

Agenda

Title of meeting:	Wales Fisheries Forum
Date of meeting:	5 July 2023
Time and location of meeting:	10:30 - 15:30 via Teams Meeting - Click here to join the meeting
Present NRW Board Members:	<p>Steve Ormerod (Chair) (SO)</p> <p>Ben Wilson (BW)</p> <p>David Mee (DM)</p> <p>Sara Sherratt (SSh)</p> <p>Ruth Jenkins (RJ)</p>
Present Board Members:	<p>Andy Phillips – Angling Cymru (AP)</p> <p>Denise Ashton – Wild Trout Trust (DA)</p> <p>Dylan Roberts – Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (DR)</p> <p>Guy Mawle – Usk LFG Rep (GM)</p> <p>Lee Evans – Taff and Valleys LFG rep (LE)</p> <p>Paul Edwards – Welsh Salmon and Trout Conservation (PE)</p> <p>Tony Harrington – Dŵr Cymru/ Welsh Water (TH)</p> <p>Sam Jones – Angling Trust (SJ)</p> <p>John Ellis – Canal & River Trust (JE)</p> <p>Stuart Smith – Wye LFG rep (SS)</p> <p>Creighton Harvey – Gower and West Wales LFG (CH)</p> <p>Gail Davies-Walsh – Afonydd Cymru (GDW)</p> <p>Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance (RW)</p> <p>Mervyn Williams (MW)</p>

Title of meeting:	Wales Fisheries Forum
Apologies:	Chris White – Campaign for the protection of Welsh Fisheries (CW) Chris Mills – IFM (CM) Robert Ffloyd – Welsh Government (RF)

Minutes

1. Welcome, introductions – Steve Ormerod – 10:30

Steve Ormerod opened the meeting and covered any matters arising

- **Thanks** - Thanks to Michael Evans (NRW) and Richard Garner-Williams (Wildfish) for their work and attendance at WFF in recent years

2. Admin Matters – 10:45

The notes from the previous meeting are now formally approved

AOB's: Poaching on Anglesey and more discussion on Brown Trout

- **Comment:** NRW sponsoring Faenol Estate Game Fair – rod license holders will get a discount into the fair
- **Action** on BW to update on the Salmon Advisory Group
- **Action** on SSh: Colour code the action log: traffic light system
- **Action** on BW: Update 'Advisory Group' on the new fish eating bird post holder

3. Provisional Salmon & Sea Trout stock assessments – 11:00

Presentation by Dave Mee

Run through of the 2022 provisional stock assessment for Wales.

Final report due to be released end of August.

Comment from SO: Focusing on the lessons which could be learnt from practises on the 2 healthier rivers. They are well wooded – increased shading. What can we learn from catch and release efforts and their impacts on fish?

- **Action** from DM on BW to provide Teifi counter figures for the previous year in next update paper. **Observation:** More fish in April / May / June but much fewer later in the year
- **Action** on SSh: circulate DM's Power Point presentation

4. NASCO & Annual Progress Report - update – 11:30

Briefing paper and presentation led by Ben Wilson

Update on the 40th annual NASCO meeting (see update paper). BW Focused on ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) advise to NASCO, the special sessions on climate change and the future of NASCO.

ICES advice on pre fisheries abundance and marine survival, shows Multi Sea Winter fish did show a slight increase in survival rates but this has plateaued, One Sea Winter fish have continued to decline. ICES advice on predation suggest they could cause a barrier to local stock recovery (e.g. cormorants). England and Wales implementation plans given satisfactory rating against NASCO's delivery plan. NASCO advocating a standardise format for the risk factors affecting salmon. NASCO are reviewing their future function have highlighted the need to do more as Salmon stocks are in a state of emergency. BW suggested 2025 NASCO meeting may be held in Wales.

- **Comment GM:** NASCO meetings tend to avoid capital cities, so a location other than Cardiff might be preferable. Also, highlight the effects of salmon stock decline on indigenous people in Wales not just abroad.
- **GM comment:** new agricultural regs enforced from April 2021 – enforced much later
- **GM comment:** *Gyrodactylus salaris* – more reporting required on Salmon parr populations
- **BW comment:** fish monitoring programme from the fish health inspectorate on the Usk and they haven't detected any *Gyrodactylus salaris*
- **GM comment:** Urgently need to deal with high seas bycatch issues. NASCO focused on this previously and there is a risk of complacency thinking its "job done".
- **MW question:** Is Russia still participating in NASCO? BW replies they are still a signatory, do participate in the meeting (albeit it virtually) and continue to submit an annual performance review

- **CH comment:** Mackerel fisheries status downgraded due to over-exploitation
- **Action** on SSh to distribute BW presentation

5. Small salmon populations response – what’s happened since and what next? – 11:50

Salmon and Sea trout PoA update recommendations for the future

Presentation and discussion Ben Wilson

Presentation from BW on the Salmon and Sea Trout plan of action. Complex document with over 60 actions. NRW have shown achievements across each of the 9 different areas. However, the PoA is due for a review and update and BW suggest a mechanism to ensure we identify and focus efforts on the key priority pressures.

- **Comment** from SO: anglers haven’t had their licences checked in many years. Need more effective enforcement in parts of Wales
- **GM comment:** mostly list of activities rather than outcomes rather than what has been achieved
- **GD Question:** How to track outcomes? If work is ongoing then can’t be green as they haven’t got clear outcomes?
- **SO comment:** Need to reflect on how NRW are delivering measures and assessing impact
- **RJ comment:** NRW work towards a framework set out in the corporate plan. Activities highlighted are known to be plausible measurable steps but challenging to pinpoint definitive start and end points when the task in hand is so large.
- **Question** by RJ: Is there a step missing between corporate statements and these activities? A lot of the changes we need to make are a societal change and NRW are trying to work with, and influence others, to help achieve those big steps by directly delivering and engaging in larger system shifts.

Continuation of presentation on “Plan of Action Review”

Presentation on Plan of Action Review by BW.

NRW Board have asked to consider what additional and “radical” measures could be taken to affect recovery. BW again highlighted the need for high impact stressors to be agreed and focussed on and actions agreed the address tractable and most damaging problems first. **Question** by BW: What is in Wales’s (and NRW’s) immediate control? Proposals for radical actions include:

- Keeping Rivers Cool initiative to improve shading and riparian habitat (building on SFS and Wales Gov Woodland Creation scheme)
- River national park,
- Reconnection rivers by removing all barriers.
- Catchment demonstrator project - to explore innovative approaches.
- **DA comment:** opportunity with sustainable farming incentive to focus those funding schemes to rivers on farmland.
- **TH observation:** in NZ they forced farmers to fence off rivers on farming land and allow those areas to regenerate and recreating shading for rivers.
- **RE comment:** farmers have signed up to a Wye and Usk foundation scheme. Understanding and educating themselves on improving the water run-off from where animals feed etc.. Need to get farmers on side and more positive messages. Need more farmers into fishing programmes.
- **Recommendation** for BW to identify positive case studies of farmers working to improve their rivers.
- **CH comment:** 11th July will be announcement on sustainable farming scheme. CH & RE discuss the importance of getting larger farmers with larger polluting issues to adhere to schemes as they won't need the funding. One way of achieving this is to go above the farmers and to go to their buyers who could set new environmental standards / performance as they have for animal welfare practises.
- **SO comment:** NRW needs to stay impartial around the 'rivers national park' and steer a path with clear evidence.
- **BW comment:** NRW are hoping to have a summit with estate owners to ask what they can do differently.
- **Action:** BW and DM to consider workshop for a one day workshop with people getting together to brainstorm ideas for the next steps – give momentum.
- **Action** on BW to produce an updated progress report on POA
- **Action** on BW building evidence on using the “Norwegian system” to classify the impacts to Salmon and Sea Trout.

6.Lunch – 12:30

7.Warm Water Protocols for issuing Advice and Guidance on Salmon and Sea Trout Angling – 13:00

Presentation led by Dave Mee

DM asked forum members to endorse and potentially add their logo to the fishing temperature guidance sheet – displayed at the end of the presentation. DM highlights the need for robust procedures to monitoring current water temperatures to effectively issue advice if / when temperatures may meet / exceed threshold.

- **Comment** from GDW & SS: A need for a network of temperature monitors across Wales providing up to date readings online.
- **BW comment:** more temperature probes won't necessarily be more helpful as hard to find one location on a river that is representative. Follow NASCO guidance.
- **Suggestion** from BW to give people fishing thermometers so they can have the final say as to whether they fish / land.
- **LE comment:** Pro-active clubs do normally say 19 degrees is the limit.
- **CH comment:** Monitoring should be done by NRW or another agency to give a definitive answer.
- **DM comment:** this is advisory guidance and currently there is no legal mechanism to enforce compliance, hence it is crucial to gain support and advocacy from local clubs and fisheries.
- **Action** on SSh to circulate DM presentation
- **Action** on DM to collaborate with WFF members to add logos to infographic before distribution.

8.Pink salmon alert – 13:30

Presentation led by Dave Mee

Active issue within NASCO due to it being a non-native invasive species. Not currently an issues in Wales but need awareness raising so that anglers can report pink salmon catches.

NASCO advice any appearance can be monitored and managed by raising awareness. Correctly identified fish should be reported on the NRW reporting page & humanely dispatched. If unsure release back into river. Killing accidentally of native species could lead to enforcement action.

- **Action** on SSh to circulate the presentation

9. Updates from other Fora – 13:50

WLMF: Subgroup on agricultural pollution – Creighton Harvey

Water Forum – Steve Ormerod

CH update on new / rotating chairman for the Agricultural pollution LMF. John Reed (Director of Avara Foods) discussed chicken farming in Wales, highlighting the distinction between egg industry and broiler for future negotiations. Disposal of manure highlighted as major problem. Currently the business is developing two AD plants. John Reed suggested more regulation needed by NRW.

- **Comment** from GM: NRW should consider need for more monitoring particularly as sheep scab been discovered in some samples, particularly on Usk, which has led to WG sponsoring sheep dipping schemes. Disposal issues highlighted – Afonydd Cymru know details but could cause significant unknown problems. GM would like more details from APLMF on sheep dip.
- **GDW comment:** AC written to WG & NRW regarding Diazinon. AC asked to sit on steering group. Raised concerns as no monitoring points been put in place in parallel with eradication scheme.
- **SO comment:** Water Forum notes that routine monitoring point locations not designed to look specifically for dip. The aim of the sheep dip scheme is to eradicate sheep scab from the Welsh herd and therefore reduced need to use more in the future. The cost of charging for the disposal of dip has increased and therefore this has potentially put strain on – pushing people to dispose inappropriately. SO hoping to extend personal research on three key rivers Tywi, Wye & Teifi to detect Diazinon. Hoping to consider the Usk as well.
- **SO update** from Water Forum: citizen science and NRW has dedicated staff to highlight engagement with ongoing projects. Following on from previous trips a visit to pearl mussels on the Eden to see the pressures they are under in that area and the work being done to protect them.
- **Action** on BW, DM & SSh notes for WFF & WLMF on NRW website are out of date and need updating.

10. Updates from Members – 14:05

Angling Trust updating the missing Salmon alliance and advisory group from Sam Jones

Advisory Group: from the AT salmon charter new focus on salmon 5 point approach from NRW and EA. Lobbying with IFCA in Devon/Cornwall. Expand advisory group (expand to NE and hopefully into Wales. British Canoeing have dialogue to resolve river access issues. Meeting next month with Natural England around changes to licensing regarding predation.

Missing Salmon Alliance: likely suspects framework using key drivers of mortality. Developing an online management tool for managers on catchments. Currently in early development (workshop has been held in Birmingham).

11. WFF Update paper – 14:30

WLMF: Subgroup on agricultural pollution – Creighton Harvey

BW highlights: USK smolt tracking, DSAP and fisheries enforcement. Rod licence sales shows slight increase from last year (9% increase in income). Support angling participation projects during take a friend fishing projects – organisations should get in touch with NRW if they want support. Highlight the Sustainable Fisheries Programme Delivery – NRW grants held for fisheries projects. Due to underspend overall total spent for SFP was £308,960. This was used to deliver removal of barriers to migration, habitat work, angling infrastructure and participation projects. Also, Welsh Gov & NRW flood scheme with breakdown report of spendings and works.

12. AOB's – 14:45

Future Items: update on Anglesey poaching incident report. Since the report NRW have attended twice and area team will provide BW with a more detailed report directly. It can be confirmed a net and a boat have been identified in the area but no evidence of them being used unlawfully.

MW enforcement 6 new apprenticeship recruits across 6 areas with warrants.

- **MW question:** should there be more team members considering the geographical spread – particularly Powys.
- **GM – 3 suggestions:** catch and release – should it continue? Is it protecting or is it damaging – leading to enforcement pressures – could do with some clarity in future meetings. What is going on with Sea/ Brown Trout stocks. Highlight the loss of Ranunculus and report on what's going on there.
- **GM comment:** Gwent Wildlife Trust is in the process of surveying Ranunculus and has produced a report.
- **DM comment** to provide an update on the LIFE projects for the next meetings

- **DM comment:** IFM led Sea Trout conference – would be good to have an update from IFM themselves for the next meeting
- **Action** on BW to bring someone from enforcement to talk about how the service is planned and delivered
- **Action** on DM & BW decide what date for the next meeting either October or November.
- **Action** on BW & DM to make a plan for the “radical plan” workshop and propose a date between now and the next meeting

Meeting Closes – 15:30