

CLWB GODRE'R MYNYDD DU

SAETHU A PHYSGOTA.

ANGLING & SHOOTING

FISHING SECTION

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ACCESS TO INLAND WATERS

I am the secretary of the above club and am writing on behalf of my members as they are very concerned as to some of the proposals put forward by the Welsh Canoeing Association and the petitions committee.

Our club is now about a hundred strong with most of our members being from the locality. It was formed in the early fifties by a group of mostly miners and factory workers to allow affordable sport to local people. Over the years after tireless work from its volunteers we have raised enough funds to purchase and rent fishing rights in the Loughor and Towy catchments.

Over the years we have seen our rivers evolve from polluted industrial drains to valuable ecosystems, much of the work done to save our rivers has been done by angling clubs using their own funds and with little or no net financial gain.

The Carmarthenshire fishermen's Federation and all the clubs affiliated to it spent in excess of £120,000 in the last year on habitat improvement; they have also funded a salmon hatchery to improve fish stocks on the river Towy with anglers spending their own time and money to source brood stock for that hatchery.

The proposal by canoeists to be given free access to all rivers in Wales is both morally and ecologically wrong.

The canoeists claim that they have no access to any waters in Wales however navigation is allowed on all tidal waters which on some waters is about a quarter of their length.

Local voluntary access agreements have been in place for years where anglers have tried to work with canoeists to give access to all parties, however many canoeists, on the advice of the WCA have withdrawn from these agreements to give WAG the false impression that no access exists – a cynical and deceitful attempt to manipulate the evidence in their favour.

Canoeists seem to think they should have free and unrestricted use of rivers – anglers pay on many levels to enjoy their sport: they pay permit fees to the riparian owner for the right to be on the river and then a licence fee to the Environment agency for the right to fish, many anglers also pay membership to conservation bodies to try and avoid damage to the river ecosystem.

After paying all fees and licences anglers are further restricted on when they can fish and what fish may be taken; this is to protect the fish and ensure they are left undisturbed during their breeding cycles –

why should canoeists be exempt from all this, contrary to the Salmon and freshwater fisheries act of 1975 ?

Anglers don't pay to be able to take fish (which canoeists constantly maintain); they pay for the enjoyment of using someone else's asset. This is proved by the fact that coarse fishing clubs who return 100% of their catch still pay an annual rental to the riparian owner. Their members would think it very strange if they were given this water for free.

Riparian rights are property - they are expensive and like all property in Britain they are protected by law. If I buy a house I don't expect to wake up in the morning to find a total stranger in my bath, or lighting a bonfire on my front lawn, the trespass acts are clear and they apply the same to rivers as to any other property, the law is clear on this – it is trespass to go on a river above the tide which is in private ownership without the owners permission.

To change the law to allow unrestricted access on Welsh rivers would be a direct parallel to allowing the 'right to roam' on golf course. These areas were specifically excluded from the CRoW Act as they are commercial enterprises - but so are rivers.

The canoeists and now the Petitions Committee point to Scotland where the Scottish Land Reform Act (2003) gave open access to rivers and say that this would work in Wales. We believe it would not work and that it would be quite wrong to impose something similar here for the following, and many other reasons:

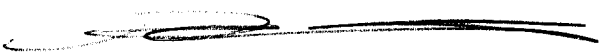
- Scottish rivers are on the whole much bigger than Welsh ones, so a group of maybe ten rafts going down a river say 3m wide is bound to have a much greater ecological effect than if the river is 10m wide;
- the numbers of major conurbations (Liverpool, Manchester & Birmingham) a couple of hours away from north & mid Wales is much greater than similar sized urban areas to the Scottish Highlands, so far more canoeists/kayakers/rafters/gorge walkers would access smaller rivers;
- The main game fish in Scotland, the salmon, is much less wary than sewin, which are so important to Wales both economically and culturally. Anglers from England and mainland Europe will not come to Wales and support local economies if big sea trout have been scared by canoeists above them and are therefore uncatchable.
- The amount of trouble there has been on Scottish rivers since the Land Reform Act was passed has been grossly downplayed. We hear from one correspondent that the upper Tay is "nothing but a war zone" with commercial rafting companies making angling virtually impossible.

If WAG allow unrestricted access to rivers it is only right that the owners be compensated for the loss of their private enjoyment of that property and the subsequent devaluation of their property – is it right to spend vast amounts of the taxpayers money in this way?

Angling is the largest participant sport in the British Isles, angling tourism is an important part of the Welsh economy; anglers are also heavily involved in conservation and ecological work on rivers.

Welsh anglers make up a substantial number of assembly voters – the majority of canoeists do not even live in Wales, and put very little into the local economy I hope this will be taken into consideration by the committee when they come to a decision.

Respectfully



D. Emyr Jenkins
Fishing Section Secretary