



## Comment from the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF) on River Access and Navigation

With a Welsh Government Green Paper on access to land and water in Wales due to be published shortly, the Foundation would like to set out our position and explain what actions we have taken in respect of navigation and access to rivers both in our catchments and elsewhere.

### Recent History

The river Wye has a public right of navigation downstream of Hay on Wye, a distance of approximately 95 miles. There have been arrangements for canoeists to use the (not publically navigable) upper river in winter months following agreements set up in 1974 and 1990. A similar agreement on the Usk was established in 1984 though only the stretch from Sennybridge to Crickhowell was ever used. In all three cases, they were abandoned unilaterally by the Canoe Unions.

In 2007, the Welsh government launched several pilot schemes with the aim of creating Voluntary Access Arrangements (VAAs). One of these was the rejuvenation of the old upper Usk and Wye arrangements. The Wye Navigation Committee, set up in 2002 to manage the navigable section downstream of Hay was supportive, though the Welsh Canoeing Association decided not to become involved. WUF therefore proceeded to set this up with the help and advice of local canoe centres, using WAG funding, firstly on the upper Wye and later on the upper Usk.

The essential tenet of the WUF arrangements was that it was not necessary to make them with a national canoe body - in the event they didn't want to be involved. As with letting fishing, we simply set out the terms and details of what was agreed and how the sport was to be conducted. These details were published on our website, signage installed and access to water agreed with owners. Visitors were aided by gauges and other information to advise of prevailing conditions.

The National Assembly, through their Sustainability Committee, endorsed this approach (Recommendations 1-4) and also agreed it wasn't for Canoe Wales to sign any such proposals. It was hoped that more VAAs would be set up across Wales, spreading the load and taking advantage of the varied rivers and river conditions across Wales, but few followed. However, the advent of the Green

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Paper has brought the lack of similar arrangements into much sharper focus, with angling groups now keen to take initiatives. As before, canoe bodies continue to avoid meeting around the table and will not accept any proposals unless they offer 365 day per year navigation and access to rivers.

**Clearly for canoe bodies, such a stand-off brings the hope of triggering access legislation for paddlers. For anglers and owners it provides a reason of sorts or an excuse for not proceeding with agreements that might otherwise head off legislation.**

We would like to draw attention to the fact that arrangements can be drawn up on any river or stretch of river, provided that the owners and anglers agree the terms, but not necessarily attempting to include national canoe bodies whose current aspiration specifically excludes sharing. It leaves owners, clubs, anglers and perhaps local canoe groups to determine arrangements appropriate for canoeing on their river. The *WG Splash* fund provides funding for nearly every aspect of these agreements/arrangements. We believe that this would be from every standpoint a much more effective alternative to enforced access.

Wye and Usk Foundation December 2013

For full details of WUF arrangements please see <http://wyeuskfoundation.org/navigation/index.php>