

Meeting note

Title of meeting: Wales Fisheries Forum

Date of meeting: 31st May 2022

Time of meeting: 10:30

NRW:

Steve Ormerod (Chair)

Ben Wilson

David Mee

Emma Keenan

Martyn P. Evans

Michael Evans

Rhianne Jones

Robert Evans

Present: Ruth Jenkins

Susie Kingham

Members:

Alan Winstone - Afonydd Cymru

Andy Phillips – Angling Cymru

Chloe White – Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

Chris Mills –Institute of Fisheries Management

Creighton Harvey –Southwest Wales & Gower LFG rep

Denise Ashton –Wild Trout Trust

Dylan Roberts –Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

Fergus O'Brien - Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

Gail Davies-Walsh – Afonydd Cymru

Guy Mawle – Usk LFG Rep

John Ellis – Canal & River Trust

Mark Owen – Angling Trust

Mervyn Williams -Dee & Clwyd LFG rep

Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance

Richard Garner-Williams – Salmon and Trout Conservation
Cymru/Wild Fish

Robert Floyd – Welsh Government

Stuart Smith – Wye LFG rep

Apologies:

Chris White – Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries,
Paul Edwards – Welsh Salmon & Trout Angling Association,
Tony Harington – Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

**Item
No:**

Item

Welcome and introductions

1.
 - Steve Ormerod opened the meeting and covered any matters arising
 - New member Andy Phillips was welcomed to the forum. Andy is the Governance Director for Angling Cymru and takes over from Carl Tonner.
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Admin Matters

2.
 - Fish Eating Bird Review Evidence reports were circulated prior to the meeting. This will be on the agenda for the NRW board meeting in July.
 - Minutes from the WFF January 2022 meeting were approved.
 - Angling participation task and finish group had their first meeting
 - Price Review 24 – BW has had discussions with Ruth Johnson and Mark Squire, but the paper has not yet been drafted as there has been some discussion around the appropriate route for the delivery of alternative mitigation which is yet to be resolved.
 - Organisations on the group were reminded to bring updates about ongoing work to future meetings
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- Welsh Government gave an update on the changes to European sea bass fishing in relation to coastal netting

[Bass Fishing Guidance 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/bass-fishing-guidance-2022)

Further to addressing the bass fisheries question in the meeting, Rob Floyd (WG) also provided the following comments after the meeting:

“These 50 nets were targeting bass to start with rather than bass being a bycatch, hence why they were stopped [To clarify Shore netting was not stopped, only the retention of bass which became a wasted discard, also see below for other species targeted] It is sea trout and sea birds that would have been the bycatch then. The EU bass regulations stopped all recreational catching of bass to sell and limited the catch from recreational anglers to initially just 1 and then 2 to be retained per day. So do we know the following:

Who issues the licences for these nets?

As these nets are not set from a fishing vessel there is no license or permit associated with the activity. There is no additional regulation to require a permit or submit catch returns.

How do they know that bass were a bycatch?

Regular patrols by Marine Enforcement Officers monitor and check activity

Where are the catch return figures for the shore-based nets - presumably these are within the MMO or Welsh government landings data?

Sales data for commercial fisheries are collected via the Registered Buyers & sellers Scheme. There is no statutory obligation on the fisher to submit a return.

What other marine fish species do they catch and land?

Mullet, Plaice, Flounder, Ray, Sole

Are there any controls in mesh or size of the nets used?

Anyone fishing in Wales must abide by the fisheries regulations. Welsh Government retains former byelaws across Wales; these set a range of requirements for net fisheries and can be found on the WG website. <https://gov.wales/inshore-fishery-legislation-definitions-north-and-north-west-inshore-district-byelaws>
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/south-wales-inshore-fishery-legislation.pdf>

Are there any geographic restrictions on where these nets can be used?

Yes, restrictions can be found in the retained byelaws
<https://gov.wales/inshore-fishery-legislation-definitions-north-and-north-west-inshore-district-byelaws>

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/south-wales-inshore-fishery-legislation.pdf>

- Action was for NRW to brief Steve Ormerod (SO) on the National Access Forum issues, but members from this forum have spoken with Lee Waters (LW) directly. It was understood that LW was aware of concerns of Fisheries Forum members, but it is not yet clear how the recommendations from the Access to Water subgroup are going to be actioned.

Action RJ to pick up matters around National Access Forum.

- SO discussed issues of water quality to the NRW board in January in relation to the Government's response to the Water Quality in Rivers Report.

[Water quality in rivers: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22 - Environmental Audit Committee \(parliament.uk\)](#)

Feedback from Ben Wilson

- BW attended meetings with Rivers Trusts across Wales and found that a common issue was the amount of bureaucracy involved in some of the NRW grant mechanisms. NRW is ensuring that we are delivering longer term grants in this current round and hoping to continue to do that going forward. There also needs to be a focus on improving GIS shared data facilities to improve catchment coordination of ongoing and planned work.
 - BW has also attended all the Local Fisheries Group meetings and spoken to most chairs now. LFGs are a good mechanism for sharing information locally and policy at an all-Wales level however, information doesn't always make it out to clubs, fisheries, or anglers.
 - It would be helpful to get some diversity into those LFGs and improve angling participation. Coarse and Stillwater fisheries are also underrepresented at these groups which needs to be looked at to broaden the remit.
 - There are still questions about stocking of salmon, the current stocking policy is valid and appropriate however there is concern around what to do when salmon populations reach a 'critical' level. This may include gene banking, but the most important measure right now is prevention and following NASCO guidance.
 - Greater visibility around enforcement is needed so that anglers can see where rod licence money is spent.
 - There are also issues around small grants for clubs and fisheries as there isn't a small grants programme that easily enables clubs and fisheries to access projects from rod licence income. EA uses different mechanisms providing funding through the Angling Trust 'Fisheries Improvement Programme' that NRW are not able to use to provide grants. NRW are looking at mechanisms to better support recreation and angling participation.
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- There needs to be greater consistency between LFGs in terms of frequency of meetings and local priorities. Some LFGs are overdue meeting. Members from Wye and Usk LFGs noted they had not had meetings recently.

Action: Ben/Dave speak with local Ops teams on progressing Wye and Usk LFGs

Action: pull together an overview paper on what's happening in LFGs – suggestion or action?

- The ongoing work at Plymouth University on management decisions for anadromous fish was raised - [Assessing and enhancing ecosystem services provided by diadromous fish in a climate change context \(DiadES\) - University of Plymouth](#)
- Work needs to be done to address all the pressures on Atlantic salmon and draw up means of addressing or minimising these pressures as we are on the South-Western edge of their range.
- There are already catchments in Wales that may be heading towards effective extinction, and we should learn from other jurisdictions and agencies are doing and consider pilot schemes to test whether these approaches may work. However, catchments can be unique and have their own set of pressures and it should be considered i) whether certain approaches can be extrapolated to other circumstances and ii) that the identification of underlying causes of population decline is often difficult. In the first instance pressures that reduce populations should be addressed and then consider the eventualities that may occur in the future.

Action – NRW to develop further strategic thinking on extinction risks in Atlantic Salmon based on small population size work

Angling Participation

4. Angling Participation Presentation

- There needs to be an evidence base to measure participation rather than just rod licence sales which have been decreasing year on year yet don't necessarily equate to participation. Should look to boost licence sales to increase participation not income.

Action – GM to send presentation on long-term trends of licence sales

4.

- Need to identify the key partners so that strategies can be aligned. However, the remit of rod licences sits clearly with NRW. It's also important to encourage people from an early age, many used to pick up angling through a parent however with fewer people fishing this isn't the case anymore and the last two generations are disconnected from natural environments. To follow that we need to ensure that there are the facilities for individuals to carry on the sport. Social media could be a useful tool in encouraging people to interact with nature and take up angling and connect with young voices but also need to identify why people took up fishing in the first place to help this. There have been successful schemes with schools
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but there's also a role for angling clubs to be involved in these projects with schemes such as 'bring a friend' but there are issues with red tape in terms of health and safety that may act as a barrier to this. Should look to demonstrate the value of anglers as people who are in the countryside seeing problems and issues when they arise, keeping an eye on the environment, producing valuable information that helps us to understand the environmental trajectories.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

5. May 22 Fisheries Forum SFS engagement project overview

- The agriculture White Paper last year introduced the idea of the national minimum standards, but NRW anticipates that these may not be in the first agriculture bill due in the autumn. We're anticipating a second agriculture bill possibly around 2023 to meet the deadline to introduce the scheme in 2025. Conscious that the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations are not fully operational yet, and that there is also potential for a new regulatory standard, and where the two cross over and how they fit, or link together is something that's being flagged with Welsh Government. We expect a full consultation in 2023.
- There is interest around secondary income from angling access and other ecosystem services, value, and benefit from natural environment, which will be included in conversations with Welsh Government to encourage more collaborative and collective land management.

5.

Action - RJ to ask BW to input on this

- Current and previous schemes have encouraged farmers to retain as much hectareage as possible as eligible land. The focus of is now shifting to outcomes such as ecosystem services, clean water, flood prevention, decarbonisation actions or climate change mitigation.
- One of the key principles of sustainable land management is looking at nitrogen levels and nitrogen loading in rivers and different catchments. Another of the more innovative things it trying to quantify simple metrics in terms of what can be monitored and measured to demonstrate a good outcome from land management be it numbers of fish in a river or diversity of habitat in the riparian zone which needs to be balanced against mechanisms for payment and developing a baseline.

Gyrodactylus salaris

6. Gyrodactylus Russian doll presentation

6.

- R.E. gave a presentation on the risk posed by Gs to Welsh rivers
 - The main threats are through the transboundary transportation / release of fish into the wild (though this is at a low level and well controlled I Wales)
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and England) and from anglers or water sports enthusiasts coming entering / returning to the UK,

- There was discussion of the need before more formal mechanisms systems in place to prevent Gs coming into the country.
- In Norway a disinfection certificate is required to prove all your kit is sterile before you are allowed to fish. Similarly in Iceland you also require proof of disinfection and border officers are required to carry out disinfection if you do not have proof along with a fine. Angling Trust are also working with Border Force Inspectorate for Invasive Species in England about how preventative measures can be best applied across the country.

Check, Clean, Dry alone may not be effective enough for preventing the spread of some INNS, and as a result guidance has been updated to include using hot water

Action – Mark Owen to share data to show pathways of Gs to the UK via British Anglers

- It's difficult to detect Gs with eDNA due to how much the genome overlaps with *Gyrodactylus thymalli* and identification relies on microscopy, but it is hoped that there will be more work to develop an eDNA technique.

Action – BW to circulate NASCO paper on gene banking of salmon

Action - Circulate Gs presentation to LFaGs for discussion and promotion of CCD guidance

4Rivers for LIFE

7. 4 Rivers for Life Project summary

Action: Afonydd Cymru to speak with SK to look at coordinate works and think about how that will work alongside the requirements that are needed for nutrient neutrality through nutrient management boards on the same rivers.

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- The project is looking at putting freshwater pearl mussels into the rivers across South Wales if there are enough adults to breed a viable population with enough genetic diversity. This includes the Usk if there are places that they will survive.
 - The project will look at getting farmers to change management practices to provide 10m buffer riparian zones but there is not likely to be a payment scheme until 2025.
 - We're trying to get for public payments, whether they are about water quality, flood risk management, carbon sequestration, protecting rivers against warming, or whether it is around producing food is becoming an increasingly live debate. During meetings about the biodiversity deep dive the Minister, Julie James, has repeatedly mentioned water quality.
 - Need to be mindful of the payment schemes to farmers where rivers trusts are working in the same area as this may lead to conflict and make delivery on longer riparian corridors quite difficult. It may also be worth considering
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compulsory purchase schemes in area that are failing for phosphates to create buffer zones.

- The project launch will be in September – members of WFF will be welcome
- Next week or so we will be advertising for 2 River Restoration Officers and 3 Land Management Officers for the 4Rivers project.

Stock Assessment 2021

8. Salmon and sea trout stock assessment NRW May 2022

Dave Mee provided latest evidence on salmon and sea trout stocks from 2021.

- Salmon catches are now lower than other point in the time series. Provisional salmon assessments of 23 principal salmon rivers: 21 rivers classed as 'at risk' and 2 rivers 'probably at risk'. Projections for 2026 suggest 20 rivers 'at risk' and 3 rivers 'probably at risk'.
All rivers have downward trends; with 15 having a high probability of failing to achieve their CL (<0.10)

The majority of rivers (19 of 23) also have egg deposition deficits of more than 5% against their management target.

8.

- Sea trout catches are also the lowest in the recent time series. Provisional assessments of the 33 main sea trout rivers
- Provisional sea trout stock statuses; 21 Rivers 'at risk' 6 'probably at risk' and 6 'probably not at risk'
- Projections for 2026; 21 'at risk', 8 'probably at risk' 4 'probably not at risk'

Only 4 rivers are assessed as having positive trends, 19 of the 33 main sea trout rivers have large spawning deficits > -50% of their management target

- Once the review of stock assessments has been completed and papers have been peer reviewed NRW will look at implementing these changes as soon as practical. NRW will also be looking into the socio-economic impacts of the byelaws and reduced numbers of fish as part of the 5-year review of the byelaws.

Salmon and Sea Trout Plan of Action progress update

9. WFF Salmon and sea trout plan of action May 2022

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9. PoA Report to WFF

- BW presented a summary of progress against the S&St PoA
- On the whole progress has been good and there has been considerable progress against measures such as
 - Byelaws implementation

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- Stock assessment review
 - Smolt tracking
 - Counter
 - River habitat and fish pass projects (internal and partnership_
 - Metal mine remediation
 - Peat bog restoration
 - Fish Eating Birds review
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 - However, the plan does need reviewing and updating to ensure that it is still up to date
 - Climate change and water quality are two of the main pressures affecting salmon and trout populations.
 - Fewer waterbodies are also failing to reach good ecological status across Wales and data on WaterWatchWales doesn't give change at a catchment level, only waterbody level.
 - Afonydd Cymru raised concern around issues with funding from NRW in terms of delivering the River Restoration Programme.
 - There are still issues around water quantity that need to be picked up between NRW and DCWW in terms of resolution of statutory obligations for mitigation on reservoirs, but also in terms of review of consents particularly on the Dee and the Tywi.

Action - BW to confirm whether we would be progressing PR24 driver for mitigation measures ASAP

- Consider a review of the Plan of Action to assess whether the measures in place are appropriate.
- It was noted that the Welsh Government's biodiversity deep dive exercise focussed primarily on terrestrial habitats and NRW needed to ensure that adequate focus given to freshwaters too. It may be more beneficial to focus on a few key areas rather than trying to address all the issues listed in the POA. And, whilst the LIFE projects look to spend a lot of money on a few catchments it is worth considering other funding pots that can do work in non-SAC rivers that could be coordinated and prioritised together with Afonydd Cymru and other stakeholders.
- In Scotland they are modelling river temperatures and carrying out strategic tree planting to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and from the perspective of natural flood management and thermal damping in rivers, the use of trees isn't powerful tool as well as for sediment retention and denitrification. However, there are problems rising with winter temperatures associated with egg deposition and survival which cannot be treated with riparian shading and other mechanisms for heat transfer need to be considered.

[A review of marine stressors impacting Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*, with an assessment of the major threats to English stocks | SpringerLink](#)

Update Paper

10.

10. WFF Update paper May 22

Updates from other Fora

Creighton Harvey feedback on the latest meeting of the WLMF subgroup on agricultural pollution in March for which the minutes will shortly appear in the link below:

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

- Dr Shane Rothwell from Lancashire University gave a presentation on the [RePhoKUs – Resilience Phosphorus UK \(lancs.ac.uk\)](#) which covered the Wye. The talk showed that no further nutrient is required in this year or for several years because of the level of saturation of phosphorus in the soil. This means that no more slurry can be spread on that land and methods for reducing the volume, so far, haven't been successful. The aim was to remove the solid matter from the liquid and the nutrient then from the liquid and unfortunately that couldn't be done economically. It also can't be put into a transferable form and management of slurry depends on what type of slurry it is and a solution for slurry management should come from Welsh Government level not farm level.
- Judicial review of the new agricultural regulations rejected NFUs application and is now due to undergo scrutiny by the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee and a report of their findings will be provided. (Insert last meeting minutes here?)
- 11. • Both the NASCO implementation plan and Salmon and Sea Trout POA refer to action on soil erosion and agrochemicals, and this hasn't been referred to at the WLMF however some work has been done to encourage farmers to practice better maize farming to reduce the amount of soil runoff and reduce the number of phosphates getting into rivers.
- [Natural Resources Wales / Wales Land Management Forum](#)

SO feedback on the [Natural Resources Wales / Wales Water Management Forum](#)

- An issue reflecting spatial disparity at England and Wales level, which is that we get all the water which falls as rain in the West, whereas they need it dominantly in the East of England and Wales. Various pathways of transfer have been discussed and the issue is being accelerate with climate change.
- SO is a part of the biodiversity deep dive group in his university role as a freshwater specialist. There are constraints over what current legislation allows us to do with the designated landscapes, in particular area AONB's and national parks. There is probably limited opportunity to change the fundamental legislation around designations that don't currently deliver for biodiversity, but would have to, if we want to realize the full complement of 30% of land and sea protected for biodiversity by 2030. Water quality and freshwater issues are being mentioned frequently in these meetings and the pivotal position of water linking what happens with terrestrial management and freshwater environments as well as the marine environment.

12. AOB

Forward look agenda items:

- Welsh woodland WG Policy and managing opportunities and risk in its implementation - planned for September 2022 meeting
- Water quality – update on the various strands of water quality improvement measures (sept 2022)
- Update on access to water from WG
- Understanding risks of salmon and sea trout population collapse and mitigation measures (once BW has completed further thinking on this)

Action – BW consider subgroup for Salmon and Sea Trout Plan of revision
