

Ms Virginia Hawkins
Clerk of the Committee
The Sustainability Committee
Welsh Assembly
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Members (Sustainability Committee)

Access to Inland Waters for Canoeists and Rafters (Paddlers)

Having read, listened to and taken account of as much information as possible on the above subject, including that given by your Welsh Assembly representatives (WA) at the Royal Welsh Show. I now see no alternative other than ask you to note my feelings and misgivings on what is a very contentious issue.

Like a lot of the people who will no doubt contact you, I am a part of a syndicate who own fishing rights on the Taff at Abercynon, (We have had a fair amount of poaching on this stretch with no Policing support from the EA) and I am also a member of the Teifi Trout Association where we are now being pressurised by not only the canoeists but by the Assembly who to my mind have little or no understanding of the actual situation or underlying feelings of all Anglers. Note here that I am not a land owner rich man etc; I have worked hard all my life in Industry and have had to pay for my pleasure both financially and health wise and ask for fair play.

I know my Legal rights and have no wish to see them changed without due consideration and then only after fair and constructive negotiation as should be the case in any democratic society. Consider what has happened over the last couple of years, canoeists and rafters being enticed to break laws, or in some cases not knowing the law, and pull out of voluntary agreements. Obviously they no longer want to negotiate or even enter into negotiation. In fact on the Teifi I believe commercial rafting is taking place, this is not only breaking the law (certainly when the raft leader tells those in the raft to ignore anything the anglers say) this type of commercial adventure be licensed and policed by the DTI. This cannot happen in that the Law will be broken by the Government itself, also in a case such as this under Health & Safety Policy risk assessment comes into play.

Allowing access to rivers without strict Laws, Policing and Agreements will be unlawful under the Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975. By condoning or supporting the Welsh Canoe Association (WCA) proposals the Assembly itself may be acting outside the law which leads to anarchy. Canoeists have given statistics which need to be seriously checked. There is approximately 25% of free navigation on most tidal rivers which is already open to the WCA and others.

The WCA through its web site are giving access and egress points on rivers which again invites trespass. These people will not accept restrictions and riparian owner's rights and we as anglers have to endure trespass by them. Now it would appear that it is the intention of the Welsh Assembly to support their application and reward them for unlawful behaviour.

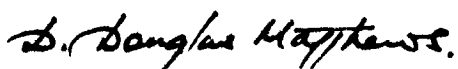
We as anglers put a significant amount of work and finance into Welsh Rivers and their habitat, this has been brushed aside by WCA & WA committees. Note that overall income to the Welsh economy from angling is £140m Quoted by your agency not us. The WA sent a team to Scotland where the Scotland Land Reform Act 2003 gave open access to rivers and this team believes, after a very short visit that this will work in Wales, absolute rubbish, Scotland is a foreign Country and its Parliament is playing down the troubles north of the border. According to reported sources there is an open war zone on the upper Tay river through commercial rafting(which our rivers are not big enough to take) making angling virtually impossible.

Let's take a quick look at the Griff Rhys-Jones scenario, through giving his opinion on how canoeists should act towards anglers he virtually proposed violence, intimidation etc; (Anarchy and Terrorism) he successfully promoted his TV "Rivers" programme very well but it again incited unlawful behaviour. I wonder what would happen if we as anglers wanted to fish where he moors his Yacht, I have little doubt that we would be prosecuted for trespass. Goose and Gander comes to mind.

Should the Law be altered as canoeists wish we believe that riparian owners, angling clubs and others would be in their right to sue the WA for the reduction in value of their assets and the derogation of leases and rights. Alternatively should any law be passed without negotiation and the implementation of rules and regulations agreed by all parties, together with the licensing of the canoeists all in line with what applies to anglers, we as anglers should withhold our license payments, fish where we like, and break the law and then be granted what we wish by the Welsh Assembly.

Please consider the contents of this letter and your proposals and especially what any alterations to the law could incite. I believe that anglers may be open to just agreement through constructive negotiation. Think what could happen to the Welsh Economy and how anglers from other Countries, who input into our economy through fishing some of the finest rivers in the world, will come to view Wales, my Country, if the Welsh Assembly gets this wrong.

Yours faithfully



D D Matthews

Cc: Jane Hutt Assembly Member for Vale of Glamorgan