



Cymdeithas Genweirwyr Eog a Brithyll Cymru Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association



President: Lord Moran, KCMG.

Chairman: Edwyn Lewis.

Secretary(Mid-Wales): Moc Morgan OBE

To Chairman and Members of Sustainability Committee

I write to you as General Secretary of the Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association (WSTAA) until December 2008 when I retired from office after forty years service.

In view of what is currently happening in Wales regarding the 'access to inland waters' issue I feel it would be negligent of me if I did not provide your committee with some details of the Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association as an organization and bring to your attention what the WSTAA has done for Welsh Fisheries and for angling in Wales over the past forty years. I have not - in fifty years of membership of the WSTAA - seen members so incensed as they are now as they know that any moves to make our rivers 'a free for all' would destroy what our member clubs have worked so hard to maintain for decades – and in the case of some clubs - for well over a century.

Background information on the WSTAA - the National Governing Body for Game Angling in Wales

WSTAA was formed in 1952 and is recognized by Sports Council Wales as the Governing Body for Game Angling (i.e. trout, sewin & salmon fishing) in Wales. It is a democratic organization managed by an Executive Committee whose members represent angling clubs from the six Welsh regions namely Clwyd, Gwynedd, Mid-Wales, South East Wales, Gower and South West Wales. It represents some seventy angling clubs whose combined membership runs into thousands. In fact it represents on average 80% of all rod-licence holders in Wales. Over the past five decades the WSTAA has led campaigns on Conservation Issues associated with the aquatic environment; it is also the Body that promotes game angling development and fly-fishing competitions in Wales. It coaches and promotes teams and individuals competing at European, Commonwealth and World Championships. In fact the Association has organized World, Commonwealth, European and Four Nation Championships on Welsh waters since 1952.

(In order to facilitate matters for the Sports Council, it agreed to join forces with the Coarse and Sea Angling Federations under the umbrella of the Federation of Welsh Anglers, but it still maintains its independence and has its own committee to deal with game-angling issues)

Links with the Welsh Office and the Welsh Assembly Government at Cardiff

Over the years the WSTAA has held annual meetings with Ministers at the Welsh Office - and in latter years with Ministers at the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) - and has always been well listened to and supported by those Ministers.

In 1967 for example, a deputation from WSTAA met with the much revered Jim Griffiths M.P. - the then Minister for Welsh Affairs at the Welsh Office. As soon as his attention was drawn to what was happening on Welsh rivers at the time – (i.e very rich syndicates from England out-bidding Welsh angling clubs in purchasing our wonderful salmon and sewin rivers for their own private use - a practice known at the time as 'the cheque-book invasion'), Jim Griffiths acted firmly and constructively – and his intervention and support ensured that local angling clubs could purchase their own local rivers for use by their own local community. This helped the angling club structure in Wales survive – a structure which is the envy of every other nation in the world.

In latter years officers of the WSTAA have met with Ministers from WAG whose portfolios have included Countryside and Environmental Matters. In their number have been Mike German A.M, Carwyn Jones A.M, Jane Davidson A.M. and Elin Jones A.M.. At each of our meetings with the respective Ministers issues impacting on Welsh fisheries have been discussed and those have included canoeists and 'access issues'. Every time the consensus of opinion has been that access to Welsh rivers would be possible – but only through local agreements signed by both club/riparian owners and the canoe club/association involved.

Recent concerns of Member Clubs – Canoe access agreements being disregarded

For a number of years local agreements had been drawn up on Welsh rivers and were adhered to by both 'sides' but, in recent years, personnel at the head of the Welsh Canoe Association has advised its members (and non-members) to terminate all agreements with angling clubs and as a consequence canoeists (and rafters) now traverse Welsh rivers at will – showing no respect whatsoever to the rightful owners. In fact on the Canoe Association websites, access and egress points along all rivers in Wales are noted and people who follow this unauthorized information have been found trespassing on Welsh rivers.

Effects on clubs

This unlawful move on the part of the Canoe Association has been very detrimental to our member clubs as many anglers – local and visiting - have had to put up with verbal abuse and nuisance activities from paddlers. Rivers the length and breadth of Wales are being affected and clubs have turned to the WSTAA for support and advice on how to respond and we can only affirm what the Ministers at WAG *have always told us - there will be no change to the law appertaining to access in Wales*. The question we are then asked is - why are the canoeists allowed to so blatantly break the law?

Recent worries re: Petition Committee's response to the Canoeists' lobby

Recent developments involving the Petition Committee (and now the Sustainability Committee) have been a cause of grave concerns to our member clubs. They were gravely disturbed and unhappy at the end of 2008 to learn that the Petition Committee had looked so 'favourably' upon the demands of Canoe Wales for open and unrestricted access to all Welsh rivers. It reminded them of the 'cheque book invasion' of the sixties as more often than not it is canoeists from across the border that come into Wales in droves to paddle on our rivers.

WSTAA and its member clubs were further taken aback when they realized that the Petition Committee had by-passed them completely and travelled all the way to Scotland to seek evidence on the access issue. It seemed that the owners of waters in Wales did not count and would have no say in what could happen to their own waters. The WSTAA and its member clubs have been the mainstay of Welsh rivers for decades and yet they were totally ignored on such an important and sensitive issue. Our views were not sought – even though we had held several meetings with WAG Ministers on this very issue!

I need hardly remind you - as our representatives at WAG - that Scotland and Wales are very different. From an angling perspective there is little or no 'club structure' on the rivers of Scotland – and anglers do not need to purchase a licence to fish Scottish rivers. The rivers of Scotland are long and wide whereas Welsh rivers are very small and narrow by comparison. Scotland is a long, long way away from the large conurbations of cities like Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester etc but the rivers of Wales are a mere couple of hours drive away – and very close and accessible to the canoeists' and rafters' clubs in these University cities.

Our member clubs do not wish to see a change in the law governing our rivers – what they want is to see the current laws maintained and adhered to by all – possibly a

strengthening of the law of trespass - which brings us back to local agreements and the need to have these respected by all who use our inland waters.

Personal involvement with Fisheries' conservation issues

On a personal note I would inform you that for several years I served on the Salmon Advisory Committee of Great Britain sitting alongside world class scientist like Dick Shelton whose research into Salmon is revered world wide. His research papers show that irresponsible activities on rivers at spawning time will result in salmon not being able to fulfil their spawning activity. This research has been supported by others and at this precarious time for our wild salmon it would be detrimental to future stocks to allow anything or anybody to disturb salmon during spawning time. Likewise with the sewin (sea-trout) The sewin also enters the rivers to spawn and because of activities out at sea – let alone the river – it is in grave danger of disappearing from Welsh rivers. Anglers are fighting for its survival – and at the moment scientists based at Bangor University are researching the life pattern of this most precious and enigmatic of fish.

Facts appertaining to WSTAA member clubs - and on anglers in general

1) The majority of our angling clubs own or lease waters the length and breadth of Wales.

e.g. The river Teifi has three major clubs on its banks namely Tregaron, Llandysul and Teifi Trout Association at Cardigan as well as three smaller clubs. Each of these clubs have purchased beats of the river for their members at great expense. E.g. – should someone wish to purchase the best two mile stretch on the Teifi today, the asking price would possibly be in the region of £50K - £100K. (Likewise with the Dee, the Dovey, the Conwy, the Towy etc and I couldn't possibly fathom the sum of compensation WAG would be required to pay should it allow all Welsh rivers to become public property as is the demands of the canoe lobby).

In spring, summer and early autumn anglers travel long distances for the priviledge of fishing for sewin and salmon on Wales's well-cared-for and cherished rivers.

2) All anglers have to buy a Rod Licence from the Environment Agency
(Any anglers caught fishing without a licence can be prosecuted)

3) All anglers have to purchase a permit to fish any and all club waters – they cannot wander onto any river without first purchasing a permit and thereby gaining permission of the rightful owners.

WSTAA Executive Committee and Access to member clubs' waters.

Since the canoeists tore up the agreements they had with angling clubs, and their subsequent refusal to enter into any further negotiations – while carrying on to trespass on club waters - the situation has been regularly discussed by the WSTAA Executive Committee. (Five meetings and an AGM held every year).

The policy drawn up by the WSTAA and its members stated that access to rivers should only be by local agreements. Canoes/Kayaks/Rafts should be licenced and should also bear a clearly recognizable registration number. All crafts also to have insurance cover. These requirements are essential – and on the matter of payment – all who participate in any sport are required to pay.

Final comments

In his recently televised series on ' Rivers', television celebrity Griff Rhys Jones, flippantly encouraged paddlers to go on rivers and disturb as many anglers as they can. He however was quietly paddling down the river in his one-man-and-his-dog canoe – a solitary figure in a wonderfully idyllic setting. Unfortunately that picture is far from what is happening on Welsh rivers today. Canoeists arrive in van loads get dropped off at

their 'access' point, go down the river in numbers and are picked up at their 'egress' points before returning to the big cities – on the same day.

On the river Teifi for example a Rafter has set up his own Rafting Business and has the audacity to charge people to go down the river on his rafts – a river which he does not own - in loads of six and more passengers. (see accompanying picture). We would ask if this is what you want to see happening on all Welsh rivers?

I would urge you therefore to think carefully before allowing such occurrences on our most precious commodity. The demand of the canoe lobby is to have free unfettered access to our rivers every day of the year. No rules! No regulations! The freedom to do as they like!

To us, law-abiding citizens, it is heartbreaking to realize that those who have so blatantly broken the law and have encouraged others to break the law are the very ones who have managed to get our own Government in Wales to consider changes in the law to meet their demands.

I would ask you to give due consideration to what angling and angling clubs have done for the rural economy of Wales for decades. They have cared for the ecology of the river systems, they have campaigned for better water quality, they have boosted the economy of Wales to the tune of £130 million (Environment Agency figures) by what they have to offer.

WSTAA and its member clubs would strongly oppose any changes in the law in order to facilitate matters for the canoe lobby. Negotiated access is available – but it does take two sides to negotiate.

For Information - listed below are river conservation and other projects that WSTAA has been directly involved in over the years:

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|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| *Water Framework Directive | *Warren Report | *Avian Predation |
| *Salmon at sea | *S.S.S.I and fishing interests | *Objective One |
| *Fisheries finance | *Funding of Welsh Teams | *Abandoned mines. |
| *Habitat restoration | *Access agreements | *Cypermethrin |
| *New angling legislation | *Abstraction proposals. | *Afforestation |
| * Right to row | *Trout & Grayling Strategy | *Water Sports |
| *Catch & release | *Leaching from lead mines. | *Warren Report. |
| *Agricultural Pollution | *Length of fishing Season | *Salmon Strategy |
| *Fishing Strategy '07 | *Brighton Report on access | *Angling Unity |
| *Enforcement | *Liming of acidic waters | |

Yours faithfully,

Moc Morgan O.B.E.

(Secretary of WSTAA (mid Wales Region) – also Chairman of Federation of Welsh Anglers - also President of the International Fly Fishing Association of the UK)

ADENDUM - RE: Angling as a Sport

The Sport of Angling

Wales is regarded as one of the leading locations for staging International, Commonwealth and World Angling events – in fact the WSTAA organized the very first Rivers International Match. This was on the river Dee in 1992. This year the event was held on the river Taff downriver of Merthyr Tydfil and brought in anglers from the four nations to fish the river for several week-ends prior to the event – which was

considered the very best ever held with the river and the quality of the fish being praised by all contestants.

Wales has also held a World Championship in 1990 on the River Dee at Llangollen as well as three Commonwealth Championships and indeed Wales has been chosen to host the 2010 Commonwealth Championship in mid-Wales. The River Dee was also the venue for the first ever World Youth Championship. As a result of the above championships visiting anglers from far and wide come to fish the rivers of Wales every year.

Wales is recognized as the country offering some of the best and fairest of fly-fishing competitions and one wonders what would happen to such events if our rivers became a free for all. In fact this year one of our major National competitions could have been ruined were it not for the fact that angling club members on the river Taff managed to restrain canoeists (trespassing) from going down the river. Had they gone down the whole event would have had to be cancelled - involving the WSTAA in paying compensation to those that had travelled, paid accommodation fees and lost wages.

As organizer of most of these high-profile events I would ask you what should I do next year for example if there was a free for all on the rivers of Mid Wales? Am I to organize a Commonwealth Championship Match/Festival - bringing in teams from all the Commonwealth Countries to mid Wales and have the event ruined by canoeists? The WSTAA has worked hard over several decades to put Wales high on the piscatorial map – providing competitors with high quality sport and we do not want to see our efforts destroyed in any way.

Local canoe clubs have lived and worked to local agreements until ordered to break them by Canoe Wales and our members have great difficulty in comprehending how the Sustainability Committee can even consider allowing open access to our rivers because of what is obviously the intransigence shown by Canoe Wales who by their actions promote only anarchy on Welsh rivers.

As the Governing Body for Game Angling, the WSTAA has strived to improve the image of angling. It has insisted on responsible behaviour and restraint in the discussions going on between yourselves and Canoe Wales. However as Canoe Wales has so blatantly encouraged their members to bulldoze their way through the restrictions imposed by law and have encouraged the tearing-up of all agreements previously signed and which govern the laws of ownership, our members are anxious to challenge the Welsh Sports Council as they are apparently giving financial support to an organization that encourages unlawful and disruptive behaviour.

WSTAA has always encouraged its clubs to ensure all their members have a rod licence in order to fish and to purchase a permit in order to have the right of access and use of a facility owned by someone else. How can the governing body for canoeing explain its mantra of demanding everything and paying nothing?

If ever Welsh rivers were made free for all then the WSTAA angling clubs - all 70 of them - would demand action from their governing body. I believe that they too would demand free fishing with no licence and no payment to anybody. That, I fear, would convert all Welsh rivers into an 'Alton Towers' scenario.

I have fished on most rivers on the continent and have experience of what happens when the rivers are 'free for all'. In Belgium the canoe pressure was so great on particular stretches of river that fishing was impossible. While fishing on a wide river in the Czech Republic I had to wade out to mid river as the fish were active on the other side but suddenly had to cease fishing as there was a fleet of canoes passing behind me and indeed had a colleague not called out a warning I could have easily caused serious

injuries to the canoeists with my lines and hooks. Having two sports on one pitch is totally unfeasible.

Since 1952 WSTAA has supported Welsh Angling Clubs and if this 'free for all' move is recommended and approved it will certainly see the demise of local angling clubs - especially the smaller ones. It will not be the 'cheque book invasion' of the wealthy as in the sixties but the 'canoe invasion' of the young and athletically strong and will certainly destroy the best fishery management structure in the world whereby local people manage their own waters.

Angling clubs have members of all ages and abilities – they open their membership to young and old, male and female, disabled as well as able bodied. They encompass the whole community.

*At one time we had the 'cheque book invasion' – thankfully overturned by intervention from the Welsh Office and by local communities via their angling clubs.

*Now we face the 'Canoe Invasion' of Welsh Rivers – and you, our representative members at the Welsh Assembly Government, are the ones tasked with addressing the issue.

I know that the Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association and all its member clubs will now be looking to you to give the matter the fairest of deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

Moc Morgan OBE
(Secretary of WSTAA (mid Wales Region) – also Chairman of Federation of Welsh Anglers - also President of the International Fly Fishing Association of the UK)