

TRIBBLE FISHERIES CONSULTATIVE ASSOCIATION

Website: www.ribblefisheriesca.co.uk

Ref: C/RFCA/
Mr Mick Bates AM
Chairman
Sustainability Committee
National Assembly of Wales,
Cardiff.
CF49 1NA

17th Aug 2009

Dear Mr M Bates,

Access Inland Waterways in Wales.

I write in support of Mr W.G.Davies brilliant letter to you dated 1st Aug 2009 reference the above. The points he makes are well thought out and backed by fact. The Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association has worked for many years in a far sighted way to rescue the River Taff and in the process make available to large numbers of people the availability of fishing. This they have done using a great deal of hard work and a lot of their own money. This scenario can be multiplied throughout Wales. He makes the point "where were the canoeists in all this", off illegally canoeing down some other river no doubt! Fishing clubs look after the environment because they know that if they do not then no one else will. They also have a strong sense of history and wish to leave an environment fit for future generations. Hence anglers can be found taking part in all types of habitat work. Canoeists have no track record of being involved in such work or being in the slightest bit interested in the environment. Indeed they boast that canoeing is a benign activity in terms of the environment. There is no such thing as a benign activity when it comes to the environment which is why anglers make such efforts to protect it. Who I wonder would be liable if canoeists introduced parasites into the watercourse and destroyed salmon stocks?

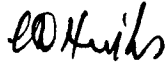
Anglers do not just look after the environment, they are the only group to pay towards its upkeep. All anglers pay a national licence which goes towards the Environment Agency and then pay permit fees to fish a particular stretch. Many angling clubs own their waters while others rent or lease. These are legal rights established over many years. On the vast majority of waters there is no navigable right of way above the tidal stretch. Are you going to ignore these legal rights and simply hand them over for free to canoeists who pay nothing?

In the evidence presented to the Committee at the Royal Welsh the situation in Scotland was mentioned. Consider for one second the fact that the population in Scotland is markedly less than can be found in England and Wales. Many of the Scottish rivers are much longer than their Welsh equivalents and this does make a difference. Even in Scotland there is much dismay at the way things are working out and some beats no longer have tenants because people are not prepared to travel long distances and pay money and be unable to fish because of hordes of canoes making a nuisance of themselves. Tourism is a major income for Wales and if anglers stop coming this would have some dire effects. There are far more anglers than canoes.

Voluntary agreements were mentioned by Mr Davies and in the evidence presented at the Royal Welsh. The trouble here is that the canoe groups do not want such agreements but complete access 365 days a year. It must be pointed out that anglers who pay for access do not have 365 days access a year for a variety of reasons, mostly environmental. As Mr Davies rightly points out canoe unions have broken just about every agreement they have made in favour of direct action and political pressure. They then claim how little access they have. It is the same policy in England in terms of such agreements. The other problem is that canoe groups/unions seem incapable or unwilling to exercise any control over their members. Canoeists want everything and are prepared to give nothing. Given this attitude why should anglers voluntarily give away their legal rights for free?

One way forward would be for canoeists to be on the same footing as anglers. They would pay a national licence which would go to the Environment Agency, perhaps helping to defray some of the expenses of putting the Water Framework Directive into operation, not that they would know anything about WFD or even care. They could band into recognised associations with rules and regulations and negotiate with landowners and riparian owners for access and permission to canoe on that stretch of the river. Anglers do not have the right of access throughout a river unless they pay for it. They would have to accept that certain parts of a river could not be canoed on at certain times of year and at certain water heights. I could go on but believe the point is made. Perhaps if canoeists paid for the privilege they would respect the environment more and do something to look after it?

Yours sincerely,



C.D.Hinks Chairman RFCA

Copy to W.G.Davies

Ribble Fisheries Consultative Association

Dear Ms Hawkins,

Please find enclosed letter that I emailed. Perhaps I should say a few words about the R.F.C.A. We are the umbrella organisation for the Ribble catchment. The Ribble is one of the premier salmon and sea trout rivers in England and Wales. We represent the majority of game fishing clubs and riparian owners on the Ribble. Our view is that the current laws on access and trespass are clear and we see no need to change them. The 1975 salmon and freshwater fisheries act 1975 is equally clear and gives protection to spawning fish and their reeds from any disturbances. Any change such as open access to canoes would bring immediate legal action for compensation. Since the Ribble salmon fishery alone is valued at £11 million p.a. these would be considerable.

The only canoe agreements on the Ribble are with scout and guide associations. These cause no problems since these organisations are well run and self regulating. There is no problem therefore with renewing these agreements. These associations do not unilaterally pull out of agreements and then claim they cannot canoe.

Yours sincerely,

CD Hinks, Chairman R.F.C.A