



Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group

Background

Work to review the position in Wales with respect to piscivorous birds and their impact on freshwater fish populations was identified as a requirement in a Board debate on fisheries regulatory proposals in January 2018.

Consequently, two expert working groups have been established to undertake this work: -

1. An internal working group drawing on ornithological and fisheries expertise within NRW
2. An external advisory group, drawing on the experience of appropriate NGOs to review information and advice NRW prior to presentation of findings to the NRW Board in 2019.

This paper presents: -

- A. the current position;
- B. the agreed terms of reference of the external advisory group.

A. Wales fish-eating birds Advisory Group: Progress Report

The Wales fish-eating birds Advisory Group¹ (hereafter termed the Advisory Group) held its first meeting on 3rd July 2018, where it was agreed the working remit of this Group will:

- consider the impacts of predation from only cormorant and goosander on all species of fish found within inland water catchments;
- review and consider experience in Scotland and England;
- seek views and advice from group members concerning requirements for Wales;
- produce a recommendation paper to NRW Board;
- ensure any subsequent recommendations are within the existing legal and policy framework, or they identify where legislative or policy changes would be required.

The Advisory Group agreed that the key output will be the recommendation paper to NRW's Board identifying whether a formal review of Wales' approach to fish-eating birds is required, and if so it will set out a suggested Terms of Reference, Scope, Time-frames and Standard of Evidence required for such an evidence-led review of the impacts of fish-eating birds in Wales. This recommendation, if accepted, would then be submitted to Welsh Government by NRW's Board.

¹ The Wales fish-eating birds Advisory Group consists of: Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, British Trust for Ornithology, RSPB Cymru, Welsh Ornithological Society, Cefas, Angling Trust, Afonydd Cymru and Salmon and Trout Conservation UK

Key actions identified to date are listed below.

Action	Description	Lead	Date to be completed	Status log
1	Agreed ToR ²	NRW	3 August 2018	Completed
2	Identify historic FEB policy framework in Wales	WG	15 November 2018	Ongoing
3	Prepare a short briefing note to identify the differences in Welsh riverine and fisheries practices, when compared to England and Scotland.	Angling Trust, Cefas, BTO & NRW	1 August 2018	Outstanding
4	Compile and present a review synopsis paper of the findings from the Scottish and English fish-eating birds policy and evidence reviews ³ Determine the applicability of the findings of the synopsis paper to Wales	NRW NRW	3 July 2018 15 November 2018	Completed
5	Create an inventory of relevant papers and documents	All	31 October 2018	Ongoing
6	Compile and present NRW approach to fish-eating bird licence applications ⁴	NRW	3 July 2018	Completed
7	Review current NRW licence application process	NRW, BTO, Afonydd Cymru	15 November 2018	Ongoing
8	Hold follow-up meetings 2 and 3	NRW	13 November 2018 12 February 2019	

Patrick Lindley (Senior Ornithologist, EPP) & Peter Gough (Principal Fisheries Advisor, EPP)

² [Wales FEB Advisory Group Terms of Reference](#)

³ [Synopsis paper of fish-eating birds policy in England and evidence review in Scotland](#)

⁴ [NRW licence procedure for fish-eating birds](#)



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Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group

B. Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

There is evidence that, in the UK, piscivorous birds can take large numbers of fish from natural and stocked fisheries. The potential impacts of three piscivorous species (cormorant, goosander and red-breasted merganser) on wild and stocked fisheries have been the focus of a policy review in England (Defra, 2013⁵) and an update review in Scotland (Harris *et al.*, 2008⁶, SNH, 2015⁷) but no review has been implemented in Wales. Natural Resources Wales wishes to establish whether a similar evidence-led review to investigate the impacts of predation by fish-eating birds on both natural fish populations and inland fisheries is required in Wales to better inform decision-making.

NRW currently acts as the licensing authority for the issuing of licences to control fish-eating birds where they are causing, or are likely to cause, serious damage to inland fisheries in Wales. Licences may be granted if certain criteria in section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1982 are met.

In January 2018 NRW's Board approved the application to Welsh Government for new fishing controls on Welsh rivers to support recovery of salmon and sea trout populations. During the public consultation on these measures, suggestions for many other issues to be addressed to improve fish populations were put forward, with the impact of fish-eating birds being the most commonly raised issue by respondents. At the January 2018 meeting the NRW Board also therefore identified a range of other measures they wished effort to be focussed on, including investigating the concerns of the fishing sector in relation to the impact of fish-eating birds on fish stocks. The establishment of this Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group is a response to this challenge.

2. Purpose

The Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group (hereafter termed the 'Advisory Group') is a joint group between organisations that represent sectors of government, conservation and fisheries management. The Advisory Group will identify evidence and establish expert opinion in order to

⁵ Impacts of predation by fish-eating birds on inland fisheries in England: Final report and recommendations' (Defra July 2013)

⁶ Harris, C. M., Calladine, J., Wernham, C. W. & Park, K. J. 2008. Impacts of piscivorous birds on salmonid populations and game fisheries in Scotland: a review. *Wildlife Biology*, **14**(4), 395-411.

⁷ Humphreys, E.M., Gillings, S., Musgrove, A., Austin, G., Marchant, J. & Calladine, J. 2016. An update of the review on the impacts of piscivorous birds on salmonid populations and game fisheries in Scotland. *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 884*

ensure Welsh policy continues to be based upon the best available evidence and is robust and fit for purpose.

Natural Resources Wales will help inform the Advisory Group with expert advice from its staff, particularly from the Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate, and through close working with those individuals and/or organisations that have evidence and knowledge in the field.

The Advisory Group will:

- Review the interactions and effects of piscivorous birds on salmonids and inland fisheries;
- Review and consider experience in Scotland and England;
- Seek views and advice from group members concerning requirements for Wales;
- Produce recommendations for next steps;
- Ensure any subsequent recommendations are within the existing legal and policy framework, or they identify where legislative or policy changes would be required.

3. Scope

The Advisory Group will:

- Consider the impacts of predation by cormorant and goosander on all species of fish found within inland water catchments in Wales;
 - Recognising that both the fish and the birds are key components of the biodiversity, culture and economy of Wales
 - Respecting the cultural heritage of people and businesses in Wales connected to these species, particularly fishing;
 - Recognising that the wildlife and fisheries of Wales are iconic and highly valued and contribute to viable, vibrant communities in Wales.

The Advisory Group will not:

- Consider in detail the impact of wider external factors such as climate change on either fish or birds.

4. Membership

The Advisory Group will comprise representatives from: Welsh Government, NRW, RSPB, BTO, WOS, Afonydd Cymru, Salmon and Trout Conservation Cymru, Angling Trust, Cefas, NE (see Appendix 1 for membership list and contact details).

5. Outputs

The key output of this group will be a recommendation paper to NRW's Board identifying whether a formal review of Wales' approach to fish-eating birds is required, and if so it will set out the Advisory Group's suggested Terms of Reference, Scope, Time-frames and Standard of Evidence required for such an evidence-led review of the impacts of fish-eating birds in Wales. This recommendation, if accepted, would then be submitted to WG by NRW's Board

The Advisory Group will be time-limited, aiming to put recommendations to the NRW Board in March 2019 (see Appendix 2 for time-line).

To achieve the key output, it may be necessary to commission further evidence and data gathering.

6. Method of operation

- Meetings will be chaired by NRW.
- Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided by NRW, this includes: preparing agendas and supporting papers, finalising meeting notes and information.

- It is anticipated that there will be three Advisory Group meetings (July, November 2018 and February 2019).
- It is expected that there will be exchanges of information between meetings, as required
- On occasions, and on the agreement of the Advisory Group members, other specialists may be asked to attend where there is the need for information of a specific nature to be discussed.

- **The members of the Advisory Group will commit to:**
 - a. attend all scheduled meetings (or if necessary nominate a proxy),
 - b. share all communications and information across all members,
 - c. make timely decisions and take action so as to not hold up the project,
 - d. notify members of the Advisory Group as soon as practical, if any matter arises which may be deemed to affect the development of the fish-eating birds review in Wales,
 - e. ensure that the work of the Advisory Group, and discussions within the meetings, are not shared externally, unless and until agreed by all members; and,
 - f. take a collaborative approach and to respect the view of other members and to act in a professional manner at all times.

7. Communications

- Notes of all Advisory Group meetings will be produced by NRW and circulated electronically to group members within 14 working days.
- After review and agreement by the Advisory Group, notes will be published on NRW website. Members may then forward relevant reports to others.

8. Amendment, modification or variation

These Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified only after consultation and agreement by the Advisory Group members.

Adopted by the Advisory Group on 0000

Paper prepared by Peter Gough (Principal Fisheries Advisor, Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate), 26 June 2018.

Amended 13.07.18

Appendix 1. Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group membership

The Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group consists of the following individuals:

Simon Bilsborough, Welsh Government

Jeremy Frost, Welsh Government

Madeleine Havard, Natural Resources Wales

Peter Gough, Natural Resources Wales

Carys Roberts, Natural Resources Wales

Ben Wilson, Natural Resources Wales

Patrick Lindley, Natural Resources Wales

Nigel Shelton, Natural England

Heather Galliford, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Rachel Taylor, British Trust for Ornithology

Mick Green, Welsh Ornithological Society

Mark Lloyd, Angling Trust

or Mark Owen, Angling Trust

Ian Russell, Cefas

Stephen Marsh-Smith, Afonydd Cymru

Richard Garner-Williams, Salmon and Trout Conservation

Appendix 2. Time-line

It is estimated that this work will take c10 months to complete (ie from the 1st Advisory meeting to submission of the final statement to Welsh Government).

Areas in green shade represent key milestones

Activity	Lead	Date	Status
Internal Governance			
Define role and membership of the NRW internal FEB Working Group ¹	Patrick Lindley	June 2018	Completed
Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group			
Wales FEB Advisory Group membership agreed.	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	June 2018	Completed
Papers prepared and circulated for first meeting of the Wales FEB Advisory Group	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	18 June 2018	Completed
Convene 1 st meeting of the Wales FEB Advisory Group	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	3 July 2018	Completed
ToR agreed	Advisory Group	3 July 2018	In prep.
Set meeting schedule	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	November 2018 February 2019	TBC
Assessment			
Identify and assess options and resource implications for commissioning of further work (eg reviews of population biology, census techniques, population modelling)	Wales FEB Advisory Group meetings	30 November 2018	
Wales FEB Advisory Group final statement produced including the suggested contents of an evidence-led policy review	Wales FEB Advisory Group	March 2019	
Final NRW Governance steps			
Progress report to Directors Operations Strategy Group (DOSG)	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	September 2018 November 2018 February 2019	
Submission of progress reports to NRW board	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	June 2018 November 2018 January 2019	
Submission of paper to NRW board detailing and seeking approval of FEB Advisory Group final statement	Peter Gough and Patrick Lindley	March 2019	
If accepted by NRW Board, final statement submitted to WG.	DOSG	April 2019	

Note: 1. **NRW internal Fish-eating Birds Working Group** is an internal group of NRW specialists and Operations staff.