

Tauranga-Taupō River spin fishing survey: Summary of results.

June 2026.

Introduction.

We proposed to introduce spin fishing along a limited section of the Tauranga-Taupō River below the State Highway 1 road bridge. This specific section was identified as underutilised by anglers. Following conflicting feedback from the angling community we decided to run a survey to better understand community sentiment.

The survey has taken place and the data analysed. This report presents the results. At this stage, no decisions have been made and there is no time pressure to progress this work – the earliest a regulation change could be introduced is 1 July 2027.

Methodology.

An online survey was publicly available for approximately two weeks (13 March to 29 March 2026) and delivered using MS Forms. All responses were anonymous, allowing participants to freely share their views and also satisfy Government privacy guidelines. The number of survey questions were kept to a minimum, allowing most people to complete the survey in 5 to 6 minutes.

Questions were carefully structured to encourage participants to share their experience fishing in the Taupō Fishing District and to consider broader fishery management issues including the long-term sustainability of the Taupo fishery, where challenges such as recruiting new anglers are important.

The survey is viewed as part of the decision-making process. The survey does not solely determine an outcome. However, it does offer a valuable insight into angler opinions, beyond the views often reflected on social media.

Survey results.

There were 1,110 responses, with a considerable majority of people holding some form of Taupō Season fishing licence. Resident and non-resident Season licence holders made up 88% of respondents, demonstrating their support for the Taupō Fishing District (Fig.1).

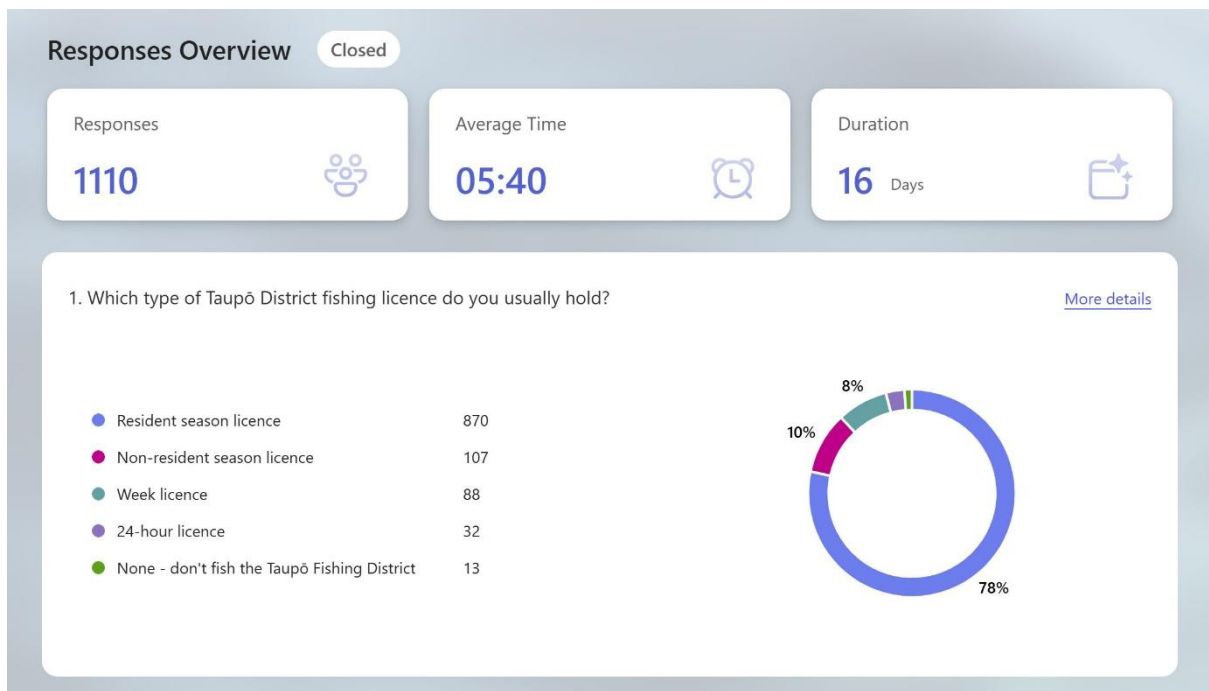


Figure 1. Overview and Taupō fishing licences.

This commitment was also reflected in the number of years respondents had fished in the Taupō Fishing District, with 89% of anglers fishing here for more than 5 years (9% fished for 5 to 10 years, 80% fished for over 10 years) (Fig 2).

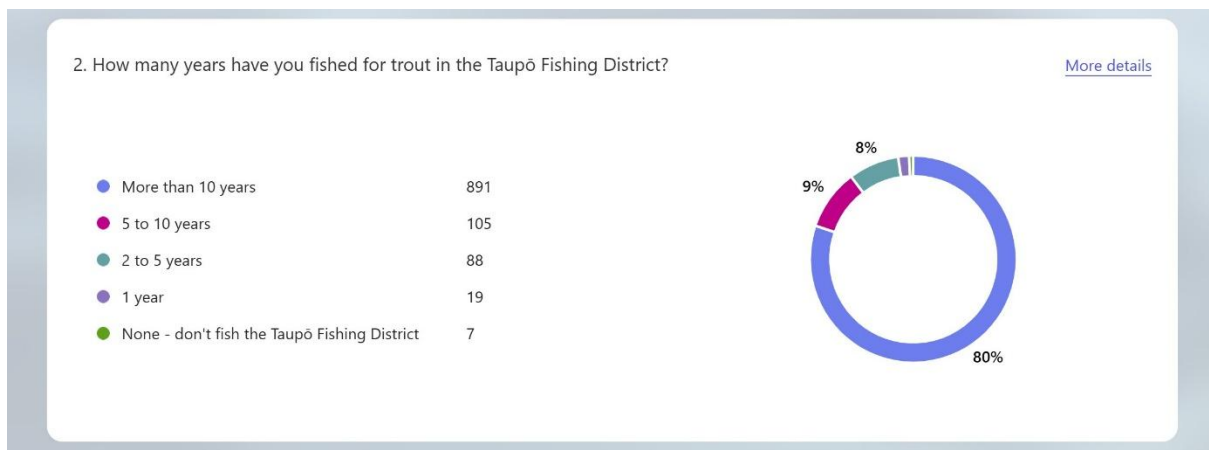


Figure 2. Years fishing in the Taupō Fishing District.

The survey indicated 45% of respondents fished the Tauranga-Taupō River either frequently or very frequently (37% and 8% respectively) (Fig 3). According to respondents, the section of the Tauranga-Taupō River below the SH1 road bridge was fished far less frequently. Most responses (83%) stated they never, rarely or very rarely fished there (45%, 18% and 20% respectively) (Fig. 4). These figures align with a previous study focussed on angling pressure at this location.

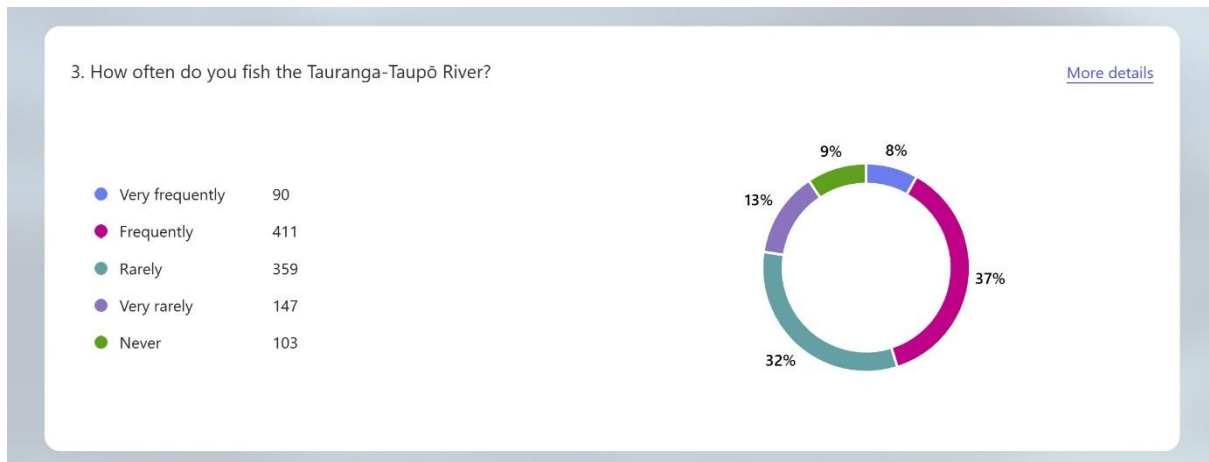


Figure 3. How often do you fish the Tauranga-Taupō River?

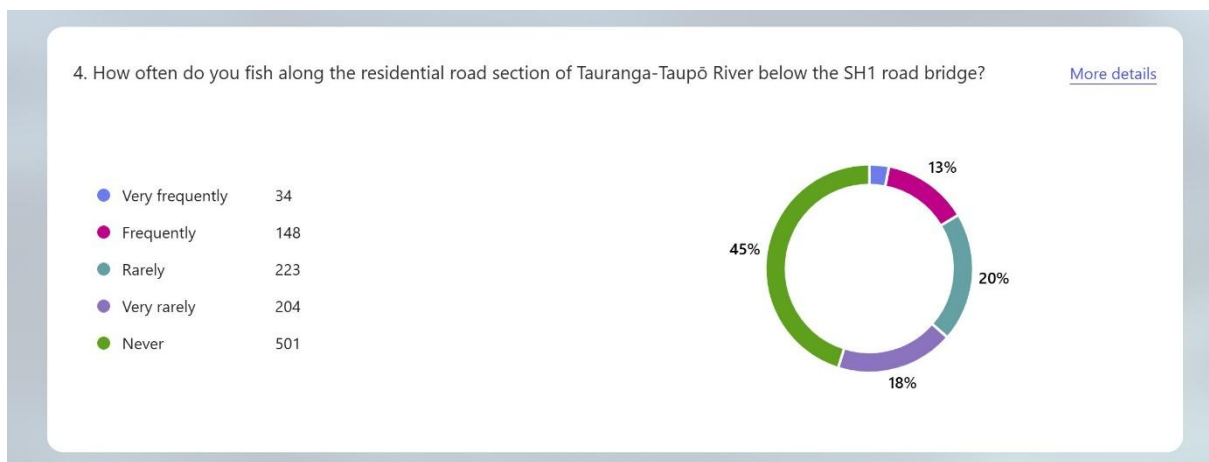


Figure 4. How often do you fish the section below SH1.

There was a more even split when it came to taking children fishing. Most anglers (31%) never take children or grandchildren fishing with them, while a significant number either do so frequently (24%) or rarely (23%). This likely reflects the varied nature of anglers and touches on the individual motivations for going fishing. Many seek the peace and solitude associated with trout fishing while others enjoy a more social experience, including teaching children to fish (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Take children fishing?

The age at which respondents started fishing was spread fairly evenly across options, with the largest number starting between the ages of 6 and 12 years of age (38%). Only 2 people had not started freshwater fishing (Fig 6).

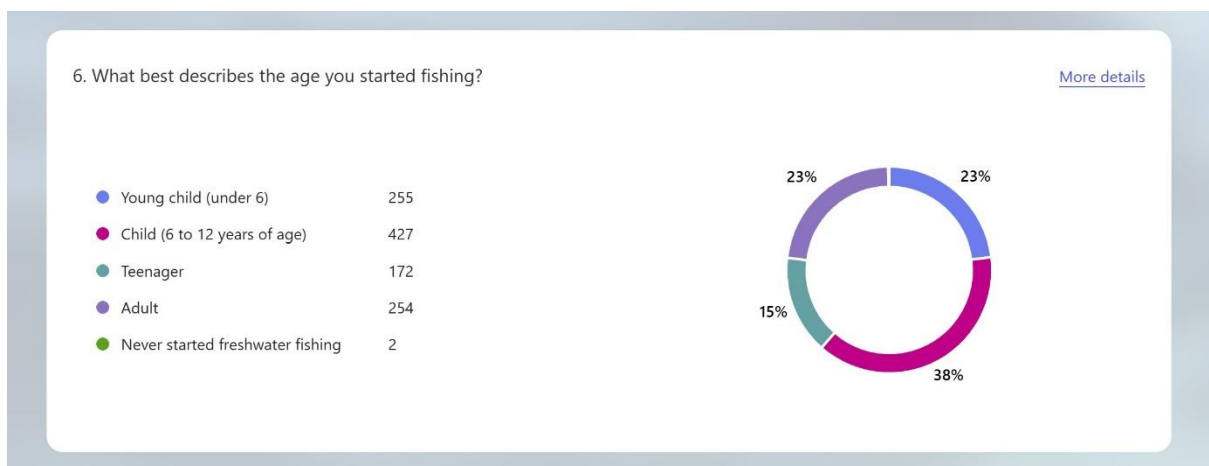


Figure 6. Age started fishing?

When it came to strength of feeling around issues impacting the Taupō fishery, protecting the future of the fishery was almost universally supported, with virtually all respondents identifying it as extremely important or very important. Encouraging children to start fishing also featured strongly. The most divisive issue was the idea to offer spin fishing as an introduction to trout fishing. A majority supported this approach, but a significant number were opposed to it (Fig 7).

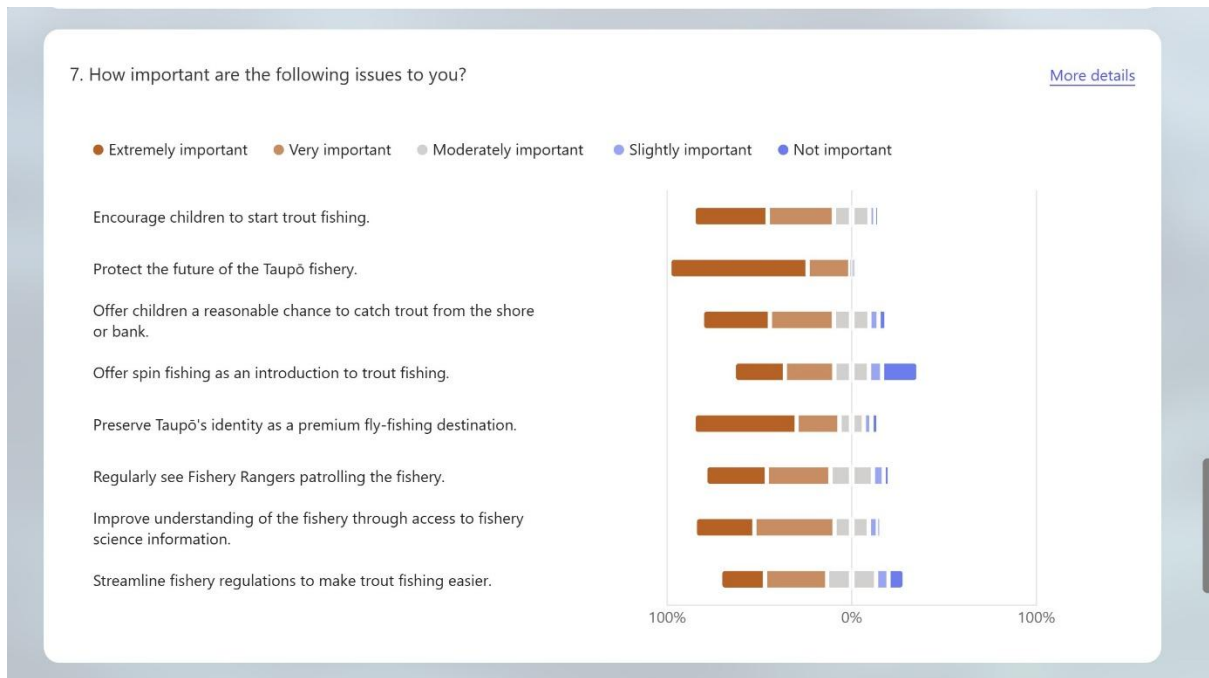


Figure 7. How important are specific issues?

There were 995 responses to the question asking about where children and new anglers might go to have a realistic chance of catching a trout. This prompted a wide variety of answers but there were some popular themes. Some respondents referenced the limited section of the Tauranga-Taupō River below SH1. Many suggested boat fishing on Lake Taupō or fly-fishing the many river mouths. Lake Kuratau featured regularly, as did the Tokaanu tailrace. The kids fishing days at the Tongariro National Trout Centre also featured strongly.

Most respondents (68%) supported the proposal to allow spin fishing along a clearly defined and limited section of the lower Tauranga-Taupō River below the SH1 road bridge (Fig 8). Support for the proposal remained steady, with little shift or deviation over the survey period.

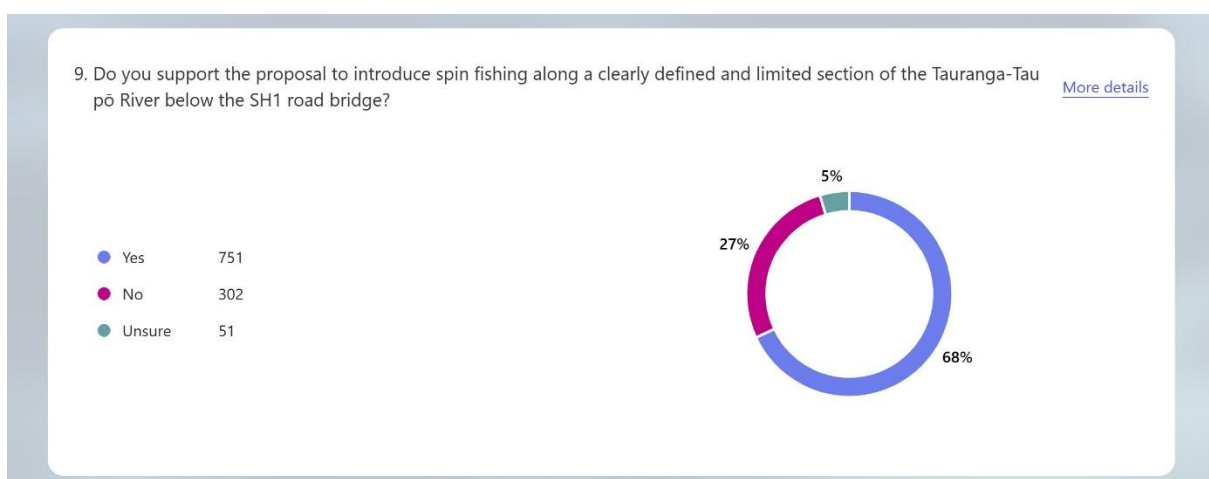


Figure 8. Support for proposal.

The last question asked respondents to share any further information that might be relevant to this issue. Of the 1,110 completed survey responses, nearly half (524) chose to provide a written comment (Fig 9).

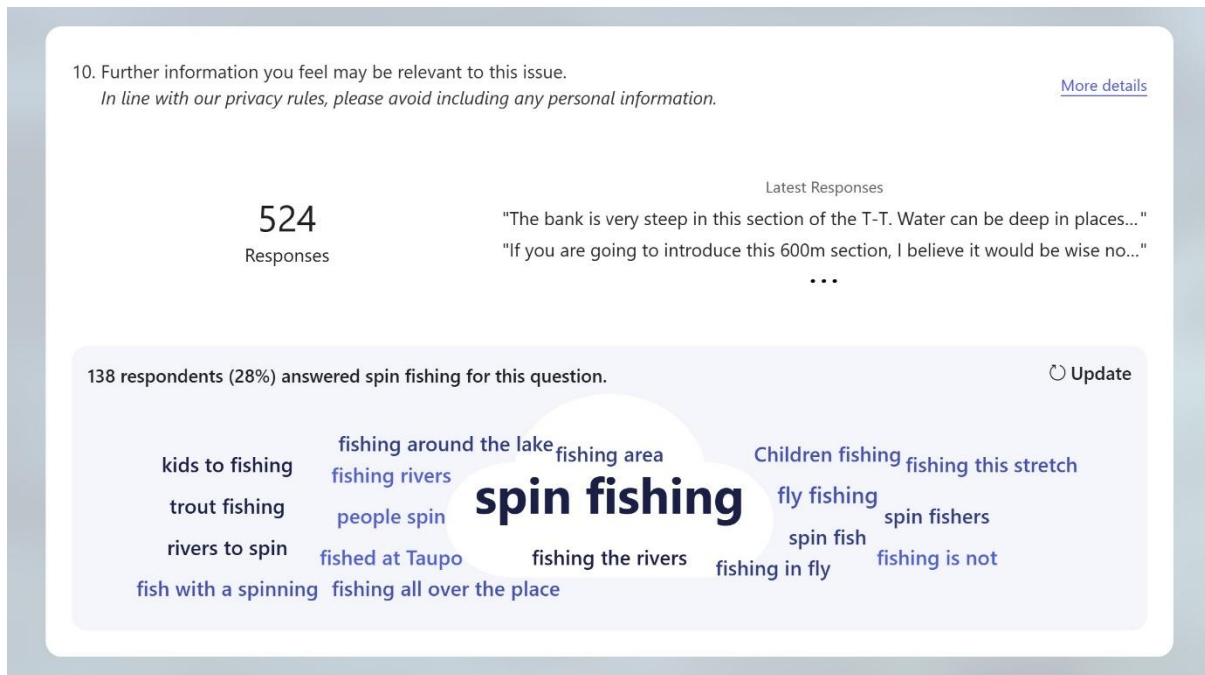


Figure 9. Further information.

It was important to consider this qualitative information in detail, so a specific analysis of the responses to this final question was conducted. Details are set out in the next section of this summary.

Analysis of respondent comments.

Comments were categorised into a series of regularly occurring themes. These key themes were ranked by estimated prevalence and backed with associated primary concerns and example quotes from the related comments. A core idea was also linked to each theme to assist with understanding the relationship between themes. It should be noted that many individual comments touched on various issues so contributed to multiple themes.

The themes are as follows:

1. Youth Engagement and Child-Focused Access

- Broad agreement on the importance of:
 - Getting children into fishing
 - Making it easier for children to succeed
 - Calls to restrict rules to children/limited groups
- Spin fishing seen by many as an accessible gateway method

Examples:

- “Anything that encourages kids to fish is worthwhile.”
- “Make it only for children under 12 or 14.”
- “Adults should only be supervising, not actively fishing.”
- “A junior licence endorsement would work well.”

Core idea: **Encourage child participation with age limits.**

2. Protecting Taupō’s Fly-Fishing Identity

- Strong concern about maintaining Taupō as a world-renowned fly fishing only fishery.
- Fear that allowing spin fishing is the “thin edge of the wedge” that could erode this identity.
- Emphasis on preserving tradition, uniqueness, and reputation.

Example comments:

- “Taupō rivers should remain fly fishing only—this is what makes them world renowned.”
- “Don’t dilute the uniqueness of the fishery for convenience.”
- “We risk losing something internationally special if spin fishing creeps into rivers.”

Core idea: **Fishery identity and reputation outweigh changes.**

3. Calls for Careful Implementation or Trial

- Many respondents suggest:
 - Trial periods with review (“sunset clause”)
 - Strict limits on location and timing
 - Clear rules (e.g., single hooks, catch limits)
- Others oppose immediate change but stress need for clear communication.

Example comments:

- “Run it as a two-year trial with evaluation.”
- “Only allow it in a clearly defined section with strict boundaries.”
- “Use single hooks only and apply catch limits.”
- “Introduce strong signage and review before expanding.”

Core idea: **If implemented, it should be controlled, temporary, and monitored.**

4. Risk of Rule Breaches and Non-Compliance

- Widespread concern that a change will lead to:
 - Spin fishing spreading beyond approved areas
 - Increased illegal fishing and confusion about rules
- Many note existing issues with rule-breaking already occurring

Example comments:

- “This is the thin end of the wedge—next it will be everywhere.”
- “People already spin fish illegally—this will make it worse.”
- “Visitors will assume spin fishing is allowed in all rivers.”

Core idea: **Loss of clear, simple rules leading to increasing illegal activity.**

5. Environmental and Fishery Impact Concerns

- Concerns include:
 - Impact on spawning runs and migrating fish
 - Increased harvest pressure
 - Potential trout injury from lures (e.g., treble hooks)
- Some also mention declining fish health and broader fishery pressures

Example comments:

- “All spawning fish pass through this section—too much pressure there.”
- “Spin fishing could impact fish migrating upstream.”
- “Treble hooks and high catch rates could damage fish stocks.”

Core idea: **Protecting trout spawning success, fish stock and health.**

6. Enforcement and Compliance Challenges

- Repeated comments that rules would be:
 - Difficult to enforce
 - Require more ranger presence

- Calls for:
 - Clear signage
 - Strong compliance and penalties
 - Regular patrols

Example comments:

- “You don’t have the manpower to police this properly.”
- “Signage alone won’t stop people breaking the rules.”
- “Needs constant ranger presence or it will fail.”

Core idea: **Policy change without enforcement equals ineffective regulation.**

7. Conflict Between Angler Groups

- Anticipated or existing tension between:
 - Fly fishers vs spin fishers
- Concerns about:
 - Crowding
 - Interference with fishing methods
 - Loss of traditional experience

Example comments:

- “Spin fishers will interfere with fly anglers.”
- “This will create conflict in shared spaces.”
- “Fly fishing experience will be degraded.”

Core idea: **Different fishing styles competing for the same water.**

8. Alternative Ways to Introduce Beginners

- Many suggest not changing river rules, but instead using:
 - Trout hatchery / trout centre
 - Lake shoreline or boat fishing
 - Guides, clubs, and education programmes
- View that beginners already have sufficient opportunities elsewhere

Example comments:

- “Use the trout hatchery—perfect for beginners.”
- “There’s plenty of opportunity on the lake already.”
- “Join a club or use guides rather than changing regulations.”

Core idea: **Existing pathways already provide beginner access to trout fishing.**

9. Safety and Access Issues

- Specific concerns about the proposed location:
 - Steep banks and difficult fish landing
 - Risks for children (falling, water hazards)
- Calls for:
 - Safer access points
 - Water safety measures (e.g., life jackets)

Example comments:

- “Steep banks make landing fish dangerous for kids.”
- “Access needs to be improved—too much blackberry and unstable footing.”
- “Children could easily fall in trying to net a fish.”

Core idea: **Current location may not be suitable without improvements.**

The information captured from the replies to Question 10 reveal a critical tension between respondents. There is a general consensus around encouraging young anglers, however, this is balanced by the high concern around protecting fly fishing within the Taupō District.

Many of the concerned views could be accommodated within the existing proposal and the current fishing regulations, while others require more consideration.

While the comments alone do not offer a clear mandate for change, they do suggest a possible pathway towards a carefully designed proposal with additional limitations.

Summary

The number of responses to the survey and the quantity of people who chose to provide further comment, demonstrates the keen interest in this issue. We were pleased that people took the time to share their views, including a large proportion of very experienced anglers who regularly fish in the Taupō Fishing District.

Responses confirmed the lower section of the Tauranga-Taupō River is not a highly used resource for most fly anglers, yet there is a minority who fish it and feel passionately about it.

The answers to Question 9 “Do you support the proposal...” demonstrates a clear majority of respondents are in favour of the current proposal. However, the important feedback offered in the replies to question 10 provide a more nuanced view.

Concerns about the potential to undermine the reputation of the Taupō Fishing District as an internationally famous fly fishing destination are genuinely and passionately expressed. We recognise those sentiments and strongly believe the reputation of the fishery would not be compromised by introducing spin fishing along a small, limited, underutilised section of the Tauranga-Taupō River. This concern appears to be more focussed on the idea that other sections of river within the Taupō District would be open to spin fishing. This is not intended.

Calls for careful implementation and a trial period are also easily accommodated within the existing proposal.

We acknowledge there might be a risk of some anglers breaking the rules and this must be countered by regular patrols by Fishery Rangers. Treble hooks are already illegal throughout the Taupō Fishing District and spin fishing is limited, so Rangers are aware of these issues.

The ‘fishery impact’ concerns reflect a fear that a much higher number of trout will be caught in the lower river by spin fishers compared to fly fishers - resulting in a degradation of fishing upstream. Given the very high numbers of trout that run the Tauranga-Taupō River (as evidenced by escapement counts/drift dives) that is highly unlikely. If there was any reduction in the quality of fishing upstream, the regulations could quickly revert.

Looking ahead, the survey suggests the clearest pathway with the greatest support is one that focuses on controlled, child-focused spin fishing, with strict boundaries and good enforcement. This is backed by the core idea captured from the most prevalent theme **‘Encourage youth participation with age limits’**.

There is no pressure to make a quick decision. The next realistic opportunity to introduce regulation change will be July 2027, therefore we will carefully consider what this survey has told us before making any further proposals.