

**Water Recreation Ministerial Advisory Group**  
**Tan-y-bwlch, Aberystwyth**  
**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011 14:00pm**

**Attendees:**

Jane Davidson AM – Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing  
John Watkins – NAMU, Welsh Assembly Government  
Catrin Dellar – NAMU, Welsh Assembly Government  
Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance  
Peter Garson – Forestry Commission Wales  
Ashley Charlwood – Canoe Wales  
Graeme Harris - Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee  
Steven Marsh-Smith – Wye and Usk Foundation  
Andy Scholfield – Environment Agency Wales  
Tony Rees – Federation of Welsh Anglers  
Max Coventry – Country Land and Business Association  
Andrew Stumpf – British Waterways  
Ray Lockyer – Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association  
Jim Embrey – Tourism Wales, WAG  
Gethyn Thomas – Carmarthenshire Rivers Trust  
Tom Pakham – Dwr Cymru  
Steven Morgan – Welsh Yachting Association

Carl Atkinson – Countryside Council for Wales

**Presenters:**

Andrew Parsons – South West Lakes Trust  
Martin Ross – South West Water

**Observers:**

Julia Morgan – Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association

**Apologies**

Huw Jones – Sport Wales  
Rob Derbyshire – Local Access Forums  
Julian Atkins – National Park Authorities  
Donald Patterson – Afonydd Cymru  
Michael Alexander – Outdoor Swimming Society

**1. Welcome plus opening remarks by the Minister for Environment Sustainability and Housing.**

The Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Minister stated that she hoped see the Group continue with the good work it had been doing.

**Action Point** – Officials to arrange the next meeting when new Minister has been appointed.

## **2. Update of latest developments by members – Round Table Discussion.**

### **Rachel Evans – Countryside Alliance**

Members of the CA are in the process of considering a couple of access agreements.

### **Peter Garson – Forestry Commission Wales**

FC is working with CCW on a code of conduct for water users. PG stated that illegal gold panning was becoming an issue on the Mawddach, damaging the banks of the river and the wildlife. FC confirmed they are looking into proposals for introducing hydro-power on some of their smaller rivers and streams and, as a part of this, are considering the impact this will have on fisheries and angling.

The Minister expressed her approval of the scheme and encouraged the Group to work to make this happen. PG advised it is early days but work is progressing.

PG also advised that plans to introduce a hydro-power scheme led to an oversight on FC's behalf which meant long standing angling permits were not renewed on the Fairy Glen stretch of the Conwy. The message was poorly conveyed and led to miss-understanding between anglers and FC. This was later resolved and the permits were re-issued.

### **Ashley Charlwood – Canoe Wales**

AC highlighted that there were new opportunities for partnership working regarding commercial rafting and Rescue 3. CW is also looking into opening up more water sport opportunities on canals.

### **Graeme Harris - Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee**

GH highlighted that there are owners and angling clubs ready to enter into agreements on recreational access but can not progress because there is only ever one party around the table. Both parties are needed to make an agreement.

### **Steven Marsh-Smith – Wye and Usk Foundation**

SMS highlighted that the Wye and Usk has had 5 years of agreement for water access. The suitability of the river Llwyd had been considered; whilst access was suitable there are large sections of the river that contain utilities pipes going across at a height that would not be suitable whilst in a canoe. SMS also highlighted that it appears that canoeists are failing to acknowledge the Sustainability Committee's report and its assessment of the legal position.

### **Andy Scholfield – Environment Agency Wales**

The EA in England has changed the level of priority given to water recreation and is down sizing their staff resource to less than 1 full time member of staff. EAW is staying at the same level and will receive the same level of funding from WAG. Shrimp issue was highlighted and ASc advised that greater education and resources are needed to ensure the issue is kept under control. ASc insisted that all parties are willing to talk about access agreements but only on a local level not national.

### **Tony Rees – Federation of Welsh Anglers and Afonydd Cymru**

TR raised his concerns that there might not be enough protection for the environment or the land owners but was happy to go with the flow as long as there is due consideration. TR also stated that there seemed to be some confusion over the law in this area.

### **Max Coventry – Country Land and Business Association**

MC stated that on the whole written agreements are popular with landowners and are seen to be a requirement in order to protect their rights and provide for the access sought. There have been numerous workshops but nothing is progressing because only the land owners attend. The canoeists and other water recreation groups need to come along to the meetings. MC highlighted that there has been an offer of wider access on the river Dee but to date no canoeists have come forward to enter into an agreement.

JD asked the group to consider what needs to be done to ensure all parties attend meetings and workshops. The Minister suggested that further workshops would be useful but at local level specific to certain stretches of river.

**Action Point:** EA to consider following up the recent workshops they supported through the Splash fund, with local workshops on specific rivers/waters.

### **Andrew Stumpf – British Waterways**

The consultation on the future of British Waterways had been issued and would ultimately lead to BW joining the third sector. ASt hopes an all Wales board can be set up with local partnership boards feeding in, with grants replaced with a contract possibly from WAG. BW has committed to create six new access points on the Montgomery - Brecon Canal using SPLASH funding. Training is available along this canal for schools and families to learn how to kayak / canoe.

### **Ray Lockyear – Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association**

RL stated that members of WSTA are content to sign up to access agreements but to date no interest has been shown by canoeists. One of the clubs affiliated to WSTAA is seeking to establish its own canoe club and have sought permission from a land owner to have access to a section of river. Only one person has so far joined the club with an interest in canoeing.

### **Jim Embrey – Tourism Wales, WAG**

Projects are ongoing to promote access on the Mawddach, Monmouthshire – Brecon canal, Montgomery and river Taff with boat hire, canoeing and other water recreational activities available.

### **Gethyn Thomas – Carmarthenshire Rivers Trust**

Partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council is working well and funding has been secured through SPLASH for new facilities for a local yacht club. GT stated that he felt little progress had been made over the last 5 years on clearing up the issues around access to water.

### **Tom Pakham – Dwr Cymru**

TP highlighted the success of agreements with Brecon Beacons National Park stating it is generally easier to work with organisations with land and property management experience. DC and BBNP are working together to formalise licence agreements to reservoirs and are looking to create a new visitor centre.

### **Steven Morgan – Welsh Yachting Association**

SM advised there had been an increase in the numbers of new participants to sailing, however not yet enough to get them to their target of 5000 before the Olympics in 2012. WYA are looking to use the Olympics to bring as much interest as possible to sailing.

JD agreed that the Olympics will be a great opportunity for Wales to show off its natural beauty and superb natural water recreational opportunities. It would be great to have as many opportunities as possible opened up to all kinds of water recreation before the Olympics. The Wales Coast Path is also on target to be finished before the Olympics making Wales the only country in the world with a dedicated path following the whole coast.

JD asked AC how WAG and other interests around the table can engage with local canoe clubs, many of whom are affiliated members of Canoe Wales, in order to promote agreements on a local level. Clarity was needed in the messages and communication emerging from CW to their affiliated clubs that CW's national policy not to support an approach to access that relied on agreements was no barrier to clubs entering local agreements if this was the best way forward for supporting and encouraging paddle sport in their area.

AC pointed out that national policy was set by the CW members at the AGM, and so will not change or be discussed until the next AGM in November at the earliest. AC agreed to a meeting between CW and WAG officials to discuss the points raised by the Minister.

**Action Point** – CW to meet with WAG to discuss how access can be improved locally without going against CW's current national policy.

### **3. Presentation on South West Water / Recreation Hub – Martin Ross (South West Water) and Andy Parsons (South West Lakes Trust). Moved up the agenda by the Minister.**

South West Lakes Trust (SWLT) was formed in April 2000 to promote and manage recreation, access and conservation on and around inland waters in the south west of England. The charitable trust is employed by SWW to administer its recreation operations on its lakes and other inland waters.

The presentation included a brief outline of the history behind the Trust and its relationship with South West Water. AP also ran through some of the projects benefitting from the arrangements – for example, the Outdoor and Active project to encourage greater tourism in the South West and to promote better access to sport and the countryside.

Turnover for SWLT is £1.5m from its cafes and equipment hire, etc. monies from forestry land farming schemes are not included in this figure.

SWLT does have a fee for access to water and the use of equipment. SWW's assets have been much better off since SWLT got involved. Website displays reports on assets.

AP advised that each major trust / lake has its own stakeholder group with good buy in from locals and local authorities.

JD apologised for having to leave, then thanked everybody for continuing to push for more access to water and hoped the Group could continue to move from strength to strength.

#### **[The Minister left for another engagement.]**

MR advised the group that SWW pay in to improve the up stream reservoirs and water quality.

### **4. Review of progress on access to water on Outdoors Online and the water recreation code of conduct – update by Carl Atkinson (CCW).**

CA provided the group with an update of the work undertaken by CCW and its partners to create a suite of codes of conduct for water recreation users. The first to be issued will be an over-arching code for all users followed by a code for each type of user.

Group discussed having insurance mentioned in the general code. CD suggested it would be better to include the need for insurance in the user-specific codes rather than the over-arching code. The Group agreed that including lines on insurance requirements in the over-arching document could give the impression that the countryside was unduly dangerous which could put off families from utilising opportunities to access it; and could also place further liabilities on landowners.

**Action Point** - CA to forward copies of the codes to the Group.

An electronic map of water recreation sites was also being created by CCW. The information on inland water would form a part of a wider map of access already available on the CCW website. CA advised this would not be a 'definitive map' but would gradually build up a picture of where access to water was permitted and on what terms, and that CCW would welcome any observations on the sites identified for access from the Group and their networks.

**Action Point** – CA to forward web address for the access map.

#### **5. Update on the SPLASH funding and related projects – update by Andy Schofield (Environment Agency).**

ASc reported that there had been a good spread of the funding both geographically and in terms of interests. EA will be looking to simplify the application process and start giving feedback on all applications whether successful or not. This was welcomed by the Group.

#### **6. Any other business.**

ASt – BW's projects to renew and create distinct features on waterfronts have acted as a catalyst for more improvements in those areas. ASt is happy to send more details.

Group wanted to wish JD all the best and to pass on the message that the Group had been a success.

**Action Point** – Officials to pass on good wishes to JD.

Group discussed lack of representative from an agricultural perspective.

CD advised that the group did include landowning representatives and to add anymore could make it too large to be functional.

CD asked that if anyone had any opinions on the Terms of Reference to forward them on.

CD advised that the new minister would not be in place until June therefore the next meeting would not be held before July at the earliest.

Meeting closed