

OPTIMISTIC ANGLER

Derek Grzelewski's feature story *Saving Trout Country* (March) and his book *The Trout Bohemia* shows he has a rare skill among fishing writers – not just in his use of prose, but in his ability to move into the realm of relationships: his own, others and those of the fly-fisher with fish, rivers and the land they flow through.

I commend him for expanding the debate about water quality in New Zealand by seeking other audiences that may respond to his love of fishing and rivers, as well as highlighting a growing activism to save New Zealand waterways from grinding degradation.

Trout and New Zealand's native eel (*tuna* in Maori) are tenacious creatures, often hanging in there in very marginal water. I have fished what is now my local river, the Ruamahanga, on and off for 45 years. This year it has been saved from what is now a regular summertime toxic algae bloom by a very wet summer, which has regularly flushed the river out.

In November, however, I fished a stretch where the algae made nymph fishing impossible and when I brought a fish to the edge to remove the hook and release it, I had to strip off the slime that coated it too. But fishermen are optimists and I take some heart that our three Wairarapa councils are making considerable improvements to their wastewater systems. Even in my own rural neighbourhood, I see open drains being fenced and planted, while other waterways are planted by community groups.

This is being done with the understanding that clean water always comes from upstream. The same direction trout usually expect their next meal from.

MICHAEL WOODCOCK, CARTERTON
LETTER OF THE MONTH

FRESHWATER STOATS?

If rainbow trout are as benign as your article suggests, why does the Global Invasive Species Database list it at number 63 while *Mustela erminea* (stoat) is listed only four places higher, at 59? I quote: "*Mustela erminea* is an intelligent, versatile predator specialising in small mammals and birds. It is fearless in attacking animals larger than itself and adapted to surviving periodic shortages by storage of surplus kills. In New Zealand it is responsible for a significant amount of damage to populations of native species."

Meanwhile, "*Oncorhynchus mykiss* (rainbow trout) are one of the most widely introduced fish species in the world... [It has] been introduced to numerous countries for sport and commercial aquaculture. [It] is highly valued as a sportfish, with regular stocking occurring in many locations where wild populations cannot support the pressure from anglers. Concerns have been raised about the effects of introduced trout in some areas, as they may affect native fish and invertebrates through predation and competition."

That's not just theory. Advocates for the Tongariro River member

Eric Wilson told a reporter in 2012 that, "during Taupo's fishing heyday, trout 'gorged' on a ready supply of native species for food. Those species had almost gone, and been replaced by smelt." Given smelt are native too, don't you think this needs a more critical look?

LACHLAN MCKENZIE, ROTORUA

• McKenzie is a former Federated Farmers Dairy chairman. His outgoing speech, in which he suggested trout are a "disastrous species" – no better than "freshwater stoats", was debated

on the Science Media Centre site by a panel of experts in freshwater, aquatic ecosystems and water quality. The following extract from Professor Colin Townsend, Department of Zoology, University of Otago, summed up the tone of the scientists' responses:

"...Our research has shown that by reducing grazing by stream insects, trout can lead to a modest increase in algae on the streambed. These extra algae have the effect of sucking up some nitrogen from stream water and so the trout actually make a small contribution to cleaning up the mess caused by nutrient runoff from farms.

"In any case, the small changes to nutrient fluxes in streams associated with trout are swamped by the much larger amounts of nutrients entering as diffuse pollution from the land. It's worth noting too that our research in Otago shows that soil erosion, and the resulting smothering of the streambed by fine sediment, can be even more harmful to stream health than nutrient enrichment. Unless Lachlan McKenzie has witnessed trout emerging from streams and churning up the land with their big fat hooves, he will find it difficult to shift responsibility from cows to trout." – Ed.

HISTORY REPEATING

Even if we leave aside the dubious claim to impartiality for the Environmental Protection Authority, the native birds it kills and the vested interests of those who have their snouts in the \$100 million a year 1080 trough, the argument for using 1080, let alone increasing its use, is a specious one.

1080 is an insecticide – that was why it was created. It also happens to be, even in tiny quantities, a virulent killer of all living creatures that metabolise oxygen, a characteristic that makes it so appealing as a pesticide. Can spreading a powerful insecticide across swathes of our bush ever be a good thing, given the vast numbers of native fauna such as kiwi that depend on insects for their survival?

Secondly, 1080 in grain-pellet form is useless against the greatest of all threats to our native birds – mustelids (stoats, weasels and ferrets).

According to Auckland University PhD student Andrew Vale, mustelids cause 50 per cent of all kiwi deaths and their diet consists of fresh meat and eggs – they ignore pellets. Wide broadcasting of 1080 pellets to control mustelids is therefore folly and wasteful. Worse than that, it leaves us with a false sense that "at least someone is doing something".

What if we discover that 1080 has a dark underbelly and is doing irreparable damage that is not readily visible? This may seem alarmist, but the "miracle" poison Mirex was used in large quantities in the south-eastern United States to control fire ants from 1962 to 1975. Belatedly, it was discovered to be highly toxic to a range of non-target animals, bio-accumulative and bio-magnified (builds up higher up the food chain) and was summarily banned, but is still found in the soil decades later.

If we learnt anything from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, it is that our priority should be to do no harm. It is ironic that what sparked Carson's book – vehemently opposed as it was by vested interests and their bureaucrat skills – was the damage industrial chemicals were doing to bird populations. History repeating?

When it comes to poisoning vast areas of pristine forest, rather than being the subject of derision and scorn, the caution and scepticism of opponents is a vital counterpoint to DoC's blunt 1080 cudgel.

JASON FOORD, AUCKLAND