

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

My thanks to members of the environmental committees of the chapters, for the contributions that they have made to our deliberations, and submissions, and their tireless efforts in this respect

We have been asked recently to prepare a budget for the costs that would be incurred in order to maintain dialogue with the Department of Environment Affairs, to collaborate in their finalisation of the draft AIS. Before I offer some suggestions regarding the elements of such a budget, I need to mention that one of the reasons why I personally have always balked at trying to do this, which has been the “how long is a piece of string” syndrome, which refers to all the unknowns involved. The problem for a relatively small NGO such as FOSAF, is that can be considered we have been unrealistically attempting to represent the trout industry as a whole. However amongst the reasons we have felt that it was appropriate that we should attempt to do this, has been because between us, we have felt that we have expertise and experience that not many other NGOs have.

Possibly we have not fully appreciated the enormity of the task we have been attempting. Also, we have not been really successful in attempting obtain the support of owners of businesses that depend on trout for their livelihoods, to contribute to the funds FOSAF has been accumulating, to pay towards the costs involved. There are also people, both in FOSAF and other in other NGOs and organisations, who do not agree that members of the environmental committee should ask for professional fees, for the work it does in preparing the comment to submit to the authorities. I might add that we have never asked for payment for all the other work we have done for FOSAF, but we have felt that if we had to give up ordinary work time to do this work for FOSAF, then we would be justified in asking for payment, albeit seldom at our full consultancy rates.

Few of us, and certainly not myself, anticipated that we might become involved in a never-ending roundabout of viewpoints and staff in DEA itself. Since we began participating in the process, there have been at least three complete changes in the personnel with whom we have been dealing. We have also commented on at least three iterations of the AIS regs. Each time a new iteration appears, we find that points on which we felt we previously had complete agreement, have disappeared as principals behind the draft regs., OR it emerges that there is no provision in the Act for what we all thought had been accepted, such as the provision to accept the existence of certain trout waters that had contained trout for long periods of time.

It has become very obvious that the officials in DEA who are designing the new legislation have no personal experience in the intricate nature of the management of trout waters, and so they rely on expert scientists from organisations based at universities or academic institutions. What seems to have been largely ignored, however, have been the socio-economic aspects, on the manner in which draft regs will impact negatively on landowners and owners of businesses, and communities who use trout as a subsistence food source that are partly, largely or entirely dependent on trout.

I quail at the thought of committing myself to a budget which we are asking stakeholders to raise funds for, in situations where there are still so many unseens.

I believe that FOSAF needs to decide on whether it really intends staying with the course it has taken to date, or whether to acknowledge that this is a battle that it cannot win.

On a trip to the E Cape several years ago, I heard several farmers saying that they did not believe that DEA had the capacity to put into practice what they are proposing. After having seen the latest

iteration of draft regs, I am beginning to think that there could be a lot of sense in just allowing DEA to come up with yet another set of impractical draft regs., knowing that they are indeed impractical, and can probably never be implemented.

I suggest that there some key issues that EXCO needs to address, which are as follows:

- In the event that DEA goes ahead with the impractical regs such as those they have just sent to us, seemingly in total disregard with what FOSAF has submitted to them in the past, does FOSAF consider that it really has the resources to initiate litigation against government?
- In the event that the response to that is in the affirmative, where will it obtain the necessary funds to do so?
- Is FOSAF prepared to pour yet more time and effort into commenting on the present impractical regs as recently sent to us for comment, and what makes it feel they will pay any more attention to what we say this time, if they did not take heed of our comment previously?
- If the E Cape farmers I spoke to are right, the authorities have no practical hope of implementing the new regs, so following the practical thinking of these farmers, everyone should be able to carry on as they always have.

These are policy issues that can only be decided by EXCO. Until we have such guidelines, I am concerned at being requested to commit myself to producing a realistic budget.

If the decision is to go ahead as before, I would suggest that the budget we have been asked to prepare should include at least the following elements:

- Provision to attend at least one further national workshop – but that could be two.
- Provision for three members of the national environmental committee to prepare detailed comment on the draft regs, which would then be circulated to the Exco members of the chapters, and possibly a realistic time to do that would be for up to five days of work each.
- Provision to for two environmental committee members to travel again to meet with top DEA officials having completed the comment, as we were invited to do recently.
- And that does not take into account the work that would be involved in preparing court papers.

In conclusion, I have served as Chairman of the Environmental Committee for over ten years. I think that it is time that I should now give way to a younger person. As with my colleagues on the environmental committee, we took a decision that having started review of the draft regs., we would see the process through to its end. I will stand by that decision. If, however, it would appear that the process is likely to continue, I will need to review that decision.

Bill B
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