**Media Statement**

**Rob Roney President West Coast Whitebaiters Association 2 June 2021**

**Whitebait Regulation Changes**

President of West Coast Whitebaiters Association, Rob Roney believes that today’s announcement of changes to Whitebait fishing regulations by the Acting Minister of Conservation Dr. Ayesha Verrall, is a clear acknowledgement of the conservative management regime that has been practiced on the West Coast for many years.

Many of the proposed changes, which are to be phased in over a three year period, are largely focused on bringing the rest of New Zealand into line with the West Coast’s more conservative regulations. This will see the rest of the country having to implement upstream limits to where fishing can occur, the establishment of non-fishable refuges, shorter screen lengths and a much shorter season to name just a few.

Some changes that will affect the West Coast include a reduced incursion of fishing gear to one quarter of the width of a river (currently on third), a shorter season length starting 2022, from 1st September to 30th October (currently ends 15th November), and shorter overall length of fishing gear to 6m starting 2023.

While these changes may not be met with the approval of all West Coast whitebaiters, Mr Roney believes that overall the proposed regulation changes are largely in line with our expectations.

As an association we have put considerable effort into communicating our views to the Minister and DOC senior staff and advisers through submissions and one to one meetings, and it would appear that the case we presented for the West Coast has been listened to. The wide support the association received from our supporters and community strengthened our case.

The association is pleased to note Minister Verrall’s reference to the importance of habitat and the ongoing need for improvement of spawning sites.

One of our central planks in our submissions was that major changes to the whitebait harvest should not be made in the absence of reliable scientific data and the need for further research. This is now firmly on the department’s radar.

The quid pro quo is that as an association, and as individual whitebaiters, we should be prepared to work with the Department to assist in providing that data to ensure sustainability of the resource for the future.

Rob Roney