

RMCA Council Report 2024

It would be an understatement to say that the Ruapehu mountain clubs, and indeed the wider Ruapehu community, are facing a period of ongoing uncertainty. This season, the uncertainty has been compounded by lower-than-average snowfall across both fields, reducing skiable terrain. However, non-skiing visitor numbers at Whakapapa have been steady, which is good news.

In March, the government agreed to provide RAL with \$7 million to ensure the 2024 ski season went ahead. At the time, Regional Development Minister Shane Jones stated it was RAL's final opportunity to find a commercially viable solution for Whakapapa. The government also provided \$3.05 million in equity and loan funding to support the sale of Tūroa ski field assets to Pure Tūroa Ltd (PTL).

In April, DOC granted PTL a concession to operate Tūroa Ski Area. While opinions on the split of the ski fields vary within the ski community, the granting of the concession to PTL offered some certainty for the future operations of the ski field, which is vitally important to the local community and snow sports in the North Island.

Just as this report was being written, we're pleased to advise that Calibre Partners are in negotiations with Whakapapa Holdings Limited (WHL) for the purchase of Whakapapa. While a deal has not been finalised, WHL and the Receivers have agreed to commence an application for a new DOC concession to operate Whakapapa. These are the same steps that Pure Tūroa went through in its acquisition of Tūroa Ski Area earlier in the year. Negotiations are ongoing and any transaction will require a concession to be granted, alongside any other approvals.

Stakeholder Meetings

Formal stakeholder meetings with DOC and Whakapapa village entities were reinstated this year after a hiatus. These meetings focus on operational matters affecting Whakapapa and Iwikau residents. Other meetings between RMCA and DOC are held on an as-needed basis. A similar arrangement is in place with RAL Whakapapa management. Council members have also established contact with the management of Pure Tūroa.

We'd like to give a big shout out to the staff at both fields - reports from club members and the community about service levels have been positive this season despite the challenging conditions.

Marketing

As with any membership organisation, clubs need to actively work to maintain members and attract new ones. The Ruapehu mountain clubs offer a unique experience at an accessible price point for most. There are few places in the world where members and visitors can experience the magic of staying, skiing, and climbing on the slopes of a volcano in a dual world heritage area.

RMCA has a modest marketing plan in place to raise awareness of the clubs at Ruapehu and to highlight that they are open to anyone with an interest in mountain activities. This year, we began by refreshing the 'look and feel' of the RMCA website. We were fortunate to gain access to artwork commissioned by RAL of every club lodge at Whakapapa. These formed the basis of the "Join a Club" section of the RMCA website. Each illustration is accompanied by a brief summary of the club's offerings with a link to their website. Although we don't yet have illustrations for Tukino and Tūroa buildings, descriptions and links are still included. It's a work in progress.

We also worked closely with RAL pre-season to promote clubs to schools planning to attend NIPS racing. Unfortunately, this event was cancelled due to challenging snow conditions at the time.

Council Changes

Angus Winstone and Jude Hamblyn stepped into acting co-president roles after the premature passing of Linda Danen last year. Linda left big shoes to fill – as many of you holding officer positions on club committees will know, these voluntary roles come with considerable time commitment and responsibility.

Late last year, we farewelled councillor Sam Towles as he went overseas and welcomed new councillors Phill Thomass (RSC) and Debbie Evans (Ngauruhoe Ski Club) to RMCA. This year, Angus Winstone and Jude Hamblyn are stepping down from RMCA Council along with Sam Bunge and Liza Fitzsimmons. Thanks to the outgoing councillors for their work over the years and welcome to the incoming RMCA Council.

There are undoubtedly challenges ahead for the club community, compounded this year by lower snow and ongoing uncertainty around the ownership and operations at Whakapapa. We know some clubs might be finding things tough at the moment. If your club needs help in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out to RMCA.

RMCA Council