

The Rt Hon Richard Beynon  
Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Fisheries  
DEFRA  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2010

Dear Minister,

### **River Wye Fisheries in England and Wales**

I write on behalf of the River Wye Gillies Association [RWGA]. The association was established in 1984 to represent the interests of Gillies on the Wye and its tributaries. We are members of the Salmon & Trout Association (STA) and RWGA was represented by myself during the formation of the original Salmon Action Plan [SAP] in conjunction with Environment Agency Wales [EAW], The Wye & Usk Foundation [WUF] and Wye Salmon Fishery Owners Association [WSFOA].

Our stated aim are to see the Wye returned to its position as the premier salmon river in England & Wales. To see a sustainable river environment where all indigenous flora and fauna can thrive and grow. A river providing employment opportunities for gillies and an environment anglers and other users can share in a fair and equitable manner. Our brief is to encourage DEFRA to provide the support of a local river authority gathering data and intelligence, taking appropriate action and resourced sufficiently to safeguard and develop the river environment.

It has come to our attention that you have received a proposal from two individuals [Dr Stephen Marsh Smith & Major Patrick Darling] regarding the setting up of a pilot district fisheries board to replace the current control by the Environment Agency. We suggest, and I am sure you may agree, that for any such River Board to be successful it would need to be mandated to achieve and deliver EU standards and Water Framework Directives targets.

We would like to state very clearly here we strongly agree with the principle contents of the letter and are wholly supportive of an elected district river board if drawn from all local interests and with representatives from the whole fisheries sector. However we are very concerned with the performance of bodies currently charged with delivering improvement we feel strongly that by their own published objectives they have failed to deliver such results. There are a number of major angling interests on the river including clubs at Rhayader, Builth Wells and Hereford plus a number of Owners on the river who we believe share our views.

Since WUF were set up some 14 years ago with objectives '*To conserve, protect, rehabilitate and improve the salmon and other indigenous species of animal and plant life of the rivers Wye and Usk*' salmon catches by anglers have declined by some 65%, with results this year heading towards 90%. Their pursuit of habitat improvement is admirable but as the decline has continued they and with them EAW have failed to adjust their plans to circumstances. We could point to issues such as the fact that, in particular WUF along with CCW are against anything other than Elan Valley mitigation stocking and as such the river is unlikely to meet EU targets on fish stocks which could lead to heavy fines on the Government not WUF. We believe controlled stocking, limited to a period of 10 years, would assist significantly in the recovery of salmon stocks to a level that would prove self sustaining and meet EU standards avoiding such fines. If WUF is to play such a strategically important part of this structure shouldn't its executive and leader, along with that of LSFG, be elected [and re-elected every 5 years or so] with anybody allowed to stand but only people with a vested interest in the river [riparian owners, fishery tenants and bona fide clubs and associations] allowed to vote.

The river Wye was traditionally the premier salmon river in England & Wales with 40% of the catch and returns in the 1980/90s of up to 7000 fish per season. In 2009 the Wye catch was 600 and its share of the England & Wales total had declined to circa 5%! Whilst we cannot ignore the general world wide trends of salmon stocks and issues such as global warming and sea survival of this migratory species we regularly ask why has the Wye declined so dramatically in relation to other rivers in the UK?

Professor Steve Ormerod from the Cardiff School of Biosciences who studied populations of young salmon and trout in the River Wye, said that river [Wye] populations have fallen dramatically, putting both species at risk. He found salmon numbers fell by 50% and trout numbers by 67% between 1985 and 2004 – even though the river itself became cleaner. The comparison between trout and salmon is important because, unlike salmon, trout from the Wye never migrate to the sea. “Only factors affecting the River Wye can therefore explain their decline”.

Currently only anglers are asked to pay, by way of licences, towards the upkeep of the river and subject to bye-laws. We believe further funds could be generated by a fair and equal levy on all river users. Why are not canoeists licensed and subject to bye-laws? Why are activity centres using the river in pursuit of their businesses allowed to do so free of charge? Why should water abstraction be allowed uncontrolled and free of charge? Fundamentally all river users should pay, be subject to bye-laws whether they are fishing, canoeing, abstracting or discharging and held to account when they fail to comply. Only then can you maintain and manage the river environment

We submit this letter not to discourage continued deliberations over the proposal but merely with the request that any proposed scheme should take into account all local fisheries stakeholders views and opinions, to arrive at a fair and balanced conclusion as to the way forward. We will continue to canvass the views from our members along with other stakeholders and if necessary, given more feedback we may add to our correspondence.

Yours Sincerely

Geoff Franks  
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cc  
Roger Williams MP [Brecon & Radnorshire]  
Kirsty Williams AM [Brecon & Radnorshire]  
Jessie Norman MP [Hereford & South Herefordshire]  
Bill Wiggins MP [Leominster]  
David Davies MP [Monmouth]