

Jane Davidson AC/AM

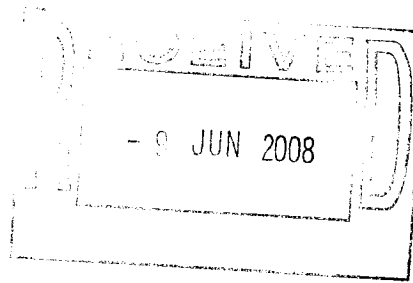
Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing



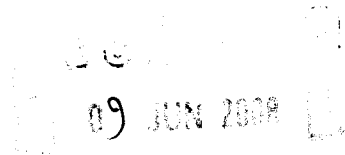
Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref PET-03-118

Ein cyf/Our ref JD/00618/08



Val Lloyd AM
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA



5 June 2008

JVD

Dear Val,

PETITION – WELSH CANOE ASSOCIATION – ACCESS TO WATERWAYS

Thank you for your letter dated 8th May regarding the above petition which was considered by the Petitions Committee on 24th April.

The Welsh Assembly Government is keen to promote wider public access to Wales' extensive inland waters (rivers, lakes, canals and reservoirs) for healthy recreation. I believe there is scope for these resources to be used more widely by the public – and on a responsible and sustainable basis – with consequent benefits for local communities and visitors to Wales in terms of improved recreation opportunities.

However, the existing legal position on access to rivers in particular is complex, with much enshrined in common law. Rather than pursue legal options, therefore, the Welsh Assembly Government is seeking to make progress here via consensus-building and via practical action.

For example in 2007/08, the Assembly Government funded a number of pilot projects designed to create new opportunities for water access. One good example is a new updated agreement between landowners and user groups for increased canoeing to take place on the upper reaches of the rivers Wye and Usk. This approach has been successful in increasing the number of access points for canoeists on those rivers, while significantly improving the provision of information.

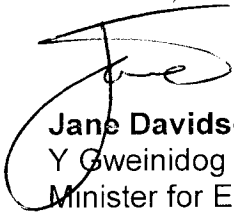
In addition, the Assembly Government has asked the Environment Agency Wales to produce a new Strategic Plan on Water-based Recreation in Wales. I will be launching this on 5th June. The new Plan identifies a wide range of potential new opportunities for water-based recreation in Wales and the Assembly Government will be providing over £400,000 in new resources this year to assist early implementation of ideas within the Plan.

Key elements of the Plan will be taken forward on a consensus-based approach, which takes account of the needs of different user groups as well as the interests of landowners. I envisage that the focus will be on new local voluntary agreements that encourage responsible access to water.

In terms of new legislation, as the petition envisages, this would require a new Legislative Competence Order as the first step. I do not see this as a priority for the Assembly Government at this stage, however, because it is not within our One Wales agenda. I am hopeful that real progress can be made through consensus and the practical advice that the Welsh Assembly Government is actively pursuing with its key partners.

I hope this information will be helpful to you and to the Committee.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane', written over a horizontal line.

Jane Davidson AM

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Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing