

Meeting note

Title of meeting	Wales Fisheries Forum
Date of meeting	1 st April 2021
Time of meeting	10:00

NRW:

David Mee

Emma Keenan (Technical Secretariat)

Peter Gough

Steve Ormerod (Chair)

Michael Evans (part)

Sarah Wood (part)

Mark Squire (part)

Members:

Alan Winstone – Afonydd Cymru

Carl Tonner – Angling Cymru

Chris Mills – Institute of Fisheries Management

Present: Chris White – Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries

Creighton Harvey – South West Wales & Gower LFG rep

Denise Ashton – Wild Trout Trust

Dylan Roberts – The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

Gail Davies-Walsh – Afonydd Cymru

Guy Mawle – Usk LFG rep

Lee Evans – Taff & Valleys LFG rep

Mark Owen – Angling Trust

Mervyn Williams – Dee & Clwyd LFG rep

Paul Edwards – Welsh Salmon & Trout Angling Association

Richard Garner-Williams – Salmon and Trout Conservation Cymru

Robert Floyd – Welsh Government

Stuart Smith – Wye LFG rep

Tony Harrington – DwrDŵr Cymru Welsh Water

Other:

Rachel Taylor (British Trust for Ornithology)

Apologies: Ruth Jenkins (NRW), Nicola Teague (IFM), Mungo Munro (Severn LFG rep) & Rachel Evans (Countryside Alliance Wales)

Item number	Item	Action
Welcome, introductions and apologies		
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Steve Ormerod (SO) opened the meeting, welcomed several new participants and deputies and gave a brief overview of how the meeting would be run so that participants could get the most out of using Teams.	
Admin Matters		
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minutes of each WFF meeting are reviewed and, subject to any substantive correction, are approved by correspondence approximately 1 month after each meeting thereby enabling early circulation to LFGs. <p>Actions from meeting of 19 November 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">SO has continued to push matters to the Board on water quality issuesNoted that Countryside Alliance have put Casting for Recovery on long term hold due to the vulnerability of their clients. They are however hoping to restart the Fishing for Schools as soon as they can.Minutes of the November 2020 meeting, having already been approved by correspondence were finally ratified.	<p>PG to check if specific minutes from board meetings relating to this matter can be released.</p> <p>EK to recirculate updated, ratified minutes</p>

Introduction of New Members

- 3.
- Gail Davies-Walsh – CEO of Afonydd Cymru. Gail joined Afonydd Cymru from Welsh Water where she was Environmental Programme Manager. Gail also works directly with WUF.
 - Robert Floyd – Head of Aquaculture and Freshwater Fisheries Team at Welsh Government. Rob has spent most of his career in WG fisheries since 2008. He spent the last four years working on responses to EU and international quotas. After the Brexit transition period he then looked at areas that needed more attention and created the new teams to look at freshwater fisheries issues in more detail.
 - Mike Evans has joined WFF today as an observer. He chairs NRW's Fisheries Strategy Group – the governance group for NRW fisheries matters.

Fish Eating Birds

- Sarah Wood (Programme Manager - Review of NRW's approach to the shooting and trapping of wild birds) gave a presentation on the ongoing work in NRW. EK to circulate presentation
 - Dr Rachel Taylor (Senior Ecologist BTO Cymru) gave a presentation on the FEB surveys conducted in December - February on 10 principal salmon rivers. EK to circulate report when released.
- 4.
- Rachel's presentation included information that is yet to be published in a report to NRW, the presentation was not available immediately. However, once the report is signed-off it will be made available and disseminated to the Forum.

Discussion:

- SO recognised the major effort that had gone into collecting this data during the given circumstances of two major disease concerns, coronavirus and avian flu, and gave thanks to Rachel and the BTO for completing this large piece of work.
 - MO pointed out that modelling in England takes WeBS data and factors-in where it came from which is why the trends are more important than the population numbers. Also, the recovery of cormorants in the UK coincides with both the ban on DDT pesticides and, more recently, culling.
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However, RT pointed out there were also periods of heavy culling in Europe.

- AW noted that Rivers Trusts were also on rivers surveying and pointed out the potential for working collaboratively. In terms of data collection, they noted that birds were clumped in certain areas and did BTO have any views as to why birds picked particular locations.
 - RT noted that the problem is the underlying data required to answer that isn't available to bird surveyors. Also river dynamics, river 'furniture' (habitat features) and fish refuge areas have an impact and may point to where fish are more vulnerable to predation. Collaboration will need to involve sharing methodology and conversations about who could use that methodology.
- PG – noted that:
 - Gwent Ornithological Society had carried out their own surveys too at approximately the same time and that data should be brought together to be used.
 - The BTO report is NRW commissioned and after a few iterations will be made public.
- It was asked if barriers could be mapped to compare to patterns of FEB populations, and if the location of roosts within catchments could be identified.

However, the impact or otherwise of barriers is probably dependant on flow and it was discussed, but considered not feasible to ask, for surveyors to record this extra data. However mapped bird dataset against barriers to fish migration might be appropriate.

- GM noted that this survey didn't take place during smolt migration season. This was partly related to consistency with other survey timings, and also to the evidence need to support the licence application process.
- Discussion on:
 - Currently it is not known if predation is additive or compensatory in terms of fish populations (ie has density-dependent implications for fish).
 - There is also difficulty around planning surveys in May due to the differences in ecology of goosanders and cormorants.

PG to send GM's reports on Usk bird and smolt interactions to RT

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- However more work needs to be done on fish/bird interactions although it was noted that whilst most are generalist feeders, some individuals may consume high numbers of a particular spp.
 - CT - Many coarse angling clubs have changed their fish stocking policy due to cormorant predation. His own club has seen roach and dace wiped out by cormorants on a 10-acre lake. The club now only restocks with bream or carp of 3lb plus. This has caused the loss of a “silver fish” water - not what was wanted by anglers, but by necessity.
 - PG noted that still waters had also been surveyed and that this data will also be considered.
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Beavers

DR gave a presentation: ‘Beavers: what’s the dam problem’.

EK to circulate presentation

[COWX-Review-Beavers-Fish-and-Fisheries-06Jan2021-2.pdf \(anglingtrust.net\)](#)

Discussion:

5.

- This item asked for Forum members to consider a position, perhaps representing the overall views of the Forum (but potentially not those of NRW). However, the broad number of responsibilities held by NRW on this matter would need to be considered.
 - Noted that a licence has been issued to release beavers into enclosures on the Dyfi, after a public consultation, and that there is to be a second consultation for an application to release further beaver into the wild.
 - CM noted that the IFM supports many of the points in DR’s presentation and there are significant risks with reintroductions that need to be managed. There needs to be consideration as to where they (beavers) can be released with minimal damage rather than an ad hoc approach.
 - There is anecdotal evidence of beavers already present on rivers in Wales and members of the public are urged to report these to NRW. SW noted that these reports are taken seriously, and work has been commissioned to investigate this. Any release of beavers without licence is
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unlawful. Beavers released illegally in Wales are not protected however animal welfare issues need to be considered.

- A more substantial debate is required on this matter by the Forum and this will be an item on next meeting's agenda.
SO noted that at the last NRW Board meeting he had asked for an evidence session/seminar on beavers as there are additional negative impacts on the environment, in addition to those on fish and a full evidence review is necessary.
- There was also concern that, as many rivers in Wales are SACs with salmon as designated features with many of these populations classified as being either "at risk" or probably at risk", that release of beavers may have negative impacts on these populations.
- Reference was made to the following information sources:

[Beavers and trout | Wild Trout Trust](#) – WTT position on beaver reintroductions;

[Beaver: Nature's ecosystem engineers - Brazier - 2021 - WIREs Water - Wiley Online Library](#)

PG to report back whether or not beaver introductions comply with section 3.2 of the Plan of Action in terms of habitat protection.

The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2021/77/contents/made>

MS gave a presentation on the review of phosphate in Welsh SAC rivers and on related planning issues

- [Agriculture \(Wales\) White Paper \(gov.wales\)](#)
- [Natural Resources Wales / Tighter phosphate targets change our view of the state of Welsh rivers](#)

Discussion

- NRW provides advice to planning authorities however MS noted that the authorities may not have the expertise or resource to ensure that the advice is fully considered. This is a systematic failure, and as a result Habitats Risk Assessment

EK to provide the MS presentation and links to phosphate compliance reports.

EK to circulate revised planning advice

6.

experts are looking to develop new guidance for local authorities on SAC management. Planning advice is being further updated and will be reissued and shared with the forum. In the meantime, many applications are on hold but there is concern that some applications may be going through that wouldn't have, under the newer tighter restrictions.

- Although standards have been revised, the previous standards were not being met so there is uncertainty how new standards will be met. In some areas, agriculture is likely to be a major contributor, but how is this likely to be addressed? New WR regulations will pick up the nutrients aspect but doesn't seek to fix single problems.
NRW is in discussions with Welsh Government about how regulations will be rolled out as well as staff resource requirements and incident management.
- There is a need for guidance to be readily available alongside the new regulations, and work is being done to make the guidance available as soon as possible.
- SS asked about the possibility of citizen science involvement in WQ monitoring as this is being proposed by the EA.

MS noted that:

- NRW is looking at citizen science and how we might take it forward;
 - However, the EA programme appears to be in a state of flux and not at a stage of landing yet, so it is not yet known what these programmes will look like.
 - There has been criticism over the downsizing of sentinel and agile monitoring as well as reductions in grant in aid.
 - WQ monitoring is still ongoing in NRW despite Covid-19, however there are still restrictions on the programme due to social distancing in the lab. There isn't currently a full programme, but priorities have been set for 2021 and it is hoped to be back up to full capacity by the end of the year.
- The Forum agreed that there needs to be a clear enforcement strategy for the new WR/Agri regulations as they won't be as effective without one.
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- MS noted that the work is around preventing issues before they arise and that the bigger picture matter is embedding better practices.

<https://www.cprehampshire.org.uk/news/nitrate-neutrality-law/>

SoNaRR

PG ran through a standard presentation on SoNaRR, raising issues in the papers to which links were provided for Forum members.

Natural Resources Wales / State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales 2020

- 7.
- The freshwater side of the reports paints a poor picture of rivers in Wales at the moment but misses the contrast to 2016 which would demonstrate that there hasn't been an improvement.
 - How will the 'Nature Emergency' be addressed?
 - Whilst waterbodies are supposed to be reaching 'Good Ecological Status' soon, it's not looking likely. The Environment (Wales) Act and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act have given rise to a broad-brush approach to these matters, continued assessment needs to be monitored in terms of biodiversity and broad socio-economics.
 - At present policy has had high aspirations but not delivered achievements. Broad economic perspectives need to balance resources demands with environmental protection to protect those parts that are responsible for well-being.

Fisheries Update – Papers taken as read

- 8.
- NASCO – The UK, as a conglomerate of Northern Ireland, Scotland, England & Wales is now a full member of NASCO in its own right (and therefore no longer part of the EU delegation).
 - New NRW Emergency Byelaws for salmon fishing in the Severn in Wales are now in place for the whole of 2021. During 2021 NRW will be
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looking at what needs to be done in terms of byelaws going forward.

- Wye and Usk salmon fishing byelaws expire in December 2021 and NRW will be liaising with LFGs about what needs to be done on future controls so that options can be developed for a statutory consultation in the summer.
- Net licence Duties – more work needs to be done around:
 - sustainability of sea trout stocks as they are showing a similar pattern of decline which may affect future licencing strategy.
 - Consideration of heritage context: certain net fishing is regarded by some as a heritage asset and this needs to be reviewed and a conclusion reached. There will be future liaison with appropriate fisheries groups with some form of consultation around Q2/3.
- Eel – notified all fisherman of new position on eel authorisations for 2021. Little feedback, 3 out of 45 came back with concerns to which NRW responded. NRW position has prevailed. NRW will be working with UK glass eels going forward. Requests for possible elver catch allocations for personal consumption have not been authorised. Certain applications for authorisation of fishing for scientific research (studying stock abundance and exploitation, and of stock and dynamics) have been approved for: Dee Estuary, lower estuaries of the Usk and Wye and the Severn Estuary in Wales. Applications to catch eels to move them over impassable barriers will be considered on individual merits.
- Plan of Action tracker – There was support for the development of an exception report to highlight where good successes have been achieved and where NRW are struggling to deliver actions which groups represented at the Forum could support.
POST-MEETING NOTE – THE PoA ACTIONS ARE SCORED ON A RAG (RED, AMBER, GREEN BASIS).
Where NRW are resource challenged in enforcement they are looking at the kickstart approach.
- Habitat restoration plans are not yet available on our website but can be supplied on request.

All members to identify where they can help with the Salmon and sea trout plan of action.

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- MO reported that the Angling Trust enforcement website is now live:

[Enforcement - Angling Trust](#)

Updates from other Fora – Papers taken as read

- [Natural Resources Wales / Wales Water Management Forum](#)

[Natural Resources Wales / Consultation on the proposed update to Wales' river basin management plans 2021-2027](#)

Consultation for the proposed changes to the river basin management plans for the Dee and West Wales is now live until the 22nd June. Once the Severn consultation is ready, a link will be forwarded to forum members.

9.

- [Natural Resources Wales / Wales Land Management Forum](#)

Welsh Government addressed the forum on the agricultural regulations and the enforcement of these regulations. The Dairy Project was also discussed with concerns around the monitoring for the project.

EK to circulate statement when available

- [Natural Resources Wales / National Access Forum for Wales](#) Preparing statement to go out but hoping to get this to WG by 14th April and as soon as this has been made available it will be circulated with the forum.

AOB

- Update on the Llynfi – pollution incident and post-incident investigation. It was noted that members of Gwent Angling Association had supported the post-incident river assessment, for which NRW is grateful.

10.

POST-MEETING NOTE:

The matter had been discussed at the Wye LFG on 19th March, and an extract of minutes from this meeting are presented here:

- A casefile is with the NRW legal team and there is ongoing liaison between them and the environment team dealing with the incident
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- A large amount of FOI's received
 - Legal team asked for further information which has led to further sampling, dye tracing, sondes have been deployed, and interviews are taking place
 - The legal team are to determine what action will need to be taken

MR questioned whether there is now a suspect in the investigation. CM replied yes there is a suspect but unable to say who. MR asked whether the sondes are just for the phosphates. CM advised that they gather basic water quality parameters.

MR also advised that other incidents have been witnessed and asked about the discharge pipe from the penstock, and whether there were any other outfalls from the sewage treatment works. CM advised that the penstock was currently being looked into, and that as far as aware there is only one outfall from the sewage treatment works, that has recently collapsed due to the weather.

MR also raised concerns about what NRW will do to prevent this happening again and if they are likely to hear an update on the progress of the legal team by the next LFG. CM advised that they hoped there would be an update soon.

- In the Terms of Reference, it states that the forum should be reporting to NRW on performance of its duty for fisheries. To do this an annual report is needed to say what has happened and where we've gone to.
- Agenda items suggested for next meeting:
 - Beavers
 - River Basin Management Plans
 - Rod licence reviews
- Date of Next Meeting:
 - 20th September
 - 13th January

PG/DM/EK to take away.
