



10 February 2015

<b>Paper Title</b>	<b>Alternative mitigations programmes for rivers in Wales previously stocked with salmon</b>
<b>Paper Reference:</b>	<b>NRW B B 10.15</b>
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<b>Purpose of Paper:</b>	<b>Information</b>
<b>Recommendation:</b>	To note progress
<b>Decision Required:</b>	To endorse the way forward.

<p><b>Impact:</b> To note – all headings might not be applicable to the topic</p>	<p><b>Impact on the Environment:</b> By their nature, the proposed alternative mitigations works will be positive for salmonid populations, but also for other species of fish and for local environments.</p> <p><b>Impact on the Economy:</b> Fisheries in Wales have an important role in providing jobs and income in fishing and local tourism. The proposed works will bring benefit to the fish populations supporting this activity.</p> <p><b>Impact on Community:</b> Engagement with catchment groups will contribute to the sense of local ownership of rivers and the issues impacting them. The work will provide opportunity for education, recreation and associated health benefits.</p> <p><b>Impact on Knowledge:</b> The catchment groups will add to the local knowledge-base, informing NRW and partners on matters around fish stock management and delivery of Water Framework Directive obligations, thereby supporting citizen science opportunity.</p>
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### **Issue**

1. Following the decisions to end all salmon and sea trout stocking in Wales, to close Maerdy and Mawddach hatcheries, and to work towards creation of a research facility at Cynrig, we are developing alternative mitigation programmes and proposals to discharge our commitments.

### **Summary**

2. The paper describes the current position, and planned work over the next few months, to progress our commitments on alternative mitigations, the closure and sale of our two hatcheries in North Wales, and our proposals for future operations at Cynrig hatchery.

### **Background**

3. At Executive and Board meetings last autumn, decisions were taken to cease the stocking of salmon and sea trout into Welsh rivers, to close the NRW hatcheries at Maerdy and Mawddach, and to explore the future role for Cynrig hatchery.

We have undertaken work against each element of the decision.

### **Alternative mitigations**

4. The NRW and external stocking programmes have all now ended with the exception of a small amount of residual stocking of the final cycle of fish production. No stocking will occur after 2015.
5. Alternative work, consisting of various types of habitat improvements and maintenance will be undertaken in each of the seven river catchments in question (Annex 1).

### **Legal Basis of the Programmes**

6. The legal basis for work in each catchment is summarised in Annex 2.

### **Catchment Groups**

7. Catchment groups have now been established for each of the seven rivers in question, membership being drawn largely from membership of Local Fisheries Groups, rivers trusts and groups known to be active in the catchments. The first meetings have now been held, and there has been a constructive approach to the task. Generally our progress to quantify mitigation targets and to the compilation of action plans has been good, however the highly specific nature of many of the actions requires substantial further work. Each plan will embrace the ecosystem approach. It is our intention to have plans ready to inform practical work commencing in the 2015/6 business year.
8. The work clearly addresses issues also considered in WFD work programmes and will also bring benefit to the objectives for those sites previously stocked that are

designated as N2K sites (Dee, Mawddach, Cleddau, Tywi, Wye). It is important that there is distinction between the work plans as commitment has been given that the alternative mitigation work will be 'over and above the day job'.

9. The initial phase of alternative mitigation work will commence prior to finalisation of the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans (cycle 2) and is intended to cover a 5-year period, after which there will be a review to establish:-
  - Whether the quantified mitigation target has been resolved in full or in part
  - The ongoing nature of alternative mitigation work
  - The ongoing financial basis for this

### **Closure of Maerdy and Mawddach Hatcheries**

10. Mawddach hatchery was taken out of commission last autumn, and progress is now being made to de-commission Maerdy. It is intended that this will be completed by the end of this financial year. Once this is concluded it is our intention to commence on a plan for the sale of the hatcheries, and to seek confirmation that proceeds of the sales will be invested in the alternative mitigations programme.

### **Future Operations at Cynrig**

11. All biodiversity work undertaken at NRW hatcheries is now focused at Cynrig where programmes for the following species will continue until the future of the site is resolved:-

White-clawed (native) crayfish  
Freshwater pearl mussel  
Water vole  
Arctic char (Llyn Padarn)

12. These programmes will contribute to delivery of national objectives under biodiversity plans.
13. Additionally, small packages of salmon rearing work are underway to prepare the fish required to support future investigations work at Bala Sluices (Dee catchment) and Radyr Weir hydropower (Taff catchment). We also need to provide capacity to address the commitment under the Mawddach Trust agreement.
14. Work is ongoing to scope a future for Cynrig as a freshwater and fisheries research centre. A part of this work will include engagement with our landlord on this possible amendment of our operation at the site.
15. We have secured agreement with the University of Swansea to work together on an outline business case that will describe a vision for work, and this will lead to

construction of an outline business case by the summer of 2015. The ambition is for the work to include partnership with other key organisations including other Welsh universities and NGOs, and full consultation with NRW departments.

16. All work at Cynrig is to be funded through a budget to be agreed with ET. Project management will be through a steering group, the leadership of which remains to be determined.

### **Next Steps**

#### **Alternative Mitigation Plans**

17. Further meetings of the groups are scheduled to ensure that plans are compiled, prioritised and implemented during Q3 and Q4.
18. We will provide the staff and management resource through the existing Sustainable Fisheries Project managers based in each of the three relevant areas.

#### **Disposal of Maerdy and Mawddach**

19. In order to obtain the best financial return, we will engage with our Estates team to consider how and when these assets should be sold.
20. We will seek agreement from ET to use these funds to discharge alternative mitigation commitments.

#### **Future Operations at Cynrig**

21. We will progress liaison and scoping with the University of Swansea, and engage with a full stakeholder group to include:-

Other Welsh universities  
Afonydd Cymru  
DCWW

We will need to identify a NRW project manager to take this forward.

### **Risks**

The main risks for the package of work set out above are:-

22. Legal challenge to the supporting decision to end stocking  
This has been addressed by our legal team (see paper to Executive Team, September 2014). To date (8.1.15) we have received no notice of intent by third-parties to seek a legal review of the decision. Low risk.
23. Lack of engagement by local groups

Based on engagement to date, this is not considered a high risk. Low risk

24. Uncertainty of funding for programmes

This depends on decisions taken at Executive Team. High risk

25. Uncertainty of relationship to WFD programmes

There is a general perception that all work required in river catchments, notably those designated as N2K sites, will be implemented under WFD work plans, with those in N2K rivers completed by 2021.

26. Good communications are required to clarify this. In the meantime the catchment groups will continue to compile plans of actions required. Medium risk

27. Uncertainty of engagement in partnership working

Past legal mechanisms used to effectively engage with partners through Letters of Agreement for joint-funded partnerships appear to be in doubt. This needs to be resolved. Currently medium risk.

28. Staff resource

All of the work described here relies on fisheries staff resource. Current re-structuring and staff departures under VES will place demands on the remaining resource that might constrain our ability to take this programme of work forwards.

We need to confirm a steering group and project manager. Medium/High risk

### **Financial Implications**

29. Commitment has been given to allocate the financial resource previously put into hatcheries and stocking into the alternative mitigations programme, and to maintain Cynrig operations pending a future decision on its role.

30. The outline budget proposed is £472k (approximately 84% funded by NRW, the rest being from external sources) and represents re-investment of financial resources previously used for hatchery and stocking work.

### **Communications**

31. Since the decision, we have received communications from 12 stakeholders, all but one critical of the decision. Five of these were deemed to represent requests for information under the Environmental Information Regulations, 2004. Replies have been provided to all, where they were requested, and there are currently no outstanding matters.

32. Ongoing communication is vital the successful delivery of the programmes of work described here. We will continue to work with our Communications Business Partner to ensure this occurs.

**Equality impact assessment (EqIA)**

N/A

**Index of Annexes**

Annex 1	Rivers for which alternative mitigation programmes will be implemented.
Annex 2	The legal basis for alternative mitigation programmes