

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ynni, Cynllunio a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-810  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00516/18

David John Rowlands AM  
Chair - Petitions committee.

government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk

20 March 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 6 March, regarding petition P-05-810, regarding proposals for an alternative approach to resolving the issue of reducing salmon and sea trout stock in the rivers of Wales.

Fresh water and migratory fisheries in Wales are managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) (in line with the statutory duty under section 6(6) of the Environment Act 1995 to "maintain, improve and develop fisheries of salmon, trout, eels, lampreys, smelt and freshwater fish").

Detailed management measures and operational decisions such as stocking of rivers are a matter for NRW and its Board.

The Welsh Government has made clear in our Natural Resources Policy (NRP), our rivers and seas provide important recreational angling opportunities and economic benefit in rural and coastal communities. I want to see thriving rivers supporting angling and other important economic activities within our rural communities. However, this vision can only be built on a foundation of healthy fish stocks.

To address the poor state of salmon and sea trout in our rivers NRW has proposed significant changes to fishing byelaws on the rivers of Wales. These byelaws would introduce compulsory catch and release for salmon across all rivers in Wales for a 10 year period commencing with the fishing season in 2018. NRW received approval of its Board regarding these proposals on 18 January 2018. I subsequently received a formal application to determine the byelaws from NRW on the 20 February, under the provisions contained within the Water Resources Act 1991.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400  
[Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I will therefore consider the range of issues in detail, including the alternative proposals submitted by stakeholders during NRW's consultation, before making a determination in line with the process set out in the Act. Until this is completed I am unable to comment on the proposals.

In relation to industrial and agricultural pollution my department continues to report to the European Commission over river pollution. It is disappointing to see the number of pollution incidents still increasing. Poor land management is something the Welsh Government is determined to tackle. The Welsh Government expects to receive recommendations from the Wales Land Management Forum Sub-group by the end of March on Agricultural Pollution. While we intend to explore options to provide land managers with flexibility, where these would achieve the same or better outcomes than a regulatory approach, voluntary measures alone will not tackle the issue, and it is envisaged regulations applying to the whole of Wales will underpin any action.

I want to assure you and the petitioners there is no large scale netting or factory ships operating around the Welsh coast.

I am very aware, like other countries in the North Atlantic, Wales is subject to a variety of natural predation with regard to salmon and sea trout stock. Whilst I have a desire to ensure sustainable fish stocks are achieved in the rivers of Wales, it is important to be aware both cormorants and goosanders are protected species in Wales under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA 1981).

When NRW came into operation on 1 April 2013, the function of issuing licences to shoot piscivorous birds was given outright to the NRW. Under section 16 (1) of the WCA 1981 a licence should be issued primarily as an aid to scaring birds away from a particular location. NRW urge angling interests to operate on a large geographic scale in order to avoid the issue of 'moving birds from one pool to another'.

In regard to removal of barriers to fish migration, Welsh Government provided Grant in Aid of £800k per annum for over 10 years to the Environment Agency Wales (now NRW) to facilitate the draw down of EU and partnership funding. This has contributed to a total spend on environmental and access improvements of £32million over 10 years. This investment resulted in more than 1,500km of improved access (fish passes and easements) and more than 500km of riparian and in-river habitat improvements.

Regards  
Lesley

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