

# Sport Fish Regulations Survey 2024

## *Results of Sport Fish Regulations Survey, December 2024*

Baylee Kersten, Senior Fish & Game Officer, January 2025

## Summary

*West Coast sports fishing licence holders were surveyed regarding the current regulations and if they had any suggestions or feedback.*

## Introduction

Following the December 2015 West Coast Fish and Game Council Meeting, it is now West Coast Fish and Game policy " *That the West Coast Fish and Game Council conduct a consultation process with licence holders regarding key regulation proposals being considered for implementation in sufficient time to enable the feedback to be considered for regulation setting in 2016 and use this as a basis for a 3 yearly regulation set to be reviewed 3 yearly.*" West Coast licence holders were surveyed again in 2018 and 2021, now nine years on from the policy being formed, another review and survey is due.

## Method

The survey was carried out using Microsoft Forms, which is an online form sent directly to licence holders ready for the recipient to complete. West Coast Adult, Family Licence, Local Area, and Loyal Senior licence holders were sent an email that included a link to the survey, as well as stating that they have a chance to have their say on Freshwater Sports Fish Regulations. The email was sent on Wednesday the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2024, and the survey closed on Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2024. Giving West Coast licence holders 19 days to complete the survey if they wish to have a say on the current regulations or suggest any other potential changes. Of the 3,077 invited to participate, 50 completed the survey, that being 1.6% of invited licence holders.

## Results

**Q1:** Do you have any suggestions or any regulations that you would like to see reviewed?

*Answers summarised by AI:*

The feedback on fishing regulations reveals a wide range of suggestions and concerns. Some anglers expressed appreciation for New Zealand's fishing regulations, but highlighted areas for improvement. Key suggestions included offering clearer communication about fishing restrictions, such as the Arahura River, which some believed was closed, but Fish & Game had not confirmed. Others proposed the introduction of cheaper, temporary licenses for visiting anglers, particularly those staying for short periods. Many felt the rising cost of licenses, especially for non-residents, was becoming unaffordable. A few suggested expanding designated waters and restricting

non-resident anglers in high-demand areas to preserve fish populations and enhance local economies.

Some proposed better education for anglers before they reach waterways and more enforcement of rules around non-licensed fishing, especially for campervan users. Others suggested increasing the bag limit on certain waters, like the Arnold River, to ensure healthy fish stocks. There was also a call to reconsider the environmental impact of practices like 1080 poisoning and its effects on local ecosystems. Additionally, some advocated for more catch-and-release programs, fly-only waters, and extended winter fishing opportunities. Overall, while most were satisfied with regulations, they urged for more affordable, clear, and sustainable practices to protect both the sport and the environment.

**Q2.** Do you currently reside outside the West Coast Fish & Game Region?

Answer: 58% of respondents, 29/50 respondents, answered "yes" to residing outside the region.

**Q3.** What motivates you to fish or hunt in the West Coast region? (Only asked of those that confirming they resided outside the region.) *Answers summarised by AI:*

Anglers and hunters are motivated to fish and hunt on the West Coast for several reasons, primarily its stunning natural environment, excellent fishing opportunities, and low-pressure waters. Many participants mentioned owning properties, holiday homes, or having family in the region, contributing to their frequent visits. The area's unspoiled beauty, with less crowded rivers and lakes, allows for a more peaceful and immersive experience. The region's excellent back-country fishing, abundant waterways, and the quality of fish, especially trout, are frequently highlighted as key attractions.

Others enjoy the West Coast for its solitude, fewer anglers, and the opportunity to fish in areas that are less commercially pressured. The ability to access a wide range of fishable waters with relatively good access is another appealing factor. However, some hunters expressed frustration over the impact of 1080 poisoning on local wildlife, particularly in the Whataroa area, which has affected hunting opportunities. Despite these concerns, the West Coast's natural beauty and the abundance of fish continue to be significant draws for those who seek outdoor activities in a less crowded and more pristine environment.

**Q4.** In a few sentences, please describe your understanding of Fish & Game's role and activities. *Answers summarised by AI:*

Fish & Game's role is primarily to manage and conserve New Zealand's freshwater fisheries and game bird populations. Their responsibilities include issuing and checking licenses, ensuring compliance with fishing and hunting regulations, and promoting sustainable practices to preserve fish stocks and the environment. Many see them as protectors of waterways and ecosystems, working to ensure that fisheries are healthy for future generations.

Fish & Game also stocks rivers, monitors fish populations, and provides support for access and signage. Additionally, they advocate for anglers and hunters, ensuring that

resources are managed fairly and efficiently. While some focus on their role in education and enforcement, others highlight concerns about the perceived effectiveness of their activities, particularly regarding access and regulation enforcement. Overall, Fish & Game is viewed as an essential body for maintaining the quality of New Zealand's fisheries and game bird resources while ensuring that they remain accessible and sustainable.

**Q5.** Has Fish & Game done anything that has impacted or benefited your fishing or hunting activities? If yes, please explain. *Answers summarised by AI:*

Fish & Game's impact on fishing and hunting activities varies among respondents. Some anglers appreciate the organization's efforts to preserve fish stocks, ensure access to fishing spots, and maintain waterways. For example, improved signage, information on river access, and local advice from Fish & Game officers have been beneficial for many. However, others feel that some of Fish & Game's actions, such as designated waters with extra fees, have restricted their freedom to explore and diminished their fishing experience, especially for non-resident anglers. The increasing cost of licenses and regulations like the 5-day limit per region were also seen as negatives by some, making it harder for certain anglers to enjoy their pastime.

Additionally, some expressed frustration with the publication of fishing maps and information, which has led to overcrowding in previously less-known spots. While a few have noticed positive efforts, including better management and advocacy for angler interests, others feel that regulations are being enforced too strictly, particularly in terms of introducing new anglers to the sport. There are mixed opinions on the effectiveness of Fish & Game's activities, with some praising their work and others calling for more balanced management.

**Q6.** What prevents you from fishing or hunting more often? *Answers summarised by AI:*

Several factors prevent people from fishing or hunting more often, with the most common being time constraints due to work, family obligations, and other commitments. Many respondents also cited the rising cost of living, including the price of licenses, travel expenses, and fuel, as a barrier to frequent participation. Weather conditions, especially extreme weather or unsuitable seasons, were also mentioned as limiting factors, particularly when the available time for fishing or hunting does not align with good weather. For those living outside New Zealand, the distance and cost of traveling, especially from places like Australia or overseas, were significant obstacles. Some also mentioned a decline in fish numbers, health issues, or poor conditions of rivers and access points as factors that impacted their activities.

Additionally, concerns about regulations, such as fishing limits and restrictions, were also noted as deterrents. Despite these challenges, many still manage to fish or hunt as much as they can, though the frequency and enjoyment of these activities are often impacted by these various constraints.

**Q7.** What suggestions do you have for Fish & Game to enhance your fishing and hunting experience? *Answers summarised by AI:*

To enhance fishing and hunting experiences, several respondents suggested maintaining current efforts, such as preventing overfishing by wealthy overseas anglers, ensuring access to fishing spots, and continuing to manage fish populations effectively. Some recommended lowering the license fee for non-residents or making day passes more accessible. Many also emphasized the importance of clearer information about fishing locations, particularly regarding access points, and the need for more detailed communication about fishing regulations. Several respondents voiced concerns about the negative impact of fencing rivers and streams on access and environmental health, suggesting that alternative methods to protect ecosystems should be considered. Others proposed increasing the regional fishing allocation, especially outside peak seasons, or introducing more "put and take" fisheries.

Some advocated for proactive efforts to combat pollution from agriculture, urging Fish & Game to address water quality issues more effectively. Improving interactions with landowners and reducing fishing regulations were also mentioned as potential improvements. Several participants emphasized the need for continued efforts to manage fish and game resources sustainably while preserving the solitude of remote fishing spots, without making access points too widely known. Overall, most responses focused on improving access, reducing costs, and ensuring sustainable management practices to enhance future fishing and hunting experiences.

**Q8.** Do you have any additional comments or feedback for Fish & Game?

*Answers summarised by AI:*

Many respondents expressed general satisfaction with Fish & Game's efforts, appreciating their work on managing fish populations and maintaining access points for fishing. Some suggested that Fish & Game continue lobbying for the interests of fishermen and hunters, as well as advocating for the value of these activities in New Zealand's economy. A few noted concerns about the reduction in fishing limits and access, with some suggesting that designated waters be reconsidered. Several expressed the desire for easier access to fishing-related information and for more patrols on rivers to ensure compliance. Others mentioned the need for less paperwork and more fieldwork focused on enhancing fish habitats.

There were a few concerns about Fish & Game making fishing destinations too accessible, which some felt eroded the solitude they once enjoyed. Additional requests included reducing license costs, testing the effect of price reductions on participation, and introducing more rainbow and salmon fisheries. A few respondents suggested removing treble hooks to reduce damage to fish that are released. Overall, feedback was mostly positive, with many appreciating Fish & Game's efforts but offering suggestions for improvement, particularly related to access, regulations, and habitat protection.

## **Staff Recommendations**

- That the council receives this report.
- Maintain current West Coast sports fishing regulations for the 2025-26 season.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: West Coast Fish and Game - Sport Fish Regulations Survey Questions

1. Do you have any suggestions or any regulations that you would like to see reviewed?
2. Do you currently reside outside the West Coast Fish & Game Region?
3. What motivates you to fish or hunt in the West Coast region? *(Only asked of those who answer "Yes" to residing out of the region).*
4. In a few sentences, please describe your understanding of Fish & Game's role and activities.
5. Has Fish & Game done anything that has impacted or benefited your fishing or hunting activities? If yes, please explain.
6. What prevents you from fishing or hunting more often?
7. What suggestions do you have for Fish & Game to enhance your fishing and hunting experience?
8. Do you have any additional comments or feedback for Fish & Game?

### Appendix Two: Raw Feedback on Question One: Do you have any suggestions or any regulations that you would like to see reviewed?

- No, its your country and I'm honoured to have been your guest once or twice a year for over 30 years.
- Back country fees
- No
- no
- no
- A cheaper licenses
- Designated waters and extra fees for non resident anglers and any addition to them.
- Nil
- No
- "Clarification is needed on whether anglers can actually fish the Arahura River. I feel that Fish & Game needs to update all anglers (urgnently) if the river can no longer be fished. Rachel Scott (see evidence below) is 100% clear that the river is now no longer available to fish (please note that they consider the whole river to be closed). This has important ramifications for all anglers, and urgent next steps from Fish & Game are required. I appreciate that this might be a different understanding than Fish & Game might have.

**"Sorry no options it is the whole awa." - Mawhera Operations Manager**

Or "Hi [REDACTED]"

**The Committee are not issuing fishing permits currently as they are finalizing their Health and Safety plan for the Awa.**

**Sorry about that and not sure when they will be available again.**

### **Cheers" Mawhera Operations Manager**

- I'm not sure. I think it's fine
- The back country licence for regions to be increased from 5 per region to 10 - there is more than enough rivers in each region and stretches on the same river - it near on takes out the option on over night trips as you will use up half of your allocations.
- No
- Stop discouraging and encourage tourist fishing. Designated waters, there are much better ways to stop overfishing if that is how you see it! Tourists bring in so much money into our local community and allows it to flourish not fade away like many of our towns are doing. Motels, Hotels, AirBnB, restaurants, guides, petrol stations, it's the easiest influx of money into our wee towns.
- Not at present
- Availability of licences for restricted waterways to non-residents
- "The principal regulations require anglers to be licensed to take fish. Reg.. 1st Sched 2.3.4 states - no angler may be more than 15m from the rod being used.  
There should be some provision that allows an adult license holder to supervise another person using the license holder's one permitted rod assembly, or other activity such as netting, within the provisions of cl2.3.4 (except prohibiting any commercial type of arrangement).  
This will make it easier for prospective anglers to be introduced to the activity. "
- Yes
- No
- Reduced anglers in high use areas
- No, I think that WC F&G have the right mixture for their regulations,
- see below
- I think the designated waters are wisely chosen and not a blanket control of all waters like North Canterbury. The signage at angler access points is getting too much. Education of anglers needs to happen before they arrive at rivers edge - but it is a fine balance, especially when you're dealing with foreign anglers such as myself.
- Would like to see some areas better enforced for non licensed campervan fishers.
- yes stop the 1080 and rat poison being put into our bush and waterways in whataroa area,
- Yes, it would be nice if a monthly license could be introduced for the visiting angler who's there to fish for a week or 2 weeks. To have to pay for an annual license seems a little excessive.
- NO
- no
- No, I am a visiting angler from Tasmania, I only target trout in the west coast lakes. I release all fish captured.