

Notes from Inaugural Fisheries Forum 31 Oct 2018

The agenda was as follows:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Governance
3. NRW's Fisheries Business
4. Salmon and sea trout fisheries
5. Fisheries enforcement
6. Updates on current work
7. Future business items
8. Communications for the meeting
9. Any Other Business

Attendees (going around the table):

Carl Conner:	Angling Cymru
Luke Davies:	WG Inland Fisheries
Jeremy Frost:	WG Inland Fisheries
Rachel Evans:	Countryside Alliance
Denise Ashton:	Wild Trout Trust
David Mee:	NRW
Mark Lloyd:	Angling Trust
Peter Gough:	NRW
Stephen Marsh Smith:	Afonydd Cymru
Richard Garner Williams:	Salmon and Trout Conservation Cymru
Michaela Teague:	APM/Institute of Fisheries Management
Paul Edwards:	Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association
Ben Wilson:	NRW Operations Manager (Enforcement)
Chris White:	Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries
Alan Winston:	Representing Rivers Trusts
Ruth Jenkins:	NRW (Chair of the meeting acting for Ceri Davies)

Agenda item

1. The meeting was opened by Ruth Jenkins who explained that she was standing in for Ceri Davies who was on sick leave. After those present introduced themselves Ruth asked if there were any issues for AOB, the following were tabled: NASCO Implementation Plan; Agri Pollution: Canoeing; Hatcheries.

Governance

2. NRW explained that they had recognised that they needed to engage with the angling community in Wales and the Fisheries Forum was the first step in the process of re-engaging with their customers (my interpretation not what was said!). The draft terms of reference were discussed and it was suggested that there should be representation from riparian owners as they are key players in the success of any long term fisheries strategy. It was commented that the TOR's were not action oriented i.e. the forum needs to have an action plan as what gets measured gets done – the forum should not be seen as a talking shop. The question was asked how do we engage the angling grass roots and how do we promote angling. It was suggested that the Forum should have some representation from the Tackle Trade from what was said NRW communicates with the tackle trade on an informal basis. NRW explained that they have to complete a statutory declaration on how they will improve and enhance fishing in Wales, they have produced statements which cover 7 areas including marine fisheries, at the moment these are not available via the NRW web site but these should be available shortly. If any of those present wanted to added additional items to the TOR's they are to be sent to Peter Gough as soon as possible.

NRW's Fisheries Business

3. There was commitment from NRW for continuing with the LFG meetings as they value the opinions expressed at these meetings. I asked about the use of LFAG with the 'A' referring to an advisory role, this was rejected as it could be perceived that the use of the designation 'advisory' could be construed as government sponsored group. The 2015 document: Sustainable inland fisheries in Wales: an agenda for change would be used as the basis for the development of the on-going strategy it was accepted that since the production of this document nothing had been done and it was seen more as an internal policy document hopefully this will be revised into an action document.

Salmon and sea trout fisheries

4. It was announced that the public inquiry into the proposed bylaws would now take place in January (we already knew this). I raised the issue of the temporary measures which the Minister had referred to in her recent letter to me and asked what these were, NRW are still working on these! It seems that as the national salmon regulations expire on 31 December 2018 something has to be put in place for 2019 to incorporate compulsory C&R. It was explained that if this was not done netsmen could start operating again. Stephen Marsh Smith seems to think the Wye would be protected as they had bought off the nets, unfortunately he may be in for a surprise. We bought the nets off on the Dee only to find out that the payment received by the netsmen was for loss of income during the 10 year ban (which was extended for a further 10 years ending this year) so if nothing is done to include compulsory C&R netsmen could re-apply for a licence which according to NRW cannot be refused.

Enforcement

5. Ben Wilson presented on the enforcement NRW undertakes. The graphs he presented showed that the number of reported incidents was reducing which justifies the NRW intelligence lead policy. I pointed out that the level of poaching had not decreased and that anglers won't report incidents as they see no positive action. On the map shown there were many reports of poaching activity on the Conwy system but there has been no action to reduce this, just a mark on the map. I pointed out that last weekend poachers were lamping on the upper Lledr and would in one night remove most of our broodstock (otters eat what is left!) much to annoyance of Betws and Llanrwst anglers who have been returning their fish only for them to be taken by poachers on the upper river spawning grounds. Mark Lloyd asked about honorary bailiffs and we were advised that a 'river guardian' scheme is in development and until this was up and running were told to keep on reporting incidents!

Updates on Current Work

6. An update was given on the progress of the river restoration plans; much of this work has been undertaken by Afonydd Cymru. There were no details on how these plans would be implemented as this is still work in progress, feedback will be via presentations at LFG's.

There was an update on the group looking at fish eating birds, there had been a meeting of the Wales Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group which is being chaired by Madeline Harvard (an ex NRW Board member) although not much has happened so far and we were referred to the paper sent out with the agenda, most of the actions had been completed but it seems unlikely that effective controls will result from this. Pat Lindy is apparently advising on what needs to be done. It was suggested by Alan Winstone that there should be more focus on a single activity if we are to achieve anything from the forum.

I have included a diagram as an appendix to this note showing the losses from egg to sea and back you will see from this that angling is not the cause of the decline – FEB's are! We need to get more smolts to the sea if we are to reverse the decline.

NRW provided an update on Fishing Licence sales, not surprisingly these were down again in 2018 with revenue down by 16%. I raised the issue of anglers only buying a trout licence as they cannot take a salmon on several rivers due to voluntary restrictions imposed by many clubs. The problem is of course that salmon are being caught (as a 'by-catch') by anglers supposedly fishing for trout with worm. I pointed out that there is no mechanism for trout anglers to record these salmon; this further skews NRW's stock assessments which rely on angler catch returns. In answer to this NRW claims to have adjusted their algorithm to address this i.e. increasing undeclared catches to 30% from 10%.

It was accepted that the economic value of fishing Wales needs updating and fishing needs a higher profile and promotion on the Visit Wales web site. Taster sessions were discussed and whilst this may well encourage uptake from youngsters there is no mechanism for the next steps once they have had their taster session. The success of the passport scheme was raised and it was suggested that this was a way to promote fisheries opportunities; in North Wales clubs have no difficulty in selling day tickets to visitors and object to paying 10% to WUF for use of the passport scheme although the offer for a free period was apparently on the table.

I raised the issue of inappropriate hydro schemes on our rivers and the adverse effects these are having. It transpires that NRW are fully aware that hydro developers are not complying with the regulations and that they would be acting on this in the future, as ever too little too late.

Future business items

7. It was agreed that agricultural pollution should be included as an agenda item for the next meeting.

Communication from this meeting

8. As the minutes from LFG meetings are already published on the NRW website it was agreed that the draft (unapproved) minutes should be published on the NRW website and if possible these should also be posted on attendee's websites.

Peter Gough mentioned that 2019 is to be the International year of the salmon it will be the responsibility of CEFAS in the UK and they will refer to all of their relevant activities as the 'salmosphere'. After Brexit it is assumed that the UK will remain as a member of NASCO as at the moment this is covered as a member of the EU.

Any Other Business

9. It was agreed that the issues raised at the start of the meeting would be agenda items for the next meeting.

Arrangements for next meeting

10. It was suggested by Paul Edwards that the WSTAA use the Elan Valley Hotel near Rhayader for their meetings and this would be a central location for all attendees although there is no public transport to the venue. It was also suggested that Wrexham would be a good venue due to its good transport links. NRW are to investigate the use of the Elan Valley Hotel for the next meeting which would be on 14 March 2019.

From egg to sea and back

