

Hearing submission

Introduction

My name is Graeme Rae, I'm a member of the Teviot Angling Club and I have been for most of my life. I am club captain and have been on the committee for the last 30 years. My father was a member of the club and my grandfather was a member of the club. They spent time shooting and fishing at Lake Onslow.

I was born in Roxburgh and am currently living there for the last 30 years. I'm a hut owner at the Lake. I'd spend 10 to 12 days a year out fishing at the Lake.

What makes lake Onslow special?

Lake Onslow is an exciting fishery. You're always guaranteed of catching some fish, so it's a good place to take your children and grandchildren. I generally see fishing at lake Onslow as a group activity. I think this is because of the high catch rate combined with the ability to camp near the lake. How many places can you go camping and be assured to catch a fish?

I think the lake is also popular for fishing because of its high-country setting, which introduces a special element into the activity. It's different to fishing a river and people seek this out.

The Lake has specific times of the year that you can catch fish with a certain method. The cicada season is one of those times and it brings a lot of fishermen in. Cicada fishing is very much a shore-based activity, as is fly fishing.

Lake Onslow is the only place where the majority of people from southland have access to a high-country lake. You see them bringing their kids up. It's the only place you can catch a fish and keep a kid's interest up. It's a good fishery below the huts, you always catch fish in there. There's quite a good creek that comes in there. I've fished it recently and have been surprised how many fish are in there.

Patterns of angling use

People fishing the lake are either shore based or boat based.

Shore based fishing is mainly fly fishing with a minority who spin fish from the shore. Fly fisherman always walk and fish ahead of themselves, targeting the fish. Some fly fisherman will walk for hours but others will stay within a 100m or so. Some of the best fly fishing on the lake is on the top end, which is the east end of the lake. A lot of that is dewatered quickly as the level drops.

I always see boats at the ramp during summer, generally during weekends. People seem to keep coming as long as they can get along the boat ramp. People use boats to mainly get to fly fishing spots. They do troll but its more of a secondary thing.

Impacts of low lake levels

As the lake drops the eastern parts quickly dewater and this pushes fish out into the lake. There's lots of food in that arm of the lake so when they get pushed out their feeding grounds get limited. When this happens, the fish aren't very active at all. Having fished other, similar lakes, this seems

to be unique to Lake Onslow. I think that lowering the lake quicker allows for this to happen more often.

In my experience the food for fish is in the top 2.5 meters. When that top 2.5 meters is gone, what's left is very little.

When lake levels get low, angling from the shore starts to get limited. Mud flats will become more extensive. There will be places that are better and worse for this and you need to be more specific about where you fish. It starts to get very limiting where you can fish. Places like around the huts are currently quite good but still have their pitfalls. For example, the mud flats near the huts are less extensive but there's a lot of water coming out of the banks which can some sections quite treacherous.

Shore fishing areas accessible by boat becomes less and less as the level drops because getting ashore becomes a bit of a nightmare. At the moment it's not too bad but I'd hate to see it if it dewatered quicker, or at twice the rate.

On boating, there's always an inherent risk when you're on the water. Because the lake is so shallow, you need to keep an eye on the bottom of the lake and the shore so you avoid mud bars. This is a risk at any lake level and any lake. The lower the lake level is, the more mud bars you're likely to encounter.

I've never fished in the lake when it was at its lowest mark. I imagine it'd be very muddy and its accessibility would be very limited. Personally, I'd just go and fish in another lake.

Pioneer has made a statement that the drawdown impinges on their ability to generate electricity. Which is not true. It impinges on of their ability to make more money off of what they do generate increased revenue. My overall view is that they are a public company and all profits go back to the community for amenities. Why trash one amenity to pay for another?