

## **Minutes - Round Table Meeting with Water Access Interests**

**Monday 21 January 2008**

### **Present**

Jane Davidson, Minister Environment, Sustainability and Housing  
Sally Gronow, Dwr Cymru  
Kevin Jackson, Association of Heads of Outdoor Recreation Centres  
John Cook, WANPA  
Ashley Charhwood, Welsh Canoeing Association  
Tim Peppin, Director —Regeneration and Sustainable Development  
Stephen Buckley, Forestry Commission  
Marc Evans, British Waterways  
Sir Broke Boothby, Wales Tourism Alliance  
David Chapman, Wales Tourism Alliance  
Gethyn Thomas, WSTAA  
Moc Morgan OBE, Secretary of the Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association  
Rob Owen, CCW  
Dr Huw Jones, Chief Executive of the Sports Council for Wales  
Dr Stephen Marsh Smith, Association of Rivers Trust  
Graeme Harris, Chair of FERAC  
Andy Schofield, Environment Agency  
Gerry Quarrell, Welsh Assembly Government  
Richard Morgan, Welsh Assembly Government

### **Apologies**

Leol Collins, National Mountain Centre

### **Welcome and introductions**

1. The Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting. She drew specific attention to the degree to which waterways in Wales were underutilised for recreation purposes. The purpose of the meeting was to establish consensus that the draft Strategic Plan for Water Related Recreation provided an appropriate means of improving responsible access to a range of water based activities and to agree a way forward,

### **Exemplar Projects Supported by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2007/8**

2. Gerry Quarrell outlined five exemplar projects which were intended to help inform future development projects in Wales. Funding of £100,000 had been provided by the Assembly Government to CCW and the Forestry Commission for the following projects:
  - » The Wye and Usk River Plan (model access agreement), which updates and re-instates previous agreements permitting canoe access. It covers 35 miles of the Wye (from near Rhayader to Hay) and another 20 miles on the Usk (from Sennybridge to Crickhowell).
  - \* British Waterways: Montgomery Canal, which aims to establish a family orientated outdoor pursuits and recreational 'hub' on the Montgomery Canal (at Berriew).
  - National Trust: Glaslyn River and Llyn Dinas, a project to support access improvements for water-based recreation activities.
  - \* Pembrokeshire Coast National Park: Llys-y-Fran Reservoir, aiming to encourage wider community use of the reservoir and its environs.
  - Afon Mawddach: exploring the feasibility of a new canoe trail on this river as

well as other recreational activities within the river corridor.

3. Ashley Charwood noted that monitoring and evaluation of these pilot projects was essential to ensure that they can inform future work, and asked if lessons learned from the projects would feed back into actions that arise from the draft strategy. Gerry Quarrell confirmed that monitoring and evaluation was part of the process.
4. Moc Morgan said that angling clubs had no objection to the pilot scheme approach. However there were concerns regarding the project on the Mawddach which had been expressed by two local angling clubs. The Minister emphasised the value of the pilots in helping to deliver improved access to water in a responsible and managed way, through ongoing discussions and partnership working.
5. Stephen Marsden-Smith said that the pilot on the Wye/Usk had been a reasonable success and emphasised the importance of signage and good information, (e.g. access and egress points).

### **Overview of the draft Strategic Plan for Wales on Water-Related Recreation**

6. Andy Schofield gave a brief presentation on the draft strategic plan, and Jane Davidson invited those present to comment on the contents.

### **General Discussion on content of plan**

7. Moc Morgan explained that the development of angling at reservoirs should be looked at as the quality of reservoirs in Wales for fishing is very high.
8. Sally Gronow said that the potential for recreation at Wales' reservoirs is significant. Although Dwr Cymru's priority is to supply water, there is no objection in principle to third party involvement in developing Dwr Cymru sites for carefully managed water related recreation.
9. Kevin Jackson welcomed the draft plan and pointed out that increased useage must be managed in a way that ensures that health and safety concerns are addressed. He added that communication on the plan needed to promote how the health benefits of water related recreation outweighed potential risks. Jane Davidson agreed and added that most of the suggested activities were already taking place to some degree in Wales so there is already a pool of experience to build upon.
  10. Huw Jones asked how the priorities in the plan would be brought forward in practice - whether at one extreme the plan would result in high quality facilities focused at specific locations, or whether the emphasis would be on local access at many different places. The relationship between local and national priorities should be explored. Some of these issues were looked at in a document produced by CCW and SCW produced in the early 1990's - 'A Sporting Chance for the Countryside\*'.
    - 11.
  12. Moc Morgan asked Kevin Jackson whether the Urdd organisation has been involved with the work of the Association of Heads of Outdoor Recreation Centres. Kevin Jackson confirmed that they were..
  13. Tim Peppin asked what involvement local authorities had had in the preparation of the draft plan. Andy Schofield estimated that around 50% of Local Authorities had been represented at the workshops. Jane Davidson said that following the consultation phase, the next stage would be development of an Action Plan to guide implementation. All Local Authorities should be kept up to date with the development of the plan, and liaison with WLOA would take place to achieve this.

14. John Cook welcomed the recommendation that guidance should be prepared for planning authorities with regard to access to water for recreation. He added that the draft plan seemed to lack empirical research on the demand side, for example research into demand for 'hydro centres'.
- 15.
- 16.
17. Marc Evans agreed that research about demand was required, and said that canals offer a resource that must not be forgotten given that towpaths are ideal for use by walkers, cyclists and for disabled people, and that they allow for the possibility of creating long distance trails. Detailed planning guidance exists for development near canals. He pointed out that the 'Waterways Wales Working Group' had similar objectives to those contained in the draft plan, albeit with an emphasis on transportation.
18. Rob Owen agreed that coordination of the efforts of all agencies and access to EU funding would be crucial to the delivery of the priorities in the draft Strategic Plan. For example, there would be the opportunities to link up with the Coastal Tourism Strategy and Sustainable Tourism Framework prepared by Visit Wales. Another example of collaboration between agencies is the 'Natural Facilities Database' compiled by CWW and SCW.
19. Jane Davidson agreed that there was a particular need to make information easily accessible to the public. She welcomed the broad support from the group for the draft plan and said that following its launch a forum should be set up to bring forward different elements contained within it.
20. Gethyn Thomas said that the WSTAA had spoken to fishing clubs across Wales and that there was widespread support among them for the draft plan, adding that since waterways are only used for fishing six months out of the year, there were opportunities for recreation by other user groups.

### **Resources to implement the Plan in 2008/9 and beyond**

18. The Minister invited the group to suggest any opportunities that had not been covered in the meeting so far for possible inclusion in the proposed Action Plan. On the issue of resources, Gerry Quarrell summarised potential sources available to implement the plan in 2008/09 and beyond, including opportunities to bid for EU Convergence Funding. The Assembly Government planned to create a central 'pot' of some £0.5 million with contributions from other key agencies, if at all possible. The Minister endorsed this approach. Work was also ongoing with the Environment Agency to develop a bid under

[ the 'Environment for Growth\* fund for a sustainable tourism project which<sup>1</sup> would incorporate water-based recreation opportunities.

### **Next Steps**

19. Gerry Quarrell outlined the next steps. An Action Plan would be drawn up which would require examination of the main elements of the plan and the points raised at today's meeting. To this end, he planned to establish a (small) working group of representative from key agencies (including amongst others CCW, SCW, EAW, PC and WLGA). A communications plan would also be drafted.
20. The Minister closed the meeting by thanking those present for contributing to a very useful discussion. She suggested that the group meet again in the autumn to review overall progress.

February 2008

Richard Morgan

Access and National Parks Policy Branch