

BEFORE THE CANTERBURY REGIONAL COUNCIL

UNDER the Environment Canterbury
(Temporary Commissioners and
Improved Water Management)
Act 2010

IN THE MATTER of the proposed Hurunui and
Waiau River Regional Plan

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MALCOLM GRIERSON BELL
ON BEHALF OF
THE NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1 My name is Malcolm Grierson Bell. I am 57 years old. I own “The Complete Angler” a fishing tackle store employing 9 full time workers. The business was started by me in 1982 and has advised large numbers of both local and overseas anglers on fishing techniques and locations.
- 1.2 I have a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Science with a major in Ecology and Entomology. I have run fly fishing and casting courses for 27 years, teaching over one thousand anglers to fly fish. I have written and photographed for various fishing publications and worked in producing various DVD's on fishing.
- 1.3 I have fly fished since I was 12. Fishing became very much part of my family culture. I enjoyed a particularly close relationship with my father and brother as we explored many different areas and honed our skills in trout and salmon fishing. In looking back over these years I consider those times of fishing and camping of extreme value as I learnt to cope with the outdoors and become resourceful in that environment. The opportunity to do the same sort of thing with my own children is of high value to me. I have maintained a very enthusiastic approach to fishing particularly over the past 29 years fishing on 50-60 days per year, the majority of this is fly fishing in the Canterbury High Country. The river I have fished the most and put on the top of my most favoured list is the Hurunui.
- 1.4 I fish a wide variety of waterways and particularly favour the rivers that are more remote throughout the South Island with a focus on Canterbury, Nelson and Marlborough. Of recent years I prefer the bigger braided rivers as they are a huge frontier for high quality fishing. I particularly enjoy the Rangitata River above the gorge for fly and spin fishing and love fishing the mouth area of the river for salmon during the months of January, February and March. The Rakaia from the

Wilberforce up for trout fly fishing is a magnificent river and the lower reaches to the sea are also productive for salmon. I spend a lot of time in the Waimakariri River around the Mt White bridge and am a frequent visitor to the Waiau, Hope and Doubtful Rivers. I particularly enjoy the solitude and scenery of the Waiau tributaries where a unique blend of exceptional trout fishing environment is on offer with good access from the Lewis Pass highway, yet with a bit of walking, the charm of the area's remoteness comes into play. I have fished extensively in the MacKenzie country, South Canterbury and West Coast. I have also fished several other rivers recognised for their outstanding values by water conservation orders in force on them including the Motueka, Buller, Maruia, Mataura, Kawarau, Nevis, Greenstone, Von & Ahuriri. I have had the privilege of fishing both Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotoroa. To me the fishing experience and draw of the habitat of the Hurunui, particularly the South Branch and North Branch above Lake Sumner, make it one of my favourite trout fisheries.

- 1.5 I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses (November 2011). This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on facts or information provided by another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

Scope of Evidence

- 1.6 I would like to outline the importance of the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers to me personally and on a wider scale to consider the value of these rivers to the clients that I work with and advise. I will present evidence and observations regarding the unique qualities under the following headings:
- a. My exploration of the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers;
 - b. Strategic value of the Hurunui and Waiau fisheries;
 - c. High fish populations;

- d. Ease of access, quality of opportunity to fish and variety of challenges for angling;
- e. World class trophy trout fishing;
- f. Ability to sustain fishing pressure despite the demise of so many other fisheries;
- g. Exquisite scenery and environment;
- h. Salmon fishing.

2. **MY HISTORY IN FISHING THE HURUNUI AND WAI AU RIVERS**

2.1 In 1984 I made my first trip to the Tongariro to experience a fly fishing technique that may be called big water nymphing. This 10 day trip introduced to me a highly productive and extremely enjoyable method of catching trout. This type of fishing was in its infancy in the South Island and I set about looking for suitable rivers to adapt the technique to.

2.2 The Hurunui was a river just a little bigger than the Tongariro and it had a good population of brown trout. With early success I began an incredible journey of discovery in what was to be a huge part of my future business and fishing experience. My first full day on the Hurunui river was centred on the area of the river around the confluence of the Mainstem and South Branch and the lower section of the Mainstem (between the South Branch and Mandamus). It was an amazing day as my fishing mate of the day Brian Moyse and I caught and released 18 fish up to 8lb between us in the solitude of a river that at that time received very little attention from anglers.

2.3 Essentially the techniques for fishing the famous Tongariro River and the Hurunui are the same. In the Mainstem of the river down to where the Seaward River enters, the river has pools and runs in fairly close sequence that have excellent numbers and quality of fish every bit as good as the Tongariro. The great thing about the Hurunui is that the fish are in this area for most of the year, only declining in numbers when the larger brown trout move off to spawn in late April though to early August. By contrast, the best of the Tongariro fishing is in the winter where the spawning run is fished from May to September. I was

one who fell in love with the Tongariro, fishing it on average 8-10 days a year from the early 1980's up until the mid 1990's, but eventually the better quality and size of fish in the Hurunui made me decide to fish it in winter, particularly in August and September for a similar fishing experience with better sized fish and less anglers to contend with. My catch rate using the same techniques is similar and I have the flexibility to go when I choose.

- 2.4 This started me on an apprenticeship of fly fishing larger rivers and a personal journey into the sport I love. I regularly went to the Hurunui over the next 2 years – once a week in the main part of the season learning where the fish were living and various methods of fishing for them.
- 2.5 The early season (October and November) saw generally high river flows with the snow melt and spring Nor-Westers. Hungry fish putting on condition after the rigours of winter and spawning made for good fishing and a great day out of doors. In late November there was a major increase in fish numbers so that runs and pools that earlier had a few fish in them were crowded. It appears that these fish moved up from the lower river and were large with a fresh silver colouring, characteristics that anglers consider likely to be the result of time spent in the sea. Fishing up until Christmas was of the highest quality. After Christmas the river usually became low and very clear with exceptional quality dry fly fishing.
- 2.6 Adapting the fishing lessons learned from the Hurunui, I went in search of new water and started fishing the tributaries of the Waiau system. I explored the feeder rivers one by one, discovering that these offered uniquely different fishing experiences. Initially I spent most time in the Hope, Boyle and the Doubtful Rivers. The Hope was a moderate sized river set amongst predominantly grassy river flat banks in an attractive valley with beech forest on the mountains and fringes. It was an easy river to fish, with lots of brown trout of good size and condition. The Doubtful River was smaller and more intimate with close bush on the valley floor and although there were fewer fish, the size remained with an average weight over 5lb from my diary

records. Trips up the Nina, Boyle and Waiau in the St James region added to my exploration and fishing success in the area.

3. **EXPLORATION OF THE HURUNUI RIVER**

The South Branch Hurunui

3.1 I proceeded to explore different areas of the river outside of my starting point around the confluence of the Mainstem and South branch, starting with the South Branch. For me this involved a real adventure as I proceeded up the metalled Lake Sumner road past the river flats of Lake Taylor Station and “The Lakes” onto the rough track past a picturesque and pretty Lake Taylor. As the road continues toward the main Divide the towering tussock and scrub faced mountains become more bush clad and by the time I reached Lake Sumner it felt like the West Coast. I love this transition land between the West and East Coast habitats. The river flats are quite open and green, bordering Beech forest rising up the snow-capped mountains on either side of the valley. The context of the environment adds to the enjoyment of the fishing experience. Because I enjoyed walking, I would happily park at the head of Lake Sumner and proceed over the Mason Saddle and into the upper South Branch. The trip took me high above the valley and down through a small amount of bush past the twin Mason lakes. It is a marvellous spectacle with fly fishing being an excellent excuse to be there.

3.2 In the late 1980’s, few ventured there and the quality of fish and fishing was exceptional. The outstanding features of this area were the type and size of the water which was easy to wade and a suitable challenge to fish for trout of large size and high quality, all this set in pristine scenery. I would go down to the section just above the gorge and fish up past Lake Mason outlet stream until I reached the open area some 7 kilometres upstream of the lake outlet, where fish habitat didn’t support many fish. A typical day with favourable conditions, would see me and a colleague fishing to around 30 – 40 fish, catching 10 – 15 of them and having a full and satisfying day.

- 3.3 The thing that was most outstanding was the size and quality of the fish. Each trip would see fish landed and released in the 8 – 11lb category, something that can be done in very few places. On one occasion in 1995 a trip saw 12 fish landed in a day with an average weight of 7.5lb.
- 3.4 I also regularly fished the Lower South Branch from 1986 with exceptional fishing and high quality fish. Here the river passed through a tight scrub lined river valley and at times there was a steep gradient in its fall. Many of the sections below where the Esk River flows into the South Branch had surprisingly good numbers of fish in the pools and runs with the highest quality of nymph and dry fly fishing. We would fish this section of the river when the flow of the Hurunui was below 20 cumecs at Mandamus as there were numerous river crossings in the riverbed.
- 3.5 As with all of the braided rivers of Canterbury, there is a real delight in the change in course of the river when there has been a flood. My preference is for fishing the larger rivers of Canterbury because I always seem to fish a different river with the changing dynamics of flow, weather, season and pools. This variety provides endless challenge as the fish move around. Old pools disappear and new ones show up giving a renewed sense of adventure. Natural realignment of the river and the splitting of the braids means that I have different sized streams to fish. For me this means I can be fishing to a large trout in a small stream one minute and looking at a large deep hole the next. This variety is essential for me to keep my interest with the challenges required as an angler.
- 3.6 Unlike the Waimakariri and the Rakaia, although floods will reshape the Hurunui it is vastly more stable with its rocky bluffs and large freestone boulders throughout its length. The braided Waimakariri and Rakaia have low fish numbers and transient fish populations in the murky waters of the reaches from the gorge bridges downstream, which can result in a poor quality fishing experience. The Hurunui with its inherent stability of bed structure holds vastly more feed for trout

and a more stable and predictable fish population, while still exhibiting changing dynamics as a result of the varied flows.

- 3.7 In order to maintain this quality of fishing experience it is essential that the unhindered flow of water be maintained. Floods clear encroaching vegetation from the riverbanks and renew and reform the river. Periods of high river flow rest the river from angling pressure. Flows above 60 cumecs would keep me away, however I would be happy to spin should I have the urge at flows around and below that figure.

North Branch (above Lake Sumner)

- 3.8 My first journeys above Lake Sumner were a surprise to me with the sheer numbers of exceptional quality and sized brown trout. They were not always easy to catch, but the quality of the fish is unmatched in my opinion in the Canterbury area. The average weight of fish I have caught in the area is around 7.5lb. This is of particular significance as there are many fisheries with healthy populations of trout and average weights from 3-5lb, but very few with average weights over 6lb. As an angler, this habitat provides a truly unique experience on a world scale with an opportunity to fish to “double figure trout” on a regular basis. It is this opportunity that motivates me to regularly visit.
- 3.9 It is not the fishing alone that draws me here. I have a real love of the more rugged backcountry and this particular area is a magnificent mix of river flats and bush clad mountains. I recently took my 30 year old daughter up to this part of the river on a day trip in poor weather conditions, her overwhelming comment was that we go back up with a tent and spend a couple of days there because it was so beautiful. In this part of the river higher flows replenish the fish population as more fish move up from the lake, so the natural fluctuations of rainfall help to keep the fishery viable. Prolonged low flows cause major fish population decreases.

- 3.10 In recent seasons there has been exceptional fishing, with huge fish being present. My son in his last trip there at 14 years old caught a fish of 10lbs and I had the privilege of one 11.5lb.

Mainstem from Lake Sumner to South Branch Confluence

- 3.11 It was this stretch of the river that I first put most of my fishing energy into from the early 1980's. Most effort was in the area below the Sisters Stream gorge as the river was reasonably challenging, yet it had a substantial population of medium to larger sized trout. In my capacity as a tackle shop owner and fly fishing instructor, I advised many of my clients to visit the area and learn the art of fly fishing where there was a sufficiently high number of fish to get results. I have continued to fish this area because of its reasonably easy access and good fish numbers right up to the present time and have been pleased to see that the number and quality of fish has stayed consistent despite the increased angling pressure. This ability to sustain angling pressure is quite rare in our Canterbury rivers with inconsistent flows and highly variable fish numbers. Our other larger rivers like the Waimakariri and Rakaia are difficult to catch consistent numbers or quality of fish from. The demise of rivers like the Ashley, Selwyn, Hawkins, Hororata, Okuku, Waipara and many other streams flowing from the Alps has meant far less choice for the angler to go river fishing in North Canterbury.

Mainstem Downstream of the South Branch Confluence

- 3.12 The section of the Hurunui River below the major South Branch confluence has been a favourite of mine in the winter season – from May to September. The area is in my opinion the best winter river fishery we have by far providing good sport in an otherwise bleak time of year, particularly upstream from the confluence to the Seaward River entrance. I have also spent a lot of time walking down into the Maori Gorge area and fishing the river as it passes through the wide river flats and rolling hills. The fishing experience is different from any other on the river and is looked forward to with anticipation. The river changes in character here from the closer confines of the reasonably

tight valley to more open river flats. The gradient of the river is also more relaxed giving longer pools and generally better access to the water.

The Lower River (below Mandamus)

- 3.13 The area around and up from State Highway 1 has been noted for its high numbers of fish. These fish are of good quality but smaller than in the upper river. In May 2008 I went to this area and witnessed a hatch of mayflies and rise of trout that would rival the best hatches in my fishing career. Others who witnessed this were astounded at the numbers of fish.

- 3.14 The fishing here is challenging as the river banks are well vegetated and the banks are quite rough with gorgy rock outcrops. Floods are essential to keep the weeds and foliage down and these same floods cause fish movement and varied fishing opportunity. It has been my experience to get some of the best fishing possible after a flood subsides and the river first clears. This is true for both spinning and fly fishing. The river in this region passes through farmland although most of the farms are on elevated river terraces. The surrounding hills give a sense of rugged isolation, something I value highly.

- 3.15 It is a regular place for me to take my 17 year old son to catch fish. We often leave Christchurch at around 1pm and fish a short section of the river near the rail bridge seeking to catch chunky trout. I fish this section of the River when the flow is typically below 30 cumecs at Mandamus, and like it best around 20.

4. **EXPLORATION OF THE WAI AU RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES**

The Hope River

- 4.1 As an avid trumper the combination of a notable walkway and an outstanding river led to exploration of the Hope River. My first trip was in the late 1980's and was a real eye opener as to the numbers and quality of fish present. Parking at the Boyle River, I waded the river and proceeded to fish up to the swing bridge above where the Kiwi Stream came in. The fishing was outstanding with good numbers of fish that proved a challenge to catch. Repeated trips right up to the present day have produced outstanding fishing, with my last trip there producing 15 fish landed for the day, the largest being over 10lb. It is not just the fish that keep me going back again and again rather that this river valley is picturesque, intimate and yet it also has its own sense of remoteness once you leave sight of the Lewis Pass road. It is my favourite of all the Wai au tributaries.

The Doubtful River

- 4.2 I first explored the Doubtful River in 1987 crossing the Boyle and making my way up the valley into the upper reaches. These rivers had little angling pressure in those days and the fishing truly reflected it. Fishing it with a companion for the first time, I was amazed at the quality of the fishing. The river itself is quite steep, however when the gradient relaxed and water suitable for holding trout was encountered, there were fish present to be outwitted. Early trips produced good catches of fish, with much of this being documented on video to capture the experiences. The striking thing that made the Doubtful so attractive particularly in those days was the smaller river that held such big fish. The setting was far more intimate than the Hope with a narrow valley and often Beech tree lined banks giving it more of a West Coast feel. Sadly over the years the fishing pressure and floods seems to have reduced the population of fish and trips that I have made in the mid 2000's have been disappointing compared to the earlier days.

The Boyle River

- 4.3 As part of the general exploration of the Lewis Pass area, I spent time in the Boyle River above the Lewis Pass highway. Moving up the bush lined stretch below the swing bridge there were several smaller fish in fast water. However once above the swing bridge, the country changes in transition to a large open flat. Here larger fish were found in the pools and riffles providing good dry fly and nymph fishing. Over subsequent years I have had a range of different fishing days on the river and have noticed a considerable variation in fish numbers. In October 2005 a friend and I landed 17 fish in a day, with the largest being over 10lb in what must be described as excellent fishing. The area is quite widely fished by anglers and on subsequent trips I have found others fishing this stretch of water, a situation I like to avoid.

The Nina River

- 4.4 I first explored the Nina River and valley in the late 1980's. The river itself is very picturesque with lots of bush on the margins and a steep valley. I found the access to the river difficult apart from one or two places and generally don't go there to fish as I believe the effort for the little fishing hardly worthwhile.

Fishing the Lewis, Boyle and Hope Adjacent to State Highway 7

- 4.5 The Lewis Pass highway provides great access to a long stretch of a number of tributaries to the Waiau. From just below Hanmer westward, the road largely follows the river and in the appropriate flows fishing can be very good. This easy access means that it is often fished, and even though the fish are quite educated to avoid flies and baits, many are still caught and many of those are trophy in size and condition. I personally have caught trophy fish in this area and have been challenged by very large fish that have rejected my offerings.

Fishing the Waiau Above the Confluence of the Hope

- 4.6 I have been a visitor to the upper Waiau above the confluence with the Hope River on a couple of occasions in the 1990's. On both occasions I have been impressed with the size of the fish in this region. Getting access to this area in the past has been difficult; however access changes after the purchase of St James station by the Crown reflects the scenic and recreational value of the region. I have only caught one fish in my two trips into the region, however that fish was over 10lb, I was with others who caught fish of similar size.

Fishing the Waiau around Waiau Township

- 4.7 In the late 1980's I first started fishing the stretch of river for 10 or so kilometres above Waiau township. I started doing this in the winter as there was limited quality water available at that time of year and I enjoyed the exploration. From the outset I was pleasantly surprised at the sheer number of fish. The river in this area is quite braided and subject to great change from year to year, but over ensuing years it always fished well when the river was in flows of 55 cumecs or less at Marble Point. Last winter I fished the area for around 3 hours one winter's afternoon for 6 fish in willow lined surroundings and solitude as no one else was around.

5. SALMON FISHING THE HURUNUI

- 5.1 In 1984 I caught my first salmon at the mouth of the Hurunui River. For me it was "love at first sight" and I became a regular to fish for salmon at the picturesque river mouth. In 1985 I was privileged to catch 27 salmon during February and March. I have fantastic memories of fishing for salmon with my late father along with the other anglers of the area, something that has added to the quality of my life. Since then I have regularly fished for salmon at the Hurunui Mouth with some fantastic seasons during that time.
- 5.2 I have an intense fishing interest in salmon happily rising at 3.30am in early January to journey to the Rangitata, Rakaia or Hurunui. I have

the advantage of hearing a lot of information in store regarding how the rivers are fishing and will go out when at all possible if conditions are suitable. The Hurunui mouth is my favourite salmon spot on the river. I love the changing river mouth over the tides and with the river flows. In the 1980's and 90's catch rates were really high and as late as 1994 I was privileged to catch some fantastic salmon up to 31lb in weight, in that year over 20 were from the Hurunui. Numbers of salmon returning have fluctuated markedly from that time on, however in February and March of this year I landed 4 fish at the Hurunui for four outings to the mouth.

5.3 To me the Hurunui mouth is the most picturesque of all the river mouths associated with the East Coast braided rivers. The river spills out into the sea through a lagoon area backed by sheltering high clay cliffs. The local wildlife is ever present with bellbirds easily heard in the scrub behind. In my opinion compared to the more sterile and exposed mouths like the Rakaia and Rangitata or the odd smelling and formless Waimakariri it is unmatched. There is quite a community of anglers who regularly fish this area so the mouth fishing experience is very social with around 20 other anglers on a suitable fishing day all enjoying the place.

5.4 From a salmon fishing point of view the river has some real attributes. It can be fished in quite high seas – up to a 2 meter swell. Because the river is much more stable and carries a lesser silt load it is rarely dirty in the sea at the mouth. The Rangitata and Rakaia river mouths are much shallower and should be fished at the mouth when the sea is 1 meter or below, the heavy silt load these rivers carry deposit lots of fine sediment near the mouth so it is often quite dirty. Not only is the sea clearer at the Hurunui than most of the other rivers, but the river itself gets its rain from a different catchment from the southern rivers and it is often the only one clear and fishable in times of rough back country weather. Fluctuating flows in the course of a normal season flush the river, with salmon running upriver typically when the river is dropping after a flood. Often the low flows of the river see salmon moving in and out of the river mouth, unhappy with the river temperature and flow and reluctant to move upstream. When a flood

does come, these fish move upstream to the delight of those who chase them in the pools above the mouth. In a normal season I would fish the Hurunui mouth 5 or 6 times.

6. **STRATEGIC VALUE OF THE HURUNUI AND WAIAU FISHERIES**

6.1 As one who has a high interaction with the angling public, I along with my staff am constantly being asked on where to go fishing. The incredible decline in reasonable and available waterways to send prospective anglers to has meant that the default choice is the Hurunui River. Public knowledge of and interest in the Waiau system means that it is widely talked about and visitors to that system are increasing. One of the major reasons for this increase has been the improved access to the upper Waiau through St James Station.

6.2 When I first came into business in 1982, I could recommend rivers like:-

- a. The Hororata. In 1982 this river had a high density of trout averaging around 4lb and high quality water. However, now it is virtually bereft of trout, has low quality water affected by dairy and very low flows due to abstraction;
- b. The Hawkins. In 1982 this was a high quality fishing experience with high trout density and good fish averaging around 4lb. Now the fish population and water are gone;
- c. The Waipara. In 1982 this exhibited good water flow and excellent quality of fish – some very large – up to 10lb. Now severe water abstraction has resulted in extremely low numbers of fish and a poor fishing experience;
- d. The Ashley. In 1982 there was excellent flow all year and good trout numbers throughout, including some very large fish. It also had a regular salmon run. Now the fishing is OK in the early season, however midsummer flows see the river drying

up, requiring regular fish salvage by Fish & Game and resulting in a poor fishing experience;

- e. The Waikari. In 1982 this was a tremendous fishery with high density of medium to large fish. Now the river is dry and the fish are all gone.

6.3 I could go on and on over the demise of rivers like the Cust, Irlwell, Selwyn upstream of Coes Ford, Halswell, Kaituna and many many more. These streams and rivers have suffered at the hands of land use change, water abstraction, aquifer level reductions and climate change. The results are quite simply devastating in such a short time and the reality is that when someone wants to go fishing somewhere and they ask at my store, the options are now incredibly limited.

6.4 The Hurunui and Waiau Rivers stand out like beacons as anglers aspire to fish them and talk about them in terms of adventure, challenge and for a location to take the whole family. It is my belief that these waterways are able to take considerable angling pressure due to unhindered access from the source to the sea for both people and fish. It would be a tragedy to see such unique and irreplaceable treasures suffer the same way that these other rivers have. Unfortunately demand for water appears to hang over the Hurunui and Waiau in such a way as to be a real threat. The rivers needs protection.

6.5 I had a particular piece of water on the Hurunui I enjoyed fishing around the Jolliebrook River inflow and stretching up to the bottom of the gorge below the Sisters Stream. It became a particular favourite as it held a high concentration of nice conditioned hard fighting fish and I often fished it in an afternoon, leaving work early afternoon, arriving there at around 3-4pm and spending a pleasant afternoon hopefully catching fish. I would often catch 6-10 fish in that time with an average weight of around 4lb with the 6-7lber mixed in.

6.6 I fished this area heavily in the late 80's up to the mid 90's all the while running fly fishing schools and promoting the area as a place to hone

angling skills, I noticed more and more people fishing the same stretch of water so decided to move to other areas to get my angling fix.

- 6.7 I had not fished this area for a number of years until my daughter came back from Germany in 2002. I went to the same area I had fished so much before and managed to land some 12 fish in an afternoon up to 8lb in weight something that gave me great heart as to the resilience of the fishery.

7. **HIGH FISH POPULATIONS**

- 7.1 The Hurunui has an unquestionably high fish population compared to the barrenness of most of the region's rivers. The numbers of trout in a particular area vary quite markedly from month to month dependent on the time of year and events like floods or droughts. I have found high numbers of smaller fish in the lower river around State Highway 1 during the months of March, April and May and often a reduction in numbers over the winter months as these fish move around. Usually the numbers build up again in this area from September onwards providing great sport for anglers like me who enjoy spring fishing.

- 7.2 The Waiau has also exhibited extreme resilience in terms of the fish population found there. I have seen no decline in the number of fish over the area of the Hope River that I regularly fish. The fluctuations in the Boyle population is often linked to flood events or the lack of good holding water due to the randomness of natural braid formation. The Doubtful is small and subject to pressure and floods. As the lower Waiau gets bigger towards the sea, numbers of fish seem to me to be holding steady providing a little used venue for anglers to fish.

- 7.3 In the Hurunui large numbers of fish are also clearly evident in the area of river from the Sisters Stream up to the outflow from Lake Sumner. A trip up there on a reasonable day gives spectacular fishing in terms of numbers and provides an excellent learning ground for the novice and intermediate angler. Angling methods might have to be modified with the advent of Didymo, but the fish are still there.

7.4 Driving up the Lake Sumner road on a pleasant weekend day is an opportunity to see just how many anglers use this resource. The river is large enough to give an enjoyable experience to a large number of anglers, even those who follow up an angler who has been through some water before him or her. This is quite unique in the district, as most other waterways with lesser numbers of fish and smaller flow are suitable only for the first angler through as fish will spook and be difficult to catch for following anglers. Thus the fishery handles tremendous pressure well, providing enjoyment for a large number of people.

7.5 Angling stores, fishing clubs, magazines, DVD's and guides are constantly advising a trip to the Hurunui. As already mentioned, it is my recommendation of choice for a quality day's fishing.

8. **ACCESS, QUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY TO FISH AND VARIETY OF CHALLENGES FOR ANGLING ON THE HURUNUI**

8.1 The Hurunui provides a huge variety of different angling challenges over its length, with the opportunity to fish by various methods and for an emphasis on different numbers and sizes of trout. I will choose a particular stretch to fish depending on the weather – particularly the wind, time available, and who I am fishing with, knowing that the variety of experience available to me presents a challenge and change of surroundings that differs significantly from another area of the river. Salmon also can be targeted by different methods and in different locations on the river depending on what experience I am looking for.

8.2 The roading and access along the river's length varies from very accessible to quite difficult yet allows a true wilderness experience for the hardy angler who enjoys a solid tramp to find fish. There is sufficient roading along the riverbanks to allow many anglers to fish easily from their vehicles.

8.3 The Hurunui moves from a pleasant mouth area to a braided flow where the wide open spaces and various sized streams provide a challenge for the spin and fly fisherman alike. For the keen angler

even the lower river with fairly easy access has its challenges as holes and bluffs require a bit of negotiation to get to water that holds good fish. The varying water flow provides great variety in angling method with even a small drop or increase in flow creating a challenge.

- 8.4 Once it reaches State Highway 1, the river moves into a hilly habitat with river flats and the bed of the river is confined to a tighter gorge area with some deeper holes that may harbour big trout and hold salmon in the right season. Fish numbers are high generally in the lower river from just above the mouth until the crossing of State Highway 7. Access may be from the adjacent roads or across farmland, the area is able to support many anglers.
- 8.5 Above State Highway 7 the river opens out into a braided section alongside Balmoral forest. Here fish may be more transient and can be fewer in numbers, but the terrain is quite easy and the fishing can be very good especially for those spin fishing.
- 8.6 Above the Mandamus the river once again tightens up with river flats and a deeper bed with pools and runs, rocky outcrops and riverside scrub and vegetation. The sense of the Canterbury foothills which can be quite rugged, adds to the scenery. The fishing through here is good but the access from the Mandamus up to the point where the Lake Sumner Road meets the river is a little more difficult. This isolation does provide a satisfying fishing experience once you make the effort to get into this section.
- 8.7 Once the Lake Sumner road meets the river, the sense of the rugged backcountry is all around. Steep hills tower over the riverbed with a sense of bigger mountains further inland. The river is surprisingly easy to get to with an adjacent road giving good access and on the fishing front the size of the fish gets bigger and the numbers are good. This is a place I often refer anglers to as it provides a very “back country NZ” fishing experience.
- 8.8 The confluence of the Mainstem and the South Branch sees a split in river size, I have already described the picturesque and intimate South

Branch that leads to some outstanding fish in terms of size and quality. The Mainstem is a marvellous bit of water all the way to the Lake Sumner outflow with its stable riverbed, high food biomass and huge concentration of fish. This pristine fishing environment is set in a river valley that is well photographed and extremely beautiful.

8.9 It is amazing how quickly the feel of the Hurunui River changes over the distance of a few kilometres. The upriver sections particularly offer rapid change in the type of fishing and even the size of fish. Even the less desirable areas of the river have features and fishing that would surpass most other fishing locations in the region.

9. **ACCESS, QUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY TO FISH AND VARIETY OF CHALLENGES FOR ANGLING ON THE WAI AU**

9.1 The Waiau also provides a huge variety of different angling challenges over its length, giving opportunity to fish by various methods and for different sized trout. Salmon also can be pursued in different areas of the river when they are about, giving variety to the fishing experience. Choosing where to fish within the system depends on the river height, weather, time of year, time available and access requirements along with a host of other considerations. Having this choice of water and fishing opportunity on offer is a distinct privilege for the angler. I have had many memorable days fishing within this region.

9.2 Access varies along the river's length with road side access along the main highways giving way to walking and true wilderness access in the more remote areas of the tributaries. This offers a wide appeal for many anglers with different mobility and desire to pursue their sport.

9.3 The mouth region is quite inaccessible except by jet boat or 4WD. Those who have the privilege to fish there have relative solitude to chase trout, salmon or whitebait. The river from the mouth to Waiau township has limited access, although my clients who do fish there report that fish numbers are high.

- 9.4 From Waiau township to the confluence with the Hope river, the Waiau has a good population of medium and large sized fish that can be caught on fly or spinning gear. Access through this part of the river varies, but the roading network allows enough access points to cover most of the water as desired. The river is largely braided and tree or scrub lined on the banks, this area is lightly fished, but for those who choose to fish in this region, the fishing is productive.
- 9.5 The Waiau from the Hope confluence up toward its source changes in character quite dramatically. Moving upstream through a tight gorge with poor access and few fish, the river opens out into reasonably clear river flats bordered by majestic mountain scenery. This is a place for magnificent wilderness fishing. Fish numbers are good and the chance to fish for very large fish lures many anglers to this area. Recent relaxed access has made this highly visible in the angling community and those who venture to this region want to keep going back.
- 9.6 My personal favourite in the upper Waiau River area is the Hope River particularly above the confluence with the Boyle. The scenery changes from river flats, to rocky stretches and opens out to a braided section before moving into a gorge and more river flats. The challenge that the fish in these places bring motivate me to return again and again. The chances to catch trophy fish over 10lb are there and the setting is idyllic.
- 9.7 Upper Waiau tributaries like the Boyle, Nina and Doubtful each seem to have their own personality and as these rivers are closer to the West Coast have the added charm of bush clad surroundings. Different in character, they provide more variety in catching similar fish to the rest of the Waiau system. Easy access along the main road allows anglers who can't walk far the opportunity to fish for outstanding fish in a wilderness setting.

10. **WORLD CLASS TROPHY TROUT FISHING**

10.1 To me the trophy trout fishing sets the Hurunui and Waiau fisheries apart. I am an avid hunter of large beautifully conditioned hard fighting trout. This quest has led me to many waterways with a wonderful reputation, but for all the publicity of these reputed trophy fisheries, the upper Hurunui in the South and North Branches and the upper Waiau and its tributaries provide some of the best examples of quality trophy trout that I know of. I have caught a substantial number of very large trout in this region and know that many anglers like me value the opportunity to see and have a go at catching these magnificent creatures.

10.2 These fish appear to have run to sea and the unobstructed passage that they enjoy on their return will see the quality of this fishery legend for generations to come, provided we recognise what we have and protect it.

11. **COMPARISON WITH OTHER FISHERIES**

11.1 Comparing other rivers that I have fished and that have been recognised as having outstanding fisheries and are protected by water conservation orders with the Hurunui, I consider that the Hurunui is of equal or greater value and should be a part of the river heritage preserved for future generations for its fishing alone.

11.2 For example, the Oreti is noted for its wilderness trophy brown trout fishery and rightly so, however the Hurunui in the upper South and North Branches has a fishery that is its equal (please see photos with this evidence). The Ahuriri with its majestic scenery and outstanding trout population has less available water to fish than the Hurunui and a comparison of fishing the two would have me personally choose the Hurunui because there are more opportunities to fish different types of water and it is better able to take the fishing pressure. Both have magnificent scenery and wilderness value. The Motueka is a river I like to fish and it rightly is protected however the Hurunui is consistently a better fish producer in terms of effort put in. The upper Buller reminds

me a lot of the Hurunui with its size and flow and high fish numbers. The fishing on the lower Buller is difficult and not as desirable because of its huge size whereas the Hurunui has a more manageable flow coupled with a high fish count in the lower river for the angler to fish for. The Mataura is probably one of the most famous South Island fishing rivers and offers a huge variety of different fishing experiences as it grows from its source and flows to the sea. The Hurunui has similar variety as it grows from its source to the sea. The Rakaia and Rangitata have excellent trout fisheries above the gorges, however these are very often unavailable to anglers due to wind and elevated river levels. They also have significant salmon fishing in them which attracts huge angler interest during the salmon season. By contrast, the Hurunui trout fishing is considerably more significant in terms of numbers and consistent quality of fish. The fishing opportunity in terms of physical access along its length, and the increased clarity of water and less exposed nature of the river bed to wind make it a far more consistent producer of fish. The salmon run although not as large as for the Rangitata and Rakaia still is significant and attracts good numbers of anglers each season.

12. **CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 In my opinion the Hurunui and Waiau Rivers justify the highest level of protection.
- 12.2 The whole of the Hurunui River is dependent on the South Branch to flush out vegetation and renew the pools and banks, clean rocks and evict didymo. The unique and desirable features that make the highly fished and used river below the confluence attractive and viable need the South Branch to flow unhindered. Any threat to the free flow would be unacceptable to the angling community and a robbing of the heritage we leave to our future generations.
- 12.3 With the extreme decline in available fishing water that the North Canterbury region has recently seen due to issues of farming practice change, the Hurunui and Waiau River systems stand out like oases with a rich supply of fish for anglers to enjoy. As rivers they are unique

in the diversity of habitat, clarity of water and moderate size to be able to cope with an increasing angling usage pressure. They are close enough to Christchurch to be considered local and can be accessed easily from a number of main roads. There are no other rivers in the radius from Christchurch that provides any sort of fishing opportunity that is comparable.

12.4 The trophy trout that inhabit the Hurunui's upper waters require free access throughout the river system (and possibly the sea) to complete their life cycle. The salmon require free access to the sea. Damming of the river would be unthinkable for me as the river would lose its salmon and the trophy trout fishery.

12.5 In collecting information for and writing this evidence it became clear to me that we have few waterways left of such intrinsic value. Many overseas anglers regularly come to New Zealand because they can't get the kind of fishing experience at home that we have freely on offer. These anglers come from Australia, USA, Europe, Asia and Africa and have the same sort of story. Their once good fisheries have been poorly managed or subject to the pressures of excessive development and degradation. I would hate to see the Hurunui or Waiau go that way.

12.6 For the local angler, with a terrible history of fisheries that have evaporated in the past 25 years, it seems imperative to me that we protect the future of these phenomenal rivers to provide them as a heritage to all New Zealanders.

M Bell

12 October 2012

Appendix – Photos

Malcolm with a fine Hurunui Brown



A Prime Searunner from the Hurunui



A Large Brown (Feb 06)



On the Run Hurunui



Over 10lb (Dec 04)

