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Tuesday, 8th September 2009

FAO the Sustainability Committee,

Cardiff Bay,

CF99 1NA

I own a length of the Afon Teifi and the Afon Cych which border my fields. I fish the rivers, I'm a member of the Teifi Trout Association and I make my water available to the TTA. I'm a founder member of the Teifi Rivers Trust and I'm the coordinator for the Teifi Rivers Invertebrate Monitors – [www.riverfly.co.uk](http://www.riverfly.co.uk). I rent out my cottage; anglers form the largest section of my customers.

I've owned a canoe for many years and thoroughly enjoy the sport, however unlike the militants I canoe legally, on tidal waters, on the sea or where access agreements are in place.

I've written to the Sustainability Committee on behalf of the members of the Ffynnon Taf Angling Club but this submission is my personal contribution to your inquiry into access to inland water in Wales.

During the purchase of my property one of my greatest concerns was that I had absolute title to the fishing rights. My fishing rights were estimated to have added a premium of £27k to the property; the rights apply to around a quarter of a mile of river. At the time of purchase I was assured that there were no established rights to navigate the Teifi unlike parts of the Wye where such rights exist. I was satisfied that I would be able to enjoy the excellent fishing which the Teifi offers without the interference or intrusion of water craft, an understanding protected in laws which have worked well for many years.

I'm aware of the changes to the laws of navigation on Scottish rivers but feel that no valid comparison can be made between these wide and remote rivers and the rivers in Wales which are far narrower and far more likely to become swamped due to their accessibility to major population centres.



Who will compensate the owners of fishing rights and related businesses if canoeists are allowed to wreck the fishing?

Why do canoeists expect to have free access to waters which they haven't bought?

I see no need to change the law which prohibits navigation on non tidal rivers of Wales but I would like to see the introduction of a registration system for water craft and licensing introduced for their owners so that the owners of illegally operated craft could be identified and prosecuted by a government agency in the same way as the owner of an unauthorised car which had been driven over the green of a golf course would be.

In the past canoeists had a voluntary agreement enabling them to use Teifi Trout Association waters in the close season - free of charge - for five and a half months between mid October to the end of March. Voluntary arrangements such as this generously gave access to the Teifi for nearly half of the year during which canoeists could enjoy their sport without ruining the sport for anglers. Recently activists have decided to ignore all previous voluntary arrangements and to confront owners and tenants of fishing rights, something which has made many local canoeists uncomfortable as it has upset the relationship between them and the local landowners. I would like to see winter access back in place but with a charge for businesses that are currently exploiting the amenity of the river without contributing to the well being of the river in any way.

Along with many of my friends I would like to see the National Assembly for Wales acting on behalf of anglers, these are the people who represent the largest sector of river users in Assembly Members' constituencies. Allowing water craft to have access to our rivers in the fishing season will destroy the nature of the river and the sport which anglers pay to quietly enjoy.

I am particularly concerned about the impact which increased access by watercraft will have both on my angling based business and the membership of fishing clubs.

As a land owner I would like to have the ability to identify the canoeists who are using my water illegally, a requirement which is not currently met by canoeists but one which is compulsory for anglers who are required to carry identity and a fishing licence. On behalf of landowners I would also like to bring the unethical activity of the commercial operators on the Teifi into the discussion. Last summer my family and I had to ask large groups of canoeists led by Llandysul Paddlers to leave our field. On the first occasion they ignored the request to leave made by my children, my wife had to leave the house to tell them to leave, on the second occasion while walking the field with friends and family I had to ask another group led by Llandysul Paddlers to leave. This business has used our land as a picnic spot for their clients without any permission being sought or any payment being offered. Behaviour like this typifies the irresponsible attitude towards property which is spoiling the amenity which landowners, tenants and anglers have paid for.



Apart from the nuisance caused by rogue businesses I've also had to put up with the rudeness from independent canoeists who, for one example, have sworn at me in front of visitors when I've asked them to leave my land. Their anonymity and ability to take to the river make resolving these incidents impossible. Increased canoeing will certainly increase this kind of problem.

Canoeists have plenty of places where they can enjoy their sport, they have free access to the tidal reaches of rivers, access to many reservoirs and lakes, free access to the sea and many voluntary agreements allowing them access to rivers in winter. Why this sudden desire to cause conflict has arisen is very difficult to understand unless it is being driven purely by commercial interests who intend to capitalise on our rivers at the expense of anglers and the character of the waters.

I hope the committee will listen to the voice of protest which is slowly rising from the anglers in Wales and beyond. Many of us look on proposals to open our inland waters to navigation throughout the year with nothing short of horror. Rivers in Wales are sacred to anglers and the prospect that members of a Welsh Assembly would allow these rivers to become the playground for crowds of people is nothing short of sacrilege. For every visitor that comes into Wales to play on a boat Wales will lose two visiting anglers but more importantly the rivers of Wales will lose that indefinable quality of wildness which is such a special aspect of our land.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Chapman

