

Promoting Welsh Fisheries – a partnership approach

Background

Angling is an important pastime in Wales with approximately 45,000 licences sold annually to just under 40,000 unique anglers. In addition, the wealth and diversity of freshwater and sea angling opportunities in Wales remains attractive to visitors. Freshwater and sea angling has been estimated to be worth together approximately £150 million to the Welsh economy (Radford et al, 2007 – Economic Evaluation of Inland Fisheries; Nautilus Consultants, 2000 – Study into inland and sea fisheries in Wales) with approximately 450,000 visitor angling (all freshwater) days recorded in Wales in 2005.

More recently Mawle (2018) has estimated river fishing in Wales to represent £20 million annual 'gross value added' (approximate household income) and to support over 700 full-time jobs. The Environment Agency has also published evidence that all freshwater fishing in England in 2015 contributed £1.46 billion to the economy and supported 26,000 jobs

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-survey-of-freshwater-angling-in-england>).

NRW has statutory duties to “Maintain, Improve and Develop” Welsh fisheries (Environment Act 2006). Predecessor organisations armed with greater resources including dedicated Welsh Government and European funding and expert marketing staff have interpreted these duties to encompass a clear role for them to proactively promote Welsh fisheries.

Stakeholder concerns

Declining budgets together with a loss of expertise (including a dedicated Fisheries Marketing Officer) has meant that NRW has not had the capacity in recent years to promote Welsh fisheries. This has led to stakeholders concerns about a lack of action by NRW culminating in a request to our Chair that we once again find the necessary resources to promote Welsh fisheries and that we do this in partnership with organisations such as Angling Cymru, Angling Trust and Afonydd Cymru.

The main concerns raised centred around the lack of high quality information provided for visitors on both NRW and Visit Wales websites as well as up-to-date promotional material such as the quarterly fishing E-zine produced under the Wild Fishing Wales project and the Fishing Wales brochure which was central to the highly successful Fishing Wales marketing campaign run by Environment Agency Wales.

Challenge to NRW

In March 2018 Dr David Collins, Vice-Chair Gwent Angling Society, representing Angling Cymru and with the support of the Angling Trust sent an email to NRW's Chair and Chief Executive Officer outlining their concerns about the lack of action and suggesting a way forward.

The main challenges main challenges were that:-

- Wales's inland fisheries need to be promoted in a way which is professional, structured, informed and instructive, and also in a way which is sustainable.
- The promotion of angling must also be equitable with that of other outdoor pursuits, as required under the Well-being of Future Generations Act, 2015. Its promotion needs to inspire and to make people want to come to Wales, and then to tell their friends, and to come back again.
- Wales's inland fisheries need to be promoted again as a significant destination for anglers from the UK and from abroad.
- A more holistic approach to promotion, involving anglers, needs to be taken to ensure that the best information is available via the platforms provided by both NRW and VW's websites, and a mechanism put in place to make this happen.

NRW's response

NRW's Chair at the time Diane McCrae replied to Dr Collins on the 30th March concluding:-

"I would like to accept the implicit challenge you have laid down – for NRW to work with a group of partners each of whom can contribute something to the challenge to make fishing more available and attractive. In the first instance this should be a scoping meeting and I would invite you to contact Peter Gough to arrange this."

This remains NRW's position despite the later resignation of the Chair.

What has happened since March?

An inaugural meeting was convened in June 2018 involving all the main interested parties with the aim of agreeing a way forward. Several key actions were agreed including to set up a Steering Group and progressing a funding bid to resource future work.

The Steering Group held its first meeting in September with representatives from Angling Cymru (including Dr Collins), the Angling Trust, NRW, Visit Wales, Cymru Wales Marketing, WG Inland & Marine Fisheries and Sport Wales. A number of key actions were agreed at this meeting and are currently in progress although NRW accepts that due to competing priorities and ongoing organisational change, progress by NRW has been slower to date than hoped.

Next Steps

The main priority in the short term is the improvement of web-based material including Visit Wales and NRW content including sign-posting to other appropriate sites which contain relevant promotional material such as where-to-fish in Wales (Angling Cymru, Angling Trust and Fishing in Wales websites).

Subject to resources, the next priority is to create high quality promotional material in the form of a hard copy/electronic Fishing Wales brochure and regular (biennial or quarterly) e-zines which can be mailed to individuals and available for download via the internet. As noted, the Fishing Wales e-zine proved very popular in the past and was recognised for the high standard of articles. It is recognised

there is little scope or desire at present to promote angling for fragile migratory species, rather the focus will be on non-migratory rour, coarse fish and appropriate sea angling species.

Regular steering group meetings will be held in the future to check progress against plans and to coordinate applications for funding. Roles of the various partners involved will be further clarified so that all parties play to their strengths.

The Wales Fisheries Forum as well as Local Fisheries Groups will be provided with regular progress reports and may be asked to provide advice where appropriate.