

DOC BACKS OFF F&G RESTRUCTURE

Proposals to radically restructure Fish and Game, the organisation that administers and manages trout and salmon fishing along with duck and game bird shooting, have been shelved according to a letter from Conservation Minister Kiri Allan sent to the New Zealand Outdoor Party.

Outdoor Party co-leader Alan Simmons said the minister has confirmed there is no time scheduled for legislative changes in the near future.

The proposals to restructure Fish and Game arose from a review set up by previous Minister of Conservation Eugenie Sage who said the intention was to look at governance only. A two-person review panel, however, went well beyond this and concluded government appointees and iwi representatives with voting rights should sit on both national and regional F&G councils while regions should be reduced by amalgamations.

The proposals drew angry reactions from licence holders and organisations such as the NZ Federation of Freshwater Anglers and Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of NZ and most F&G regions themselves.

Simmons said an alarming aspect was the lack of consultation with the 150,000 fish and game licence holders whose license money funded the organisation.

"It has been financially independent of government with no taxpayer money subsidising it, unlike the Department of Conservation which is totally taxpayer funded," he said. "It was DOC that was administering the Fish and Game review. Ironically, in the opinion of many outdoors

Kiwis, it's DOC that needs a strong, searching review."

Minister Allan said in her letter that there is widespread agreement within F&G circles for regional amalgamation but that required considerable further consultation.

"That's debatable," said Simmons, "but she did consider F&G should push on to internally restructure and strengthen governance practices, which I think many feel is justifiable."

He said he was heartened by the Minister's assurance that any legislative processes would be done under "normal public engagement and consultation."

Simmons said he was very concerned at the inadequate consultation over the issue, with the current F&G NZ chairman Ray Grubb talking only to regional councillors.

"That's just under 150 people, i.e., licence holders, whereas there's probably over 150,000 licence holders in total," he said.

Tony Orman, a member of the Council of Outdoor Recreation Councils and a Fish and Game regional councillor for some 30 years, said governments had attempted numerous state takeovers of F&G and its predecessors, the acclimatisation societies. The 1968 Hunn Report admitted there had been 10 previous attempted state takeovers at that point, with more since then.

"Any organisation can develop faults and wrong cultures," said Orman. "The underlying principle is that F&G is totally funded by fish and game licence holders."

He commended Alan Simmons for challenging "the potential state takeover of the public's fish and game organisation."

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