

Meeting note

Title of meeting: Wales Fisheries Forum

Date of meeting: 13/01/2022

Time of meeting: 10:30

NRW:

Steve Ormerod (Chair)

Ben Wilson

David Mee

Emma Keenan

Dave MacCallum

Joel Rees-Jones

Nick Thomas

Robert Vaughan

Present:

Members:

Carl Tonner – Angling Cymru

Chris Mills – Institute of Fisheries Management

Chris White – Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries

Claire Quigley – Environment Agency

Creighton Harvey – South West Wales & Gower LFG rep

Denise Ashton – Wild Trout Trust

Dylan Roberts – Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Gail Davies-Walsh – Afonydd Cymru

Guy Mawle – Usk LFG Rep

Mervyn Williams - Dee & Clwyd LFG rep

Nicola Teague – Institute of Fisheries Management

Paul Edwards – Welsh Salmon & Trout Angling Association

Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance

Richard Garner-Williams – Salmon and Trout Conservation Cymru

Robert Floyd – Welsh Government

Stuart Smith – Wye LFG rep

Tony Harington – Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

Apologies:

Shaun Leonard (Wild Trout Trust), Mungo Munro (Severn LFG rep), Alan Winstone (Afonydd Cymru), Lee Evans – Taff & Valleys LFG rep, John Ellis – Canal & River Trust, Mark Owen – Angling Trust

Item No:	Item
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Welcome, introductions

1.
 - Steve Ormerod (SO) opened the meeting, welcomed several new participants and deputies, and gave a brief overview of how the meeting would use Teams.
 - Particular attention was drawn to the [Environment Audit Committees report on water quality in English rivers](#)
 - New member Chris Mills was also welcomed back onto the forum as rep for the Institute of Fisheries Management. The Committee extended thanks to Nicola Teague for her time on the Forum. CM is the current president of the IFM but is also the Chair of Afonydd Cymru as well as a trustee of the RSPB.

Admin Matters

2.
 - Minutes of each WFF meeting are reviewed, corrected as necessary and approved by correspondence approximately 1 month after each meeting thereby enabling early circulation to LFGs.
 - Minutes from the September 2021 meeting were approved.
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Outstanding actions from September 2021

Action: EK to circulate BTO presentation (April 2021) and report once approved

Action: On Fish-eating birds, PG/DM to seek clarification from Ian Russell about which life stage of juvenile salmon any compensatory mortality mechanisms might operate to inform the Wild Bird Review.

– This will be included in the final recommendations paper from the FEB review which is expected by the end of March. The FEB advisory group will need to approve the recommendations which will then be presented and considered at the NRW Board at the end of July.

Action: BW was asked to clarify whether the evidence reports that have informed the FEB review would be available prior to the final recommendation report

ACTION: Consider forming a task and finish group around angling participation to discuss the way forward and opportunities. CT, RE & GDW – BW is keen to do this.

Action: EK to circulate August minutes when available – still not available but all other minutes are available here: [Natural Resources Wales / Wales Land Management Forum](#)

Ben Wilson initial thoughts and priorities

BW joined the National Rivers Authority in 1990 where he was tracking salmon up and down the Tywi and Tawe, and then the River Dee. He then went on to complete a PhD on the impacts of cormorants and goosanders on freshwater fisheries. From the 2000s he then came back to Environment Agency working mostly on fishery habitat restoration, fish passes, fish barriers and partnership working as part of the Sustainable Fisheries Programme in the Fishing Wales Project. After a brief absence managing industry regulation, South West Wales fisheries and monitoring, Ceredigion and the water quality laboratory Ben is back in fisheries as Principal Fisheries Advisor.

3.

Coming back into fisheries there have been some big changes and we are facing some really big challenges, salmon and sea trout stocks are of serious concern at the moment as well as eels. Climate change is affecting our stocks as we saw with the 2016 juvenile recruitment as well as water quality which was mentioned in the report above.

Fisheries within NRW has also changed in terms of organisational design and a change in the way we do things. Fisheries is now delivered through a series of service plans with staff in a wide range of teams across Wales. This presents some challenges, but also opportunities. We have a core of fisheries staff that are really dedicated and championing fisheries at various levels within the

organisation. Dave Mee and Rob Evans are key leaders in terms of fisheries strategy within our policy department alongside freshwater biodiversity and river restoration aspects which broadens our expertise that we can apply to fisheries.

The Plan of Action for Salmon and Sea Trout is real plus. It is a recognition of the importance of fisheries to Wales, the impact of their decline and the need to address the many issues surrounding the decline in stocks. This goes much further than a simple fisheries focus and includes land management and water quality as well. As well as the personal commitment of staff, there is a real organisational commitment to addressing these issues, including the chief exec and other leaders across NRW. Delivery of the outcomes in the plan of action is one of my highest priorities.

Working with partners is key, and thankfully we now have a much more complete and profession range of partners to work with, especially in the rivers trusts we now function across Wales. It's good to see we are working together to deliver shared outcomes and objectives. Funding will always be an issue for organisations like NRW but in terms of project delivery on the ground we're doing very well at the moment which is not just delivered by NRW but our partners too. There is room for improvement however, and I want to make partnership working easier for us an of our partners

Angler participation has dropped off dramatically over the last 15 years. Despite some good signs of uptake in Covid, it is clear that several factors are affecting this. I'd like us to focus on this issue. Part of the issue is around how we communicate with anglers. There is a need to communicate not just the work NRW does but also to promote the benefits of angling. The way in which we engage with anglers across Wales through LFGs varies and this should be looked at to create some consistencies.

These are just some initial thoughts and priorities. I am committed to listening to the group, to understand what we can do better or differently in the future.

Action: BW to set up conversation with Helen Pierce, John O'Connor and Carl Tonner re angling participation

Action: BW to establish a T&F group on Angling Participation

BW will be looking at contacting relevant stakeholders to start conversations on these topics.

Action: GDW to help coordinate a North Wales visit with trusts.

'Get A Fishing Licence' – update on delivery Claire Quigley (Environment Agency)



Get a Fishing Licence
Presentation.pdf

- 4.
- It was requested that there was a means of printing off your own licence
 - Work is being done to make rod licence Welsh Language Act compliant.
 - Wales is currently being charged around £90k for sales and admin and separately £12k for catch returns at Brampton. These costs routinely increase by approximately 2% annually. It is not known what these costs will be in the future; EA are currently carrying out a baseline review for costing.
 - The total fishing licence budget is £2.4 million where Welsh anglers account for approximately 4% of the total rod licence sales.
 - It is possible to record catches on the new system on the days you go fishing but instead of submitting, it must be saved.
 - It was noted that although you can record catches as they happen, you cannot submit them until the end of the season. This implies a loss of an opportunity to record and report instantaneous information.
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Dee Life Programme – Joel Rees Jones



Dee Life Programme
Presentation.pdf

- 5.
- The initial project bid outlined the proposed works under the project that would be completed by 2024 but didn't outline which years' work would be completed in. There is ongoing communication with Welsh DeeTrust to keep them up to date on what work is ongoing and where.
 - Afonydd Cymru are also looking at alternative funding initiatives for work on the Dee and would welcome information on large projects to include in their business proposals.
 - There is a monitoring plan in place that is signed off by LIFE which covers several different areas including electrofishing, HABSCORE and tagging. The results of which can be shared with the forum.
 - It was pointed out that this type of work could be funded through the water companies National Environment Programme (NEP). NRW are currently revising the Driver Papers that specify the work to be undertaken in the NEP.

It was noted that it will be very useful if NRW could shape the Driver Papers for the National Environment Programme to make sure that they allow and support this kind of work. BW noted that this was the approach we were

using on the Cleddau and Tywi mitigation work and could be extended to other rivers where there was an obligation for mitigation.

Action BW to liaise with Ruth Johnston and Mark Squire to draft Driver Papers

Four Rivers for Life – Nick Thomas



Four Rivers for Life
Presentation.pdf

- Project team costs are likely to be a few million with more spent on the project than direct delivery. Work will be directly delivered through NRW and some of the partners. There will be money available for some partners, for example there will be money available to provide equipment for tackling invasive species.
- The project is currently at the recruitment stage which will continue over the next few months. Once the Project Manager is in post it is hoped the steering group project board can meet. This year will focus on getting the project team in place and continuing to develop the plan by identifying what else is going on within the catchment by working with partners. Work will begin to be delivered in 2023 with major works carrying over 2024-2026. Coordinating all the separate activities and work that is ongoing will be a key role for the project manager and senior staff in the project.
- The overall anticipated total projects costs are £9.1m of which project staffing and management account for Approx. £3m.
- The group noted that the project needs to cover more than just physical change but also the issues around water quality too as well as impacts from climate change and minimising the frequency and extremity of floods (e.g., “slow the flow”) some of which may need addressing through land management change.

Updates from other fora

6. Natural Resources Wales / Wales Land Management Forum

- Creighton Harvey and Bob Vaughan gave an overview of the last two WLMF meetings, the notes for which can be found here [Natural Resources Wales / The Wales Land Management Forum sub group on agricultural pollution](#).
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- NRW are still pushing ahead with the work to look at in terms of what we call regulatory principles the full range of different approaches that we can try and influence farms with and subsidy will be essential.
 - Although the regulations have come into force and will be ratcheted up over the next couple of years, a broader approach needs to be taken where NRW can influence good farming practice, we will, though we need to acknowledge that the marketplace such an important influence on how farms behave and operate.
 - Peter Fox MS is putting forward a Food Bill, which NRW have been supporting, looking at food use in Wales. Its focus is on local sources and using food locally, and how that impacts the environment, especially on catchments, to link all these different aspects together. This may include looking at the impacts of operations, how they affect pollution levels and what the environment can accommodate. It is hoped at the next meeting DCWW will be giving an update on the updated phosphate information where nutrients rather than just nitrates are considered to look at the whole nutrient cycle to create a more holistic approach. BV offered some evidence that there had been a reduction in pollution incidents from agriculture of approx. 20% in the last 3 years, but there is some uncertainty reflecting the challenges of reporting during lockdown.
 - One area that's clearly missing from the Welsh regulations that is in English regulations is soil erosion and protections. There aren't any targets in the Water Framework Directive for sedimentation suspended solids which covers up the problem. That is something that could be addressed by bringing in a similar regulation as they have in England, which is already written quite some relatively simple.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2018/151/regulation/10/made>

- The voluntary guidance for spreading slurry said you shouldn't spread in inclement weather on steeply sloping or frozen ground, yet it is happening, and it highlighted the need for regulation as opposed to guidance when it comes to bad agricultural practice which has been raised with the committee.
 - Members of the forum strongly recommended that NRW prioritise incident response, especially for agricultural pollution.
 - BV noted that there has been a decreasing funding stream from Welsh government and a reduction in incident response resource. Currently we don't have a great deal of resource to be able to spread ourselves out, and the new regulations are very good example of that where they've been put in place without any additional resource.
 - Whilst NRW may not have a sufficient resource currently in that area, NRW needs to look hard and long at where it's spending its money in totality, and something like responding to pollution incidents has got to be a very high priority.
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National Access Forum Wales Access to Water Sub-Group

- Dave MacCallum confirmed that following the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government 's request to the National Access Forum, "to give particular priority in 2019 to laying the groundwork for the greater dialogue on inland waters issues that is needed"; the NAFW formed the Access to Water Sub-Group. Its purpose was to report the outcomes of its discussions, and associated conclusions and recommendations by March 2021.
- Following submission of the Sub-Group's report to Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters, the NAFW Chair confirmed that with the submission of the report, the work of the sub-group was concluded.
- The Deputy Minister has confirmed that under Welsh Government's new Programme for Government, they are focussing on measures to designate Wales' inland waters for recreation. This work is being commenced by the water branch of Welsh Government. The Deputy Minister has noted the findings of the subgroup's report, and he will forward it to the water branch so they may take the evidence into consideration
- The chair noted that the Environmental Audit Committee report on water quality from the Commons today also recommends issues around designation, in particular of bathing waters as a means of driving improvements in water quality and that is in a specific recommendation. There are concerns about access, particularly with anglers, but water quality gains could be significant.
- Members of the group commented that the ministerial reaction to the report is bitterly disappointing. The sub-group brought together people who would have otherwise continued to argue, to discuss issues and tackle differences head on to produce a report they all supported. It may be necessary to resurrect the group to continue with this matter due to its potential impact on angling.
- A member of the group reiterated concern about the impact of Canoeing on spawning fish, believing there has been continual disturbance for the past 15 years on the Tryweryn. They cautioned both NRW and the Welsh Government about introducing access over spawning areas which could precipitate a judicial review.

Action: NRW recreation team to brief SO on the National Access Forum Wales Access to Water Sub-Group issues, and to consider a formal response from this group.

Update Paper

7.



211209 WFF Update
paper Jan 22 Final.pdf

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- The group requested a breakdown of cost incurred by NRW in administering the licence, prior to any consultation on the change to rod licence duties, as well as a consideration of the impacts this may have on participation. It was also noted that Wales no longer receives income from the sale of licence in England for anglers fishing in Wales. Receipt of income over and above sales to Welsh anglers had been a key factor in 2009 when considering the merits of a separate rod licence for Wales. It was suggested that NRW should consider a separate licence for Wales again, especially given the long term fall in licence sales.
 - The data release around WFD classification improvements was questioned as it didn't include the new phosphate targets in SAC rivers which may affect the overall WFD classification. There are also challenges in interpreting WFD data and improvements could be made in the way the data is used. It was also noted that reasons for failure are yet to be updated on Water Watch Wales website. The group commented that a 3% improvement in GES, even if genuine, was pitiful and that sea change in approach was required to achieve objectives under the WFD and Habitat Regulations.
 - The new salmon stock assessment methodology will be discussed when the proposals are drafted. We will bring them to this group for discussion.

News from Forum Members

There is now a specific agenda item which provides an opportunity for individual organisations to present on matters close to them to move to a more cooperative effort.

8.
 - RGW highlighted the project where more information can be found on their site: [Smart Rivers - Salmon & Trout Conservation \(salmon-trout.org\)](http://salmon-trout.org)
 - Angling Cymru shared that NRW providing finance for getting 3 new fishing platforms to a small grassroots club and have offered to the club to then pay for additional platforms through professionals which otherwise wouldn't have happened.
 - There is a proposal for the Salmon School artwork by Joe Rossano that featured at COP26 to be displayed in Cardiff in Match 2023 which will be a valuable tool for visualising the plight of salmon in our rivers to both the public and politicians.

Action Organisations are asked to consider providing further updates at future meetings.

9. AOB

Items for next meeting agenda:

- Sea net licences that could have impacts on salmon and sea trout as bycatch
- Tree planting -update on NRW approach
 - To include: Scales & timing, site selection and impacts on biodiversity
- WFD Fish classification
- Publication in June of Drainage and Wastewater Management plans from Welsh Water

Steve to take approaches to tackling water quality issues from England to the board for discussion/consideration at the forthcoming Board meeting in late January.

Action: Welsh Government to circulate a response to the group on the changes to European Sea Bass fishing in relation to coastal netting
