

● NEW
countryside group
sets out to fight
access plans
PAGE 2

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A LIFELONG angler is vowing EU action against ministers for failing to safeguard spawning fish in North Wales.

Chris White, from Connah's Quay, said he had battled the Welsh Government and its agencies for six years but had made little headway.

He said salmon stocks on many Welsh rivers have reached "disastrous" lows – fewer than 50 have been caught on the River Conwy so far this season.

Mr White, secretary of the Conwy Valley Fisheries & Conservation Association (CVFCA), said poor weather in recent years was partly to blame.

But a key factor was the disruption of important spawning grounds by canoeists, rafters and, in some cases, wading anglers, he claimed.

Mr White said the "wilful disturbance" Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act.

He has now pledged to take his case to the EU environment commissioner claiming the UK Government allowed one of its devolved administrations – Wales – to fail in its statutory duty to protect fish stocks.

"It's a game of attrition but I will not back down," he said.

"Ministers have to face up to their responsibilities. I will continue pressing the case or die in the attempt."

The action, directed at the former Environment Agency Wales (EAW) and the CCW – now both part of Natural Resources Wales – will ask the EU to compel the Welsh Government to put safeguards in place.

This may include a ban on river water sports during the winter spawning season in vulnerable areas.

Mr White, a retired Shell engineer and KPMG consultant, has to exhaust all avenues of discussion with the Welsh and Westminster governments before he can launch his action.

On Monday Cardiff responded to an ultimatum by asking for Mr White's evidence dossier.

"It's just another delaying tactic," said the 66-year-old. "I'm quite happy to sit down with them but they always hide behind the excuse that it's too difficult to prosecute offenders."

He has amassed years of evidence to support his claim that canoeists and other river users are damaging salmon redds (nesting sites).

One difficulty is "official" advice indicating that salmon sites are only disturbed if canoes breach gravel riverbeds.

Anglers claim this advice is inappropriate in North Wales where, even in high water, mountain rivers usually



Veteran angler Chris White says he will lodge a complaint with the EU over a 'failure' to protect spawning grounds in North Wales for fish such as this leaping salmon
Salmon picture: David Chubb/PA Wire

Angler vows EU action over fish 'disaster'

AGENCIES TAKEN TO TASK OVER SPAWNING CRISIS

run clear.

Mr White said a sanctioned EAW experiment on Afon Lledr showed that a single kayak caused spawning salmon to bolt from their redds.

"Can you imagine the uproar if mountain bikes were allowed to ride roughshod over ground bird nesting sites?" he said.

Mr White's EU action is being backed up by the threat of a Fish Legal-supported private prosecution of Canoe

Wales, the body that represents some 4,000 canoeists in Wales.

It coincides with the launch of a new action group against greater access to the Welsh countryside.

A green paper outlining Welsh Government proposals is due next month but Mr White said his action will go ahead regardless.

CVFCA chairman Roger Latham said the Welsh Government should recognise the economic interests of angling

when weighed against much smaller user groups like canoeists.

"It also needs to stop putting the needs of a few visitors before the needs of local residents," he said.

A Welsh Government said it took its responsibilities "extremely seriously" when it came to managing Wales' natural resources.

A spokeswoman said: "We are currently investigating these claims.

"As part of this we have written to Mr White seeking more information on the allegations and we are speaking to Natural Resources Wales about the issues raised. We will respond fully to this complaint in due course."