*Chairmans report SRST AGM, 5th July 2020.*

What a roller coaster of a ride this year has been for the hatchery. The highs and lows experienced have impacted markedly on hatchery operations. Very few fish returned to the hatchery early 2019 resulting in a drastically reduced number kept back to release later in the year. 55,000 smolt were released in 2018, none in 2019 and this year see’s only 7,500 clipped and ready for release. Some riparian work was started early in the year around the source of McKinnons Creek however this has not been followed up to date. To keep ourselves compliant with our consent, a flow structure was installed in the supply creek during May and has been calibrated this week by Fish and Game staff.

Around 7th December a major flood swept down the Rangitata river and did some damage to infrastructure at the hatchery. This resulted in extra work and cost to get things back to normal. We were lucky really and only lost a few fish from the inside hatchery tanks and an insignificant number of the land based fish held in one of the raceways. We were unable to visit the hatchery for several days, however our intrepid Treasurer canoed across the floodwaters the following day to check on the hatchery site. March saw our annual fin clipping day go ahead with reduced numbers (7,500) fish but an excellent number of helpers.

Just at a time when a good number of adult fish began to turn up at the hatchery from the 2019/20 salmon run, we had to make some drastic changes to hatchery operations to comply with Level 2 then level 4 Covid 19 lock down rules. Firstly we clarified with the Ministry of Primary Industries that we were classed as an essential service under "animal/fish welfare and the survival of a species". Secondly we produced a strict SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for anyone working at the hatchery plus a traceability list. Anyone working at the hatchery had to sign the document to show they would comply. Attendance has been kept to an absolute minimum and only essential jobs were being done. Family "bubbles" were strictly reinforced. The return of adult fish (130) was very pleasing and what with some of the land based fish we kept back from 2017 we have ended up with around 80,000 eggs under incubation. Only a portion of the adults of both classes were used and many were released into McKinnons Creek and spawning redds have been spotted throughout the creek. The politics around salmon hatcheries is still unclear and there has been some heavy pressure exerted to close down all recreational hatcheries. We have excellent support from CSI Fish and Game and our strict adherence to the rules has paid off. The lockdown also had on impact on when we could hold our AGM.

Due to a communications oversight, the “Trust” had some problems with the Charities Commission during the year however this has been rectified and all the papers will be filed after this AGM. I would like to see our AGM held later in April or early May to enable the Treasurer to complete all the accounts for the tax year. Our Bank balance looks healthy due to an agreement with RDRML to pay for salmon fry used in the past for testing purposes. Most of this is earmarked for fish food.

I would like to thank all those who helped at the hatchery during this difficult year. I will not need to name all those involved, they know who they are but they have ensured the hatchery remained operational and very successful over the year. Once again I put a call out for more helpers who can become involved in the day to day running of the hatchery. The pressure is considerable on those currently involved and help in this area is needed.

Phil deJoux

(Chairperson SRST)