

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a
Materion Gwledig
Rheoliadau Llygredd Amaethyddol

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Ymateb gan: Ymateb unigol

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural
Affairs Committee
Agricultural Pollution
Regulations

Evidence from: Individual
response

I am an angler, the Secretary of a club renting water on the Eastern Cleddau.

We used to enjoy good fishing. We caught so many sewin we didn't bother to count them and a sprinkling of salmon as well. We had a limit on membership of 25 members, a number we thought the fishery could support (in over a mile of river there are relatively few places where one can actually access the water on this small river). Our membership this year is 12, an increase of 3 over last year due, I think, to the effects of the Covid epidemic and people having time on their hands. We are fishing for the stock of brown trout which is small with only a few larger fish. No member has caught a sewin or a salmon for the past 3 years and I would put that down in part to the fact that the members do not fish the water as results are so dismal. It is going to be interesting to see how many members re-join next year.

The water itself is patently polluted. In all the slower stretches the gravel and stones on the bottom are coated in filamentous algae. We used to see hordes of small fish, fry and minnows. They would cluster round your boots as you disturbed the bottom of the river but one does not see that now. One effect of all this filamentous algae must be to produce a fluctuating level of pH in the river by reason of photosynthesis, the pH climbing as the day progresses and falling in the hours of darkness to the detriment of the fish. The algae also blankets the bottom and seriously reduces the invertebrate life, thus depriving the fish of their food.

We have in the past had patent pollution of another, dangerous, kind in that blooms of cyanobacteria in a reservoir in the system have flowed down through the fishery. The water has been turned green and turbid in these events and I have advised my members not to fish as even breathing the air over a river polluted by cyanobacteria presents a health hazard. I have been told that numbers of sheep which had access to the river when it was in that condition died. The proliferation of cyanobacteria in the reservoir is directly linked to pollution by phosphorus in its various forms. The reservoir in question, Llys-y-fran, is surrounded by dairy farms some of which have, in the past, caused direct and highly visible pollution of the lake with slurry but all of which have to distribute their slurry onto local grassland from which the diffuse

pollution by nitrates and phosphates eventually washes into the reservoir.

It is certainly the diffuse pollution from the intensive dairy industry in the watershed of the Eastern Cleddau which has reduced the river to its present sorry state and it was to be hoped that the new Regulations would bring about an improvement in the condition of the river. There is also intermittent gross pollution from the dairy industry all of which has been reported, to no effect. I have seen tributary streams foaming and running brown with slurry. As I have no powers of investigation I have no idea as to whether this was a wilful, improper, means of disposing of a quantity of slurry (which I strongly suspect) or some breakdown of storage or handling. I have seen a field heap of manure, in the same location (the only flat bit of the farm?) year after year - a direct flaunting of the code of practice - with the brown and stinking run off from that heap running down the gutter of a public road for hundreds of yards and straight into the river. I have seen a manure bay formed with cement blocks, a perpend joint left open so that liquid could run off into a ditch and thence into a river. I have seen a farm yard, extending across a public road which is so constantly covered in faeces, eventually draining into a local stream, that it is well known as 'mucky corner'! The existing storage regulations and the code of good agricultural practice ignored and not enforced despite all the good advice offered over many years to an industry substantial parts of which seems not to give a damn. The Eastern Cleddau is a major source of drinking water supply in Pembrokeshire. If the public saw what I see with my anglers eyes there would be an outcry and one day there will be, politicians beware!

One aspect of the argument put forward by the Farmers Union in opposition to these new regulations really upsets me. They have constantly referred to the fact that NRW 'only' proposed a NVZ for the watershed of the two Cleddau rivers. They know that NRW did that under the then existing legislation as they were duty bound to protect a Special Area of Conservation, part of the tidal Daugleddau water way, where the outflow from the rivers, polluted with phosphate and nitrate was causing an undue growth of a sea-weed to the detriment of the health of tidal mud flats. I have never seen the farmer's argument on that point refuted by either NRW or the Welsh Government, refuted in a way which would highlight the absurdity of having two polluted rivers, both with very diminished stocks of fish, acknowledged and virtually allowed to continue apart that is from their effect on a sea-weed!

We rent our fishing from a farmer, a stockman. I used to make out very large cheques for the annual rent. I don't do that now. He bends my ear about ridiculous regulations but is willing to concede that some parts of his industry have a lot to answer for.

If the dairy industry is presented with what is consider to be an acceptable, tolerable, level of pollution from their activities they will have to adapt to it or go out of business, a difficult trick to pull as they must be riding a financial tiger. At the moment they are seeking to maximise their profit whilst effectively dumping the excessive waste from their business into the public sphere. Any improvement will depend on the enforcement of the new regulations and I see no evidence that the Welsh Government is of a mind to fund and ensure that.

David Nattress
Secretary Ridgeway Angling Club