

Issue 186

TROUT FISHER

New Zealand's dedicated magazine

Spring 2023



Those Hackles
A lifetime on the WEST COAST
Another UGLY Adventure
Confessions of an Addicted Salmon Angler
Kiwi Cane 2024

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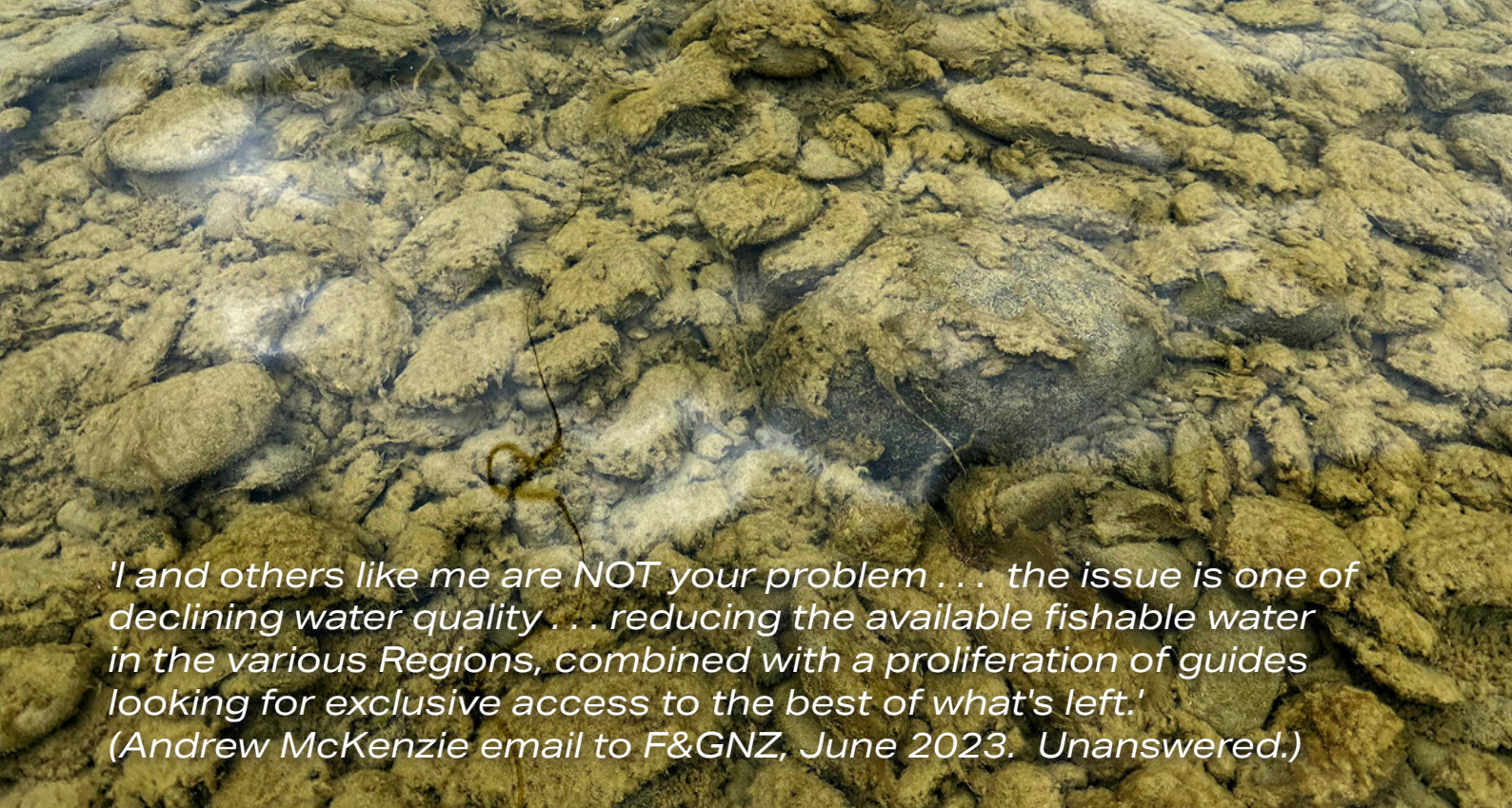
Fishing amongst Whio. (John Gommans)

Here

Hakataramea riverbed, January 2023.
(Barry Cawthorn)

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'I and others like me are NOT your problem . . . the issue is one of declining water quality . . . reducing the available fishable water in the various Regions, combined with a proliferation of guides looking for exclusive access to the best of what's left.'
(Andrew McKenzie email to F&GNZ, June 2023. Unanswered.)

Nobody treating freshwater this way has public interest in mind. Everybody knows it only looks like this when private interests collaborate to bypass environmental legislation, for mutual benefit. This riverbed is the result of lobbying, networking, back-scratching, give and take; compromise.

The photo was sent in by an Australian subscriber. Was Barry Cawthorn the only angler to fish the Hakataramea this January? Clearly not. Most anglers visiting the river would have been Kiwis. Kiwis for whom, supposedly, river beds like this are now just part and parcel of a day's fishing – or they would surely do something about them. Fact: Barry spent thousands of dollars getting to that river where those Kiwis would have spent tens or hundreds. This suggests that when faced with degradation of freshwater, the less spent getting there the more anglers too will compromise and the perpetrators clearly knew this.

Why then should Fish & Game want to make it harder for anglers like Barry to fish here, with the Designated Waters Licence Proposal? Ostensibly, it's because we keep complaining about overseas anglers hogging our rivers. Yet, as Andrew McKenzie also commented to me recently: 'While it's overseas unguided anglers copping the brunt of the new DW Licence regime, those changes will not improve the lot of resident anglers either, as guides, both onshore and offshore (resident), are still able to fish anywhere, anytime'. Good point; fishing pressure is best managed by balloted beats – as with the Waitaki Canals. (My email to F&GNZ, whether the proposal has been passed for 2023/24, also remains unanswered; all Andrew and Barry's emails to F&GNZ and Southland, on the broader picture, too.)

Fact: both major political parties have directed Fish & Game operations for the last 33 years, through their Minister of Conservation. (So when one says it will form a Ministry of Fishing & Hunting, what does it want besides our votes?) Fact: over the same period, both parties have not only ignored declining freshwater quality and quantity, but also the ever-increasing impact of an unregulated guiding industry on freshwater angling opportunity. Fact: any F&G councillor can have direct commercial interest in the sport (as did I) and there's guiding industry presence at all levels. Fact: anyone can guide here, anywhere, regardless of residency and subject only to market forces (Frank Murphy's letter therefore seems timely). Fact: F&G itself has been understaffed throughout its 33 years' existence. Its regional staff rely on us licensed anglers, their only source of funding, to assist them in protecting freshwater and thereby, our interest in trout and salmon fishing.

So if you find a river bed like this in 2023/24, please, don't compromise. Photograph and report it to every legally-responsible entity: F&G- and E-Whichever, DOC and EWaitato (Taupo), MPI, MftE – and MoF&H especially, should it eventuate. Let's find out which support public interest in freshwater and which private. That's the question this photo clearly poses.



The first week provided typical wilderness fishing . . .

Another UGLY Adve

With Clive Shaw and John Gommans



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Back in 2008 Clive and I undertook our most challenging back-country fishing trip, a 12 day adventure into the Tasman Wilderness zone of Kahurangi National Park to explore the Ugly River; tough to get to but great fishing, followed by a long tramp out. That trip was planned after my 50th birthday with the realisation that increasing age may restrict our future ability to attempt these more extreme wilderness adventures. Some 12 years later, it was therefore somewhat surprising to find us contemplating a similar trip!

With heavy packs containing two weeks' food, tramping and fishing gear we again planned a helicopter drop off, onto the ridge at the Western edge of the wilderness no-fly zone. Unfortunately, high winds made that landing site too risky and instead we landed on the wide-open top of Bald Knob, almost 1 kilometre above the river. That descent took us nearly a day and a half through West Coast alpine scrub leading into bush, with detours around treefall and the odd bluff, plus an overnight stay in a steep gully beside a small stream that provided a spectacular nocturnal glow-worm display as some compensation for the cramped campsite. Eventually we reached a riverside campsite on a flat terrace, with trout easily visible as they cruised the large pool below.



Almost 1 kilometre above the river, centre left

On the way down

The start of a magical first week, previous pages fish top right . . .

