

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
NRW 2015 – 43
Natural Resources Wales – Annual Scrutiny 2015
Response from Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association



**MERTHYR TYDFIL ANGLING
ASSOCIATION**

Web Site: <http://www.mtaa.co.uk>

President: Huw Lewis AM

Vice Presidents: Dai Havard MP

Geoff Pritchard FRICS

Ron Gover: Councillor Tom Lewis



1. The opportunity to make comments to the Scrutiny committee is overdue. Starting from the beginning the first mistake was the removal of the Fishery Advisory Group and the local Fishery Groups. This left no consultation, the Local Fishery Groups have now been resurrected only because realisation has set in and the need to at least discuss what is happening, albeit late in the day.
2. We as an Association have been closely involved in fisheries improvement and protection on the Rivers Taff and Usk for nearly 50 years. It was obvious to us from the very beginning that the fisheries service was only being given lip service in all early dealings with Natural Resources Wales. We should point out that this was not at the local level we were normally dealing with but high up in the management structure.
3. The setting up of NRW has been a disaster for Welsh fisheries and some other correspondents make this case. The first indication of problems to come was the handling of the Rod licence system as it was. Welsh anglers pay for an **Environment Agency licence** and still do at the moment. Due to a previous negotiated agreement, between Environment Agency and the Welsh Region as it was, Wales was classed as a Region at that time, a right to a portion of the "top slice" of the licence revenue i.e. what was considered surplus funds as they were, was given to Wales at the end of each year. This was set up and negotiated by previous Environment Agency Wales **fisheries staff** who were clued up. Environment Agency England must be laughing up their sleeves at not having to pay out the £20K that did accrue to Wales at that time. This return of money was to develop more angling opportunities and increase the number of anglers – to increase Rod Licence revenue. It would have been irrespective as to what it was used for but the principle should have been maintained. We have never been given a valid explanation of why this extra funding was stopped except to say it was now incorporated into the Rod Licence money returned to Wales. There has been a reluctance to give a straight answer.
4. This also raises the point of Rod Licences and although we have been assured that the National licence as it is will be continued, **much to our relief**, we have no confidence in the current way decisions are taken. It would be a travesty for Welsh Anglers and a total waste of money to attempt to bring in a Wales only rod licence fee. However shrewd negotiation should be able to give Wales a good deal as the current way the

- licence is sold through the Post Office should, with the help of the number of licences sold in Wales, help to negotiate a cost saving based on licences sold in Wales.
5. We work with Angling Cymru, set up at the time by WAG and Environment Agency as well as Sport Wales, and are recognised by Sport Wales, as the overarching body of Angling in Wales. Sport Wales Fund angling through Angling Cymru and previously funding was also given by Environment Agency to Angling Cymru direct but totally stopped by NRW in their second year, with the curt explanation that the Sustainable fisheries fund that was previously ring fenced for Fisheries is now in a large pot not ring fenced. That the fisheries budget had been cut by **over 60%** and because of that Angling Cymru's funding was nil. This shows in our opinion the total lack of concern regarding the Fisheries function in Wales. Some local funding has been maintained. Many who have worked with the previous body in Wales (Environment Agency) now look on in envy at the way the English Regions still get support. We note in the response from some consultees that other Governing bodies have suffered from the same loss of Funding with possibly no formal reason given as to why it has been stopped
 6. The closing of the hatcheries, another extremely contentious issue with the steady and continuous decline in the Salmon population, is another travesty. In all the reports and documents presented to the Board not one mention has been made of the outstanding contribution made by our own Cynrig Hatchery. A renowned centre of excellence and one that should at all costs be protected, we are being told it will become a centre of excellence, but at present again information and positive movement is slow. One would have expected the business plan to have made sure that after the decision to stop stocking things would have moved quickly. More importantly the records of the enormous work carried out by this hatchery on the salmon stocks on the Taff ranks as probably the most comprehensive data record available for any river in Wales or from our knowledge in the World. The Scrutiny Committee should be made fully aware none of the data was presented to the Board in any documents that were presented as reasons for closing the hatcheries. They should also insist that the data is published and preserved as its findings are of more relevance to Wales than all the other papers that were presented. Others will have presented more evidence for the other hatcheries that are to be closed, in great haste we may say.
 7. The other point on Hatchery closures was the mitigation programmes that were in place covering historical agreements that were **not discussed with the relevant funders before closure. This was even though the legal advice below stated.**
 8. **Whilst NRW may be able to enter into discussions with relevant parties as to the possibility of agreeing alternative mitigation measures in place of salmon stocking, and notwithstanding the provisions in certain agreements which allow for a variation in the current mitigation measures eg Cardiff Bay Agreement, and whilst relevant parties may be willing to enter into discussions concerning any such variations, we need to be conscious of the fact that until such time as those discussions are complete and any agreed variations are formally documented, there does remain a risk that we may not be able to agree the same. We are high lighting this as an example of what we feel is mis management in that a decision was taken to carry out a change of circumstances when NRW knew that this advice had been given. Not what we would**

consider good business practice. Other comments posted indicate the total lack of understanding from the Top.

9. The stopping of third party stocking has also had an effect on at least one Welsh business that has lost at least 50% of its turnover. It has also put in jeopardy a programme being funded by the Wye owners association at their expense to increase the knowledge and survival of salmon on the Wye. This was previously supported by the Environment Agency and in doing so was carrying out one of the new aims of NRW of working as a knowledge based organisation. This programme is now in jeopardy. In the interest of the decline in Salmon stocks this should be addressed. The worrying factor in all this is that previously all these programmes were supported by the then Environment Agency. All the supposed evidence to curtail stocking has been available for years. It therefore appears that the cessation of stocking has more to do with cost and New Ideas than a genuine concern for the welfare of one of our iconic fish species and one that has seen a dramatic decline in the last years, The Salmon.
10. We note with some concern that the list **attached** from the CEO of Natural Resources Wales indicating a list of stakeholders that could be consulted by you does not mention one organisation or group that represents the owners on the rivers of Wales. In fact not one fishing governing body from Game Sea or Course is mentioned as well as Angling Cymru. We note that for the first time in two years angling has been given a profile on the home page of the Natural Resources Wales web site. It goes at length to describe the benefits of Angling to the economy as well as the health benefits that accrue from the outdoors it also promotes the need to buy a rod Licence!! There needs to be recognised, there was until the ring fencing was taken off the Sustainable Fisheries Fund, many benefits to support Angling in Wales.

W G Davies

Chairman Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association