

Fishing For Votes

by Tony Orman

September 20 may well be the most crucial election ever in terms of outdoor sports and fishing. Huh? Who cares about politics? Well, a lot don't care going by the last election in 2011. About a million voters did not vote. It was the lowest voter turnout in 120 years!

And look at the Fish and Game elections in 2012. Several councils did not have enough nominations to fill the 12 councillor chairs in each region. Others had just 12 nominations so there were no elections necessary.

So who gives a stuff about politics? Don't worry a few do.

You see a good friend of mine was the late John Henderson. He was "a political animal" as the saying goes, having fought for the "Save Manapouri" campaign in the 1970s. While he was better known as a deerstalker and president of the NZ Deerstalkers' Association he was also a very skilled and avid fly fisher. Indeed, he taught me on the Wairarapa's Makuri and Makakahi Rivers how to catch browns on a dry fly.

John just loved getting up in the rivers of the Tararua Ranges where with his "one dry fly" – the English-conceived Mole Fly – he would stalk and cast to big, hefty browns that could go into double figures. He fished the Otaki, Waiohine and a few others like the Ruamahunga and Waingawa Rivers.

John would rather have been there instead of doing battle with politicians and bureaucrats. Instead he unselfishly spent years and years and thousands and thousands of his personal funds going to battle on behalf of the public estate, public assets like National Parks and the right to just go trout fishing any time, any place, as long as you asked permission. That is, having paid your licence fee first.

Politicians did and still do see it differently. In battling politically-originated threats you have to roll the sleeves up, take the gloves off if needed and punch it out with politicians and governments. A brilliant orator John was feared in debate so much so that the late Duncan McIntyre, an advocate for trout farming, would not debate with "JBH" as his friends knew him as.

John's motivation was born of a couple of basic beliefs. One was that "politics and the environment are just cause and effect". In other words, you cannot dodge politics because the decisions that result in threats to free access to trout rivers or clean rivers or other attributes, have their birth in politics within a government or government departments.

The other was a belief in the egalitarian society that New Zealand is founded of and embraces the things like trout fishing. "Our forbears came to New Zealand to rid themselves of a feudal system that arbitrarily assigned the wildlife resource to a handful of wealthy nobility—that wealth shall not be the factor determining who shall hunt or fish."

He did not want the system where for \$50 a day or a fee ten times that you could only fish a 200 metre stretch of a trout river. He wanted the vision of the early European settlers for a truly egalitarian society—equal opportunity for all and the equal right of the young boy, lowly wage worker or chief executive to go and fish the Ruakituri, Mātaura or any number of rivers for no cost except the annual trout fishing licence fee.

And he wanted polluters punished and clean, clear rivers to fish, swim or bathe in. "JBH" would be saddened to know today, 61 percent of our rivers are unsafe for swimming. He would be angry at government plans to weaken the Resource Management Act and dilute controls on polluters. He would

be angry at the lax controls of foreigners buying high country stations and erecting locked gates. At government allowing overseas oil companies to prospect public forest parks for oil. He'd be angry at a lot of trends.

And unlike the apathetic, disinterested trout fishers who did not vote last Fish and Game elections, he would have stood up and fought against ugly threatening policies and trends.

JBH had scant respect for politicians because of bitter experience. He said in a public address of "nonsense and insults from some very arrogant government ministers of the Crown and their backbench MPs—glaring cases of deceit by cabinet ministers" and so on.

Sound familiar?

Today there's the Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations (CORANZ) which has drawn up a charter of key priority issues. Of interest to trout fishers are:-
Government must value outdoor recreation as a legitimate right of all New Zealanders, clean rivers and lakes, no indiscriminate toxins.

An efficient biosecurity system to prevent undesirable imports entering NZ.

A meaningful, mandatory and scientifically valid National Environmental and Recreational Standard for Water and reversing the current degradation of freshwater.

Then there's full legal recognition sporting freshwater fish such as trout, salmon and perch as valued recreational assets, recognition of freshwater (and saltwater) fish—as publicly owned with full, equal and proper public access to them. The principles of Section 23, Wildlife Act, that no purchase or selling of rights to recreation be allowed, shall apply to all and be clearly written into all relevant law.

Damming or diversions through private canals of river systems for hydro or storage be avoided.

Impose stricter controls on foreign ownership of New Zealand land, maintenance, enhancement and development of public access rights to public lands.

Recognise the Treaty of Waitangi was about bringing two cultures together into one integrated society.

There's even a call to establish a population policy for New Zealand—people put demands on land, water, fishery and other resources.

And how about an index for national prosperity, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) based on solely economic indicators, be replaced by a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) based on three values—social, environmental and economic to thus fully measure the quality of life?

All pretty good stuff. But hold on, a lot of that in principle, was what my friend John Henderson was on about in the 1970s.

Come September 20, election day, do go and vote. You must. Vote carefully and remember under MMP, the crucial vote is the party vote.

NZFFA 12 Point Manifesto:

([http://www.nzfishingclubs.co.nz/news/news_upload/documents_agendas_2edb.NZFFA%20Political%](http://www.nzfishingclubs.co.nz/news/news_upload/documents_agendas_2edb.NZFFA%20Political%20))

