

Synopsis of Inquiry – NRW to date 8/2/2019

All,

The 3 weeks scheduled for the Inquiry have now come to an end without all of the evidence being heard and closing submissions still to be presented. Yesterday (Friday 1st) should have been the final day but the Inspector wisely decided on an early cancellation given the snow forecast for many parts of Wales and as a result the Inquiry has adjourned until Tuesday 5th March at what we understand will be a new venue, possibly a hotel close to Welshpool.

All updates and documents can be found at [All Wales Fishing Byelaws Inquiry | Helen Wilson Consultancy Limited](#)

All Wales Fishing Byelaws Inquiry | Helen Wilson Consultancy Limited

Apologies that this is something of a “*one size fits all*” report on progress so far but it is intended to cover friends, colleagues, contacts and “*Uncle Tom Cobley and All*” in one fell swoop. Frankly I think I speak for everyone who has been involved directly in this whole sorry saga that respite from emails, telephone calls and constant discussions about the “*Inquiry*” will be more than welcome for a few days. Whilst we were looking forward to the end of the process and an element of “*closure*” whilst we await the Inspector’s decision, that has now been put back and is beyond our control.

In essence the “*Objectors*” consist of a random group who share a common goal; the restoration of our stocks of migratory fish without inflicting unnecessary damage on angling clubs/organisations, the rural tourism that they support and the habitat improvement/work/river restoration that we are keen to progress and who reject the “*one size fits all/we know best/legislative approach*” which has been relentlessly pursued by NRW since July 2015. Our goal is a voluntary solution that builds on what has taken voluntary return rates from zero to 86% across Wales through education, shared values and cooperation.

I am grateful for the support shown by my colleagues who have put so much time and effort in getting us to this point and am proud to have stood alongside them in this fight (in no particular order)

Chris White - Conservation Officer - Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries

Reuben Woodford - Afon Ogwen Anglers

Mike Ashwin - REDFA & NWATFCC

Karl Humphries – PAAS Game Angling Officer

Mark Lloyd - Chief Executive, Angling Trust & Fish Legal

Noel Hulmston - Llyn Guides

Emyr Lewis – former head bailiff for the Dyfi Area & Llanbrynmair AC

Mark Frey – NDFA angler

Andy Nicholson – NDFA angler, angling journalist and broadcaster

Geoff Rothwell – Dyfi Valley Trout Farm

I have managed to attend on 6 of the 10 days so far (960 miles and counting!) whilst Chris has not missed a single day! I must also thank everyone who has turned up at the Inquiry to support our collective effort, without your support and that of the countless telephone calls, emails and conversations that have taken place over the past 3½ years we would have given up long ago. Special mention should go to Alwyn Cartwright who has been present on a daily basis, Dave Meyrick who has not only attended on a number of occasions but whose

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Professional expertise and knowledge of the Equality Act is posing a significant challenge to NRW's case and Dr Clare Eno, Constituency Office Manager for Mandy Jones A.M., who drove 2 hours through the snow at a time of family bereavement to show her solidarity and support. We cannot thank you enough.

It is difficult to describe the process, clearly there is protocol to be followed but many of us have felt that we are defending ourselves in a criminal court rather than giving evidence at a public inquiry. We have been faced by 2 barristers (Richard Wald assisted by Gethin Thomas) from 39 Essex Chambers, 3 solicitors from London Based BDB Pitmans and NRW's own solicitor all of whom have been tasked with undermining our case by every means at their disposal. However, I believe that collectively we have more than stood up to the challenge and have presented a strong and well researched case and whilst there is no way of knowing what the Inspector may be thinking, we are still some distance from the final whistle.

We believe that the playing field has been far from level, with many of us completing 14 hour days (including driving time) whilst the "Opposition" are holed up in the venue hotel, collectively plotting our downfall. The timetable has constantly been adjusted as NRW claimed that they would need the first 6 days of the Inquiry to present their case but in the end only used 4 of those days. In addition the barrister has sought to manoeuvre the proceedings to NRW's advantage by insisting that CPWF's presentations were heard back to back on the same day. Despite our protestations that they would never follow our arguments, we were ordered to proceed with only Chris and Mike completing during the day. Mike in particular was constantly interrupted by the barrister and was refused permission to present vital evidence as it was on a flip chart and they had not been able to view it in advance. This allowed them to spend the whole evening preparing their cross examination whilst we travelled to and from the venue. Thursday began with the barrister cross examining Chris for 3½ hours without even a comfort break!! A very short cross examination of Mike who presented our statistical evidence (they were in no position to challenge the technical points) was followed by own presentation. At this point they wanted Reuben to follow on in order to use the previous day's tactics until I pointed out that I was unable to return on Friday which led to a 30 minute adjournment followed by cross examination. I think that it is fair to say that all of us have stood up to the barrister's cross examination pretty well considering that it is not a familiar situation.

On Friday, Mark Lloyd was subjected to an unnecessary attack by the barrister who we believe was attempting to discredit the Angling Trust who have given us their backing. This resulted in the attached letter to the Minister for Environment, Energy & Rural Affairs which is self-explanatory. The "I am unable to comment" response from Lesley Griffiths was perhaps no great surprise but those present this week have detected a softer approach by the barrister (we had been previously led to believe that aggressive cross examination would be stamped on!).

By refusing to negotiate and employing an expensive legal team to protect their stance, NRW are now in a position where it is difficult to imagine any of us beating a path to their door to engage in any form of meaningful partnership working. It will be a particularly sad day for our fisheries if the decision is to endorse NRW's proposals. A vicious circle of fewer members fishing, clubs unable to pay rents and/or maintain their waters, relinquished/sold

waters, increase in poaching etc is something we all seek to avoid, yet is the stark reality on the horizon. The threat to habitat improvement and conservation work is clear and obvious. Many genuine friendships have developed amongst us during this campaign which will continue long after the final outcome has been decided. Sadly that is unlikely to be the case amongst the opposition.

If anyone feels that they can attend at any point during the final week commencing Tuesday 5.3.19, your support would be much appreciated. Absolutely crucial during that week will be the wording of our closing submissions which we are currently working on.

Thanking you once again for your support and backing

John