

**Round Table Meeting With Water Relation Recreation Interests
Ty Hywel (Crickhowell House)
Monday, 18th January 2010 13:00.**

Attendees:

Jane Davidson AM	Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing
Gerry Quarrell	<i>Head of Nature Access and Marine Unit, WAG</i>
Catrin Dellar	<i>Access and National Parks Policy Branch, WAG</i>
Ieuan Jones	<i>Access and National Parks Policy Branch, WAG</i>
Craig Mitchell	<i>WLGA- Director of Regeneration and Sustainable Development</i>
Arfon Williams	<i>Fisheries Policy Team, WAG</i>
Andy Schofield	<i>The Environment Agency</i>
Graeme Harris	<i>Chair of Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee</i>
Sara Jones	<i>British Waterways</i>
Julian Atkins	<i>Brecon Beacons National Park Authority</i>
Jont Bulbeck	<i>Countryside Council for Wales</i>
Gethyn Thomas	<i>Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee</i>
Paul Henderson	<i>Dwr Cymru - Welsh Water</i>
Chris White	<i>Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association</i>
Anthony Rees	<i>Federation of Welsh Anglers</i>
Stephen Marsh-Smith	<i>Association of Rivers Trust</i>
Huw Jones	<i>Chief Executive of the Sports Council for Wales</i>
Peter Garson	<i>Forestry Commission Wales</i>
Ashley Charlwood	<i>Canoe Wales</i>
Eddie Palmer	<i>British Canoe Union</i>

1. Welcome plus opening remarks by the Minister.

The Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided the group with a brief update of the main Welsh Assembly Government actions on access to inland water since the last meeting of the group in January 2008. These included Splash funding and the Strategic Plan for Wales on which the group received further detail later on in the meeting.

The Minister also stated that she wanted to hold these meetings at least twice a year from now on in view of the growing importance of this agenda and the number of initiatives/developments under way.

AP- Officials to arrange next meeting, to be chaired by the Minister, for June/July.

The Minister emphasised the importance of joint working between the interests around the table. She also stressed that access to water was not just an issue for Kayakers / Canoeists and Anglers and that all water interests should be taken into consideration, in particular those of disabled water users.

The Minister also referred to the recently published Visit Wales Paddlesports Action Plan. The Minister noted that Visit Wales were absent from the meeting and that she would like to see a representation from them in future meeting.

AP- Officials to ensure attendance by a representative from Visit Wales at the next meeting.

2. Review latest developments – round table discussion.

The Minister then asked for brief updates from those present on latest developments on the access to water agenda.

Craig Mitchell (WLGA) – No update.

Andy Schofield (The Environment Agency) – Had been working on a number of key priorities, e.g. the Wales Fisheries Strategy to create better access for angling and net fisheries (commercial). They were also helping WAG to deliver on the the Water Recreation Action Plan along with partners such as British Waterways, CCW and user groups.

Andy also mentioned that officers in EAW are in the process of mapping and signing the Conwy catchment as a part of a pilot project to map spawning grounds.

AP- Andy Schofield to send the group information on the work done on this pilot.

Sara Jones (British Waterways) – BW had utilised the Splash Funding to improve opportunities for canoeists on their extensive canal network and had been working with partners such as the Environment Agency to further increase access opportunities.

Julian Atkins (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority) - Splash Funding had allowed a new project officer to be recruited for the Park. He would be taking forward a range of initiatives.

Jont Bulbeck (Countryside Council for Wales) – CCW had issued a review of the exemplar projects funded by WAG. CCW has also carried out the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey including information on water recreation usage. CCW would also be publishing a Feasibility Study on water access on the River Taff in March. .

Gethyn Thomas (Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association) – Gethyn explained that the Association's role is to improve the water environment and as such has a responsibility to engage communities into enjoying the water environment and ensuring that all users refrain from infringing on each others sport.

Paul Henderson (Welsh Water) – WW has a large reservoir resource and their current approach was to encourage the management and development of existing assets through third party organisations. Most activities concentrated around Visitor Centres but the main sticking point when it comes to water access as far as WW is concerned was maintaining water quality.

The Minister asked WW to look into which sites would be best situated for improved water related recreation.

Chris White (Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association) – WSTAA had been looking into alternative solutions for access to water, including new forms of agreement.

Anthony Rees (Federation of Welsh Anglers and Merthyr Angling Association) – The Federation has an extensive range of on the water and near the water resources. In Merthyr they have been looking to improve access by the local community.

Stephen Marsh-Smith (Association of Rivers Trust) – Wye and Usk Foundation was in the process of negotiating further access agreements on these rivers.

Stephen Marsh-Smith issued an open invitation to the group to visit the Wye and Usk rivers to see what's happening there.

Huw Jones (Chief Executive of the Sports Council for Wales) – SCW provides funding on a national level for angling, kayaking, canoeing, sailing and other sports especially for local clubs and at an elite level. SCW has worked with the Environment Agency and Plas Menai to improve access opportunities in north Wales. SCW has also been gathering information on access facilities, including those for water related recreation. Further work to be done on linear routes and reservoirs.

Peter Garson (Forestry Commission Wales) – FCW felt there was a lot of scope for access to the water but limited for access on the water. The Mawddach exemplar project was on hold and no management agreement had been formed. FCW was keen to work with others to make more progress on the Mawddach agreement but was also mindful of the environmental sensitivity of the area.

AP- [FCW] officials to provide the Minister with a note on the Mawddach project.

Ashley Charlwood (Canoe Wales) – CW had good resources of expertise on canoeing issues. He stated that CW also represented other groups who did not fall under their own governing bodies e.g. free swimmers.

3. Progress update on the Strategic Plan for Wales on Water-Related Recreation.

Gerry Quarrell gave an update on the five important strategic points for action:

- i. Improving evidence base;
- ii. Improving info to tourists and locals;
- iii. Health and safety;
- iv. Sharing good practice;
- v. The development of centres and hubs for water recreation including the reservoirs in BBNPA; and

These five areas might be developed further using the Splash Fund which was already funding practical projects across Wales.

AP- Officials to issue a copy of the Action Plan on Water Related Recreation with the minutes of the meeting.

The group agreed that it would be beneficial to have a definitive map of where the public had secure access to water in Wales for recreation which could eventually be placed on the internet.

AP- WAG officials to liaise with CCW and EAW over the creation of the map.

4. Update on the Splash funding and related projects.

Andy Schofield gave an update on the Splash fund:

155 expressions of interest had been received followed by 105 full applications. Over a third of these projects had been approved. The average grant provided was around £24k. Due to the flexible nature of the grant other funds have also been secured. EAW estimates that 10,000 additional 'on the water' activity days have taken place since the start of the grant. Over 110 individuals have received training as guides or coaches and 30 jobs had been supported. Most grants have been to third sector groups. The type of projects has varied considerably with not just kayaking and angling groups taking advantage of the fund. Over 2,000 children have taken advantage of the £5 sailing taster sessions at Plas Menai. The fund has been used to create new sites such as the creation of a lake in Llandysul. It has funded specialised wheelchairs to facilitate disabled access to Barry Beach. The Pembrokeshire Marine Code has created a leaflet setting out best practice in relation to water based activities.

The EAW is looking for projects that will resolve some conflict issues and pilot new ideas raising awareness of water/river issues. EAW will also look into spawning season and what impact paddle sports have.

It was noted that at Plas Y Brenin training on environmental issues was provided to canoe instructors.

It was also noted that it wasn't only canoeing and kayaking interests that were benefiting. For example, the Wye and Usk Foundation's angling passport scheme, funded through Splash, had provided over 8,000 rod days. Over £250,000 had been generated. 50% of visitors stayed overnight, mostly from outside Wales bringing in an average £36 pounds each.

AP- By May EAW to produce an outcomes based report on the initial 2 years of Splash funding. This will help to allow the Minister to consider additional funding for future years.

5. Update on the Wye and Usk voluntary access agreements.

Stephen Marsh-Smith updated the group on progress on the Wye and Usk rivers. The project, which benefitted from the pilot scheme funding and Splash has been possible only through agreement with the land owners. There are no legal binding agreements. Access was permitted on a seasonal basis and depending on water levels. The Foundation has placed water gauges which can be viewed via webcam.

The lessons learnt from the Wye and Usk experience could be tailored to, and transferred to other rivers in Wales. Certain factors would have to be taken into consideration, such as clearly defined areas for access and egress from the water, parking and water level markers. Gerry Quarrell indicated that the Assembly Government were very keen to see the Wye and Usk experience transferred, if possible, to other main rivers in Wales. This would represent a major step forward on water access if it could be delivered and he sought the Round Table's support for this.

AP- Officials to organise a sub-group to look at seeking new agreements on other main rivers in Wales.

The Minister then had to leave the meeting but thanked those present for contributing to a very useful discussion.

6. NAFW Sustainability Committee Inquiry into Access to Inland Waters – Welsh Assembly Government line (Minister's evidence).

Catrin Dellar then gave a brief update on the Sustainability Committee's Inquiry into Access to Inland Water at which three Ministers, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Minister for Heritage were due to give evidence at on the 21st January 2010.

Gerry Quarrell closed the meeting and agreed that a mid year meeting would be arranged towards the end of June/ beginning of July.