

OHAU CHANNEL / LAKE ROTORUA – state of the fishery – anglers observations

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Context.

The Ohau Channel was regarded as one of New Zealand's most iconic fisheries. In a New Zealand content Opening Day and the excitement of catching the big fish always drew a focus towards the Ohau Channel (as a fly fisherman). It is referred to in fly fishing books and tourism literature around the world as a New Zealand “must fish” experience.

Ever since trout have been present in Lakes Rotorua & Rotoiti the Ohau Channel has served as a “fish highway” . Empirical evidence exists monitoring fish movements between the lakes and further up the Waiteti and Ngongotaha Streams to spawn.

The Channel fishery comprises three (3) quiet distinct fisheries;

- Lake Rotorua outlet, and extending down the Channel over the upper spawning beds for about 300 meters;
- The lower section from Mourea Bridge to the Rotoiti Delta;
- The Delta.

The decline of the Ohau Channel fishery has clearly and quiet measurably occurred post completion of the Rotoiti diversion. At or around this time the unabated “*out of control*” poaching (drag netting) at the top of the channel have now completely marginalised the fishery through the poaching of heritage spawning fish stock;

The fishery at the top of the Channel now in the main only attracts trout holding off the Lake Rotorua - Ohau “drop off”, there is a distinct absence of Rotoiti trout which is quiet clearly correlated to an absence of smelt runs from Rotoiti;

For those trout that enter the top of the channel to feed / spawn a significant build up of sediment from Lake Rotorua sees them fleeing back into the lake on daybreak, the fish no longer hold in this stretch of water;

The smelt runs up the Channel seem to have almost ceased, these runs would carry with them trout from Rotoiti chasing a plentiful bounty. The large Browns that lived below the Mourea Bridge would also follow these up, returning back down to their holds the next day where they would at night I believe enter Rotoiti to feed on Koura at the delta drop off, again returing into the Channel at night. This plentiful feed source created an absolutely unique variant of the Rotorua Brown trout. With the diversion now in place the feed source and existence of these fish have vanished;

The Delta in its own right was an iconic fishery, providing a unique fly fishing experience in which to catch a trophy Rotoiti trout. The great thing with this area as it could be fished during the day – 2pm was the “magic” hour where by most of the other shore based Rotoiti fly fishing spots would only fish in the hours of darkness. This “gem has now gone;

In considering the above the fly fisher has lost significant angling opportunities. A fishery has been destroyed by human intervention. The frustration is that everyone I have talked to understands the argument and reasons behind the diversion, this is not at question. What is at question though is the inability for a balanced solution to be delivered to enable the fishery to re-establish itself.



OAK Competition Catch Rates – Season Opening

OAK SEASON OPENING CATCH RATES

Year	Trout Weighed by 9.00am	Browns
2014	10	0
2013	19	1
2012	10	0
2011	18	1
2010	19	0
2009	98	12

NOTE: Pre Wall estimate 40/50 fish by 9.00am.

Summary...

My thoughts to address current challenges are;

Acceptance that Rotorua / Rotoiti are an “integrated system” that require an integrated fish management approach. The Channel is the key linkage in this system;

Insertion of fish passes at the point of the delta drop off to facilitate smelt and trout movement between the lakes;

The removal of sediment build up at the top of the channel to enable fish to hold and spawn;

The review of bag limits in the Channel;

The implementation of a robust plan to catch poachers;

Consideration of the upper channel, or Rotorua Lake outlet as a trout stocking / release site;

Implementation of a specific management plan for the Channel fishery, with specific, measurable objectives relating to its reinstatement.