

THE HON. OWAIN ROWLEY-CONWY

National Grid Reference – SJ 045 788

19th August 2009

Dear Ms Hawkins,

I am writing to you concerning the proposal to give canoeist access to all rivers in Wales at all times of the year.

I am a riparian owner on the River Clwyd between St Asaph and Rhuddlan in Denbighshire, in some parts on both banks of the river. Anglers regularly fish the river principally for sea trout but there are some salmon as well. Some of these anglers are local but a good proportion are tourists, many from the caravan camps in this area.

The current situation is that there is no right of navigation upstream of Rhuddlan bridge. Downstream of the bridge are some three miles of river available to canoeists navigable by canoes at all stages of the tide. This has been the situation for generations - possibly centuries - and is well understood by all. Any canoe further upstream in non tidal water is trespassing because it is passing over the riparian owners property. The situation is clearly defined and I see no reason to change it.

I am concerned that allowing access further upstream would affect anglers ability to carry out their hobby, for which they have paid not only ourselves but the Government in the form of their annual rod license - currently £68 for migratory fish. I believe it would also be detrimental to the life cycle of the fish themselves, which are, incidentally, themselves protected under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act.

There are many excellent voluntary agreements on Welsh rivers. On the River Dee there is one which is also supported by the water companies who arrange releases of water from the reservoirs that create white water conditions of the highest international standards. It seems to me that much of the difficulty is caused by the Welsh Canoe Association itself in that they refuse any constraint on their activities at all and seem to encourage canoeing clubs to adopt the same intransigent attitude - to the point where some perfectly workable and existing compromises are refused purely because they

are not entirely without restriction. Having rejected such practical arrangements they then complain they have no access to that river - a rather extraordinary standpoint.

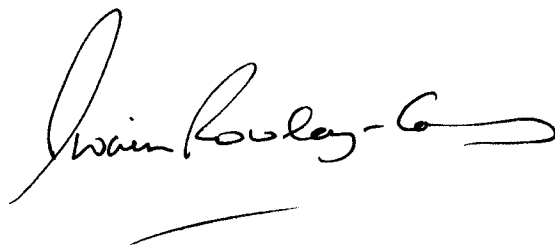
As stated above anglers are required to pay for an annual licence and with riparian owners and angling clubs carry out a considerable amount of work on the rivers. What contribution can we expect from the canoeing fraternity? Presumably they too will have to purchase some form of license from the Environment Agency in order to help the Agency protect the riverine environment - although this will be difficult to enforce - but can we expect them to join in the work required to help preserve the rivers in good order? I somehow doubt it.

I am concerned that in their enthusiasm to sway your opinion the canoeists draw parallels with the Scottish experience which do not bear close examination. Scotland is not Wales and its rivers are generally larger and more remote from urban centres of population. However that is not true of all of them and to blithely assert that no problems have been caused by the extension of the right to paddle is simply untrue and I would ask you not to be misled by such nonsense.

As a political act - which as Clerk to the Committee I appreciate does not affect you personally - I would regard extending the right to paddle in the way suggested would be (as Sir Humphrey would put it) "most courageous". There are a lot more anglers than there are canoeists, however vociferous the latter body may be, and one would be able to do one's own electoral calculations quite simply.

Finally there would be the matter of compensation to consider. Angling interests would naturally seek considerable sums for the degradation of their sport and I could see a real bean feast developing for the lawyers with claims, counter claims and, who knows, judicial reviews and suchlike. To suggest to the practitioners of the largest participator sport in the UK that their opinions can be run over roughshod at a time when the Government is less popular than I can remember in my life - and I was around to see the end of John Major - could lead to some quite exercising situations.

Yours sincerely



Gavin Rowley