

**FIRST ATTEMPT – This is an article for the ‘Bangor Aye’ an online community focussed e-zine.**

Anglers upon the Afon Cegin and Afon Ogwen, Bangor’s game angling rivers, could within months find themselves hamstrung by a host of mandatory measures engineered by NRW to restrict game angling practices. The ‘All Wales Byelaws’; publicised by NRW as a means of improving fish numbers, are claimed by the angling community to be a ‘wolf in sheep’s’ clothing and the greatest risk to angling and management of our fisheries this century carrying a long list of potential impacts, the angling community insist will impact on community and environment well-being.

The ‘All Wales Byelaws,’ Public Inquiry, the final stage of which was held in Welshpool, was formally closed by the Inspector, Mr Declan Beggan on Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> March, leaving volunteers from the Bangor area and across Wales, content that they have given their all to defend game angling and partnership working for improved environments . Angling representatives who spoke and witnessed proceedings at the Inquiry, who were assisted by colleagues from NW England, however are disillusioned with the fairness of the Inquiry itself. The Inquiry which began in January 2019, has followed on from a Byelaw development process conducted by NRW where angler views were ousted from the final decisions.

The All Wales Byelaws which would apply draconian restrictions upon anglers fishing for Salmon in the Bangor area and the rest of Wales, are being sold by NRW, whose north west Wales Office is in the city, as the potential saviour of fish. In real terms, the angling community at the Inquiry have indicated that the All Wales Byelaws would do nothing to tackle the causative factors of stock decline. Water pollution; habitat loss; barriers to fish migration and artificially high natural predation rates, sustained, ironically by NRW regulation, stand as the main river impacts on fish stocks along with illegal fishing activity.

Angling in Wales accounts for only 2% of the exploitation of salmon, with salmon anglers across the country now returning 86% of their catch as part of a commitment to sustainable angling practices. Evidence presented at the Inquiry, shows anglers are not the problem, however the host of failures by NRW to undertake their duties to enhance the quality and security of our local environments in Wales is.

At the Public Inquiry, volunteers from the local community have faced an undue level of bullying and prejudicial tactics from NRW’s legal counsel, reputedly costing thousands of pounds a day to subdue the extensive evidence presented by representatives of the Angling community. That evidence, has illustrated that the local Afon Ogwen is compliant with the recognised salmon stock target for Principal Salmon Rivers in Wales of which there are 23. Compliant with it, the Afon Ogwen should not be placed under mandatory control at this time, however on a voluntary basis, anglers have been showing they can provide real outcomes to protect community fisheries and this progress is set to continue.

The additional twist that has come to light at the Inquiry, is that rivers such as the Afon Cegin in Bangor, by their very nature being outside of the Principal Salmon Rivers in Wales, which also includes all rivers in Ynys Mon, should not under the NASCO guidance be available to NRW for mandatory control. The NRW confirmed at the Inquiry that rivers such as this would be and gave no recognition that this was a contravention of the guidelines.

The NRW, repeatedly stipulated at the Inquiry that the ‘All Wales’ Byelaws are not a pan Wales policy and yet it is evident to the angling community they are. The only viable explanation for this, is

that this is due to the preference of NRW executives and senior managers. The game of 'smoke and mirrors' reportedly played by NRW at the Inquiry, reported by local angling representatives, raises real concern to the authenticity of NRW's statements in entirety.

The Inquiry, headed by an Inspector attuned to regular planning concerns, such as a new housing developments, rather than complex environment policy considerations as this is, raises further concern to the validity and fairness of this Inquiry and the ability of the inspector to make an informed decision. With a mix of technically complex evidence, volunteers drawn into an unfair process of legal gamesmanship and an Inquiry which has felt bias at all stages towards NRW, anglers now fear for the future of game angling in Bangor's and the North Wales community.

The inspectors report from the Inquiry, which will stipulate his recommendation for the All Wales Byelaws, which could be approved, adapted or rejected, should be ready by the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019 after which, the fate of the proposed measures and anglers will be made by the current Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Environment and Rural affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM.

In parallel in England, The Environment Agency have concluded, that measures similar to those in Wales cannot be applied on a mandatory basis because the approach is flawed. Even, the NRW at the Inquiry stated they do not have the enforcement resource to enforce the Byelaws, leaving onlookers bewildered how the organisation can be so blind to the inappropriate nature of the measures.

Representatives of the Angling community who have opposed the All Wales measures at the Inquiry, now seek the media's attention and assistance to raise public awareness of the plight of communities in this challenge. The proposed measures, are arguably the antithesis of what is required for the health of game angling and fisheries in the Bangor Area and Wales wide. An organisation such as NRW, known to be stripped of resource and reliant on partnership working to function, cannot bring improvements for people by ousting people from the process and making their lives harder.

Local Assembly Members to the Bangor area have provided strong support to the angling community in this campaign and that sustained support will be vital if a democratic decision is to be made upon the All Wales Byelaws.