

Meeting note

Title of meeting:	Wales Fisheries Forum
Date of meeting:	27/09/2022
Time of meeting:	10:30

Present

NRW:

- Steve Ormerod (Chair)
- Ben Wilson
- David Mee
- Emma Keenan
- Elen Richards
- Martyn P. Evans
- Michael Evans
- Rhianne Jones
- Robert Evans
- Ruth Jenkins
- Sian Williams
- Susie Kinghan

Members:

- Andy Phillips – Angling Cymru
- Creighton Harvey –Southwest Wales & Gower LFG rep
- Denise Ashton –Wild Trout Trust
- Dylan Roberts –Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
- Evelyn Over – Welsh Government
- Gail Davies-Walsh –Afonydd Cymru
- Guy Mawle –Usk LFG Rep
- Lee Evans – Taff and Valleys LFG rep

- Patrick Cowdy – Welsh Government
- Paul Edwards – Welsh Salmon and Trout Conservation
- Richard Garner-Williams – Salmon and Trout Conservation Cymru/Wild Fish
- Robert Floyd – Welsh Government
- Tony Harrington – Dŵr Cymru/ Welsh Water

Apologies

- Carl Tonner – Angling Cymru
- Chris Mills – Institute of Fisheries Management
- Mervyn Williams - Dee & Clwyd LFG rep
- Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance
- Stuart Smith – Wye LFG rep
- Mungo Munro - Severn LFG rep
- John Ellis – Canal & River Trust
- Mark Owen – Angling Trust

1. Welcome, introductions – Steve Ormerod

- Steve Ormerod opened the meeting and covered any matters arising Declaration of Interest
- Lee Evans has taken a job with the Wye and Usk Foundation but will still be remain as LFG rep.
- Richard Garner Williams has taken a seat on the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) council.

2. Admin matters

- The notes from the previous meeting are now formally approved.
- Members of Wales Environment Link will be responding to the Agricultural Bill.
- Ruth was to feedback on the Access Forum but there are no updates yet.

Action - BW to speak to Jont Bulbeck, re Access Forum

- There is an action on NRW to develop further strategic thinking around extinction risk for salmon, in particular small population genetics. Ben has a meeting with Nigel Milner and Carlos Garcia De Leaniz to finalise the piece of work to better identify and respond to critically low levels of salmon recruitment in Wales which will be published as an NRW Evidence report.

- BW has been continuing to engage with Rhian Jones regarding the sustainable farming scheme to confirm it will deliver some fisheries benefit.
- RJ wanted to remind the forum that despite the Sustainable Farming Scheme not coming online until 2025 work is being done to enable farmers to feel more comfortable about opting out of agreements if there's disadvantage to them relative to the new scheme and raising with WG the need for a statement to reassure landowners.
- DCWW are discussing with NRW what should be in the PR24 alongside discussions around affordability with WG. The change in charges to customers will dictate the pace at which improvements can be implemented such as habitat enhancement and improved access.
- BW will establish a subgroup in the new year to help review the Salmon and Sea Trout Plan of Action and align this work with our reporting to NASCO. This will include revisiting measures of success for some of the measures already in place.

3. Water Quality Update

Sian Williams – Head of Northwest Wales Operations NRW

- Currently reviewing what we do with water quality and quantity focusing on the day job. Water has been at the forefront of the media recently from storm discharges to impacts on water from land management. Now that the Dee and Western Wales River Basin Management Plans have been published, work is being done to deliver against the actions listed in those documents by both NRW and external partners. The Environment Agency take the lead for the Severn RBMP, and we can expect to see that in the coming year. Priority catchments have also been identified where we felt that we could make the biggest difference and could deliver some big improvements.
- Bathing waters have been a focus over the summer for looking at the impacts of sewage discharges into coastal waters as there are limits on discharges that go into bathing waters, however during high rainfall, sewage does get discharged and looking at compliance will be a big part of that. In Wales we have one inland bathing water, Llyn Padarn, and WG has a priority for designating more inland bathing waters and the process for designating more in the future.
- NRW are working with WG to look the new Agricultural Regulations due to come into force next year that are focused on the nitrates and impacts of nitrates discharged from agricultural land and how we will regulate ensure compliance of these.
- There is also work looking at the SAC phosphate standards and what this means for the environment. In catchments that have failed their phosphate standards planning applications have been stopped and there is work looking at how these can progress and what the implications would be for river catchments.

[Written Statement: River Pollution Summit at the Royal Welsh Show \(1 August 2022\) | GOV.WALES](#)

- Modelling has been done by DCWW with involvement from NRW to look at the different contributions of phosphate the different sectors make to SAC catchments. Many sectors including WG, planners from local authorities, house building companies etc will be committed to take action.
- As part of the Dairy Project 800 farms have been visited and action has been taken at many of those to look at what could be done to improve management. NRW are looking at how this project can be evolved and link with SAC rivers and the new Agricultural Regs.

- The 4 Rivers LIFE project is starting now which encompasses the Usk, Tywi, Teifi and Cleddau as well as the Dee LIFE project that looks at steps to improve biodiversity, fisheries, and water quality. There is also further capital work elsewhere to look delivering similar types of projects as well as the continuation of the metal mines project which is delivering fantastic results.
- New issues that are also being looked at are pharmaceuticals and microplastics and what evidence is out there now. Royal Society in Wales have started a project looking at the environmental impact of pharmaceuticals and prescription medicines as well. NRW are part of group involving pharmacists, public health and water companies looking at what research is currently available and what is being carried out. There is also work being carried out to look at how we deal with microplastics in the future.

[Environmental regulation of overflows: action plan \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Discussion

- Work is still ongoing to look at water quality requirements of specific SAC features and due to report back through our internal governance routes first and then will come out externally when it's ready.
- NRW are starting off an intensive review in the next couple of weeks, looking at interactions between water quality and quantity and the effects that they can have on the environment including fish populations from sources such as land management. Part of this will look at whether the work being done now is achieving the right results and whether the systems in place to enable us to do that. Communications and governance structures will also be reviewed to ensure actions are delivered in the most efficient way and that this is communicated to stakeholders.
- Concern was expressed by WFF members around staffing levels and the importance of staff continuity withing the Dairy farming project. Currently staffing levels for the dairy project are quite low and retaining staff and skills is an issue as most staff are recruited on a temporary basis which can result in high turnover as well as few applicants for posts. The current funding is coming to a close in March so there is a push to make sure all outstanding actions are completed by then. From then on, we expect to start an evolved version of the dairy farms project, which help employ higher grade posts with longer contracts. This work will then look at connecting the impact of dairy farms can have but also the wider water quality priorities on SAC rivers and nitrates from the new Agricultural regs. NRW have had conversations with WG around longer term funding and our service level agreement which will hopefully be resolved in the next couple of months. There is also an issue around trust between the farmers and with officers, it's important to highlight that they are not there in an enforcement capacity but are there to offer advice to help the farm deliver what is needed. There is work to be done on how we deliver this and the new regulations coming in.
- There is now a dedicated Comms officer in post just for water and they are looking at how we position ourselves, what communications are going out and how we can be more proactive with positive news. There are also ongoing discussions at NRW Board level around our position and how we can engage on specific issues and spread positive messages to better reassure the public.

- There have been discussions with SO, Chris Collins (Head of Knowledge and Evidence) and Alun Attwood (Manager, Monitoring and Reporting) around new and emerging water quality issues outside the traditional sanitary issues. There may need to be a shift in how resources are used towards a more agile network to address problems as they occur. Page 140 [22 September 2022 Board Meeting \(cyfoethnaturiol.cymru\)](#)

SO referred to a recent report on long-term WQ trends:

[Is water quality in British rivers “better than at any time since the end of the Industrial Revolution”? - ScienceDirect](#)

4. Woodland Creation Wales

Welsh Government Policy – Evelyn Over

NRW Grants Scheme Assurance - Elen Richards

- There was concern from some communities about the impacts of commercial forestry on the environment however whilst there is a target to plant 180,000 hectares of upland Wales with trees there are many factors that are taken into consideration when determining what to plant where. Whilst that is a big target, when it is considered on a farm-by-farm basis, it's not so big. It is important that planting is well planned. There's also a push from WG to utilise more own grown timber. There are major opportunities for woodland to be used in positive ways to address a lot of the water quantity, water quality, biodiversity environmental product requirements that we all need. The issues are where that is, how it rolls out, what the mix looks like. we also need to recognise that Timber sales raise revenue that benefits the planting and deployment of other key environmentally beneficial actions, including planting of more broad leave in riparian zones.
- Welsh Government have included NRW in developing this new scheme, along with stakeholders, following on from the deputy minister's Forestry Deep Dive and the issues raised around water courses. Water quality has been considered it is one of the top five sensitivities that we are mindful of. There have been time lags historically on those forest research maps; Welsh Government have developed these woodland opportunities map only end of last year and it's another opportunity to update it and when those maps are there.

[Natural Resources Wales / Woodland Creation Planners' Guide](#)

5. Prolonged Dry Weather / Drought

Salmon and sea trout Warm water protocols - David Mee

- There is a need to review some of the water release protocols so that river flows can be better managed in times of prolonged dry weather or drought. This should be looked at

by rivers trusts, operators and NRW together, to establish where we can improve provision on regulated rivers where we have a “fisheries bank”.

- The group highlighted the need for better communication around releases, and how they benefit the rivers. However, it was not recognised that the distance downstream that water releases can help will vary, and they will, in some cases, rapidly equilibrate with atmospheric temperature. Hence, whilst this can be an important support to fish in warm weather, it is unlikely to provide a significant long-term solution. There is also some evidence of risk that releases of water at the wrong time could increase water temperatures, especially if that water is running over hot stones and cobbles and this needs to be monitored as well.
- WFF members noted there is a need for definitive guidance for angling clubs and anglers on what are safe temperatures for fish. Some angling clubs were closing beats during the heatwave but there was debate around trigger temperatures and what is appropriate for different species. Any guidance developed needs to be communicated properly and alerts sent out to anglers when triggers are reached. This could be an agenda item for future meetings on how this will be handled.
- There hadn't been any reports of fish dying after being released by anglers nor have there been any reports of disease outbreaks during the prolonged dry weather and associated high temperatures. Although NRW have only received a limited number of reports of dead adult salmonids it was estimated that 40-50 adult salmon may have died as a result of water temperatures being above the critical 23°C for sustained periods of time during August. No other reports other than the occasional single fish have been received this summer.
- There is a bigger issue around climate change and making changes that can have positive impacts on rivers now such as broadleaf riparian shading and overall catchment management.
- There is some evidence that suggests that if water reaches the river by infiltrating the ground it will be significantly cooler than run off which would be especially beneficial during the winter. Also, in rivers where there is habitat heterogeneity there is more likely to be temperature heterogeneity due to the continuous depth of water.

ACTION: DM NRW to further develop robust protocols /advice and coms to advice for warm water fisheries to aid consistency in voluntary approach in the future.

6. Corporate Plan

Sue Ginley - Lead Specialist Advisor, Corporate Planning & Performance

[Natural Resources Wales / Corporate plan to 2022: our well-being objectives](#)

- The forum will be sent a draft of the wellbeing objectives and steps along with a questionnaire to gather feedback with the aim of reporting back to the directors by the end of November.

ACTION: SG to circulate questionnaire

- BW and DM have started drafting high level fisheries objectives that sit within wellbeing objectives.
- WG have been involved through NRW's sponsorship teams and policy leads, the corporate plan will need to go to the Minister to be approved before it can be published.

7. Updates from other Fora

WLMF: Subgroup on agricultural pollution - Creighton Harvey

[Natural Resources Wales / Wales Land Management Forum](#)

[Natural Resources Wales / The Wales Land Management Forum subgroup on agricultural pollution](#)

- There was a concern around the lack of timetable for no minimum regulatory standards for Land Management. There is ongoing work looking at whether an ecosystem service type approach to reduce pollution but also increase carbon sequestration and biodiversity but without national minimum standards there is no baseline or comparison. This also has implications for the agricultural land management impacts on the SAC compliance failure.

Water Forum – Steve Ormerod

The Water Forum had not met recently and was due to meet soon after the Fisheries Forum.

[Natural Resources Wales / Wales Water Management Forum](#)

8. Update paper

- There was a concern around raising rod licence duties whilst rod licences sales are decreasing and there is also waning angler participation. Another issue is that anglers who don't have internet access will struggle to get their rod licence once they are no longer able to do this at the Post Office. Approximately 14% of rod licences are bought this way (in England and Wales). The new system will also offer a multibuy service, so that anglers can buy licences on behalf of others. There is a need to communicate this effectively. There will also be the telephone sales option for those who do not want to pay online
- It was suggested that there could be something included in the corporate plan around increasing awareness of the benefits of angling for wellbeing. In addition to this there was also concern that an increase in duty would put many anglers off due to the current cost of living crisis.
- The point around cost recovery was raised and whether the cost per licence reflects the costs incurred per ticket as there is currently a disparity between other water users along with the issues of public access.
- There is also a need for the justification of the increase in rod licence duties to be advertised so that it is clear what anglers get for their rod licence fees.

ACTION: NRW to notify WFF and LFG members of advertisement on rod licence duties expected following DEFRA approval probably in October.

- NRW are continuing to develop an Implementation Plan following approval from NRW Board of the findings of the FEB review Group.

Members expressed concern that fish eating birds also have an impact on coarse fisheries too and is there evidence for this as well. It has been identified that impacts of

FEBs on salmonid fisheries is a conservation of flora and fauna issue whereas the impact on coarse fisheries is a socio-economic issue. The impacts vary from situation to situation and would need to be evidenced as part of the application progress and Stillwater fisheries need to be accommodated in that. There is also to be work done on methods and effectiveness as part of the review.

ACTION: Ben to keep the Forum updated with developments and delivery of the Fish-eating bird review

9. Stock Assessment Review Update

NRW and partners CEFAS and EA continue to work to improved approaches to salmon conservation limit compliance.

1. Improving CL target setting
2. Improving adult return and egg deposition estimates
3. Increasing the robustness of the assessment methodology and simplifying the stock categorisation process
4. Making the decision structure actions more definitive
5. Shortening the periodicity of the implementation cycle

Moving to a three-category approach, Red, Amber, Green, with 2 reference points lower reference point (conservation limit) and higher reference point (90% smolt Max).

Next steps Conclude the current work programme and confirm overall approach: Informal stakeholder consultations WFF/EFG, Peer Reviewed papers 2023 of a) Rod Exploitation Rate b) Compliance Assessment, Scoping Statutory Instrument winter 2022, Possibly trial new assessment approach from 2023 and adopt in 2024

ACTION: NRW to keep WFF updated with progress and have substantive items on the projects with WFF in 2023.

10. AOB

- National Game fair – The fair was held at The Vaynol Estate, Bangor, Gwynedd over 3 days in September. GWCT are trying to increase their exposure to Wales and promote Welsh people who are involved in the environment and countryside. Just over 10, 000 people attended the organisation held in partnership with Swallow events. They are permitted in principle to host another one next year with the hope of improving on what was delivered this year and there is the ambition to have a North/South split.
- The Salmon School sculpture that was displayed at COP26 is hopefully coming to Wales in January for approximately 6 months with the Senedd as a potential site. Planning applications are currently being put together, one is being completed by Gail to the Heritage Lottery for the educational element and another for the installation element which is going through the Arts Council Wales.
- Welsh Salmon & Trout Angling Association have been running coaching courses and have roughly 15 new level one coaches, which are assistant coaches, across the whole

of South Wales which they are hoping to emulate across Wales. They are looking to improve angler participation with coarse and sea anglers also coming to courses.

- Afonydd Cymru the Welsh Environment Link (WEL) are arranging meetings with the salmon and the sea trout/sewin species champions at the Senedd for a salmon and sea trout event which will be held around 18th October. which will invite all Senedd members are invited so that they can have a discussion around the plight of these species. Wales Environment Link (WEL) are working with the Senedd at the moment as well as Afonydd Cymru, Wild Fish and Wildlife trusts, who are the sponsors of those species are involved. Salmon – Huw Irranca-Davies MS [Salmon - Huw Irranca-Davies MS - Wales Environment Link \(waleslink.org\)](#) and Sewin – Cefin Campbell MS [Sewin - Cefin Campbell MS - Wales Environment Link \(waleslink.org\)](#)
- Items for next meeting:
 - Access
 - DCWW update on National Environment programme (springtime)
 - It is intended to bring a substantive item on the salmon stock review project in 2023 to the Forum
- Emma Keenan to be stepping down as Technical Secretariat – the forum extended their thanks to EK for time and efforts.

January meeting will remain online but, the Spring meeting may would be intended to be in person or be a hybrid meeting to enable those not able to travel.

DONM 31st January 2023