

# Troubled Waters at Whitebait Creek

Foxton Beach locals brace for return of anti-social campers and escalating tensions near Whitebait Creek

**Jacob Brookie**

**W**hile many Foxton Beach locals look forward to whitebait season, for some it's the start of an ordeal which has them thinking of moving away.

Anti-social campers near Whitebait Creek have become a problem during recent seasons, prompting Horowhenua District Council to crack down on illegal camping near the creek, and the Department of Conservation (DoC) to step up ranger patrols.

Whitebait Creek is unique among the region's whitebaiting spots as it flows by urban streets, and while most whitebaiters quietly enjoy their hobby, a few aggressively defend their 'spot'.

"We are dreading when the season starts," an anonymous resident said, describing "regular fights and drug use", and expressing concern about children at makeshift camping spots who do not appear to attend school. They had observed whitebaiting rules were often broken and "many locals who want to go fishing with their children are being bullied away".

Residents also feel trapped in their own homes, with some being verbally abused when walking their dogs. Another resident tried to confront the campers, and was told to go back inside "otherwise windows might get smashed at night".

Residents told Horowhenua Chronicle they've complained to Council and DoC for years about the behaviour, and although staff have attended it has "just gotten worse".

Council has banned freedom camping in the recreation reserve alongside part of Whitebait Creek. Signs will be installed warning campers, and new bollards will



keep vehicles out. The freedom camping ban may be extended if campers set up in nearby areas.

At a recent DoC whitebait season de-brief, Council's Parks and Property Lead Shaun Hester acknowledged residents' complaints, and said illegal camping will be monitored this year.

"If people park on the road, we will deal with that as a traffic issue," he said.

DoC's Principal Investigations Officer

Neal Phillips considers Whitebait Creek to be an "area of concern" and is frustrated about illegal camping at the Creek and the number of calls they receive about fights and broken bottles.

"The most important thing residents can do is call police," he said, but more ranger patrols will visit the Creek this season to ensure whitebaiting rules are followed.

"We try to have a chat with the whitebaiters, but if it gets aggressive we call police".

Foxton Police Station did not reply to the Chronicle's request for comment.

The signage and bollards are scheduled to be installed before the whitebait season starts in September. Residents were relieved at the "great news". Most whitebaiters at the creek enjoy a pleasant day's fishing, and now the residents hope this season will give them a pleasant night's sleep.

## DOC Nets Information About Whitebait

With just 123 days until the whitebait season officially casts off in Horowhenua, a de-brief held at Foxton Beach last month was an opportunity for locals and the Department of Conservation (DoC) to share information and learnings.

DoC has been relying on isolated 'snapshots' of data to gauge the success of each season, and the impact on whitebait, so regional de-briefs with local Councils and conservation groups are proving helpful in finding new areas to check and what to work on in preparation for upcoming seasons.

This season will feature new waterside signage and national campaigns on biosecurity, keeping safe around the water and the reasons behind whitebait rules. Local rangers will encourage whitebaiters to share details of their catches and experiences, as well as discussing ways to educate whitebaiters about their catch.

Pre-season updates will be shared on the Wildlife Foxton Trust's Facebook page, as well as through the Department of Conservation's Facebook and DoC rangers.