



# President's Report: 2025-2026

## Foreword

The last year has been dominated by fast-track applications with the prospect of losing rivers outright, and legislative changes, but the bulk of our energy went into a quieter, more stubborn problem: getting to rivers in the first place.

Access is not a new issue for us, but in 2025/26 it arrived from every direction at once. New gates going up across access roads, road conditions deteriorating, and changing landowners. These patterns repeat across the motu and have been met with a wide variety of solutions and support.

Thank you to the Board, to our affiliated clubs, and to the many people who quietly sorted things out this year without waiting to be asked. Thank you also to our Patron, Nigel Parry, whose institutional knowledge has been invaluable. And thank you to everyone who let us know about issues in their community, shared our advocacy messaging, and came along to a film night.

## The Year Gone

**Access and the new Access Fund** - The Board has established a dedicated Access Fund, with the rules being finalised and published on the website. It quickly became clear that this was a necessity for the board; almost every access issue that came to us needed a few thousand dollars at the right moment, and we needed the reserves to service this. The fund now has the proceeds of this year's film night series behind it, and we expect to be drawing on it for the Kakapotahi, the Pūkaki access road, and the Kaituna lower gorges take-out track. If access is a problem where you paddle, please tell us; we would much rather hear about it early.

**Film Nights** - The series ran again over winter, opening in Ōkere on 9 August and Christchurch on 13 August, with Wellington, Dunedin and further screenings following. Wellington and Rotorua both played to a full house. We screened Godspeed Los Polacos alongside a set of local edits, and we are grateful to everyone who donated footage and to the organisers in each centre who made their night happen. The series has so far raised around \$5,000 for the Access Fund, with more film nights to come.

**Kakapotahi Access Road** - Happy Valley Road has been a live project all year, and work finally started in August. Getting there included a massive push and a lot of work from Peter Kettering, who must be acknowledged for this effort and donation towards this. The funds to complete this work included donations from local paddlers, a grant from the West Coast Community Trust, and from Whitewater NZ's reserves, on top of the earlier \$6,000 from the Mangahao fund that covered the initial work. There is a working bee on the walking track planned in the near future, with a barbecue, and we would love to see locals, polytech students and the Canterbury clubs there. If you head in over summer, please send us updates on the road condition.

**Mohaka and Oamaru Hut** - This one has been grinding on for the full year. After months without a response, Poronui gave us a clear no: they will not support any access arrangement through their operation. Plan B is a lobbying argument, which we will continue to work on. Oamaru Hut sits on public conservation land, but practical hardshell or raft access depends on a helicopter concession, and the current concession settings are letting a private commercial interest block a legitimate public user group from a public destination. We are now looking into operators willing and able to fly paddlers in. Watch this space.

**Motatapu Open Day** - On a happier note, the Motatapu open day in November drew around 40 paddlers, the station staff were pleased with how it went, and there is appetite to make it a regular fixture. The common thread across all three: shut the gates, leave no trace, and be someone a landowner is glad to have on their place.

**Hydro re-consenting** - A good year on this front. The Tekapo re-consent is complete, with Whitewater NZ and Tekapo Whitewater Trust named in the consent and water requirements stipulated. The Pūkaki re-consent came through on 15 June with no change to recreational releases: typically six hours on one day of a weekend, four weekends a year, generally in summer, with a flexible approach and a default flow requirement each year. This is managed by the Tekapo Whitewater Trust, around 80 people turned out for the March release, which was great to see. Wairoa re-consenting is also ticking away in the background and looks like conditions will continue the same as they have worked up until now.

**Mangahao** - Mangahao was referred to fast track with no changes proposed, and Whitewater NZ and the Environmental Whitewater Park Trust (EWWPT) continue to work on a side agreement with each other, and with Contact, to retain and improve the consent conditions for the future.

**Submissions and advocacy** - We made an individual submission on the Conservation Amendment Act as well as a joint submission with FMC and other organisations from across the outdoor recreation sector. We followed that with a submission to DOC on the National Conservation Policy Statement.

Jetboat NZ consulted on easing speed limits on some West Coast rivers, but with the appointment of a Harbour Master to cover the West Coast, this is now on hold. We have significant concern about the effects of raising the speed limit on rivers with high value to paddlers, we want safety to remain a high priority. Especially on beginner runs like the Arnold

and lower Crooked. Thanks to the West Coasters for helping us pull together feedback on this; we really appreciate the local knowledge.

Not all legislation changes this year were bad, we were very pleased to see the Health and Safety Amendment Act contained a specific exception for recreational access. Once the Act comes into force early next year, landowners and land managers can be confident that they have no risk of liability for any recreation-related accident on their land, unless the accident results from their own work.

We also supported Water Safety NZ's lifejacket bill, which was passed into law last month.

**Events** – Summer saw many events being run across the country. It's great to see such active participation in events. It was hammered home to everyone at Bullerfest the importance of entering in and supporting these events, without racers and volunteers, these events simply cannot happen. If we want to see these events continue in our community, it is important to sign up and enter! Winning is secondary.

**Photo Competition** – Every year the photos entered just seem to get better and better, we had 74 entries this year and they were all outstanding.

**Behind the scenes** – There's lots of very unglamorous work that goes into running Whitewater NZ, we had several challenges with our website and have a quote in hand for a website rebuild and are looking at funding options, as it has been five or six years. We're working on some other technology solutions to ensure that the resources Whitewater NZ provides for our community remain up to date, useful, and safe.

## Summary

Access will remain our focus into next year. The Access Fund gives us something to lean on but it's going to be a big push that will need a lot of support from across our community; money only ever solves half of an access problem. The other half is relationships, and these can break down quickly. Building and keeping good relationships with landowners, iwi, concessionaires and councils will be the real work of the coming year. We'd love to hear how you or your club might be able to help on your local runs!

I am grateful, as always, to be part of this community. None of what is described above was achieved by the Board alone, and much of it was achieved by people who are not on the Board at all. Thank you to everyone who got in touch this year to share feedback, criticism or a heads-up about something happening locally. We cannot keep track of every regional project without you, so please keep an eye on your patch and let us know what we can help with.

**Mō ngā awa te aroha, he waiaroha.** For the love of rivers.

Ngā mihi nui,

Nicola Buisman