

WELLINGTON FISH & GAME COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE WELLINGTON FISH & GAME COUNCIL, HELD ON TUESDAY 22 MARCH 2022 AT 3.05PM HELD AS A ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCING MEETING

1. **Present:**

Chairman Paul Dewar, Councillors Jim Cook, Aaron Passey, Richard McIntyre, John Hancock, Jennifer Yanko, Malcolm Francis, Don Scott, Steve Brown, Colin Shore, Paul Shortis (co-opted).

In Attendance:

Fish and Game Staff: Phil Teal, Hamish Carnachan

Welcome and Confirmation of Agenda

Chairman Dewar welcomed councillors and outlined the agenda for the meeting. He noted that items involving receiving reports from and discussion with Paul Shortis (Liaison with Wellington Conservation Board and Wairarapa Moana) would be dealt with earlier in the agenda. Two items of General Business had also been forewarned prior to the meeting – (1) a discussion on Catch and Release ethics and (2) a report by *ELECTIONZ.COM* of the Fish and Game elections.

2. **Apologies:**

Apologies were received from Professor Steve Haslett, Andrew McGregor, Jennifer Yanko (lateness 3.23pm), Dr Matt Kavermann,

It was moved

that apologies be accepted

Jim Cook/Don Scott

Carried

3. **Conflict of Interest**

The Conflicts of Interest Register was reviewed, and identification of additional conflicts were sought specific to the agenda.

Mr Teal confirmed that the Conflict of Interest register was updated accordingly from the previous meeting, and Conflict of Interest Management plan was also updated with the new conflicts of interest that were identified and how Council intended to deal with managing a conflict.

4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting of 8 February 2022:**

After brief discussion it was moved that

the Minutes of the meeting of the Wellington Fish & Game Council of 8 February 2022 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings of that meeting.

Jim Cook/Malcolm Francis

Carried

5. Matters Arising:

Mr Teal confirmed that all the actions from the meeting of 8 February 2022 had been completed notably including:

- Forwarding the recommendations of Council for the 2022 Game Season to the Minister of Conservation.
- Advisory briefing paper prepared for NZ Council and wider organisational discussion for the Freshwater Fish Futures project being co-ordinated by the Cawthron Institute.
- Work to provide improved access to Lake Wairarapa at Molly Dykes on the eastern shores.

6. NZ Fish and Game Council Business

Councillor McIntyre noted that Robin Holmes had presented a summary of the proposed Cawthron Institute co-ordinated Future Freshwater Fish project to NZ Council. There was some discussion that reassurance should be sought that the research should be investigating information gaps to inform future governance direction and management response rather than seeking to support predisposed views on species interactions and policy development based on perceptions.

Councillor McIntyre provided an overview of the development of the project noting that initial discussions on Fish and Game's involvement and support were with a previous NZC CE (Martin Taylor) and NZC staff. Discussion ensued on who in the wider Fish and Game organisation should be engaged and what the project was trying to achieve. Councillor McIntyre outlined the potential risks to Fish and Game regarding the general debate on trout – native fish interactions, and the more general debate on introduced fish in waterways (where it was recognised that there was an agenda of some to eradicate trout). It was agreed that research should focus on the actual risk at a population level of trout – native fish interaction in open systems – given that trout have been in the waterways for over 150 years and had not been detrimental in terms of native fish extinctions. Mr Teal noted that the work being undertaken by Ami Coughlan and Dr Adam Canning on native fish and trout interactions would be informative in identifying risk assessment and potential management responses.

Councillor Brown noted that there had been little or no credible investigations into the effects of harvest of whitebait species and what level of active management response by the Department of Conservation to

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'manage' the population – of which harvest may be additive or compensatory. It was noted that the focus on the Freshwater Fish Futures project was heavily weighted in terms of social science investigations to inform policy development – and these risks being weighted to feelings, perceptions, and opinions on topics.

Councillor Yanko joined the zoom meeting at 3.23pm.

Councillor Francis questioned the position of the Department of Conservation in terms of management of fish interactions in the Taupo Lake fishery –noting that only modest native fish populations remain there. Further discussion on the effects of commercialisation of eel fisheries and the effect on those populations long-term, and postulations that competition for food between trout and blue ducks were speculative – it would be an unlikely limiting factor in those habitats given the abundance of food in those habitats. Councillor McIntyre concluded that Fish and Game needed to assist the project by looking at areas where there is a need for more directed research, how Fish and Game can help, and what focused research will fill information gaps.

It was then moved at 3.32pm that

Council move into public excluded closed session to discuss recent staffing changes at NZ Fish and Game Council and to enable a free and frank discussion regarding short term implications for regional Fish and Game Councils.

Paul Dewar/Malcom Francis

Carried

It was moved at 3.45pm that

Council move back in to open public session

Paul Dewar/Malcom Francis

Carried

Councillor McIntyre confirmed that the NZ Council and regional Fish and Game Chairs would meet in late April to discuss the findings of the Structure Review Group, progress on implementation of the recommendations of the Ministerial Review, and progressing the Cawthron Institute project on fisheries governance.

After further brief discussion it was moved that

The report by NZ Council appointee Councillor McIntyre on NZ Council business be received

Malcolm Francis/Aaron Passey

Carried

7. Regional Structure Review

Chairman Dewar outlined the process and timetable that the Structure Review Group was working to and noted that the final report would be provided by 31 March 2022 to the Implementation Steering Group dealing with recommendations from the Ministerial Review. He further outlined the feedback provided by Wellington Council (dated 16 March 2022) on the draft Structure Review report. This included comments on:

- confirming the preference for a devolved regional structure,
- preferences for potential future amalgamations,
- consideration of boundary adjustments,
- how the linkages to New Zealand Council to regions should be maintained,
- development of organisational culture,
- Future prioritization of iwi engagement,
- Timely completion of a resource allocation review of all regions.

Discussion then ensued on the draft Structure Review Report. Councillor Passey noted the pros and cons of establishing 'mega' regions (in terms of sales and resource activity use). Councillor Francis was keen to maintain representation of licence holders across the country and considered having a 3 North Island regions : 4 South Island regions split still worth considering.

There was concern expressed regarding the detail of the overall timetable for implementation of the recommendations from the Ministerial Review and also that the resource allocation review should be progressed to at least establish the principles that will be used. Chairman Dewar considers that Wellington Council could ask for a more detailed timetable of progress of all aspects of the implementation and that Fish and Game needed to show adequate progress or else we risk government intervention.

It was then moved that

The Chairman contact the Implementation Steering Group seeking clarification and timetable of the implementation programme

Jim Cook/Steve Brown

Carried

8. Public Forum

Chairman Dewar noted that due to COVID restrictions under Traffic Light System (Red) that meetings would be held via zoom. There had been no additional specific requests to attend this meeting by members of the public to make submission to Council on relevant issues but this could be accommodated.

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Chairman Dewar then invited Paul Shortis to provide an update on the meeting with the Wellington Conservation Board and Wairarapa Moana.

9. **Wellington Conservation Board – Liaison (item 26 on Agenda)**

Paul Shortis noted that Councillor Cook had been appointed to the Wellington Conservation Board and expressed congratulations on that appointment (the potential conflict of interest was reiterated). The purpose of the Conservation Board is to advise DoC on what to concentrate their management efforts on (as an overall governance watchdog) but DOC don't have to follow the recommendations of the Conservation Board if conflicting with internal priorities. He noted that the relationship with DOC Management appeared to be acknowledging work programmes and management reports – which is not overtly effective in influencing direction of management effort.

Councillor Shortis considered that Fish and Game needed to provide awareness of 2-3 things for the Conservation Board to focus on that were important for Fish and Game resource management and recreational access.

He noted that the GWRC spokesperson recently confirmed that GWRC Flood Protection appeared to focus on 'business as usual' with a primary focus of working with landowners. If DOC are a 'partner' to Wairarapa Moana and wider catchment management then Fish and Game and the Conservation Board could be asking DOC to support many of the Whaitua recommendations for the Ruamahanga catchment released over two years ago (31 August 2018). Discussion ensued on whether decision-making by the Conservation Board was a key aspect – or whether it was an opportunity for DOC to show selected 'success' observations. Councillor Hancock noted that Dr Kavermann's presentation on the field trip was well received by the Conservation Board members. It was agreed that Fish and Game needed to maintain awareness of issues to the Conservation Board and provide advice on how to ensure implementation of appropriate programmes of work and management objectives.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Conservation Board would be held on Kapiti Island – focusing largely on the work on that project.

It was then moved that

The report from Mr Shortis on Wellington Conservation Board liaison meeting be received

Don Scott/Jennifer Yanko

Carried

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10. Wairarapa Moana Update

Mr Shortis confirmed that there was a Governance Meeting scheduled for early April with the consultants expected to deliver two reports: visitor facility development and management, and ecological restoration reports

It was then moved that

The report from Mr Shortis on Wairarapa Moana Governance Group be received

Jim Cook/Malcolm Francis

Carried

11. Health and Safety Reporting

Mr Teal noted that staff had been reacting to different COVID-19 level restrictions by developing Health and Safety Plans for each level and then following the protocols recommended. This had also been relevant with the systemic change to the COVID Traffic Light System with the existing community transmission of Delta and Omicron variants.

Mr Teal noted that he had made the Health and Safety meetings of weekly frequency to deal with a dynamic situation, and also provide an opportunity for more regular health and safety discussions/updates.

It was noted that during recent drift dives were conducted in the Ruamahanga River while the Masterton District Council was discharging partially treated wastewater into the river as an “emergency measure” from their wastewater treatment plant. There was poor and inadequate public notification (especially warning signs at entry points) with publishing on the Masterton District Council website and subsequently two days later included as a news item in the local newspaper.

It was moved that

Council receive the Health and Safety Report for February and March 2022

Colin Shore/Jim Cook

Carried

Mr Shortis left the meeting at 4.30pm

12. Strategic Planning and Discussion

Chairman Dewar introduced discussions on defining a strategic overview of outcomes sought with a view to prioritising direction and outcomes sought for the next 2-3 years.

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Councillor Brown reiterated previous observations regarding the Upper Manawatu and Makuri rivers where habitat quality had deteriorated with sediment deposits, willows removed, banks unstable, and deep of pools and runs reduced. Councillor Scott note that Horizons RC and GWRC are charged with maintaining the integrity of river, and had failed to do so over many years. Hamish Carnachan noted that forestry operations had refocused media on storm events and had generated debate on mass planting resulting in sedimentation and water retention. There was potential for national policy of advocacy for managing these issues. Councillor Passey noted that from a local context, contractors were regular extracting gravel – which might be consented but appeared to be large amounts in total.

Discussion focused on the summary of strategic issues identified at the Council meeting 8 February 2022. These included:

- Separate fund to purchase land for habitat and access to recreational hunters and anglers
- Provide sites for easy access for anglers – reservoir fisheries
- Develop strategies for dealing with fluctuating or declining fish stocks
- Review rules to simplify them across the country
- Ethical hunting and fishing – harvesting for food
- Wider engagement on educating wider public but also specific cohorts (Iwi)
- Promote the benefits of the pursuits – well-being and what ‘good work’ is being achieved by the organisation
- Take Me Fishing Initiative needs implementing

Councillor Scott noted the desirability to purchase wetlands for waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunity, and access points for anglers. It was noted that other organisations such as the Waiau Trust in Southland would purchase land and section off key habitat components and re-sell the surplus – giving them control of access and management objectives. Other useful tools include creation of access covenants for hunters and anglers (and the wider public). Councillor Brown noted that promoting wetlands for purchase could be part of a communications strategy. Councillor McIntyre noted that in addition to the concept of buying land outright, that working with farmers wanting to develop their land would reap benefits to wetland enhancement and creation. Collaborations with industry players such as Fonterra regarding wetland development in rural landscapes is also worth pursuing. Councillor Passey considered there were opportunities from potential donors to strike up partnerships.

Discussion ensued on developing a long-term strategy on access – whether we actively consider purchase opportunities or focus on primarily with

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farmers and landowners that doesn't involve buying land. Councillor Hancock considered that the benefits of wetlands needed to be promoted in terms of nutrient stripping and retention (nitrogen, sediment, phosphorus) and the breeding habitat it supports for many species including waterfowl.

13. **2022/2023 Draft Annual Plan and Budget**

Mr Teal provided an overview of the draft budget for Wellington Fish and Game Council for the 2022/2023 Financial Year which is based initially on a similar budget from the 2021/2022 year. It was acknowledged that Wellington region were still be operating from a base funding 5% below 2019 base funding (pre COVID). Discussion focused on identifying contestable funds to be considered in the wider Fish and Game budgeting process.

Items of discussion:

1. Contestable Funding requirements to meet priorities from strategic discussions
2. Requirements to deal with high CPI increases to operations including salary adjustments as a good employer to reflect CPI increases (at least partially)
3. Review of salaries following Remuneration Subcommittee job sizing and preliminary pay scales.
4. Requirements to deal with high increases to fuel and running costs:
 - For vehicles in fleet
 - For aerial transects etc using aircraft

It was agreed that item 2 (regarding CPI adjustments for staff salaries) and item 4 (regarding increase vehicle running costs) should be priorities for contestable funding, while maintaining a conservative and responsible approach.

It was then moved that

the items for CPI adjustment to salaries and vehicle running costs be forwarded as principal contestable funding applications to be considered in the Fish and Game budget process

Jim Cook/Don Scott

Carried

Discussion continued on other funding requirements and budget considerations. Chairman Dewar noted that further work was urgently needed on trout interaction with native fish as this had been alerted as an important issue and it was agreed that funding for research into this area would be required.

It was then moved that

Research regarding trout and native fish interactions in open systems be given priority in NZ Fish and Game co-ordinated research and appropriate funding be allocated from the Research Fund.

Paul Dewar/Malcolm Francis

Carried

Chairman Dewar sought opinions from councillors on the appropriate level of any licence fee increase that would be seen as acceptable to licence holders (if the licence fee recommendation was to increase). Councillor Brown considered the licence fee is still relatively undervalued and that there are project costs that should be funded. It was considered that a price sensitivity project should be completed to confirm price points for different cohorts of anglers and hunters (based on casual itinerant occasional participants compared with dedicated invested participants).

Councillor McIntyre considered that fishing and hunting be focused on principally as harvest for food. He noted that we need enough total funding to adequately run the organisation but the licences needed to be affordable to hunters and seen as value to the individual.

Councillor Brown considered the perception and concept of the licence fee vs management fee. Councillor McIntyre reiterated that some demographics fished and hunted for enjoyment whereas others were principally harvesting natural healthy food, and we should not price the licence too high for either 'market'.

Discussion concluded that the rate of inflation being over 5% that this was the maximum licence fee increase that could be considered. It was seen as important to consider staff salaries as a priority.

It was also seen as important to consider the Non-Resident Licence Fee setting – noting that there was a working group on Pressure Sensitive Fisheries and Non-Resident Licences.

14. Policy Review Update

Mr Teal provided a brief overview of the Department of Conservation's signal that the Wildlife Act 1953 would be undertaking a substantial review in the next year or so. It was agreed that Wellington staff would be offered to any working group established by Fish and Game to consider this review.

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15. Consultation Draft Wellington Sports Fish and Game Bird Management Plan

Mr Teal noted that Wellington Region had a current draft of its 10-year plan – Sports Fish and Game Bird Management Plan that was ready for consultation but had not progressed beyond socialising it with some iwi groups.

16. R3 Marketing Report

Mr Teal provided an overview of actions that had been undertaken to encourage participation and license purchase for the game season. The Weekly Hunting Bulletin and Game Newsletter were being scheduled and prepared. Other initiatives to retain participant of lapsed or yet to purchase licence holders (angling) were also undertaken.

It was noted that a communications strategy was being developed by a working group involving Hamish Carnachan and Councillor McIntyre and would be presented for wider consultation as part of the process in subsequent months.

It was then moved

To receive the Marketing R3 and communication report

Don Scott/Jim Cook

Carried

17. Regional Plan Updates

One Plan – Plan Change 2 Environment Court Appeal:

Mr Teal noted the technical and planning consultants were developing risk matrices that guided management practices required, as an interim option. This approach was also being investigated for the Waikato Regional Council plan.

Greater Wellington Regional Plan:

Mr Teal noted that there was still a residual of consent orders being processed through the Environment Court – despite the principal agreements being reached several months ago.

Horizons – Freshwater Futures Update:

Mr Teal outlined that Horizons had sought engagement to progress the Regional Plan review regarding NPS FM 2020.

Regional Plan Approach for NPS FM 2020 Implementation:

Mr Teal drew attention to a recent analysis of regulatory reforms of NZ's freshwater environment by Judge Newhook who is the Chief Freshwater

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Commissioner. This provides some guidance on the issues to be dealt with in the upcoming years.

It was then moved that

The report by Mr Teal on Regional Plan planning processes be received

Richard McIntyre/Steve Brown

Carried

18. **GWRC Western Rivers Global consents**

Mr Teal noted that no progress had been made by GWRC on engaging with iwi – therefore the Waikanae and Otaki river consents were being operated under their existing historical consents.

He noted that some work was progressed without seeking input from Fish and Game or the Wellington Flyfishers Club on the Wainuiomata River. The GWRC Parks did not consider either to be an affected party in the consents process – which was corroborated by GWRC Consents department.

19. **Wairarapa Moana Update**

Mr Teal outlined that the Treaty Settlement process which had been in quiescence due to High Court clarifications on iwi mandating, and has been stalled by legal action by factions within iwi. There has been no indication of when this will be resolved but once it is the legislation to enact the Treaty Settlement will be progressed quickly.

Mr Teal confirmed that potentially more balloted positions would be processed in September/October 2022. There has been a more active response to match hunters to stands to set them up for success, but this has required more staff resources.

Staff were actively engaging with all parties to Wairarapa Moana to progress the weir proposal for JK Donald Wetland – but meetings to progress the project were deferred due to staff changes at GWRC.

It was confirmed that work was being progressed to improve access to the lake at Molly Dykes access at cost of \$2000 – just south of the Wairio Wetland.

The removal of a hut on the Wairio Wetland had not yet been progressed.

It was then moved to

Receive the report on the Wairarapa Moana Projects and Issues

Malcolm Francis/John Hancock

Carried

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20. Research Update

Mr Teal provided a brief overview of the trout native fish interaction project that Ami Coughlan and Dr Adam Canning were progressing with the former currently completing writing the final draft of the thesis requirements manuscript. While this won't be published work, it is anticipated that two papers will result from this work.

It was then moved to

Receive the report on the Research Projects

Jim Cook/Richard McIntyre

Carried

21. Junior and Novice Participation Project

Mr Teal provided a brief overview of the trout that are ordered for delivery in October 2022 for the sites including Hokowhitu Lagoon, Palmerston North, and the Otaki pond site. This may also include the Marton Reservoir to provide additional angler opportunities – for novice anglers and potentially families.

It was then moved to

Receive the report on the Junior and Novice Participation projects

Jim Cook/Colin Shore

Carried

22. Access Management Issues Update

Mr Teal no progress had been made with NZDF on resolving helicopter access at the lower end of the Remote Experience Zone in the Upper Rangitikei River. However Mr Carnachan noted that DOC had opened up the REZ (Remote Experience Zone) to helicopter use for hunters aligned to the Sika Foundation. It was agreed that renewed efforts be made to the Conservation Board to amend the Management Plan to secure helicopter landing sites at the top end of the REZ and the lower end at the Otamateanui River junction. Currently one operator is dominating all helicopter access to the sites – given the lack of overseas anglers and landing agreements.

It was moved that

Staff would progress an option paper relating to landing sites in or at the boundary of the REZ Rangitikei River

Richard McIntyre/Steve Brown

Carried

23. Management Report for the Period 1 February to 12 March 2022

Mr Teal provided an overview of the Management Report for the relevant period and provided clarification on a number of points.

After further discussion and clarifications it was moved that

Council receives the Management Report for period 1 February to 12 March 2022 be received.

Jim Cook/Malcolm Francis

Carried

24. Licence Sales Report – 1 September 2021 up to 19 March 2022

Mr Teal provided a brief overview of licence sales – cumulative sales for season to-date. He noted that the start of the 2021/2022 season for fish licence sales were ahead of the previous year - about 150 LEQs better than last year at the same time, but fish licence sales LEQs up in season sales only small amount now (+11LEQs). This is principally due to poor weather at the start of February and subsequently very soft sales. The effects of COVID restrictions, public apprehension to interact or travel, and increasing costs of fuel have no doubt all had a lingering effect on sales since February. Expecting no licence sales from Non-resident licence holders over next few months.

He noted that only early sales for Game Licences have been noted and was too early to analyse trends or differences from previous year.

After brief discussion it was moved that

The licence sales reports for Fish Licence Sales 2021/2022 as at 19 March 2022 be received

Aaron Passey/John Hancock

Carried

25. Expenditure Report/Financial Transactions

The summary of income and expenditure to 28 February 2022 was considered.

Mr Teal confirmed that a vehicle replacement had been completed but delivery took longer than expected.

Councillor Scott provided an overview of expenditures and revenues and noted that there were no material variances or concerns to note.

After brief discussion it was then moved

Receive and Accept the Expenditure Reports to 28 February 2022 and Financial Transactions for January and February 2022.

Don Scott/Richard McIntyre

Carried

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26. **Correspondence / Media**

No items of material discussion.

27. **Recognition and Contribution Awards**

Potential recipients were discussed, and additional nominations called for consideration at future meetings.

Discussion ensued on potential recipients with it moved that

Peter Pearce be recognised for his long, and continuing reliable contribution to the drift dive programme.

Jim Cook/Jennifer Yanko

Carried

28. **Wellington Conservation Board Liaison**

Completed discussions earlier.

29. **General Business**

Chairman Dewar introduced a topic on ethics of catch and release following correspondence from an angler that some anglers are catching very large numbers of fish for catch and release.

Councillor McIntyre provided an overview of the public perceptions of the ethics of catch and release (for recreation and enjoyment) and conservation ethic, and those that principally harvested for food. Mr Carnachan provide explanation and context of some of the marketing and promotion – which provided a perception to anglers that there was an abundance of fish available – but the ethical basis for catching large number of fish needed consideration and debate.

Discussion continued on hunter and angler motivations and what success meant for individuals – the overall experience, or catch (success) and release (as a conservation ethic). Councillor Brown confirmed that angler and hunter motivations vary, and it is hard to put moral ethical judgment on every person’s motivation. There were various mitigating practices discussed to minimise any perceived harm to fish - use of barbless hooks, minimum retention time less than one minute, appropriate handling skills education, minimise touching fish prior to release. There was concern that the long-developed ethic of catch and release promotion to a catch and kill promotion would be difficult to mandate and implement a change in angler behaviour. The actual effects on the fish need to be considered – whether they are overly stressed or largely unaffected. Councillor McIntyre suggested to seek scientific overview of stress to fish from catch and release and identify any information gaps for potential research. Chairman Dewar noted that West Coast Fish and Game had a recommendation for six fish per day catch and

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release as a voluntary position for guided clients, but this was not a rule and generally applied to trophy sized fish.

Further discussion ensued on whether we need to be promoting better catch and release techniques as best practice – with a focus on promoting best handling practices. It was noted also that are infrequent instances fish are found at the bottom of pools due to poor handling and release practice (e.g. touching gills). Mr Carnachan noted that in future there will not be promotion of maximum catch and release potential of expert anglers, and will actively promote best practice for catch and release.

The potential ethical issue for the wider public *is any stress to fish for one's enjoyment justified?*

Chairman Dewar noted that in some instances that recommendations for maximum water temperatures to fish (reducing potential stress on fish) were being considered different regions: Hawke's Bay (19/20°C), Eastern region (going through process), Auckland/Waikato (going through process). This would require accurate an easy to use/access thermometers as they use in competition fishing. Councillor Francis noted that in some Australian waters they close the river to fishing at anything over 20°C.

Discussion ensued on the *ELECTIONNZ.COM* report on the Fish and Game elections held in October 2021. It was then moved that

***The report on the Fish and Game elections in October 2021 by
ELECTIONZ.COM be received***

Jim Cook/Richard McInyre

Carried

There being no further items of general business the meeting was closed at 6.05pm.

Next Meeting to be held: Meeting on Tuesday, 7 June 2022 (location to be determined) at 3pm.

Chairman _____

Date _____