



# NZFFA August 2020 Newsletter

## Welcome to Our New Look Newsletter

### **President's Comment**

#### **Proposed review of Fish & Game.**

The recent video conference of the F&G National Council meeting attended by the Minister of Conservation and Mervyn English, DOC's Director of Governance, was disturbing.

It appears DOC plans to (opportunistically) take advantage of F&G's tenuous financial position, exacerbated by COVID-19, to undertake an "independent" review of F&G aided by DOC staff.

Almost from the inception of New Zealand's acclimatisation societies, Government departments/ministries have been covertly &/or overtly attempting to wrest control of our freshwater recreational fisheries.

It appears DOC is trying this on with the NZ acclimatisation societies' successor F&G.

A review of F&G will be no bad thing 30 years after its formation, but such a review should be managed by F&G's National Council without political interference from an outside body.

F&G and its predecessor are valued New Zealand institutions that have done more to protect New Zealand's freshwater resources than virtually any Government body.

#### **DOC, Fonterra and Nitrates**

DOC is also compromised by recently entering into a NZ\$20 million deal with Fonterra and DairyNZ, spread over ten years to study freshwater pollution. The dairy industry is this country's biggest user and polluter of our freshwater resources. In Canterbury there is a joint DOC/Fonterra project looking at the LII catchment. The LII has twelve long established dairy farms in a catchment situated on heavy lowland water logged anaerobic soils which typically reduce

nitrate in the groundwater.

The adjoining Selwyn River catchment is Canterbury's "problem child" fed by aquifers heavy polluted with nitrate and pathogens from the large scale dairying made possible by the Central Plains Water irrigation scheme. This is the primary source of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere's world class pollution requiring a NZ\$300 million dollar fix. This is the catchment requiring study.

**The value of "grass-roots" democracy.**

F&G's value lies in its generational knowledge and its grass roots angler advocacy.

Ministers have short-lived/ephemeral careers, yet their policy can deliver consequences that last for generations. Government Ministries are "captured" by the latest policies of a Minister driven by short term political expediency. The MfE's recent Our Freshwater 2020 report records a sorry tale of continued pollution, inadequate monitoring, and an increased number of threatened species.

It would be disastrous for New Zealand if F&G were taken over by a Ministry such as DOC and the country's only effective freshwater advocate was lost.

For this reason the NZFFA expresses strong support for the continuance of F&G and regional control without the current "power grab" by the National Council. We also welcome an update of its National Office and funding model.

Dr Peter Trolove  
President  
NZFFA





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Many of you will have seen that our Website has undergone a major make-over during the past month. Check it out at <https://nzffa.com>

This also includes a completely revamped newsletter, and we hope you find it both enjoyable and informative.

Towards the end you will find a few sample posts from the website. Feel free to enjoy, plus we are always open to publication of relevant articles. Use the [Contact Us](#) link to get in touch, or forward articles to [info@nzffa.com](mailto:info@nzffa.com)

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## **The Case for Reform of ‘Fish and Game’.**

### **Opinion Piece by Rex N. Gibson**

#### **The Current Status.**

New Zealand Fish and Game has operated to serve the interests of freshwater sports-fish anglers and game bird shooters, in its present form, since 1990. It replaced a national network of Acclimatisation Societies. There have been no significant changes in Fish and Game’s structure since then. It is funded entirely from fishing and game bird licence fees. It receives no other government funding. The funding is collected in the regions which are then levied by the national office.

There are twelve regions covering from Northland to Southland. The Taupo area has its own separate system administered by the Department of Conservation. Each region has its own autonomous Council and internal organisational structure. All regions are answerable to the Minister of Conservation and must report to the Minister annually.

There is also a central “co-ordinating” organization, based in Wellington. It is governed by a “National Council” composed of one representative from each region. It employs a CEO and other support staff.

#### **So, what is wrong with this model?**

There are three major fundamental structural flaws;

1. The model was based on the distribution of anglers, and thus licence sales, in 1990. Game licence distributions have consistently been almost equal in both islands. The demographics of angling licence holder distribution have however changed dramatically over the 30 years of its existence; Fish and Game has not changed to meet this “redistribution”; no changes equals no improvements for three decades.
2. The structure of the National Council is the antithesis of democracy. Each region has an equal vote but the number of licence holders in each region varies by a factor of 12; i.e. the largest region has over twelve times the number of licence holders of the smallest; yet both have the same voting power. The correct term is for such a political system methodology is gerrymandering.
3. The representatives on the national council are all regional councillors required implicitly, if not explicitly, to represent the interests of their region rather than the national interest of the organization. These may sometimes be the same but frequently cannot be so.

### **What are the immediate implications of these “flaws”?**

- Resources allocation is still based on the 1990 model. The needs of licence holders are not thus served proportionally in terms of their geographic distribution.
- The levies on regions are thus based on maintaining the proportional funding needs that were set up in 1990.
- There has developed an increasing, almost bizarre, disparity between the needs of licence holders in the growing regions and those in the declining (licence sales) regions at the expense of the former. It is a reversal of ‘logical’ and ‘fair’ allocations. Some regions are thus significantly over-resourced in comparison with their relative needs; all because they once had good numbers of licence holders.
- Parochialism rules in terms of decision making at the national council. What is best nationally is side-lined by the need to defend the status quo of the region that nominated the representative.

### **Major consequences of the status quo for licence holders.**

- A gerrymandered voting system; as noted earlier.
- The national council fails to operate in the national interests of licence holders as a resource manager. It serves primarily as a “horse trading” venue. While the head office expends its \$2.7m the National Councillors argue over the crumbs.

- There is poor co-ordination between regions on regulations, manager and staffing remuneration, employment contracts, asset (including vehicle) purchasing, volunteer ranger management, etc. There is an almost endless list replete with efficiency and effectiveness gains once you start looking at the possibilities.
- The licence holders in four major regions (all South island) lose almost 50% of their licence fee to subsidise other regions and the national office. Of the other eight regions none loses more than 18% and several receive subsidies of up to 314% of their income from the national pool.
- Some of the regions paying minimal or no levies are accumulating significant reserves whereas at least one major region (North Canterbury) has almost no reserves yet has been excessively levied for well over a decade; earthquakes and all. The South Island regions are also currently being asked to cut costs and services, deplete reserves, sell assets and lay off staff.
- Sixty seven percent of the national income for F & G comes from the South Island. This reflects the fact that angling licence sales there are highest, yet only 39% of the funding is allocated back to the South Island regions to service their licence holders' needs. This latter point is to be contrasted with the data from the most recent National Angling Survey (2016). It showed clearly that just 1.5% of angler fishing days were spent in the "other island"; thus removing any justification for transfer of funds between islands. The Angling Survey showed quite graphically where anglers fish; and few bother to cross Cook Strait. Any southerners going north are largely heading to the DoC administered Taupo fishery.

### **The Funding Data in Summary (2019-2020 allocations)**

The funding allocation back to the main South Island regions works out as follows; **the figures are expressed as a percentage of the income collected:**

- Southland 55.1%
- Otago 50.0%
- Central South island 48.4%
- North Canterbury 50.5%

There is clearly some consistency here. Their Levy is about half their income. These are four of the five regions with the greatest angler usage of their

fisheries.

It is worth a comparison with the returns to the major North Island regions:

- Wellington 134.5% (+\$207K)
- Eastern 83.9%
- Auckland/Waikato 87.2%
- Hawke's Bay 91.7%

Their levies are thus averaging just a couple of percent of income and these allocations here make these regions corporate beneficiaries of their South island counterparts. Go figure! With the smaller northern regions the discrepancy is even greater.

- Taranaki 214% (+\$193K)
- Northland 314% (+\$365K)

The two smaller players in the South are better treated with West Coast receiving a subsidy (\$104,630 or 1% of the national income). This is less than either Northland or Taranaki receive even although it has 300 km of the most difficult geography, and extensive fisheries, in New Zealand to monitor.

The final elephant in the room is the National Office. It “absorbs” almost 25% of the national budget (c\$2.7million). There are serious questions that must be asked about the value of its expenditure as a return of investment for licence holders. It has had Chief Executives who have been national figures in the advocacy for clean waterways; but the costs of \$2.7 million per annum for the whole operation are hard to justify in the current licence fee based system.

The latest post-covid budget proposal reduces the National Council budget to \$2.5m but as all regions now face further 5% cuts that means the National Council's budget stays at 24.75% of the total income.

### **Is Fish and Game democratic?**

- Of the 100,000+ licence holders only 21,069 ‘chose’ to be on the electoral roll.
- Of these only 5,379 voted in the 2018 elections for regional councils i.e. around 5% or less i.e. c95% of licence holders are not represented on their regional councils.
- In three regions no election was necessary as there were insufficient candidates. This included two of the largest corporate beneficiaries; the Eastern

and Auckland-Waikato regions. This situation of insufficient candidates is not unusual over recent decades.

- The average turnout of voters was 28.87% of those eligible in the nine regions holding elections.
- Voting licence holders have no say on who represents them on the National Council. This is the greatest flaw in the democratic sense.
- National Council uses a gerrymandered system of voting, as outlined earlier, that largely disenfranchises most of the licence holders in the larger regions.

### **Where to from here?**

The current management model for Fish and Game has to go. They have shown that they are unwilling to make changes that will provide an organization that is fair and equitable.

The current budget proposals (June 2020) which leave the inequities in place and simply cut all allocations by 5% are a classic example of shuffling the deck chairs on the Titanic; and tossing a few overboard in the hope that this lightens the load of the sinking ship.

The National Council's preoccupation with "horse trading" practices over many years has seen it fail to put in place appropriate supports for the essential components of its structure; the regional councils. In the past three years there have been three Ministerial audits required of regional councils. In each case it is hard to see what the National Council has done to aid these regions to avoid the situations that developed.

A ray of light shone though when North Canterbury engaged a specialist in Governance and Management to advise the newly elected councillors in 2018 (11 of the 12 had not been on the previous council). It was an audit recommendation. This step needs to be the norm after each election in all regions. Anecdotal evidence is prolific of cross-overs between governance and management roles across the country. These crossovers have damaged both the angling and shooting opportunities and the abilities of both governors and staff to be effective in delivering the goals of the organization.

Despite the actions and intentions of many honourable councillors over the last thirty years the lack of change in the face of social changes equates to a lack of improvement in the delivery of Fish and Games' statutory responsibilities to anglers and shooters.

### **The Future**

The National Council in its present form is incapable of doing anything but protect the status quo. The resource allocation system outlined above is indefensible in the light of any honest analysis. The only basis for understanding why there is no urgency to fix this problem is that the National Council is not capable of even mustering the will to do so.

Any objective analysis of the National Council operation will show that it is highly vulnerable to a surprising level of ignorance by anglers and shooters; including those with past involvement as cogs in its machinery. The political naivety of one regional council, and more recently the National Council towards the Minister of Conservation (even if it was based on failed internal communication) disrespects the Minister's role. National Councillors seem unaware that they, and their regions, are statutory bodies that are part of the machinery of government. Whenever the lunatics take over the asylum outside forces come in to re-establish control. The 'Council' is precisely what its name says; a council. It is not a political party. It is elected (selected) to fulfil a set of statutory obligations to its licence holders.

Organizations that prefer to wait for their failings to become publically obvious are asking for change to be forced upon them. The National Council's chair recently noted the concerns of some regions about resourcing issues and stated that these would begin to be looked at in the 2012-2022 year. Following widespread dissatisfaction this was subsequently modified to begin by the end of this year. **There are many around the country that could complete a fair and equitable resourcing allocation system for licence holders in a few hours. It is not rocket science.** The current system maintains failing "empires" at the expense of the more vibrant "dominions". The historical political comparisons are hard to ignore.

The review announced recently is the direct consequence of the inadequacies of the current system; especially that of the National Council. They have only themselves to blame for having their inadequacies put in the spotlight.

**Rex N. Gibson** QSM

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**Rex is :**



- **A scientist and ecologist**
  - **An avid fly fisherman and salmon angler**
  - **An Executive member of the New Zealand Federation of Freshwater Anglers Inc. and their spokesperson on a range of environmental issues**
  - **An elected member of the North Canterbury Fish & Game Council**
  - **An keen member of The New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association**
  - **An active member of three South Island fishing clubs and a Life Member of one**
  - **A regular contributor to four on-line monthly fishing newsletter and two outdoor recreation websites.**
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Dear Angler,

The Federation of Freshwater Anglers encourages all anglers to submit **while you can**. Submissions close at the end of August.

We identified the following key issues:

1. The current voting system on National Council,
2. The funding disparities between regions and whether these are in anglers best interests
3. The roles and funding levels of National Council and "Head Office"
4. The threat to the powers and responsibilities of regional F&G councils.
5. Possible centralisation of power in the National office or to DOC

The attached opinion piece above is provided to stimulate your responses.

Send submissions to **[fgreview@doc.govt.nz](mailto:fgreview@doc.govt.nz)**

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The Federation had its AGM in July the results were

### **Elections for the Executive:**

President: Peter Trollove (Rakaia)

Treasurer: Strato Cotsilinis (Wellington)

Secretary: Rex Gibson (Christchurch)

Committee:

Steve Gerard (Central South island), Andi Cockroft (Wellington), Larry Burke (NZ Salmon Anglers), David Haynes (Nelson), Malcolm Francis (Kapiti), Zane Mirfin (Nelson), Michael Gregg (Marlborough), Brett Bensemann (Otago), Casey Cravens (Otago).

Life Members, Tony Orman, (Marlborough), Sandy Bull (Gisborne), Ian Rogers (Auckland) and Ken Sims (Manawatu) are automatically on the committee

Co-opted: Alan Rennie (North Canterbury)).

The Federations's Operational Plan for 2020-21 will be printed in the next Newsletter.

Some extracts from the website <https://nzffa.com>



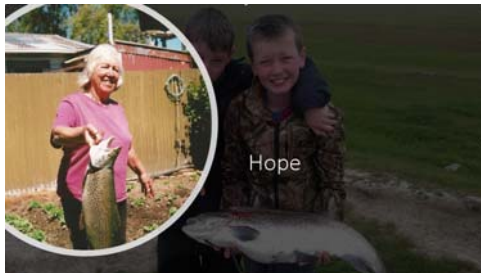
## Canterbury's Water Pollution – The Politician's Roll of Shame

An Opinion by Dr Peter Trolove  
Recent stories from Wellington suggest politicians enter parliament for gratuitous sex or to increase their personal wealth by facilitating immigration &/or the sale of...



## Government, Central and Local Fail on Rivers Rescue - NZFFA

Central and local government had failed to come to the rescue of the public's rivers, the recent annual general meeting of the NZ Federation of Freshwater Anglers was told. In...

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## Selwyn River (A Lost River) - A Power Point Presentation

Slides from a recent Power Point presentation by Alan Strong to the NZFFA AGM

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## Will Water Be Sold to the Highest Bidder?

Tony Orman looks at tradable water rights which has created a nightmare for farmers and growers in Australia and finds an uncertain murky situation in New Zealand On November 18,...

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## Carbon Trading is a Rort

OPINION:- by Anne Salmond The farmers are right. As the price of carbon rises, the settings in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will make it more profitable to plant



## Ted Trueblood's Wise Advice

by Tony Orman Ted Trueblood was a marvellous writer in the USA's "Field and Stream" magazines. As a teenager I read every article of his I came across. He made...

pine...

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## Choose wisely: A cycle or a McDonalds?

Sanjay Thakrar, CEO at Euro Exim Banlc Ltd. got economists thinking when he said: “A cyclist is a disaster for a country’s economy. He does not buy a car and...

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