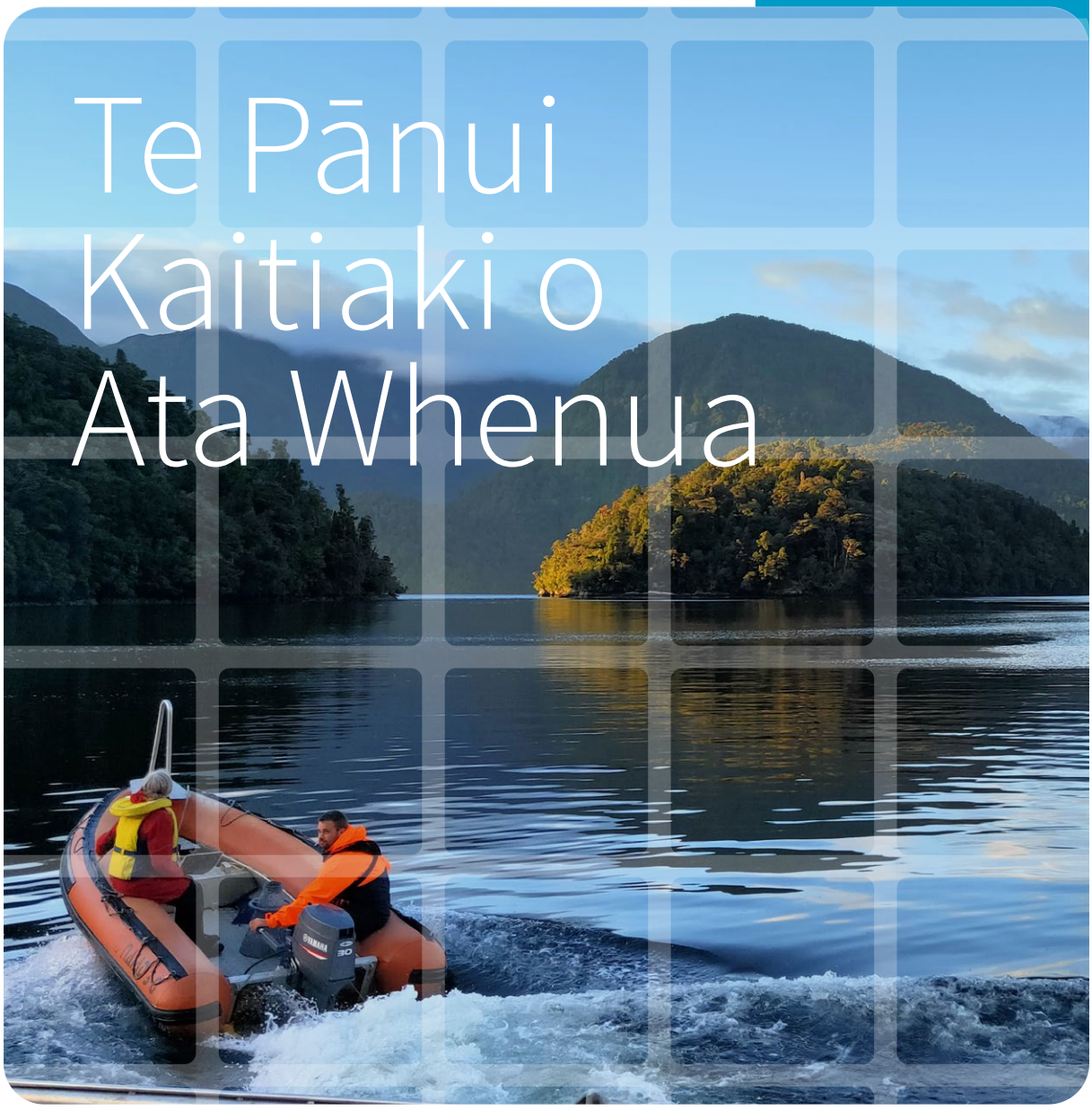
Nov 2026 | Issue 16

Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua



In this issue, we hear about the important work carried out by Southland's marine biosecurity ambassadors, as well as provide a timely refresher of the fishing rules and regulations for summer. You'll also find an update on hāpuku tagging, and learn about a smart tool for managing biofouling risk. We begin by introducing the newest Guardian, Jason Haggerty. We wish you a safe, relaxing and fun summer. As always, we welcome your feedback and thank you for your continued interest and support.

Fiordland Marine Guardians
Beneath the Reflections

Meet the Guardians

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are an advisory committee that works with government agencies and Ministers to manage the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA). Jason Haggerty joined as a Guardian in July 2026, taking over from Mark Peychers. A cray fisher's son, Jason has spent nearly every summer of his life in the fiords and has fished there full time for almost two decades. We started by asking about his first memory of the place.

When did you first visit Fiordland and what were your first impressions?

It was around 1995 or 1996 - we were on a family trip with my siblings and cousins aboard our 39-foot fishing boat. The weather was fantastic, we were catching hāpuku and it was idyllic. The sheer size of the place blew me away.

Fishing was hard in those days while the industry rebuilt the CRA8 crayfish fishery, so Dad was at sea a lot. Getting to see the place that kept him away was pretty special, and I have wanted it to be my backyard ever since.

Is there one place in Fiordland that is particularly special to you?

George Sound, without a doubt. That's where we had our holidays on the boat as kids, and it's still where we base ourselves when family or friends visit.

Dad used to shelter there every second night, and now I do the same. There's so much to explore: Alice Falls, the South West Arm, Anchorage Cove and the Whitewater.

When did you start working as a commercial fisher?

I spent time being on the boat from about 8 until I left school at 16, then trained as a chef with Real Journeys at Walter Peak and in their off-season, I'd be on the boat with Dad.

I loved chefing, but Fiordland was more appealing. I resigned the day I qualified and within a month I was fishing full time back in 2008.

Have you noticed any changes in the time you've been working in Fiordland?

The cray fishery has gone from strength to strength through fantastic management. When I started, 300 kilos out of 150 pots was a big day. Today with that amount of effort you'd wonder if it was worth being there. Blue cod are going the other way, though, which is a concern.

Access to the fiords has changed a lot too. When I started, only a few recreational boats got in around Milford, now they are everywhere, even 100km down south. My mindset has always been that once you're through the Homer Tunnel, you're on your own. People forget that now because they can just push a button, but a rescue in Fiordland weather puts other people at risk too.

What compelled you to get involved with the Guardians?

I've always been passionate about what I do. We make a living from Fiordland, and you can't just take something without giving something back. When Mark was finishing up, I felt it was my time.

I want to protect what we have for future generations, so it was a no-brainer to put my hat in the ring.

What other professional or volunteer roles have you had that equip you for your governance role as a Guardian?

I race powerboats and have served on the Lake Dunstan, South Island and national committees, the latter as Vice President of the NZ power boat association.

I've also been on the CRA8 board for about 10 years. When a seat came up, John Steffens encouraged me and a couple of others to stand after talking us through the role and its responsibilities. It was decided by a vote, so I had to make my case like any other candidate. Seeing the bigger


Jason Haggerty

picture of our industry and helping protect what we've fought so hard to get is really rewarding.

What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing the Fiordland Marine Area?

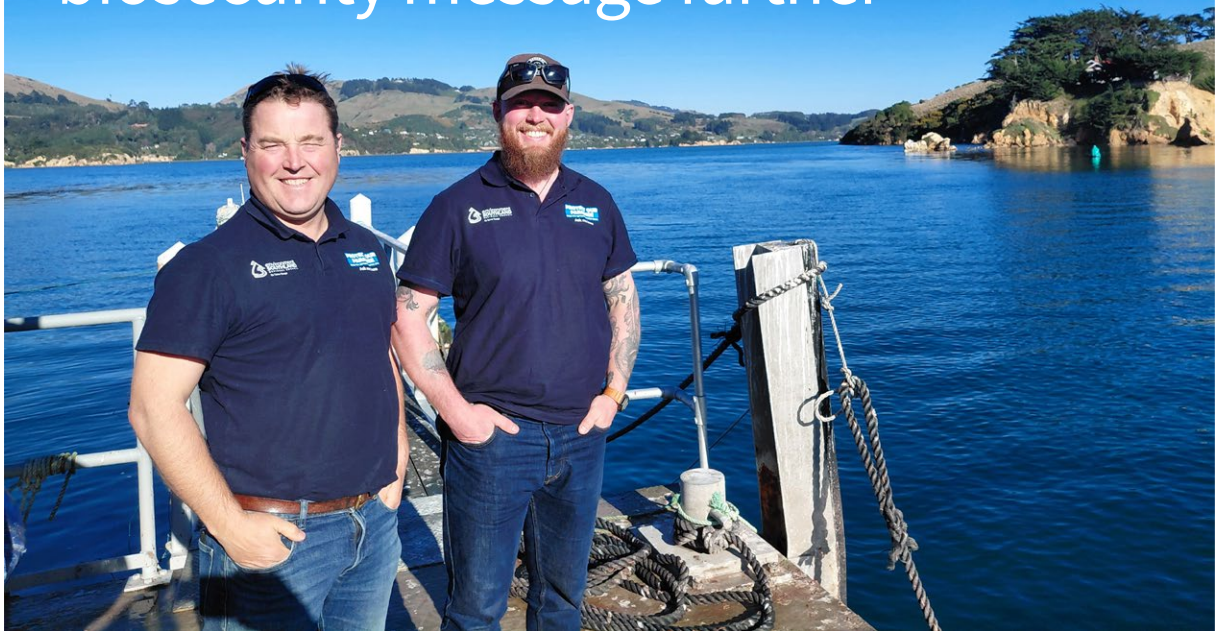
Biosecurity is a big one. The Clean Vessel Pass gives a lot of protection, but one dirty hull is all it takes. *Undaria* has been a real frustration, and we don't want to see anything like it again.

The other is pressure on the fisheries. Apart from crayfish, the iconic fisheries have declined and need managing so they recover. Fiordland is easier to get to than ever, and some people want to take advantage of that, so we all need to be mindful of the consequences of greed.

Finally, what's your favourite kaimoana?

Hāpuku. You can't beat it fresh, and I'm not very good at catching them, so landing one is brilliant! Crayfish is a close second.

Marine ambassadors take biosecurity message further



The success of Murihiku Southland's Marine Biosecurity Ambassador Programme is continuing into a second year, with the programme expanding to two ambassadors and reaching beyond Fiordland's borders.

The programme is a partnership between Environment Southland and Biosecurity New Zealand, supporting the national Protect our Paradise marine biosecurity campaign. Following the success of last summer's pilot, further funding has been secured to continue and expand the programme this year.

John Carter returns as an ambassador for a second summer, joined by new ambassador Jacob Barrett.

Jacob is already familiar with Southland's efforts in the marine biosecurity space, having worked as a Dive Trip Lead for the past four years, including as part of the Fiordland *Undaria* Control Programme.

"I am just awestruck by the beautiful marine habitats in Fiordland, truly some of the best in the world," Jacob says.

"It's so important that we dedicate ourselves to preserving the areas that we have left; not only by direct action with invasive species, but with plenty of public outreach and education."

As Marine Ambassadors, Jacob and John will visit boat ramps, businesses, events and communities, talking to people about marine biosecurity and the ways they can help protect our special places.

Environment Southland Team Leader Marine, Kathryn McLachlan, says the face-to-face approach has proved invaluable in reaching people where they are.

"Having ambassadors out there talking directly to boaties and communities has been incredibly worthwhile. They're able to have those conversations, answer questions and build connections that can make a real difference."

This year, the programme will also extend its reach into neighbouring regions, particularly at key locations where vessels heading to Fiordland are likely to pass through.

Environment Southland is working with regional partners, including southern councils without their own ambassador programme, to identify opportunities for further outreach at events, businesses and potentially boat ramps.

The aim is to make sure people know what they need to do to protect Fiordland before they arrive, including applying for a Fiordland Clean Vessel Pass ahead of their journey.

By taking the Protect our Paradise message beyond Fiordland, the ambassadors are helping ensure visitors understand the steps they can take to protect the places they have come to enjoy – before they launch, not after they arrive.

With two ambassadors now on the ground, the programme has an even greater opportunity to build connections, encourage good biosecurity practices and help keep Fiordland's marine environment free from new pests.

Planning to fish in the fiords? Here's what you need to know

To make your fishing expeditions in the Fiordland Marine Area memorable for the right reasons, check the Fiordland recreational fishing rules to ensure you're doing your bit to fish sustainably, says Ian Henderson, Fisheries New Zealand's acting Regional Manager South.

"Fiordland is a challenging, unique, and popular fishing destination, loved by locals and visitors alike," Mr Henderson says.

"Despite its remoteness and expansive waters, fish stocks for many popular inshore species need careful management due to low recruitment, poor habitat productivity and fishing harvest pressure.

"Fisheries New Zealand works closely with the Fiordland Marine Guardians to set and monitor appropriate catch limits to ensure the ongoing sustainability of Fiordland's fisheries and the wider marine environment."

The Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area covers the waters between Awarua Point and Sand Hill Point, extending 12 nautical miles offshore. It has unique fishing rules that differ depending on which area of Fiordland you are fishing in.

There are three defined areas that have different finfish and shellfish bag limits, and no daily accumulation.

In the coastal waters outside of the fiords, there is a combined bag limit of 20 finfish – which includes a maximum of 10 blue cod and 3 groper – and a limit of 5 pāua per fisher.

Inside the headlands of the fiords, the combined bag limit is 10 – including 1 blue cod and 1 groper – and a limit of 2 pāua per fisher.

The Internal Waters of each fiord have a ban on all commercial fishing, and conservative recreational fishing rules. For example, no take of groper is allowed, and the Internal Waters of Milford Sound/ Piopiotahi is closed to blue cod fishing.

There are also 10 marine reserves in the Fiordland Marine Area administered by the Department of Conservation that are closed to all fishing and gathering.



"These are not the full recreational fishing rules for the area," says Mr Henderson.

"So, it's vitally important that fishers check the rules for where they will be fishing each trip by getting the free NZ Fishing Rules app before they leave home, or by downloading the Fiordland Marine Area brochure from the Fisheries Zealand website at www.fisheries.govt.nz/rules.

"Fishers are responsible for knowing the rules for where they are fishing. Ignorance of the rules will not stop you from getting a fine if you break them."

If you hook an undersize or unwanted fish, take appropriate care to immediately release them into the water to help make sure they survive to breed the next generation of fish.

"Fisheries New Zealand has responsible fishing guidelines available on our website at https://www.mpi.govt.nz/responsiblefishing*, which we recommend all fishers familiarise themselves with to ensure they're doing the right thing for our fisheries and seabirds,"* Mr Henderson says.

"All fishers out on the fiords this summer can do their bit to help keep fisheries sustainable, and to ensure that they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations for years to come."

Hāpuku tagging project delivers promising results for Fiordland

In the June edition of our newsletter, we reported on plans for a collaborative hāpuku tagging project involving the Fiordland Marine Guardians, DOC, Auckland Museum and the Tindale Marine Research Charitable Trust. We're pleased to report that the project has now been completed, with some interesting early results.



Juvenile hāpuku (Polyprion oxygeneios) on measure mat with Tindale Marine Research Charitable Trust Inshore Tagging Program Hallprint PDS single barb plastic-tipped dart tag inserted below spinous dorsal fin (Image: Scott Tindale, Fanny Bay, Dusky Sound, 17 June 2026).

In June 2026, researchers joined DOC's Southern Winds to undertake a dedicated tagging expedition throughout Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. Over ten days, the team fished 47 sites and caught 477 fish using large round barbless hooks, tagging 371 of them. This included only 67 hāpuku (66 tagged) but still made it one of the largest hāpuku tagging efforts undertaken in Fiordland to date.

The hāpuku caught ranged from 52 to 84 cm in length, with almost all being juveniles.

All tagged hāpuku were released successfully, showing no signs of barotrauma and swam away strongly after release.

The team also recorded four hāpuku recaptures. One fish, originally tagged in Shark Cove in October 2025, was recaptured

Did you know that hāpuku mature at ~80-85cm and can live for over 60 years? Juveniles are pelagic and settle in to demersal habitats at ~50-67cm and 3-4 years of age.

For most people, seeing a hāpuku in the flesh is a rare and fortunate experience, often limited to the memories of those who remember a time when fish stocks were far more plentiful.

Luckily, in the fiords, especially the Moana Uta (Wet Jacket Arm) Marine Reserve it is once again possible to get to see hāpuku swimming around at the surface. This is a real privilege and potentially shows that the reserve is working well for this species, but as always with privilege comes responsibility.

Please remember that as tempting as it may be, attracting fish with bait in a marine reserve is not permitted and may also have some unintended consequences, especially with seven gilled sharks being attracted too.

Enjoy the chance to see these species but please be respectful.

eight months later in the same location. The fish appeared healthy and showed no signs of infection around the tag site, providing valuable evidence that juvenile hāpuku can survive capture, tagging and release, and may remain within relatively small areas of the fiords for extended periods.

The success of this trial provides researchers with a strong foundation for future work. Additional tagging, including the use of satellite tags, could help answer important questions about hāpuku movements, habitat use and spawning migrations both within and beyond Fiordland.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians thank the Auckland Museum, the Tindale Marine Research Charitable Trust, Fisheries New Zealand, and the crew of Southern Winds for their support of this important project.

If you catch a tagged fish

As more fish are tagged, reports from recreational and commercial fishers become increasingly valuable.

If you encounter a tagged fish:

- Record the tag number.
- Note the date, location and fish length.
- If possible, record the capture depth and any observations about the fish's condition.
- Report the information to the Tindale Marine Research Charitable Trust.

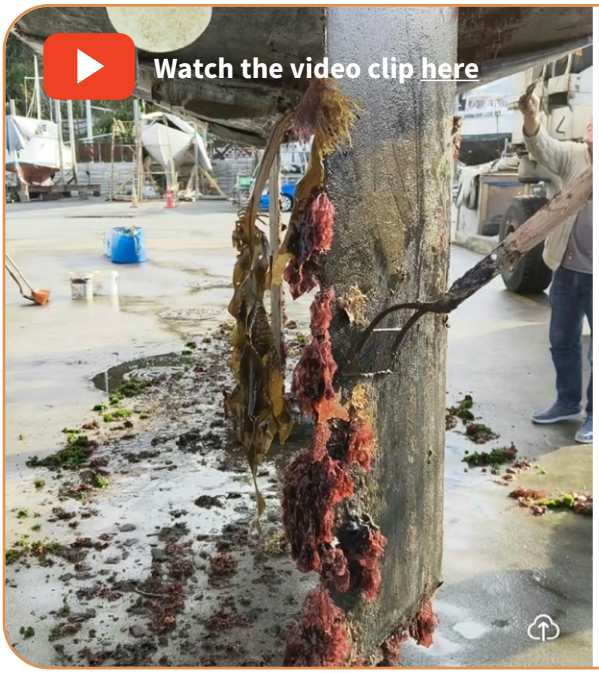
Thank you to Pure Salt for recently reporting a hāpuku bycatch that they caught in Tamatea/Dusky Sound!

While the hāpuku fishery is closed in the internal waters, any bycatch fish should be released carefully. Avoid "venting" fish by puncturing the swim bladder. Fish that show no signs of barotrauma can often be released simply by supporting them upright in the water until they swim away. If a fish is unable to descend, a release weight or release clip should be used to return it to depth.



Detail of tag (T33728) and tag site of 73 cm fork length hāpuku (Polyprion oxygeneios) recaptured in Shark Cove, Dusky Sound, on 17 June 2026. This fish was tagged in Shark Cove on 9 October 2025.

Every tag or recapture data returned helps build a clearer picture of how Fiordland's hāpuku populations are recovering and contributes to the long-term management of one of New Zealand's most remarkable marine species.



Smart tool for managing biofouling risk

When a boat sits in the water, marine pests such as *Undaria* or Mediterranean fanworm can grow among biofouling on its hull, and then when it's moved they get a ride to a new location.

A new video shows the Level of Fouling Scale is a useful tool that biosecurity managers can use to deal with this biosecurity risk. Developed through decades of science, policy and frontline biosecurity work, the Scale provides a simple, consistent way to assess biofouling on a vessel and whether action is needed.

Who to contact if you see something that doesn't look right

Fiordland and the wider Southland region cover a vast and often remote area, which makes our community's local knowledge one of its best protections. Environment Southland and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Fisheries New Zealand are grateful to everyone who takes the time to report possible unlawful activity. Your observations really do make a difference.

Environment Southland

The sooner the Resource Management team hears about an issue, the more they can do. A report made at the time gives them the best chance to respond and get a good outcome. If you see possible unlawful activity, please contact the team directly:

- 24/7 pollution hotline: 0800 76 8845
- Website
- The Antenno app

MPI Fisheries New Zealand

Reports from people on the water and in our coastal communities help Fishery Officers act quickly and protect our fisheries. A prompt report gives officers the best opportunity to assess the situation, gather evidence and take action. If you see or suspect fisheries offending, please call the MPI Fisheries Compliance Hotline, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
0800 4 POACHER (0800 476 224)

Where you can, please include:

- Location and time
- Vessel or vehicle descriptions and registration numbers
- Photographs
- A description of what you saw

Not sure whether an offence has occurred? Report it anyway. Every piece of information helps officers spot patterns, support investigations and respond in time.

Thank you for helping protect Fiordland for current and future generations.

Fiordland Marine Area: Community Drop-In Session

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are coming to Te Anau.

Do you have any concerns about the Fiordland Marine Area?

Do you see any opportunities for the Guardians to consider?

We want to hear locals' ideas on how we can:

- reach boaties with important messages as they plan their next trip
- monitor fish stocks and ecosystem health
- advocate for the FMA in the new resource management planning system
- and what climate change might mean for the place

We invite you to pop in and chat - we'd love to meet locals who are passionate about the future of the Fiordland Marine Area.

Where: Black Dog Bar, Te Anau

When: Thursday 12 November, 5pm – 6.30pm

If you can't make it but have some thoughts to share, please sing out: info@fmg.org.nz

Heading to Fiordland this summer?

Be prepared



Hold a clean vessel pass

Applying for a clean vessel pass is a simple process that can be completed online at www.es.govt.nz/fmpp or by calling Environment Southland on **0800 76 88 45** to receive a hard copy form.

Your clean vessel pass comes with a copy of our new book Fiordland by Sea – the must have guide for boaties.

Download the NZ Fishing Rules app

We get it – Fiordland's recreational fishing rules are getting rather complicated. To ensure you have the most up-to-date information at your fingertips, download or update this app before you head over the hill. NZ Fishing Rules mobile app | NZ Government.

Download the Mainland Catch app

Do your bit to help the rebuilding of Fiordland's fisheries. Mainland Catch is anonymous, easy to use, and gives you a record of your catches so you can show off to your mates. Mainland Catch App – Fish Mainland.

The new version of the Mainland Catch application is available here:

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

FISH MAINLAND
Roopu Ika ki Te Waipounamu
Recreational fishers. Your voice

Biosecurity New Zealand
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

environment SOUTHLAND
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Taiao Tonga

Fisheries New Zealand
Tini a Tangaroa

Te Rūnanga o NGĀI TAHU

Fiordland Marine Guardians
Beneath the Reflections

Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

FMG-agency meetings 2026/2027

Thursday 12 November 2026
Fiordland Community Event Centre, Te Anau

Thursday 11 February 2027
Environment Southland, Invercargill

For more information visit www.fmg.org.nz

All welcome

Our quarterly FMG agency meetings are open to the public and agenda items for discussion at these meetings can be sent to the Guardians. The agenda is set three weeks in advance of a meeting.

Keeping in touch

The Guardians work hard to facilitate community-led, proactive approaches that are informed by the best scientific information and knowledge available. We place a high value on the experiences and understanding of the Fiordland community and encourage you to share your thoughts with us. Please let us know if there is anything you would like us to cover in our next issue.

For more information visit fmg.org.nz or email info@fmg.org.nz

Thank you

Thanks to the following individuals and organisations for the photographs used in this issue: **Department of Conservation, Environment Southland, Ministry for Primary Industries, Salt + Earth Te Anau, Scott Tindale.**