



# MERTHYR TYDFIL ANGLING ASSOCIATION.



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**25/10/2009**

Mr Mick Bates AM  
Chairman  
Sustainability Committee  
National Assembly for Wales

Ref; Access Inland Waterways in Wales

Cc : Mr Huw Lewis AM, Mr Brynle Williams AM, Mr Alun Davies AM, Ms Leanne Wood AM, Angela Burns AM, Ms Lorraine Barrett AM, Ms Lesley Griffiths AM, Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM

Dear Mr Bates,

Thank you for inviting the Federation of Welsh Anglers to make our oral submission to you and your committee. As you may have appreciated, I am not an orator but a person who has worked hard with others to ensure that our fishing rights are secured in perpetuity for our members, wherever they may come from.

I hope you will accept this letter, I appreciate that you have ceased taking written evidence.

I noted that Mr Alun Davies AM was again playing the devils advocate as he did with Canoe Wales when he made the statement (truthfully) that they wanted all access rights but were not prepared to give anything in exchange. On a different tack (notice the nautical term) on his examination of Max Coventry (FWA) wherein he agreed the legal position but wanted to know from Max how the illegal trespass could be stopped. As Max stated, there are many case laws appertaining to this fact. In fact it would be the duty of all to ensure that the law of the land is upheld whether layman or AM, MP, and personally I will in future call the police when I am again accosted and threatened by paddler/s, (Criminal trespass - Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994) which has happened on a number of occasions, on one occasion they threatened to drown my dog if he entered the river. This does fly in the face of Mr Charlwood's ridiculous statement that his child was not allowed to paddle in any stream or river without permission.

I found Mr Alun Davies question of “why did we want to own our fishing” (Merthyr Tydfil AA) rather puzzling, surely it is every ones dream to own their own house if it can be afforded. As an Association, we are proud of what we have done from something worse than a standing start. We are proud of our portfolio of fishing beats. We have pride of true ownership (not just stakeholder ownership) and are proud of having worked for it. You must surely be able to sense my Associations pride of possession and in its achievements. We are not prepared to have it effectively taken away from us at the stroke of a pen.

Most importantly what we have achieved is to keep the fishing for the residents of Wales who are the Assembly’s constituents.

Moving on with the providing of evidence, I note that the petitions committee were, biased to the extreme, of course this may have been due to the fact that they were acting on behalf of the petitioners. In my simplistic way of looking at the case I would have thought that they would have taken all information on board by visiting the problem areas of Wales and visiting angling clubs not just paddling and rafting companies in cahoots with Carmarthen County Council.

Perhaps the Sustainability committee could take their evidence finding from angling clubs when they travel Wales in the battle bus.

I cannot make comment about Scotland apart from agreeing with the statement that the rivers of Wales are far smaller that those of Scotland. Also, that we are closer to the huge conurbations East of Offas Dyke. The other fact is that there has never been a rod licence requirement in Scotland.

During the questioning we could not mention the 8000 pledges (plus a few more) which were given by the people of Wales. I can vouch in person for the pledges given by farmers at the Royal Welsh Show. I personally obtained 220 pledge signatures whilst visiting the FUW restaurant and talking to farmers from around Wales, to say that I was amazed at their reactions when canoes were mentioned would be an understatement. Before I could show them the pledge the mere mention of canoes was vitriolic. I did not have one refusal during the two days I was at the show in fact you could say the farmers were of one mind, they have had more than enough trouble and provocation from the paddling fraternity.

Apart from the Royal Welsh I obtained pledges from many non anglers whose view was “Why do these people (paddlers) expect to take from the anglers when they themselves expect everything for nothing” (ref: Alun Davies in Canoe Wales submission)

As is now known the agreements were not terminated by the angling fraternity but by Canoe Wales. The damage has been done by Canoe Wales exhorting people to break the law. This action must be redressed by Canoe Wales who must instruct the paddlers to respect the law of the land (INCLUDING the SALMON and FRESHWATER FISHERIES ACT) and enter into local binding agreements with riparian holders and fishing clubs.

The way forward could be for all canoes to be identifiable and as I suggested in my letter to yourself dated 1/8/2009, registered with the local angling club whether riparian owner or leaseholder. My Association would be prepared to take this task on board for a reasonable fee.

Talking of fees I am attaching to this letter a price list for a canoe club on the river Teifi using property owned by another party. Incidentally we (MTAA) charge visitors for fishing. We do not charge any fee for use of our facilities for coaching/equipment nor for time of our coaches, neither do we receive funding from Sports Council Wales and we own our facilities or pay a substantial rent.

Please note when I mention paddlers I refer to recreational paddlers – canoes.

The allowing of commercial ventures with rafts etc on our small rivers would be resisted; in fact the rebellious talk at present would seem muted in comparison if access allowed the commercials on to our rivers.

The question of rights of navigation put forward by Canoe Wales and Caffyn, I would say is a red herring (forgive the pun). Surely, if the rivers that I know were navigable, then why was the Newport to Brecon canal built. Also I am sure the old Iron masters of the South Wales Valleys would have used the Taff, not built a canal from Merthyr to Cardiff at considerable expense.

I have included extracts from a letter which I received from Ms Jane Davidson AM minister for Environment, Sustainability & Housing – dated 16 Feb 2009 (I have seen more in this vein to other Clubs/Associations)

“The Welsh Assembly Government's focus is upon improving public access to Wales' superb water resources (rivers, lakes, reservoirs and canals) for healthy recreation for the benefit of all recreational users. **The Assembly Government has no plans to introduce unrestricted access to all inland waters in Wales**”

“We are aiming for a strong degree of consensus between landowners, fishing and other interests to help identify where progress can best be made”.

“To this end, the Assembly Government is keen to encourage more voluntary agreements to facilitate access by a wide range of users to rivers, lakes and reservoirs in Wales”.

“Users, such as **canoeing clubs**, are permitted to access the rivers on a **responsible basis** and at certain times of the year (**normally outside the fishing season**). Safely, responsibly and in a sustainable manner”.

As a last note I must mention that anglers must obey the law of the land or face repercussions. Due to the incitement by Canoe Wales and previously Welsh Canoe Union we have found that canoeists (not all) cannot be trusted to self regulate, for instance this year we have had incidents of canoes using the fish pass at Merthyr Tydfil as a playground. The law states that a fish pass must not be tampered with and it is an offence to approach within 30 mtrs up stream or downstream of the structure. Yet we have found canoes using the pass as a jetty.

I Remain

Yours Faithfully

W G Davies (Gary)  
Chair Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association