



# MERTHYR TYDFIL ANGLING ASSOCIATION

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## Decline in Salmon Stocks on both Taff and Usk

Committee members from the association sit on both the Taff Local Fishery Group and the Usk Local Fishery Group to represent the association as well as on the Usk Fishery Owners Group.

The river Taff is already 100% catch and release and historically has not been heavily fished for Salmon although the numbers that come every year and are monitored by being trapped at Radyr weir tend to hold fairly steady with yearly variations as well as variation in the time and duration that the trap is working. However any decisions will have an impact on the fishing on the Taff as the papers show. The one thing is objectionable is the fact that a reply is needed by the 31<sup>st</sup> January before any of the committees we belong to will be given the benefit of a meeting. We know that this has been brought up to the committees in November but the matter now seems to be being rushed.

On the Usk Dr Guy Mawle has unsuccessfully appealed for measures to be taken for the last three years and now although we were informed in November that a consultation paper was on the way the manner and timing has come as a surprise and really seems to be a rushed programme. The implications however for angling clubs could be as severe as a huge loss in membership with the resulting consequences.

Most agree that there is need to keep exploitation to a minimum and where some anglers wish to support the current voluntary Catch and release others are not. Natural Resources Wales have agreed in this consultation at last that Angling and anglers are not the reason for the decline but that the problem is at sea. This is probably correct to a degree but they are missing the point that the more smolts that can get to sea the more survival at sea will take place. One of the main contentious issues is the fact that the predation by fish eating birds is being ignored and is not even mentioned in the Board Papers or the options to increase fish survival. WHY? There are other factors such as low flows in the spring which hinder the passage of smolts to the sea and leave them a target for the fish eating birds. WE are also unsure on the Taff how many survive for the same reason as well as the noted fact that at some stages of the tide the smolts have to drop a considerable distance to the sea from going over the sluices and this causes more mortalities which at the moment are not being recorded.

We agree that the use of treble hooks and the possible ban on Bait fishing would be one way to progress as well as possibly to curtail the season back to the end of September and that from 1<sup>st</sup> August no fish to be killed. These are all points for discussion and we

would welcome feedback from our members on these points. The committee and many other clubs are not in favour of total catch and release unless something is done about fish eating birds. In 2015 Natural Resources Wales were offering the Ornithological Trust funds to do a survey on fish eating birds but this did not happen again WHY? We would welcome any suggestions, or what our members see as possible solutions or what you see as an acceptable way forward.

Of course the decision reached will affect the whole of Wales, so we could consider the relevant facts around the survival of migratory fish entering the rivers of Wales.

The major fact of fish eating birds has already been mentioned. There are other factors to consider.

Will any restrictions be made on net fisheries on some rivers especially in the West and North. The Usk net fishery has been closed but the netting stations in the Severn estuary, we believe, are to be revived. Those on the Tywi will not be affected because they are of "heritage value", at present all netted fish must carry a tag, these tags are unlimited in quantity. Who checks them?

Due to the advent of industry our rivers (South East Wales area) became virtually lifeless, but with the demise of industry, life returned to the rivers, helped in no small way by the clubs spending their hard earned cash in restocking the rivers with trout. There is no need for the heavy stocking at present as the fishery appears to be fairly static.

You may wonder, what was the need for the previous mention of stocking. Well with the migratory fish stock in difficulties then the obvious route would be to do as we have done and stock with viable young fish. This has been done on the Taff for the last fifteen years and the records from all the monitoring show that it was viable.

The other major factor affecting the whole of the Wales is that the Natural Resources Wales has seen fit to close ALL hatcheries and allow the "natural" sequence of events for the spawning of the Salmon. This has been done by refusing to support the private successful hatcheries such as on the Wye, Dovey and Dee.

We hear rumours of fish being taken/poached. But with the successive reduction in the enforcement team (Feel sorry for these guys in S E Wales there are three (3) officers to cover from the Wye to the Neath and from Cardiff North to mid Wales). They "operate" under a hope and a prayer, as do the rest of the almost non-existent fisheries department, but the Environment and Eco System Approach (Do not Mention Rivers) of NRW is burgeoning.

So again Anglers will be (although for the first time it has been acknowledged we are not the problem) as the sacrificial "goat" to alleviate the shortcomings of not being able to do anything else.

As previously mentioned "the angler is not to blame." We certainly have stepped up and embraced catch and release voluntary already, do not take vast quantities of prey fish from the oceans, but it is being done on a vast scale and scientists are wondering why the returning fish are much thinner than they used to be and of course in far fewer numbers. What would be our situation if our food supply disappeared and ASDA was empty? The proof of this fact is that it is almost impossible to catch "MACKEREL", what more proof is needed we wonder?

If catch and release be made mandatory would there be a need for a migratory (£78) licence? We think NOT.

The above A combination of thoughts from the committee.