weeks or more.

Lake Rataipiko supports a productive fishery for brown and rainbow trout and perch, with some fish reaching 3.5kg. Lowering the lake level every year has disrupted the aquatic habitat and the food supply for fish. While Manawa Energy is adamant it needs to lower the lake level every year to allow inspection of the inlet race, Fish & Game will continue to advocate for a better outcome for the aquatic life in the lake.

Spring weather frustration with winds gusting 100kmh on a Wellington stream. Photo: Andrew Harding



WORKING WITH THE WEATHER

It was certainly a trying start to the season with constant wind and heavy bouts of rain. Hopefully that rubbish is now behind us! It still pays, however, to be armed with tips and techniques for fishing when the weather is less than ideal because, let's face it, any day on the water is better than being at home doing chores.

Combatting Wind:

- Go up in line weight - Even if you're fishing small water, your big lake rod or Taupo gear can often punch through the wind.
- Consider the spin/softbait option - Short rods and heavy lures are infinitely better than flies when it's blowing. Even a bubble-float rigged with nymphs on spinning gear can punch through the wind better than traditional flyfishing gear.
- There's always shelter somewhere - Some stretches of river will be more sheltered than others, making it much easier to cast a fly. Target sections that have high banks or high trees lining the river's edge as these will break up the wind.
- Go heavy - Purist fly anglers should think about heavy nymphs. These will unfurl the leader much better than a lighter pattern or a large terrestrial dry fly.

High Flows:

- Use large flies - Really big flies... even double-hook, articulated streamers! The larger the fly the easier it is for trout to see in high flows. Darker colours work best.
- Again, bring out the spinning gear - For the same reason as above, spin fishing can be more productive because the lures are larger and the shiny flash can make it easy for the trout to see when chasing it in discoloured water.
- Fish the edge - Ever noticed that even when a river is in raging flood, the water on the edge out to a couple of feet remains quite clear? Trout know this and move into the shallow margins to both avoid the high water velocity in the main current and also to feed (often on worms).
- Target confluence areas - Smaller streams can carry clearer water during a flood or high flow event; and because they are sourced in smaller catchment areas, they sometimes aren't as adversely affected as larger waterways. Where this clear water meets and mingles with the high flow of a larger river, you'll find trout seeking refuge.

At this time of year, when the equinox winds are in full force, one of the best tools to have in your angling arsenal is being able to cast in all conditions. There's nothing more frustrating than spotting a feeding fish, trying to lay out a cast to it into the wind, only to have your fly and leader land in a heap not far from your feet.

Don't despair, help is here! Epic Fly Rods' Carl McNeil has put together a brilliant video showing you how making some adjustments to your gear and your casting plane can be hugely beneficial in blustery conditions.

He recommends going up a weight in fly line to help punch into the wind, shortening your leader/tippet making it easier to lay out, and putting on a heavier fly so the extra weight helps extend the leader out on the presentation cast. Scan the QR code below with your phone's camera to watch.



Jack Ogden with a lovely rainbow that fell for a fly drifted under a bubble float while threadline fishing. Photo: Jack Ogden



SOFTBAITING SUCCESS



Softbaits regularly out-fish traditional spinning lures. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



The Upper Otaki is a world class fishery. Photo: Andrew Harding

OTAKI FORKS ACCESS REOPENS

It has been a long time coming but access to the upper Otaki River in the Tararua Range has finally been reopened (or at least should be by the time you receive this).

A significant slip several years ago blocked the road leading to the Otaki Forks. This was finally cleared in early October before another slip a few weeks later temporarily closed the road again. However, the Kapiti Council was expecting that this would be resolved by now.

This is exciting news for anglers as it opens up the Otaki River headwaters, including the Waiotauru River. Both are world-class backcountry fisheries in their own right.

Given the number of years the access has been closed, these fisheries will be relatively untouched so they present a relishing prospect for this season.

If you venture up there we'd love to hear how the fishing was; staff will be looking to survey both the rivers later in the season to assess recruitment and fish condition.

Both Wellington and Taranaki Fish & Game regions have recently adjusted their regulations to allow scented softbaits to be used in all water other than fly-fishing only. The caveat is that the softbaits must be 'actively fished to imitate a bait fish'. Softbaits of any description – scented or unscented – are highly effective on trout and regularly out-fish traditional spinning lures, so be sure to add this technique to your repertoire this season.

Fish & Game has produced an excellent short tutorial video on Getting The Best Out of Your Softbaits (scan the QR code). Additionally, here are some tips that I'll share which I've learnt from experimenting with the technique over the last three or four seasons...

1. The 'Gulp' branded baits seem to be superior to other brands (for whatever reason...). The 'crazy legs' pattern are particularly effective.
2. Trout are not overly discerning about colour. From fluorescent pink to natural black/silver, they'll all take fish.
3. Don't be afraid to lose lures. I pick up most of my fish right against the opposite bank or under overhangs, including vegetation. If you're not losing the occasional lure, your lures aren't getting far enough into the right places.
4. Always retrieve with a short upward jerk of the wrist to 'work' the lure. It's this slight rise and fall of the softbait that likely makes them so attractive to trout.
5. Always have a range of jig head weights so you can get your lure fishing at the right depth. Heavy heads for deeper faster water, lighter for shallow riffles, runs and pockets. Take the time to change up – patience getting it right will reap rewards.

Gear:

- A minimum 6ft spinning rod; three or four piece makes for easy travel and stowage.
- A reasonable quality spinning reel. You need a pretty good drag as you can hook some very big fish softbaiting. These biggies will melt the drag on a cheap and nasty reel.
- Supple braid is better than nylon mainline as there is no stretch with braid so you remain in direct contact and can feel everything happening at the lure end.

FOLLOW US ON
facebook



Both Wellington and Taranaki Fish & Game are now on Facebook.

To keep up to date with news and happenings in both regions, coming events and competitions, be sure to follow us.



Fish & Game staff are actively working to improve angler access. PHOTO: Hamish Carnachan



ADVOCATING FOR ANGLER ACCESS

Many anglers may not be aware that Fish & Game has a statutory role to advocate for access to fishing spots throughout New Zealand. Often we're the only organisation fighting for this traditional Kiwi right!

The Government is changing the Health and Safety at Work Act to protect landowners from prosecution if someone gets hurt while fishing, hunting, or doing other outdoor activities on their land. The bill will be introduced by the end of this year and is expected to pass by the end of 2026.

The Aotearoa Climbing Access Trust (ACAT) led the charge on these changes, with Fish & Game and other recreational organisations standing alongside them. This provides real confidence for landowners and the outdoor recreation community – with legal fears removed, more landowners should feel comfortable opening their gates.

This is why we advocate - to protect and expand opportunities for anglers, hunters, and outdoor enthusiasts across New Zealand. Locally, staff have been working closely with the Walking Access Commission (WAC) to resolve issues where paper roads have been challenged, or traditional

access blocked or restricted. We're also working with WAC to open more recreational access when land is transferred to overseas interests.

Also, our new interactive access mapping system is a super handy tool, always being updated and providing anglers with a one-stop shop for all angler access points throughout the Wellington and Taranaki regions, as well as further afield. Always remember to be respectful guests – Ask permission, close gates, take rubbish with you and treat the land with care.



TOOLS TO BOOST YOUR SUCCESS

We want to ensure you have the best season possible! So we've developed a bunch of tools and how-to guides to help you make the most of your investment in a fishing licence...

GETTING STARTED
IN FRESHWATER
FISHING



SPIN FISHING BASICS



READING WATER -
FINDING FISH



ADVANCED SPIN
FISHING



INTERACTIVE
MAPPING APP



WE'RE WORKING HARD FOR OUR ANGLERS



HOW YOUR FISH & GAME LICENCE DOLLARS ARE SPENT

LOOKING FOR A FISHING BUDDY OR MENTOR?

Clubs are a great way of meeting experienced anglers who have a wealth of knowledge to share or take you under their wing if you need some guidance.

If you're interested in finding out more about a club in your region, get in touch:

Hutt Valley Angling Club - www.huttvalleyangling.org.nz - Al Markham: 027 345 3383

Kapiti Flyfishing Club - www.kapitifyfishing.org.nz - Malcolm Francis: 027 384 6596

Manawatu Freshwater Anglers Club -
Email Doug Kidd: manawatufreshwateranglersclub@gmail.com

Horowhenua Freshwater Anglers Club - John Davenport:
Email: olport@windowslive.com

Wairarapa Fish & Game Club - President - Chris Hansen: 0274 538 050

Wellington Flyfishers Club - www.wellingtonflyfishers.org
Email Strato Cotsilinis: strato.cotsilinis@gmail.com

Inglewood Rod, Gun and Recreational Club - Jorja Donald 027 375 5265

EASY ACCESS FOR MOBILITY IMPAIRED ANGLERS



Fish & Game is working towards providing fishing opportunities for Kiwis who have mobility impairments and limitations.

So far we've gathered information on about 30 sites around the country that allow easy access for those in wheelchairs, the elderly, and people who have suffered from medical issues. A number of these are in the Wellington and Taranaki Fish & Game regions.

Scan the QR code to find out more.