

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application pursuant to Section 201 for a
Water Conservation Order on the Hurunui River.

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF LES HILL
ON BEHALF OF
THE NORTH CANTERBURY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

Dated 6 March 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My name is Leslie (Les) Hill.
- 1.2 I have been fishing since I was 7 years old – i.e. have had 53 years as an angler. I have been a fly fisherman for 48 years and have fished for salmon for 48 years.
- 1.3 Having lived in six different locations in the South Island. I have fished all of the major rivers of the island and most of the streams as well. My broad knowledge of the angling in the rivers of the South Island would be the equal or better than that of almost anyone.
- 1.4 I have authored/co authored and been the photographer for 7 published books related to trout fishing, as listed in appendix 1.

- 1.5 I am currently a regular contributing author and photographer for Fish and Game magazine – have done so since the magazine inception in the mid 1990's.
- 1.6 Having lived in Christchurch on three separate occasions – 1971 – 1972, 1977, 1994 – 2004 – I fished the Hurunui River regularly and got to know almost every metre of the river from the mouth to well above Lake Sumner and much of the South branch as well.
- 1.7 During 1971 – 1972 I worked as a hydrologist in Christchurch. During that time I visited the Hurunui on several occasions as part of my work.
- 1.8 I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses. 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

1.9 My evidence will address

- Trout fishing experience in the North Branch – i.e. above Lake Sumner.
- Trout fishing experience in the South Branch.
- Trout fishing experience in the Mainstem Hurunui.
- Trout fishing in the Lower Hurunui.
- Catch rates and comparisons with other fisheries.
- The 12 month availability of fishing.
- Salmon fishing experience on the Hurunui River.
- The value of the river's proximity to Christchurch.
- The river's ability to provide for multiple use.

2. TROUT FISHING - THE NORTH BRANCH.

2.1 I have fished the Hurunui above Lake Sumner on several occasions. The fishing stands out for two main reasons. First, there are trophy trout (10lbs or more) available to

anglers. I have caught several in the 7 – 9lb class above Lake Sumner but have seen many bigger. Second, because of the difficulty of access these upper waters provide a remote river fishing experience for anglers prepared to make the effort to get there.

2.2 The fishing in this section of the Hurunui compares very favourably with other recognised trophy fisheries like the Ahuriri or upper Oreti. The fish numbers are similar, as is the average size of the fish. The North branch of the Hurunui however, is more difficult to access than both the Ahuriri and Oreti and therefore provides more of a remote experience.

3. **TROUT FISHING IN THE SOUTH BRANCH.**

3.1 While I have not caught many trout in this section of the river the quality of the fish has more than compensated with fish up to 12 pounds weight being landed then released.

3.2 Like the North Branch the fish numbers and the fishing compares favourably with the Upper Oreti or Ahuriri rivers but the nature of the river is different being steep banked, rocky and often gorged in the lower section and much more open higher up. The nature of the river provides a quite different experience for a fit, energetic angler.

4. **TROUT FISHING THE MAINSTEM HURUNUI.**

4.1 I have seen and caught more fish in this section of the river than in the North or South Branches. For example a diary entry says that on 2/3/97 I caught 11 fish in 3.75 hours – i.e. a catch rate of 3 fish per hour. I consider a catch rate of 1 fish per hour very good fishing.

4.2 While there is road access along much of this section of the river it is still by its rugged nature a back country river and provides a wilderness experience. There is a section of river from the outlet of Lake Sumner downstream for about 8 kilometres which has no road access and another section for several kilometres above the Mandamus confluence which is similarly remote.

4.3 Other rivers which are similarly remote but with road access are the Gowan and the Ahuriri. The Gowan has high fish numbers but its non-stop, rough and tumble nature and difficult bank access make it tough to fish. I rate the Mainstem Hurunui more highly. I would rate the Ahuriri and Mainstem Hurunui similarly – the fish numbers in the Hurunui are higher but I've caught bigger fish in the Ahuriri.

5. **FISHING IN THE LOWER HURUNUI.**

5.1 I have fished this section of the river mainly in the autumn. The main reason for this has been the fine dry fishing available at this time with reliable mayfly hatches luring the trout to the water's surface regularly during afternoons.

5.2 The lower Hurunui has plenty of trout and is the closest section of the river to my home in Christchurch.

6. **Catch rates and comparisons with other fisheries**

6.1 Diary entries for 12 fishing outings during the period 30/4/94 – 1/2/03 show that on these occasions I caught 56 trout during 53.75 hours of fishing – a catch rate of 1.04 fish per hour. For me a catch rate of 1 fish per hour is very good fishing. In comparison following are the catch rates for 4 fishing experiences during the last few months on other rivers:

- Upper Grey River - 20/10/08 5 fish/7 hours - 0.7 fish per hour
- La Fontaine River - 2/11/08 & 18/12/08 10 fish/10 hours - 1 fish per hour
- Opihi River - 6/12/08 10 fish/6 hours - 1.67 fish per hour
- Taieri River - 1/1/09 -5/1/09 12 fish/26.5 hours - 0.45 fish per hour

6.2 The Upper Grey is considered a high quality back country river. The La Fontaine is considered by many to be the best trout stream on the West Coast. The Opihi has the reputation of being one of the best trout streams in the South Island. The Upper Taieri (and especially the section I fished) is considered one of Otago's best streams. My experiences and catch rate records lead me to consider that the Hurunui River is comparable to, or better than, these other highly regarded rivers.

7. The twelve month availability of fishing

7.1 More than a half of the length of the Hurunui River can be fished during twelve months of each year. I have fished the river during each of the seasons – winter through to autumn. The fishing quality has been very good at all times of the year. My average catch rate has been 1.04 fish per hour but interestingly when I have fished during the winter (when one would expect slower fishing) the rate has not diminished. For example on 5/8/01 and 19/8/01 I fished for 9.25 hours, caught 12 fish giving a catch rate of 1.45 fish per hour.

8. Salmon fishing experience on the Hurunui

8.1 I have fished for salmon on all of the major rivers of the East Coast from the Clutha north to the Hurunui. I have also fished for salmon on the rivers of the West Coast. The Hurunui salmon fishery is superior to that on the West Coast and better than that on most east coast rivers. My fishing has all been upstream of the mouth in gorged sections (deep water) of the river and mainly in the months of January and February. For example one place that I frequented was just above the confluence with the Mandamus River. To fish this area successfully required a flow of 30 cumecs or less. Flows greater than 30 cumecs made it difficult to fish the other areas I fished too. I also preferred lower flows for trout fishing.

9. The value of the river's proximity to Christchurch

9.1 When I lived in Christchurch the river that I fished the most when going out for a one day outing was the Hurunui. There were two reasons for this choice – the quality of the fishing and the closeness to my home. I could reach the lower or middle reaches of the river in a little over an hour's drive. Frequently I would leave home mid morning, fish for 4-5 hours and be home again by 6.00pm – having caught about 5 fish on average. If this opportunity was available to me it was also there for between 300,000 and 400,000 others.

10. **The river's ability to provide for multiple use**

10.1 Invariably the quality of trout fishing diminishes dramatically when there are other users on a river because trout when disturbed stop feeding and hide. However, in my experience I have still seen plenty of fish and caught my share when others were using the Hurunui. For example my diary entry for 9/3/03 shows that on that day I shared the river with 4 canoes, 4 jetboats and 11 other fishing rods. This was in the Lower Hurunui. I still caught 5 trout on that occasion. Some of the reasons for the Hurunui being able to provide good fishing while "crowded" are:

- a. good numbers of fish;
- b. the size of the river;
- c. the frequency of trout disturbance.

11. **CONCLUSION**

11.1 The Hurunui River provides quite a unique fishery. I discovered this especially when I moved from Southland in 1994. After experiencing the wonderful fishing of Southland I wondered where I would find equal angling in Canterbury. With a little research I soon discovered (in a NZ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries report – 1989) that the fish numbers in the Hurunui River were greater than most other New Zealand rivers. For example at the Lake Sumner outlet there were 86 large trout, 243 medium trout and 79 small trout in a 1600 metre reach. In comparison the Karamea (considered by many the finest back country river in the South Island) had 52 large trout, 17 medium trout and 26 small trout above the Bend in a reach of 1850 metres length. The Mataura at Nokomai (often quoted as the finest brown trout river in the world) had 16 large trout, 11 medium trout and 9 small trout in a reach of 950 metres in length.

11.2 Most large rivers like the Hurunui have angling of varying quality along their length. There may be great fishing in one section and then a "lean" reach of many kilometers in length before good angling is found again. The Hurunui is a rare river in that the fishing is very good all the way from the mouth right up to the top of the head waters. By very good

fishing I refer not only to the number of fish available to be caught but also the quality or size present everywhere.

11.3 The fact that the river is close to the largest concentration of population in the South Island and is reasonably accessible for most of its length makes the Hurunui very special and valuable.

11.4 There are only a very small number of rivers in the South Island that support trophy trout. The Hurunui is one of these but also, in my experience, one of the best.

Les Hill

March 2009

References

Freshwater Fisheries Report – Trout Abundance in New Zealand Rivers: an assessment by drift diving. By L.D.Teirney, I.G. Jowett. December 1989.

APPENDIX 1 – Books authored or co authored by Les Hill

1. STALKING TROUT – Halcyon Press, 1985.
2. CATCHING TROUT – Halcyon Press, 1991.
3. IMAGES OF SILVER – Halcyon Press, 1994.
4. STALKING STILLWATERS – Halcyon Press, 1997.
5. THE ARTFUL SCIENCE OF TROUT FISHING, Canterbury University Press, 2005.
6. STALKING AND CATCHING TROUT – Halcyon Press, 2005.
7. A STROLL THROUGH BROWN TROUT COUNTRY – Canterbury University Press, 2008.