

Before the Independent Hearing Panel

Under the Resource Management Act 1991

In the matter of the Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021

Summary of Evidence of Nigel Paragreen on behalf of Otago and Central South Island Fish and Game Councils (#0321) on Topics: Significant Resource Management Issues for the Region (SRMR), Integrated Management (IM) Urban Form and Development (UFD), Energy Transport and Infrastructure (EIT), Ecosystems and Biodiversity (ECO)

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Submitter's solicitors:

Maree Baker-Galloway | Rosie Hill
Anderson Lloyd
Level 2, 13 Camp Street, Queenstown 9300
PO Box 201, Queenstown 9348

p + 64 3 450 0700
maree.baker-galloway@al.nz | rosie.hill@al.nz

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lloyd.**

Summary

1. Fish and Game Councils are required to produce Sports Fish and Game Management Plans (**SFGMPs**) and there is one each from the Otago Fish and Game and the Central South Island Fish and Game Councils (**Fish and Game**). As plans developed under the Conservation Act 1987, these are to be had regard to in this Regional Policy Statement (**RPS**) process.
2. A key direction from the relevant SFGMPs is for Fish and Game to act as an advocate or monitoring body to identify habitat condition or threats and protect or restore habitat and ecosystem health. As a result of this direction, and others like it, the Councils have been heavily involved in planning and legislative processes to protect and restore habitat and direct investment in habitat rehabilitation projects. This is most often for the benefit of multiple species – introduced and indigenous alike. A list of prominent examples is depicted in my paragraphs 54 – 57.
3. Fish and Game takes an ecosystem-based approach to environmental management, with a focus on protecting and restoring water bodies and aquatic ecosystems holistically to achieve a healthy state. Within this, there is a focus on habitat as a life-supporting element of ecosystems. Sports fish and game birds benefit from such protection alongside other species within those ecosystems. For example, when we seek to protect or restore a lowland river because of a sports fishery, we are also thinking of the benefits to other values, such as tuna, bullies and lamprey, and the intrinsic value of the river itself. All of this can be encapsulated in the one river system.
4. There are instances where a focus on habitat is not sufficient, such as serious, negative species interactions between sports fish and some indigenous species. Interventions to manage such interactions requires input from multiple statutory parties. Fish and Game is proposing a framework be embedded within the RPS which enables those parties to plan proactively for interventions where necessary and take a more holistic approach to freshwater management where they are not.
5. There are differing perspectives on the meaning of ecosystem health. These can be broadly categorised having a focus on pre-human ecosystems, valued species and processes; and human-environment relationships. Taking a strictly pre-human approach to ecosystem health in the RPS makes it difficult to achieve healthy ecosystems in the presence of water body alteration from human activities, structures or introduced species. However, the other perspectives may be more forgiving of anthropogenic alteration.

6. I note that the ecosystem health compulsory value set in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management is inclusive of anthropogenic alteration, including introduce species, provided indigenous species are not unduly affected.
7. There is a clear link between recreation in the natural environment and the health needs of people. For angling and hunting, this includes direct contact with water; drinking and eating food harvested from water; and health and well-being aspects of being out in nature.
8. For the latter, the health and natural environment relationship is articulated in New Zealand public health strategies and government reporting. This includes recommendations for physical activity, Kia Manawanui Aotearoa: Long-term pathway to mental wellbeing and the Living Standards Framework, which informs the government's wellbeing budget. Within the documents, access to healthy, natural environments underpins the public's well-being. The term well-being is broadly used in these contexts as part of the public's healthcare in a preventative sense, helping people to stay healthy rather than relying on curing illness after the fact.

Nigel Paragreen

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