

FLY LINES



FEBRUARY 2026

Commencing the Year with Liars' Night

**February Meeting – on Thursday
February 19 at the Kelvin Club,
commencing at 6:30 pm.**

Please make a booking for
dinner by emailing our Secretary Kevin Finn on
k2finn@icloud.com

Again our first meeting for the year is the traditional Liars Night, with three brave members willing and prepared to share something of their recent exploits and successes with us. Our three volunteers are Bill Jeans, Chris Gray and Peter Whitelaw, and from all reports they have been very active preparing themselves and their material for this first meeting. So Liars Night again this year will be another great opportunity to catch up with colleagues and friends, and hear tales of magnificent days and fabulous trout encountered both near and far.

We would encourage all members to attend what promises to be a captivating evening and a very entertaining start to the year.

For those who would like to join us for a meal beforehand please make a booking for dinner by emailing our Secretary Kevin Finn on k2finn@icloud.com before Tuesday, February 17, and leaving a message.

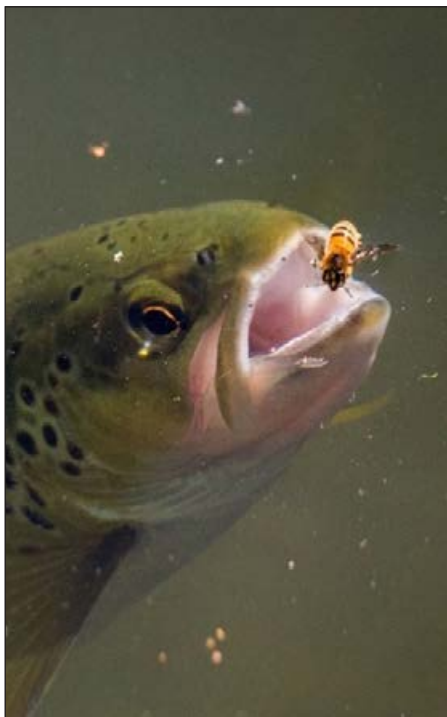


Photo from Anthony Boliancu's collection

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Vice President's Message

...from Rodger Muir

Welcome to the first edition of *Fly Lines* for 2026. I trust you all had a great Christmas and New Year, and have started the year refreshed and relaxed.

John and I continue to team-tag in the dual Vice-president role, and with significant support from your Council, are making progress on a number of fronts, albeit more quickly on some than others.

This is the third edition of *Fly Lines* published and distributed to members as a PDF file, accessible via a link to the VFFA website. Members now have the option to read it on line; to download it and keep each issue as a PDF file; or to print each edition as a hard copy.

This publication method is much less expensive and more efficient than both the hard-copy print/mailout used historically, and the e-newsletter option trialled in October last year. The change will result in funds from annual subscriptions now being available to put into member activities, rather than being totally consumed by annual publication costs, as has been the case for the past four or five years.

The Council is keen to receive feedback from members regarding this change, so please do not hesitate to contact any one of your Council members by phone, mail, or email.

On other administrative matters, your Council has resolved to consolidate all the Association's banking with Macquarie Bank and to adopt Xero for accounting. The VFFA website continues to be a work-in-progress, and these decisions



Rodger Muir with a fine New Zealand rainbow

will enable simple event ticketing and payment facilities to be included, thus simplifying members participation in and payment for events. Thanks to Andrew and Scott, who continue to work away at rationalising the Association's IT environment.

During the month of February, Council members will be contacting all members that have as yet not renewed their 2025/26 membership, and by early March, we should have a definitive membership listing.

Your Council is planning an exciting year of events for the year ahead. In terms of social activity, the traditional '*Liars Night*' will be held at the Kelvin Club on Thursday February 19. Anthony McGrath from VR Fish will present on Thursday, March 19, and thereafter there will be an interesting range of speakers arranged on a monthly basis.

In terms of 'hands-on' activity, across the winter months the Council will be arranging fly tying sessions, and casting at the Red Tag Pool. Note, access to the southern end of the pool will be restricted due to Eastern Freeway upgrade work. There will be the usual excursions to Millbrook, Warrnambool, Thorpdale, etc. Also, this year we are offering members the opportunity to sample mid-winter fishing at Taupo – see the brief summary included later in this issue.

VFFA ex-President Chris Gray has reported that progress continues to be made by the group working on the exciting Australian Fly Fishing Centre Fairlea Road Precinct Project. The latest press release from the group is set out below, and Chris will provide a much more detailed report that will be published in the March edition of *Fly Lines*.

Recent feedback received is that trout fishing in Victoria over the last several

months has been, at best, patchy. This is thought to be attributable to ongoing low water flows, hot weather, and the impact of bushfires. As I write this, John Spragg and half a dozen other VFFA members have just arrived in Tasmania for the annual 'Hayes on Brumby's' event. Too early to have got any feedback from them on the fishing.

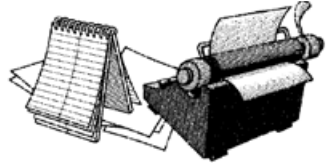
Seventeen VFFA members will descend on Waitahanui at Taupo, New Zealand, in the last week of February to try their luck targeting the local trout population. I was there in January, and found there had been a good Cicada hatch and plenty of Lacewing Moth, which should provide plenty of dry fly action for the group. More recent reports from there indicate that the fishing is currently very good, with fish in excellent condition being landed. Let's hope that continues.

Tight lines.



Odds and ends and a big collection of flies

From the EDITOR'S DESK



... from Lyndon Webb



The house at the bottom end of the editor's day on the Liffey

Fly fishing diaries are great. They have all sorts of uses and are often very helpful and instructive. In earlier days I had scribbled reports on my fishing outings in an old exercise book, but computers have now taken our lives over, so digital reports are the go. Among other things, it's now so easy to include a few photos to remind us of what conditions were like.

Most of our records may well be fairly bland and mundane, but for all of us there will have been occasions when the fishing was spectacular and particularly memorable. Years later our records of these special events will continue to ignite heaps of great memories.

I was hunting through some old fishing reports the other day when I came across a page or two reporting on a trip I'd made to Tasmania some years earlier. I'd flown

from Melbourne in early January, hired a car, and travelled up to Bronte. I had spent some time at Bronte a year earlier and had enjoyed some fabulous days, so was hoping to repeat the experience.

But it wasn't to be. On this second visit I flogged places that had been so good to me a year earlier, but despite my enthusiasm and frenetic labours (and the pile of supposedly deadly flies I had taken with me), there wasn't much to show for my efforts.

After some blank days had passed two fly fishers from West Australia (of all places) turned up and told me about the fabulous fishing they had just enjoyed on the lower reaches of the Liffey River. So I packed my kit and raced back down the hill to Longford. The next day I headed out to the Liffey, drove onto a farm I came

across, and asked the landowner if it was ok for me to fish the river running through his property. No problems; go for it!

So I gathered my gear and headed off to the water. The day was a delight - light breezes and plenty of sun, and the river was fabulous. I found fish taking insects off the surface, polaroided others in sections of shallow clear water, and still others just drifted up and snatched my floating dries as they floated by. I missed plenty (I usually do) but still managed to land and release heaps. It truly was a most memorable day.

After about three solid hours of fishing I walked back to the car, dumped my gear, and went to thank the farmer for his kindness.

I soon found myself sitting in his toolshed, enjoying a coffee he insisted on giving me, and listening to a fascinating collection of his experiences. He told how some years earlier the Tasmanian Government had planned to get rid of a tired and rusty old cargo ship of some three or four thousand tons by taking it out and sinking it in some deep water well offshore.

The farmer got to hear about this, so he and half a dozen mates had approached

the government, appropriated the boat, spent some cash making it reasonably safe and seaworthy, then sailed it to Perth.

At Perth they spent more money on further repairs, then sailed it north – all the way to the west coast of India where they sold the boat to a large company there that recycled and processed scrap iron. Then they flew back to Tasmania, much wealthier than when they left.

The stories continued, and the entertainment was as enjoyable as the great fishing I had enjoyed earlier. Eventually the farmer decided that he needed to call in to the local pub to catch up with mates, so I dropped him off, thanked him again for a truly magnificent day, and headed off to my accommodation in Launceston.

As I suggested earlier, our diaries and reports are an important reminder of our personal fly fishing histories, and particularly of those wonderful times when the fishing or the event was exceptionally special. I guess one of the benefits of getting older is that we gather lots more of them. Enjoy the rest of your season.



The Liffey. If you look hard you can see a trout lingering in the current almost right in the centre of this photo.

Press Release February 2, 2026

AFFC Fairlea Road Precinct Master Plan Ready to Launch:

The future home of Australian fly fishing is taking shape.

The master plan for the Australian Fly Fishing Centre (AFFC) Red Tag Pavilion at Fairlea Road is now complete, and a public launch is just ahead.

This moment follows a big year of progress. In late 2025 members of the Red Tag Club formally backed the Club's role in developing and managing the Centre on behalf of the national fly fishing community. That mandate is matched by strong external support, with the Victorian Fly Fishers' Association, Mending Casts, Fly Fish Australia, and the Victorian Fisheries Authority all reaffirming their backing for Red Tag's leadership of this unifying national project.

The heavy lifting behind the scenes is done. As of December 2025, all key technical reports — cultural heritage, building design, and ground and soil surveys — are finalised. Nearly a year of preparation now puts the project in a strong position to shift from planning into delivery.

Next step: the Official Launch. To be held on-site at Fairlea Reserve in the coming

months, the event will unveil the full vision and mark the project's official move into the public arena under the AFFC banner.

After launch, the full suite of plans and project material will be accessible via the Red Tag Club's website and a dedicated AFFC platform. From there the focus turns to delivery — and to bringing more partners, supporters, and community members into this landmark vision for Australian fly fishing.

In additional news, the Eastern Freeway Upgrades from Hoddle Street to Burke Road construction are underway. Whilst details are still being formalised, a construction compound is going to be erected on the southern side of the current Fairlea Road casting pool, thus reducing access for fly fishers in the coming weeks. Future information is available on the engage.vic.gov.au website and we will let you know more as it comes to hand.

Please be aware that this will increase construction traffic, and will result in reduced access to the southern side of the casting pool for a minimum of 18 months.



A stream somewhere

Victorian Fishing - The Flyfisher's Report

... from Andrew Fuller



A top brown in excellent condition caught by Andrew Fuller recently when fishing the Great Lake

It's hard to believe we're already into February and staring down the back half of the trout season. That ticking clock alone should be enough to get you out the door, but if you need a nudge, here's how things have shaped up so far.

The season kicked off with low water across much of the state, and plenty of crossed fingers waiting on rain. When it finally arrived things turned quickly. By the end of November, conditions in the North-East and Tasmania were looking the goods and stayed that way through spring.

Western Victorian lakes never really saw a full-blown mayfly event, though Lake Wendouree did buck the trend with some solid hatches. The likely reason? More stable water levels than neighbouring lakes, which always seems to help.

The Goulburn fished well through spring, being very much a quality-over-quantity proposition. Feeder streams, on the other hand, have been excellent and continue

to produce. With the more recent hot spells water temperatures have climbed, so it's now a matter of heading upstream and hunting out cooler water if you want some consistent fishing.

The Ovens was sensational for cod right through to Christmas. It's now running low and warm which has slowed things down, but very early starts can still turn up a fish or two. Further upstream past Bright the Ovens has been fishing okay for trout without being a standout. The real highlights have been the Kiewa and the upper Mitta. We've been absolutely flooded with photos of 4 lb-plus trout from the Mitta in particular, including one genuine monster tipping the scales at over 7 lb.

There's no doubt cormorants took a bite out of trout numbers last season, but right now we're seeing the upside of that pressure - fewer fish, but bigger on average. Nowhere has that been more obvious than Tasmania's Great Lake, where trout are reportedly at least a



Mike Hurren from the Flyfisher Yea store caught this fine Murray cod from the Ovens River



A brown caught from the Great Lake some years ago showing the poor condition of fish at that time

pound heavier than usual. According to Jim Allen, they're the biggest fish he's ever come out of the lake, and this is supported by records going back more than 50 years.

Closer to home, the Victorian fires have been tragic on many fronts. Our man in Yea, Mick Hurren, was right in the thick of it with the CFA. We had to close the Yea store for a couple of weeks while access was restricted, but things are now returning to normal. If you're heading

that way, don't hesitate — the local communities genuinely need the support. The Goulburn is currently producing some cracking fish, mostly from recent stockings but with a sprinkling of quality wild trout mixed in, so it's well worth a look.

Down south Tasmania's Western Lakes have been fishing really well, and most rivers are back to their reliable consistent best. Across the ditch, New Zealand has had plenty of rain — exactly what you want to keep things ticking along. It's definitely not too late for a trip! In fact, the next few months could be a very smart time to go.

As always, if you want a steer in the right direction or a bit of local intel, drop into our South Melbourne or Yea stores. We're always happy to help point you towards some quality fishing.



North-east Victoria has many delightful streams in glorious bushland

Peter Morse – Speaking at our Christmas Dinner last December



Peter Morse is a fine and very successful fly fisher

Thank you very much for your welcome. Yes, I'm very glad to be here. It's been a few years since my last visit.

When you get invited to do a talk like this and you don't really know who the crowd is going to be you don't quite know where to aim it. So tonight I've gone full on fishing - hardcore fishing. You can see the title there - *"The Swing's the Thing"* and *"The Tug is the Drug"*.

In recent years I became bored with fly fishing. I've done a hell of a lot of it. I guess the autumn season down in New Zealand's South Island didn't help, with a howling north-westerly blowing and staring into a low sun with high white cloud. It was burning my eyeballs out and I just got a bit fed up with it. So I turned around and fished downstream with the sun at my back.

And this fishing flies on the swing sort of evolved from there. I used to fish the middle stretches of the Mataura River a lot, and still do. I would fish with friends, and we'd fish up a stretch, then at the end

of the day we would have a two to three kilometre walk back to car. And I thought, well it's late in the evening and there's got to be fish lying out in this river that we walked past this morning. So I started carrying a second rod to swing flies on the way back downstream. And I started catching fish and I thought: "This is fun!"

The Fly Fishers International has a "Spey Instructor's exam", and I thought, "Ok, I've got my Masters qualification, so I'm going to see if I can go one step further and do my "Spey Instructors' Exam". Fishing with two-handed Spey rods and swinging flies was part of the study for that exam, and a big part of that exam is knowing how to teach people how to swing flies and how to make the casts with those two-handed rods. And the rigs and the flies that are needed. So I have gone down this big rabbit hole of Spey casting.

When we think of Spey we think of the Spey River in Scotland. Spey fishing with big two-handed rods sort of emerged in Scotland in the 19th century. There

were rivers there with trees tight against the bank. They were wide rivers full of Atlantic salmon, and the Scots, being the canny fellows they are, developed long rods. The original Spey rods were 22 feet long, were about 3 lb in weight, and were made from green heart wood. And they cast these things with woven silk lines across the rivers to catch salmon.

And for many years that was Spey casting in Scotland. Then probably 30 years ago the Americans discovered this mode of fishing for fishing their big steelhead rivers on the west coast. And the Canadians used it on their Atlantic salmon rivers up in Ontario.

Now when the Americans get hold of something we know what happens - there's soon an explosion of technology and in popularity. There were a lot of people in the US who couldn't get to the steelhead rivers. Steelhead are basically a sea-run rainbow trout.

They were fishing trout streams, and in the summer months they started to use Spey techniques to swing flies for your standard trout. And that's where trout Spey evolved. No other country in the world adopted it like the Americans.

The key to this fishing is making downstream presentations. Simon Gawesworth began using this style of casting in the Skeena River in British Columbia, using long rods, making huge casts across the stream, and swinging what were often quite elaborate flies.

It can be hard. I think I spent 10 days in British Columbia with Simon. He caught just one steelhead, and I got one bump in the 10 days. Last year was their best year I believe in about 70 years. This year it's been difficult again, so they're a fairly mythical fish. I went along with them as their photographer and spent some time



Peter Morse speaking at our Christmas Dinner last December

with Simon and a mate of his, and became very enamored with this part of the sport.

As a consequence it's basically all I do these days. I swing with single-handed rods, as I don't think that Spey casting necessarily requires long two-handed rods. We can cast using Spey techniques with single-handed rods. There are now specialized lines we can use. Basically a Spey cast doesn't have a back cast. We don't unroll the line in the air, as it has a waterborne anchor. It is an anchored cast where the front of the fly line sticks to the water and the back of the fly line forms a D loop behind you, which becomes your casting mass. So you can get away with Spey casting with relatively little back cast space.

In this situation there's a huge amount of space around you, and the long rods allow you to throw very long casts. As a basic rule in terms of rod length, in the hands of a competent caster every foot above the surface of the water will put 10 feet onto your best cast. So if you are wading up to your waist you've just taken 30 feet off your best cast. Thus the long rods are an enormous compensation for that.



Our Christmas Dinner last December was well attended. It was a great gathering of members and families and friends

Spey casting requires you to be wading. You've got to be in the water moving downstream with the current, and you're casting across the stream swinging your flies across the current. You make a cast, then take a few steps so that with each cast you're fishing a different piece of water. Then with a different mend at a different angle of cast across the river, you can manipulate the fly to swing in a certain way it didn't swing last time. You keep thinking, "I'm going to try something different this cast."

There is no sight fishing in this style. There is dry fly fishing using two handed rods and swinging surface flies across the surface, but it's essentially all blind casting, and very often to structures or to places where you think or know there are going to be fish. Part of this is learning to read the water through completely different eyes.

I was at Felix Borenstein's Owen River lodge a few years ago, and we had a presentation from the guides on the first

night. One of them said something that really stuck with me. He said: "In New Zealand 80% of the fish are in 20% of the water. Think about that. They're all mostly along the edges, and those are the ones I'm interested in."

That came about as a result of a day on the Waiau River down south. It flows between Te Anau and Manapouri, and I hooked a couple of fish that I simply could not stop when deep nymphing out in the middle in the deep green water, and those are the fish that I became really interested in. Okay, so they're the 20% of the fish that aren't feeding on the edges. I've got a lot of mates in New Zealand, and my preference these days is to fish for rainbows because they live in the big water, they live in the heavy water, they live out in the deep stuff.

The slabby old browns hang in the soft water on the edges, where both the food and life is easy. I tease my New Zealand mates endlessly about that. I want the real fish - the ones out in the fast water, and



Finishing a fine meal and preparing to hear our guest Peter Morse speak

not those skanky old lazy browns hanging on the edges in the soft back eddies. So they're the fish I'm interested in - the 20% of the fish that are out in the 80% of the water. And that's what Spey or swinging flies allows you to fish.

Also out in that deeper water are a lot of what I call 'maiden browns', which are browns that are around the three pound mark. Strong fit fish that have to live in the fast water because they haven't earned a spot in the slack water on the edges. Magnificent fish! You really know when you hook one. And also out in the faster water is where I find the sea runners.

So that's the water I focus a lot of my fishing on. One of my best days fishing for years was last year on the Mataura that had experienced a bunch of floods down below Gore. The river was still high and dirty, with about two feet of visibility. I had a cracking day swinging wee wet flies. I had a rig with three flies and was swinging them across the current. It was a blue sky day but with high and dirty

water, so everyone else had stayed home or gone somewhere else.

We have the winter spawning run on the Tongariro, and as you can see most of my talk tonight is about New Zealand because that's where I do most of my trout fishing these days. You've got to really change things by using much smaller flies, as anyone who's fished New Zealand well knows. One of my absolute frustrations are spinner falls with fish on those glassy calm days when they just sip spent spinners. I'll swing a fly across the front of them anyway.

On the walk back downstream at the end of the day, if nothing else is happening I'll say: "Let's have a crack! Let's swing some flies down deep!" The challenge is the mental and physical learning of a suite of new skills – casting, rigging flies, and strategies. I'll also put fly tying in there. The flies we swing with are quite different from your usual upstream dry flies and nymphs.

We use a lot of traditional soft hackle flies when they're feeding on smaller food items, but also a lot of bigger streamers and lots of tungsten and stuff to get them down deep. If you're bored with the same old thing, then here is something different. It's fun and the tug is real. You do all this swinging cast after cast after cast, and you get to think nothing's going to happen. And then- bang! 15 pound tippet snaps and the hook comes back straightened, so the hit on the swing is totally different to any upstream fishing.

I have students I teach up on the Swampy Plains. I hold Spey weekends, and on the big rivers I tell the students they have to cover the entire width of the river. In many cases, particularly on the medium-sized rivers, I tell them they are fishing water that others simply can't fish.

Here are some photos. This is the Tongariro River. You can experience the thrill of throwing big casts across the stream whilst trying to work out what your fly is actually doing. The advantages of swinging flies is presenting a fly to the fish first. You can cover a lot of water very efficiently. You learn new casts, and line mending, and fishing skills. The line mending in this game is very important. You can fish a floating line, or you can buy Spey lines that have ten different interchangeable tips so you can fish different depths and lengths and sink speeds. It's a suite of a box of tricks that once you work it out (and it takes a bit of working out) it just opens up a world for you fishing different and difficult water with different approaches.

I fish water that no one else fishes because they simply can't. It's a different approach, and not the standard walking upstream looking for fish and then sight casting to them. I'm bored with that and I'm over it. I want to explore the deep water.

In some of the talks I've done over the years I've talked about dredging in salt water, fishing to 20, 30, or 40 metres deep for pink snapper in particular. I love it, and this is part of that same process of exploring the depths of a river. Some of the time, but certainly not all the time. Using different flies with different tactics will hopefully force you to think about what you need to do to get a presentation that draws a response.

Now understand that in this exercise the biggest killer of a good presentation is drag, yet here we are dragging flies across the face of fish, and I think that's probably why we don't get so many browns when swinging flies, because the fly is dragging unnaturally, and they don't like that. Where you get your browns is when you finish the swing and he's hanging on the bank just there and will shoot out and grab the fly. But certainly not out in mid-stream.

But there are exceptions in the heavy stuff because that's where the rainbows live, and the fly's drift past the window is brief, so they'll shoot up and grab it even if it's swinging. I've had them grab tungsten bead-head nymphs off the surface the moment they've touched down out of 15 feet of heavy flowing water. In 15 feet of water they're not hanging just under the surface, they're tucked 15 feet down behind a rock on the bottom, and they rocket up and grab it.

My favourite river is the Waitaki River south of Christchurch. There are some good backwaters there. It's a big scary hydro river that has immense flow during the week. They tend to close down the flow on the weekends, but it's still a river for Spey fishermen. It's a fantastic river with a population of great rainbows, and I swear some of them have been down to the ocean and out to the sea as they're so fit and fat. You can find brownies hanging

in the backwaters. There's still plenty of brownies in there. There's plenty of other fishing in the area.

The disadvantages of Spey are you'll initially catch far fewer fish. You've got to have a lot of fishing out of your system to take this up, because you're taking up a completely different way of fishing, and it's going to be frustrating and you're going to catch few fish initially, until you work it out. It's something you really have to put time into putting together. There are no miracles in this game and you're going to really earn your fish. People say to me, "How was your trip to the Tongariro this year?" I reply, "It was great. We really had to fish hard and we earned everything."

There was reward for effort, and that's what this is about. You'll miss a lot of fish when you're swinging the fly in front of them, and you get a lot of bumps and a lot of taps where they are reacting to the fly rather than eating it. If it was a decent bump a lot of them are small fish, too. If it was a decent bump you might change the fly, and rest the fish for a minute or so.

This is what I should have done when I was in British Columbia and I got that one bump from that one steelhead. I should have known at the time. I should have rested it and sat down and changed flies. Then I should have gone back to it.

That's a tactic that works really well for us now when we get a tap. You'll miss a lot of fish because you should not strike. The moment you strike you will lose the fish, so when we fish we make the cast and fish with rod tip pointing straight down the line. The fish eats and you wait, and you wait, until it's pulling line, and then you lift the rod. If you pull back or you strike you will miss the fish every time, unless it absolutely smashes the fly.

Unfortunately, you're going to miss a lot of fish initially. You'll catch smaller fish. Big rivers are a challenge to read and to wade, and the wading staff is your best friend in these rivers, along with good wading boots, because you are in the water all the time and you have to be moving.

I had a client with me in New Zealand for five days last summer. He fell in five times, lost his wading staff, and broke my rod. I said: "This is not for you!"

So the wading is a very important part of this. Big rivers are a challenge to read and to wade and there's just so much water out there. But you learn in time about where the fish are going to be by catching them, and then noting where you caught them.



Autumn fishing- the Black Beetle

(from 'Trout Quest', by Davis Scholes)



A very young David Scholes was a pilot in the UK in World War 2. He flew Stirling and Lancaster bombers over Germany in 1943 and 1944

Tasmania's autumn weather can vary so widely from one year to the next, or one cycle of years to the next, that unlike the summer fishing pattern - which does admittedly vary to the extent that it may either be early or late - no similar hard and fast rules or set a fishing routines can be laid down to cover it. One autumn may be cold and wet, with floods and backwater fishing, while another may be calm and as dry as a chip.

If I turn to my diary for years back anywhere from late January to early March, I know fairly well what to expect, but once April comes there is no such

conformity - gales, drought, sunshine and snow. Anything can happen in April.

Sometimes when the summer has not been too severe, even the little rivers can have a reasonable head of water and the trout are still well distributed, as against the miserable situation in a drought year when the poor slim things are lethargically congregated in the few deeper pools. Even if rain has at last brought some relief, they are still poor and in much the same place; it takes trout some time to get over a drought.

After dry year, too - and wherever you live it's the same - it is possible in the autumn to cast a fly over the rocky cascades of some rivers that at other times are far too dangerous to go near, the white water racing and plunging among the wet stones where one slip could have serious consequences. But, as before, the condition of the trout is likely to be disappointing and, although a pleasant enough day can be had, they may hardly be worth catching.

Yet in the better years there is often some quite excellent river fishing to be had in the autumn. Good falls of ants sometimes occur. This is the time when new colonies are set up and sometimes their totals are enormous. In addition, there is always a



secondary emergence of various mayflies, when both air and water temperatures are similar to the spring.

The stream I have in mind has a large population of Small Black Spinners, and in April about eleven o'clock on those calm balmy days they fairly swarm along the edges, and even under the willows if there is plenty of clear space. The trout are keen on these spinners and lie on the fin wherever their congregations are thickest, continually looking upwards in readiness for any insect that inadvertently ventures too low in its pendulum-like flight, or is so thoughtless for its safety as to land on the surface to rest. At times these fish rise with a wallop, leaping right out in their eagerness. Perhaps they realise that unless they make the most of it now, it will be months and months before the next opportunity comes.

And this is the time, too, that Noel Jetson enjoys so much, creeping and crawling about on stumps and logs, up trees or anything else that will support him, while he wangles and angles his Black Spinner into position. And the Black Spinner he ties, by the way, is the best I have ever seen or used. He should be given a Gold Medal I say. Surely he will go down in history as the dresser of spinners superlative.

I have done a bit of this dangle fishing myself. A trout will sometimes refuse a fly riding the surface, but come at the same one in mid-air with a vengeance, taking it "on the wing" so to speak when there is no need to strike in the usual way, but rather the reverse by lowering the rod tip once the resistance is felt. The fish seems completely unable to resist the life-like movements of the fly as it dangles before him. By gently bobbing up and down, making it shiver and shake, you can produce a most convincing action even to your own eyes.

I had watched trout at close quarters show not the slightest interest in a fly that is just drifted over them, ignoring it with utter finality. If they actually see it fall they may give a slight wriggle of acknowledgement - just enough to make you think they're going to rise to it. But when it bobs about above the surface they quiver all over with excitement as they prepare to leap for it. Dangle fishing is particularly fascinating, but it demands great patience and care.

In some places it is impossible to make either a close or concealed enough approach for this style of fishing, but a small Black Beetle will then usually make an effective substitute for the dry, fished in the usual way - not flushed with the same feeling of excitement it is true, but if both the fish and the beetle can be watched it nevertheless has its moments.

And there are those inexplicable times when the trout appear to be lying in readiness for surface or above the surface food but will positively have none of your floater, dangled or not. What are you to do then - go home?

1965 was a good year. Wednesday, April 8, was a glorious day but I was unable to get away at any price, the feeling of vexation being made ten times worse because I knew that Reg Clayton was out fishing. I was not really surprised when, after his return, he telephoned to say how good it had been, and how they were lying out in such numbers - the bigger ones included - and how they would have nothing to do with the dry, some even apparently terrified of it, but how they were such good takers on the beetle, and how could I have missed it all, and how he came upon two especially good fish - larger than he had ever seen in this part of the river - and how he had frightened both of them, and what a pity it was because they were such beauties. But never mind, because amongst his bag limit were several decent

fish well above the stream average, and it was all really good, and how he enjoyed the day in the warm sunshine, and what a pleasure it was with no wind, and how he had the whole beat to himself.

Need I go on? I know very well that he revelled in all of this. But even while he was still crooning and bragging about his great day a diabolical scheme began forming in my own mind. "Where exactly where these two fish?" I asked. And how carefully I listened to his disclosure, picturing and fixing the place from memory as I sought the fullest details, which, I will say, he divulged without a qualm, all unsuspecting of my intentions.

A full week I waited before the next similar day. Then on Wednesday, April 15, there was no holding me. I was off like a shot for the river, my enthusiasm even more feverish since I knew that today the tables were turned, and it was Reg who was chained inescapably to the desk. In April the angle of the sun is so low that even on the calmest and sunniest of days there is little real warmth in the atmosphere until eleven o'clock, while by four there may once more be a definite chill in the air. Because of the sun's low angle, too, effective polaroiding is only possible for about four hours of the day.

Accordingly I made my arrival at the bridge towards eleven, put on a Black Beetle and headed off downstream. But I was quite unable to resist peeping over the bank now and then, especially at both the places where Reg had seen a good fish. At the first there was no evidence of trout, put at the second, even prepared as I was to see a much larger than usual occupant in the pool, I was pleasantly surprised to find a regular whale in attendance.

He was a remarkably alert trout - this possibly to some degree being the reason for his above average size. We saw

each other almost at the same moment and, unlike many of his kind, he did not remain there frozen to the spot as motionless as a stone waiting for me to make the first move. Instead, he turned about instantly and bolted a yard or so downstream to the sanctuary of a great pile of driftwood. But I had seen him, and I knew exactly where he lay on his feeding station. And this was a definite advantage to me, as will be seen presently.

It really was a beautiful day - calm, mild and sunny. The willows were steadily shedding their golden foliage, every few minutes a fluttering leaf landing with a delicate ring on the water's surface. The air had the dry scent of autumn, while for the angler the peculiar indescribable but quite unmistakable feeling of regret, even of sadness, that comes with April was strikingly present.

But, odd that it no doubt sounds to the sceptic, this is a pleasant kind of sadness! I have often referred to the thoughts of Lord Harmsworth. On this subject I find his words irresistibly fitting when he says: "These last fishing days of the season are very pleasant ones ... Your memories of these days, even if at the end of them you return to the inn with an empty creel, will linger happily with you during all the dark months of the coming winter."

Starting at the bottom of the beat I met with immediate success. The Black Beetle, fished on a cast greased to within six inches of the fly and dropped about a foot ahead and a shade to one side of the trout, was taken so readily that I changed to a dry Black Spinner to see what happened. But although the fish were clearly lying on the lookout for food - some of them rising - the mixed reception that my floater received soon drove me back to the beetle. This is an interesting observation. How often you can fall back with success on a sunken fly when the dry is refused, but

how comparatively rarely in reverse.

Thus I beetled my way up the length until I approached the lie of the big one I had scared earlier. More than three hours had elapsed since then, so I felt fairly confident of his return. Knowing precisely where he would be was so helpful. Instead of making my way conspicuously along the elevated bank I climbed down onto a flat ledge of hard clay almost at water level, well shielded by the overhanging willows behind.

From here I was able to get quite close to the huge pile of snags through which the river flowed, in front of which I had seen him and under which he had retreated. Peering ahead through the accumulated rubbish I could see three fish (two a good bit short of a pound) but also to my delight the bigger one looking even larger than ever beside this pair of "10 inchers".

Of the three he was fortunately the nearest. I therefore knew I could at least put to him without frightening one of the smaller ones and thus scaring the lot. Being so confined I decided on a backward flick cast by holding the fly between my left thumb and forefinger until the bend of the rod felt ready for release. The fly went just as far to the right as I had intended it to go to the left, but luckily the distance was right, some 18 inches ahead of him. Immediately he rushed forward to meet it, humping the water slightly as he took it confidently.



David Scholes with a superb 4lb brown from Tasmania's Break-O'Day River

The strike, delayed a couple of seconds, was solid - I could scarcely have missed.

The resulting melee was all that I expected, the whole pool being abruptly and rudely changed from a scene of tranquilly to one of total uproar. I half hurdled and half fell over the obstacles in my urgent effort to gain ground and so improve my impossible position. But just as I did so he dived back under the snags, and I felt the cast and line rasping over them horribly as he continued the struggle unseen in the depths. The rod was bent cruelly, but other than capitulate meekly there was little I could do.

Grimly I hung on. Then, little by little, I began to gain line. There was still the sickening feeling through the rod of something rasping on the snags, but I

was now definitely on the winning side. Suddenly half the cast became visible and in another moment he was there, splashing and thrashing on the surface at my feet. Beaching him was out of the question so as quickly as possible I reached for my net, at the same time keeping him up near the surface. This I reckoned was the lesser of the two evils; I had to choose between a return to the depths under the snags and an almost certain loss, or a possible loss through the wild commotion on the surface.

Luck was with me - a rare thing indeed. Everything held firmly and I soon had him vanquished in the net. But he was far from a good trout to look at, this being not so much due to an over-large head as to its rather ugly shape. And although he had good shoulders and a well-rounded back he was unduly flattened below, as if he was built especially for the shallows. His general colour was somewhat grey and sombre, without bright spots or golden patches. Still, he weighed almost two and a half pounds, and regardless of looks this was spectacular for a stream with an average size of less than a pound.

The remainder of the day produced nothing worth adding. I saw no sign of Reg's second good trout, or anything else that would have bettered the average. In actual fact I left the river at the place where Reg had seen this fish and went straight to the car at the bridge, my bag containing nine fish - one outsized and eight others. I have no doubt the limit of a dozen could have been reached, but the absence of this rather special trout, combined with the fact that polaroiding was no longer possible, seemed to provide me with a feeling of sufficiency.

But probably the best part of all this most enjoyable day was my report later to Reg that the good one he had found in front of the log jam had taken my Black Beetle

and pulled like the devil, and he weighed more than two pounds, and how good it had been, and they were lying out in numbers, and how could he have missed it all, and what good takers they were, and how pleasant it was in the sunshine with no wind and I had the whole beat to myself. And so on!

But afterwards, when we talked seriously over both of our outings, the most significant point to emerge was the outstanding success of the Black Beetle, and our agreement once again that for some odd reason this fly in the autumn is particularly effective.



VFFA 2026 Mid-Year Taupo Event

In light of the considerable interest from members in fishing the waters around Taupo New Zealand, we are organising a 'Mid-year' Taupo trip in late June 2026 (Sunday June 21 to Sunday June 28).

At that time of year the rivers flowing into Lake Taupo hold feisty rainbows in top condition, full of energy as they run upriver to spawn. Access to good water around Lakes Taupo and Rotorua should not be a problem – the lakes and most rivers flowing into them are open to fishing all year round. A limited number do actually close to fishing on May 31, however others that close, do so on June 30.

It's also mid-winter – so participants will need to be prepared and 'gear-up' to deal with this. Overnight frosts are common, and it can be wet and windy.

But the fishing should be great, as will be the evenings in the Boiler Room at the Waitahanui Lodge, sharing a glass or two and the day's stories over a hearty dinner with fellow members

This event will be run on the same basis as the very successful 2025 VFFA Taupo Event, which is also being adopted for the February 2026 VFFA Taupo Event. Briefly, this includes –

A day of guided fishing with an experienced local guide

Excellent catered evening meals prepared by an experienced chef

Genuine Kiwi bach experience accommodation at the Waitahanui Lodge, which is welcoming, warm, and comfortable.

If you are interested in taking part in this event, please contact either Rodger Muir

or John Spragg to register your interest as soon as possible (contact details below). A Notice of Event will be published in the March edition of *Fly Lines*, at which time those wishing to go on the trip will be required to confirm their participation.

Rodger Muir:

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John Spragg:

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Eucumbene in December

... by Trevor Stow



Clear water in Lake Jindabyne

Just prior to Christmas I was able to wangle a couple of days at Eucumbene before it was inundated by the holiday crowds. The previous month had been windy and often stormy. Just when you thought there might be a break in the wind, more wind arrived. Heading out before lunchtime is a very good option as it allows you to get a few hours of fishing in before the inevitable strong winds pick up again. To make matters worse, the wind not only blows from one direction, but it also follows the line of the hills and blows into every corner of every bay. That said, I did enjoy two days when the wind was bearable.

The Evenings

Evening fishing brought some variety. Some fish were feeding on midges, while others chased dragonflies or black beetles. A combination of a Griffith Gnat and a

dark midge pupa fly was worth trying. Remember that for a fish to find your fly among countless millions of naturals, it is like searching for a snowflake in a blizzard. Still, casting to rising fish is much more engaging than casting blindly all day.

Locating the dragonfly feeders was easy—they made their presence obvious



A PMX Hi Vis dry fly that apparently has proven particularly effective on streams in recent months

with their rises. The real dilemma was whether to focus on the numerous midge risers or the less frequent dragonfly risers. For the dragonfly feeders I fished a two-rig combination consisting of a hopper pattern or a PMX and a dry dragonfly.

This resulted in a few takes but no solid connections. After switching to a brown Woolly Buzzer on a floating line I was delighted to achieve much better success, especially as it got darker.

Daytime

I spent countless hours combing numerous bays during daylight hours. I particularly targeted the soaks that seeped into the lake. I mostly used the dry fly combinations, but also dragged marabou through the water column using a sweep line. After what felt like a thousand of casts I hadn't got a touch on the wet flies, and only a couple of half-hearted takes on the dries. It appeared to me that the fish were not really switched on during the middle of the day.

Speaking with other fishers it became clear that there are very few rainbows

being caught at the moment. Most of the fish are browns and they are in great condition. They have fat bellies and are fighting fit. There are plenty of browns in the 2 – 3 lb range, with fish up to six pounds being caught daily.

Currently Eucumbene is at about 47% - just a tad below its height at this time last year. It looks really good, with the water lapping up against the grassy banks. Let's hope that this level can be maintained in the next month or so. The water temperature is also good, being at about 17°C, but occasionally a little higher in certain areas. These conditions have certainly made for some challenging fishing, but the scenery and the tranquillity of Eucumbene at this time of year make the effort worthwhile. With the lake levels holding steady and the banks lush and green, it's a top spot for both seasoned anglers and those just looking for a peaceful day by the water. If you're planning a trip soon, then bringing a selection of flies and being prepared to adapt to the ever-changing wind will serve you well.



Andrew Mossman – VFFA member and highly skilled angler. Andrew fishes streams in Victoria and Tasmania, and has frequently fished rivers in New Zealand and the UK

Early winter 2025, in Southwest Montana

... by Alan Pilkington



The View of the landscape from the deck of Alan's Montana cabin in early December



Rock Creek, with ice at its edges, but easily fishable

Some members will be familiar with my love of the waters of Southwest Montana - the Bitterroot, Blackfoot, Big Hole, and especially Rock Creek. I had a fine week fishing the last of these in early December, and had the river to myself, at least on my usual beats. There were cool early winter days, cold nights, intermittent snow, and ice starting to form at the river edges. I stayed in the cabin I frequent in summer, but this time with the wood stove going and my axe getting a workout keeping the woodpile healthy.

I didn't see an insect rise in the whole week, so I fished a variety of small weighted nymphs, sizes #14 and #16, and all seemed to work equally as well - Pheasant Tails, Hare's Ears, and Red Tags. I tie the first two of these with a few turns of red thread at the head in front of the

hackle, finding the touch of red acts as an attractant. But who knows? In the shallow



Alan's Red Tag nymph, as effective as any on this winter water



*A West Slope Cutthroat trout, native to this water,
about 17 inches*

water of early winter with the nymphs drifted an inch or two from the bottom, they were all visible to the trout.

The nymph version of the Red Tag is my own adaptation, and it worked as well as the other more popular patterns mentioned.

I took browns up to 17", and west slope cutthroats, cuttbows and rainbows in sizes 14" to 16", along with a few mountain whitefish, usually catching four or five fish each day in the hour or so that I fished before my toes and fingers got too cold for comfort. I was not wading; with the lower winter water it was easy to see the lies where the fish were holding and to reach them from the bank. The fish were just a bit sluggish in the cold water, but still strong, and great fun to catch and release.

When I wasn't fishing I rested by the fire, played in the snow with my dog, and started planning my next novel. I find this time alone in the Montana wilderness important for my wellbeing, winter or summer.

A fine week on the river.

Cheers and season's greetings to all.



VFFA's Senior Vice-President John Spragg with a Murray cod he just happened to deceive with his fly

Australian Trout Foundation leads the way for Trout and Macquarie perch!

With three years of funding provided via the Recreational Fishing Licence Trust, the Australian Trout Foundation (ATF) will be working closely with the VFA and the Arthur Rylah Institute on an exciting and innovative new project at the Loombah Weir: establishing a refuge population of the endangered Macquarie perch, whilst simultaneously creating access to a new supply of brown trout!

The Loombah Weir (and the Ryans Creek catchment that feeds it) is a “Closed Catchment”, where access for fishing is not permitted due to it being protected for Benalla’s town water supply. Recent survey has shown that the lake supports a very healthy population of Brown Trout, that are behind a locked gate!

With access granted by the waterway manager (North East Water), the ATF has seized on an opportunity to capture as many trout as possible and translocate them to publicly accessible waterways such as Lake William Hovell, to enhance fishing opportunities. The Loombah will then be stocked annually by the VFA with Macquarie perch fingerlings, to establish a new population of Maccas! This project draws on the proven successes of a similar project managed by NSW Fisheries in the Winburndale Dam near Bathurst ([NSW Fisheries: Bring Back the Mack!](#)).

The ATF will use a combination of rod and line fishing, electro fishing and the deployment of a “trout trap”, to intercept fish on their annual spawning run from the lake into the creek above it. The objective of the project isn’t to eradicate trout, just to reduce their numbers sufficiently to give the Macca’s their best chance to grow rapidly and

get established. The Closed Catchment status won’t change so over time this new, protected, Macca refuge will be available for housing fish rescued from natural disasters (such as bushfire), or for translocating to “top-up” existing wild populations.

If you would like to volunteer to be a part of this exciting project you must be a member of the ATF. To join the ATF, click [here](#) or use the QR code below. To register your expression of interest, click [here](#) or use the QR code below.



Australian Trout Foundation/Membership



Loombah Weir Expression of interest



Picturesque Loombah Weir in North Est Victoria will soon be a home to the endangered Macquarie perch thanks to the Australian Trout Foundation



The Ryans Creek upstream of the lake, prime habitat for trout, and Maccas!

Managing the Masses - Protecting Our Angling Experience

(This is a slightly edited and summarised article by Nick King, writing in New Zealand Fish & Game Magazine, Issue 98. Members will no doubt be very interested in Nick's thoughts.)

The shackles of winter have rusted away, the daylight hours have commenced their climb back towards the giddy heights of summer, and just a few weeks into the season many of us have had a glimpse of the fishing that lies ahead. For many with angling in their veins, the start of the season brings together a heady cocktail of anticipation, expectation and desire, culminating in an overwhelming sense of well-being owing to the prospects that lie ahead. It is fair to say that anything that can produce such profound emotions must be pretty spectacular.

For all the superlatives that New Zealand angling evokes though, ours is not the only nation on the planet where local anglers are utterly euphoric about the opportunities available. Indeed there are other places that equal the New Zealand fishery in every way - outstanding scenery and environment, amazing dream-sized wild fish, rich culture, and opportunity for thrilling exploration and adventure.

The arrival of the new season must, unfortunately, be tempered with the fact that we are yet to build upon the framework of angling management that would forever lock in our status as one of these extraordinary places. So, while we are yet to make a move, what about our equals in other countries? Have they discovered the need to consider and implement strategies in order to perpetuate excellence and enshrine the fundamental rights of the people of those lands? And if so, what brought it to a head, and ultimately how did they manage it?

Comparable fisheries ensconced in comparable cultures can be found all over the globe, with probably the closest fit being

the North American destinations of Canada and Alaska and some areas of the 48 continental States. The issues these places face mirror those currently playing out here in New Zealand.

For example, the following extract from the introduction of the Skeena Quality Waters Strategy in British Columbia (BC) Canada, states:

“For years, people have told the Ministry of Environment that waters in the Skeena River system have persistent steelhead angler-use issues - crowding, disproportionate numbers of non-resident anglers or guided anglers, illegal guiding, and poor angler etiquette - leading to a degraded quality of angling experience. In response to these concerns, the Ministry implemented the Quality Waters Strategy on the Skeena River and its major tributaries. The Quality Waters Strategy is a province-wide process that aims to maintain and improve the angling experiences offered on BC's world-class water by managing angler use through the development of Angling Management Plans. The primary objective of an Angling Management Plan is to establish a water-specific regulatory regime utilising the least restrictive measures possible to regulate angler use levels that maintain the quality of the angling experience.”

As a result, the Skeena River catchment became one of BC's classified waterways and extra controls on non-resident anglers and guides were implemented, to be reviewed after 10 years.

Another BC example is the Kootenay Angling Management Plan, implemented for the exact same reasons - local anglers

were losing the fishery to non-residents and guides.

Stakeholder engagement with resident anglers, guides, and the freshwater fisheries society of BC ensued, and led to classified waters established in 2006, which was then reviewed and adjusted in 2015–16. This resulted in increased enforcement and compliance, stronger local angler protection, more control on non-residents, and guiding quota adjustments.

The plan has been an overwhelming success, with overarching support even from the government. Indeed, Steve Thompson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, noted that the Kootenay angling management plan and the changes to the region's classified waters "together strike the appropriate balance between access and conservation. This will ensure the area remains a quality fishery for all anglers now and in the future."

The President of the BC Wildlife Federation, George Wilson, called the angling management plan "a major step forward to maintain resident priority angling in the east Kootenay." And Matt Jennings, executive director of the BC Fishing Resorts and Outfitters Association, concluded, "It was refreshing to participate in a positive and productive consultation process involving such a diverse group of angling stakeholders. Hopefully the changes made to the plan will ensure these fisheries remain world class for years to come."

What these snippets serve to illustrate is that New Zealand is not the first to confront this issue, and we would not be the first to implement regulations to enhance and protect the fishery and the experience.

It would also be fair to point out that the Canadian stakeholders were not bullied by (or kowtowed to) idiotic rhetoric proclaiming such moves to protect their

fishery as 'jingoistic' and 'xenophobic'. Instead they were allowed to focus on a positive outcome for all, and no angler could suggest these management strategies are unwelcoming, discriminatory or anti-tourism.

Segue back to New Zealand where the great tourism beast (which never really sleeps) stretches in anticipation of the seasonal doubling of the country's population, and the vestiges of our cultural fabric face the further risk of being torn to shreds by the onset of the heaving visiting masses. The likes of backcountry huts, saltwater recreational fishing, recreational hunting and freshwater angling are all deeply ingrained in our national identity, and for most New Zealanders, are a tangible measure of social wealth valued vastly more than money in the bank.

Yet that culture is under threat. Fish & Game NZ was one of the first to recognise the need to protect the iconic Kiwi institutions under its jurisdiction. In establishing the non-resident licence the organisation became the first management body in the country to realise the need to distinguish between residents and visitors. Although there was initial resistance from higher powers, there is now a call from other sectors for differential regulations in such areas as sea fishing, hunting ballots, and hut passes.

The non-resident licence was a good move, the blueprint coming from overseas where the practice has been incumbent for decades. However, it only partly addressed the issues that need to be overcome. Further management steps are required. Like our contemporaries overseas, we desperately need to introduce a classified waters regime that allows new tools to control the desires of commerce and ever-increasing numbers of tourists.

Presently it is New Zealanders that are vanishing from our prime waters, displaced by the bright and eager faces from overseas and the continual increase in commercial guiding presence. This is the exact opposite of the result we should be aiming for, and it is partly our own fault.

Kiwis are hugely apathetic (and none more so than anglers) and have been socially engineered to not make a fuss. A grumble at a barbeque or bit of a whinge behind closed doors seems to be our lot before we just go belly up in acceptance. After pushing for changes to how pressure on our fisheries should be managed for some time, the most comments I get in public forums is from overseas people concerned about how any plan may play out. Of greatest concern is that it is hard to get our recreational anglers and guides - those with most skin in the game - to engage.

Meanwhile, our overseas contemporaries have got on and classified their waters. But that in itself hasn't been the key to successful management. They have implemented controls, worked out financial returns in order to help fund better enforcement and compliance, built a proper quota system and placed limitations on the number of commercial operations.

What is important to remember is that residents' ability to fish, as they always have, hasn't been altered or affected anywhere along the way. Rather, the management regime has focused on the pressure points - non-resident and guiding overuse - and addressed them to enhance the angling experience for all involved.

Some of the control measures adopted for BC Classified Waters include:

- Resident anglers only on the weekends.
- River-specific maximum day limits for non-resident anglers.

- River-specific caps on guide days.
- Guided only rivers for non-residents.
- Guide-free areas for residents only.
- Catch and release only.
- Non-resident ballots for limited freedom angling access to classified waters.
- Licence and usage fees that add up to far better returns for management.

This suite of tools serves to illustrate measures that could be employed to control classified water access. They may not necessarily suit New Zealand. What is needed is the development of a framework within which Fish & Game is able to create its own set of tools that fit the fishery.

Canadian stakeholders who were involved in the development of these strategies (interviewed as part of my research) now concede they didn't go far enough in some areas. They believe that New Zealand has a great opportunity to learn from their experiences, to develop an even better/ simpler mix of controls that are more uniform and will ultimately withstand the test of time and increased angling demand more completely.

What would a New Zealand framework possibly look like? Here's a starter:

- Fish & Game regions come up with a list of 'Classified Waters'. 'Classified' is the best term as it simply denotes water that is controlled, and avoids the ambiguity of backcountry/ front country, or the quality connotations of terms like 'Tier' or 'Class'.
- Citizens and residents can fish all classified and open waters unrestricted within the current licence regulations.

- Non-residents can fish open waters on their own and can hire the services of a guide to fish classified waters on a standard non-resident day, week, or season licence (season licence being limited to a three-month maximum).
- For non-residents who wish to maintain the freedoms of a resident angler, a premium three-month non-resident licence with a \$1500-plus value may be an option. If this proves to be an overly popular non-resident option, then it may need to be curtailed or managed by increasing the price.
- Classified Waters should have capped guide numbers and guide days based on historic usage and thorough commercial carrying capacity protocols developed through stake-holder engagement.
- Classified Waters plans are set for a 10-year period, allowing historic data trends and usage statistics to develop enough depth to be valuable management tools. This would also allow guiding operations with access to particular Classified Waters to make future-based and long-term sustainable commercial decisions.
- As the need arises, open waters become Classified Waters at the discretion of Fish & Game regions.

The guiding industry has maxed-out - if not exceeded - its social licence to operate on New Zealand's waters and as an industry it has to decide how it is going to proceed within a more enduring structure. If the 'Classified Waters' plan can better manage non-resident anglers, then it can also manage guides, as demonstrated overseas. Guides and affiliated tourism entities - such as lodges - have to give up unsustainable growth

models for true fishery management strategies.

I've copped criticism that my proposed tiered management plan is self-serving and favours guides over residents. That is utter nonsense. As stated in my previous article (New Era Angling Management, Fish & Game NZ magazine issue 94) the structure should be set up to protect 'the fishery' foremost, for 'residents', followed by 'resident guides' and then 'non-residents' - in that order.

The ultimate goal is to limit pressure on the fishery by imposing restrictions on a rampant and unrestricted guiding industry that is self-imploding and negatively impacting all anglers' experience and enjoyment of the resource.

Possible measures to alleviate the tensions include the following management strategies for guiding operations:

- NZ Professional Fishing Guide Association (NZPFGA) blanket concession is sun-set or retired, and all guiding businesses that wish to continue are given a set period to get their own DOC/Fish & Game concession/Guide's Licence.
- NZPFGA to continue as the representative of the professionals of the fresh water fishing industry with membership to be strongly recommended.
- Each registered guiding company restricted to operating in just two Fish & Game regions.
- Each guiding company is able to have an assistant guide in an apprentice role.
- Provision for an assistant guide licence that allows ability to guide but not to hold concessions for a term of two years.

- Each registered guide to have open access to Non-Classified Waters within their two Fish Game regions.
- Each registered guide to have historical quota allotment on Classified Waters within their two Fish & Game regions (historical usage proof available through detailed usage returns filed under NZPFGA blanket or individually-held concession obligations). Classified Waters contained outside DOC administered land will have to have quotas evenly shared if there is no proof of usage.
- Overall Classified Waters quota set by carrying capacity studies and stakeholder engagement. It would be conceivable that usage rates would need to be set at 15 years ago if we are to honestly give the New Zealand angler back a degree of his/her fishery.
- Make concessions and quota transferable within the registered guiding community. As these would be individual guide quotas there would be no point in purchasing more days than one guide/assistant guide could utilise. This would also allow newly registered guides who had passed through a two-year apprenticeship to enter Classified Waters quota as senior guides retired and give senior guides some goodwill and value to a business they may have been running for decades.
- Allow Fish & Game and DOC to tax Classified Water quota sales at 10% each. This would allow both organisations to put back into habitat and fisheries enhancement and management, as well as endemic species protection.
- Create a Master Guide category for registered guides with a 15-year history without fisheries or concession

violations. This acknowledgement of status being beneficial in marketing and gives long-term members of the industry some prestige to attain.

Guides must be willing to swap blanket access and unfettered freedoms for a fair structure that gives more than it takes, while reinstating New Zealand anglers as the prime proprietors of the fishery. If, as an industry, guides (including myself) can come to some consensus on an arrangement within which we can work, prosper, sustain and bequeath excellence to future generations, then all anglers are well on the way to perpetual opening days full of excitement ... the way it used to be, without the angst of continually looking back over your shoulder or listening for the buzz of a chopper.

If New Zealand angling stakeholders can agree on this, then the difficult hurdles between a plan and an actual result can be surmounted.

Getting DOC to agree and become party to a regulated fishery and commercial guiding industry by legitimising trout and salmon as valued assets will take a fundamental shift in their ethos. Convincing Tourism NZ that we must have the autonomy to manage our own affairs and that their penchant for never-ending growth is actually threatening many of the country's key attractions (trout angling being just one case in point) will require a forthright discussion on tourism goals and aspirations.

Finally, the right-leaning government's entrenched and paranoid distrust of NZ Fish & Game must end, and with it the desire to keep Fish & Game impoverished and marginalised.

These challenges can only be conquered if we all pull together. Continuing down the current path, into oblivion, is not

an option. Defeatist, negative attitudes will be the ruin of this once great fishery. We are all so passionate about our trout fishery asset - it's paramount that we stand up and fight for it.



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FLY OF THE MONTH

The Black Beetle



In the article by David Scholes featured earlier in this issue David talks enthusiastically about his success fishing a Black Beetle. This remains, of course, a very popular fly because it is easy to tie and very effective. It was featured in our newsletters in March 1999 and May 2000, so is perhaps due for another mention.

Pictures of this fly and descriptions of how to tie it are mentioned in many books, including VFFA publications. It is interesting to note that it is described as both a wet fly and a dry fly. David Scholes's description of how he fished his Black Beetle indicates he fished it as a wet fly but barely sunk.

Some years ago Rick Keam emailed me with his description of this fly and it's tying. Rick describes it as a wet fly, though suggests it "performs best if it doesn't sink too fast."

We could hardly do better than use Rick's description of the tying steps:

Tying the Black Beetle

Hook: #14 wide gape dry fly

Body: Either black wool built up slightly to make the shape of a beetle, or black chenille.

Back: Folded strip from a crow wing, or some other black feather.

Hackle: After the strip of crow wing is brought forward over the body, wind three or four turns of short black hen hackle (Reg Lyne) or more often brown hen hackle (Dick Wigram).

In fishing it, cast ahead of cruising fish, or use it to search the margins of lakes or streams. It is very effective fished like a nymph on a leader greased to within a few inches of the fly. Watch closely for any movement of the leader. David Scholes, Fred Stewart and Dick Wigram all wrote about the effectiveness of this pattern.



It looks like a solid connection

VFFA 2026 meetings & other activities

February 2026

- February 1 – 8 Fly fishing at Hayes on Brumbys – One week of exciting fishing
Tuesday 17 Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00pm
Thursday 19 Liars' Night at the Kelvin Club, 6:30 for 7:00pm
Sunday 22 to
Sunday March 1 Fly fishing at Taupo (Rodger Muir)

March

- 19 Thursday General Meeting at the Kelvin Club with Anthony McGrath from VRFish, 6:30 for 7:00pm
25 March Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm

April

- 22 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm
23 Thursday General Meeting – speaker TBA, 6:30 for 7:00pm

May

- 21 Thursday General Meeting – speaker TBA, 6:30 for 7:00pm
27 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm

June

- 18 Thursday General Meeting – speaker TBA, 6:30 for 7:00pm
24 Wednesday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm