



Minister rejects bullying claim

Stacey Kirk

Conservation Minister Nick Smith has rejected allegations of political interference after Fish & Game accused him of "bullying" it into pulling a campaign for cleaning up rivers and lakes.

Smith said he was considering legal action against Association of Freshwater Anglers president David Haynes, who made the allegations.

Haynes said Smith had been highly critical of Fish & Game at a Fish & Game Council meeting in Wellington this month.

"Nick Smith is very good at talking at and over people," Haynes told *Morning Report*.

"He was wading into them and they sat very quietly and listened to what he was saying.

"From my perspective they [Fish & Game] were very clearly being castigated - it could be construed as political interference. This was about telling Fish & Game to wind their neck in."

The allegations were centred on a

were untrue, Smith said.

"Clearly there was a discussion, when the minister meets with Fish & Game. They've got a very important role around advocating for both game birds and trout and salmon fishing.

"They made some criticisms of the fact that they didn't think DOC [the Department of Conservation] was making sufficient submissions. The Ruataniwha case specifically came up."

Smith said he did say that "Fish & Game does need to engage with industries like agriculture and irrigation through the collaborative process to get the best outcomes for freshwater quality".

"While it was absolutely right for them to advocate for freshwater, I do think they got into the space sometimes of being anti-New Zealand's most important industry, that being the dairy industry."

Some people in the group had

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