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Consultation Response Form

Your name:

Organisation (if applicable): General secretary of Denbigh and Clwyd Angling Club, I also sit on: the Federation of Clwyd Angling Clubs, The Clwyd and Conwy Rivers Trust and the Local Fisheries Advisory Group but respond to this consultation on behalf of the Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries.

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Questions

1. What do you consider should be the main purpose and aims of the arrangements for future inland fisheries stakeholder engagement across that sector?

I believe the main purposes of the arrangements should be:

A. To maximise the benefits to Welsh fisheries of using third sector volunteers with a genuine interest in meaningfully participating in improving and enhancing Welsh inland fisheries. It will then be possible to harness a relatively cost free and enthusiastic resource, which will cascade information to the wider community, who share their interest and use of our inland fisheries. I include relatively cost free as I think it critical that current funding sources are maintained, also that funding be available by way of an appropriate bidding process, for volunteer groups. Finance, or contributions to the financing of water and environmental improvement schemes that have been, and continue to be, successful throughout Wales will be crucial in future.

B. To facilitate meaningful interaction and communications between the Welsh Government and stakeholders, to seek their views and advice as well as their recommendations for making improvements to Welsh inland fisheries. It is will also facilitate the communication of Welsh Government directives to the maximum number of interested parties if it is cascaded down effectively to the grass roots.

C. Educational: Our inland fisheries and the environment that supports them are critical to the general well being of our nation. Anglers are becoming increasingly aware that if they are to continue to enjoy their sport they have to do more to protect the salmonids, to which the dramatic increase in voluntary catch and release bears witness. The Environment Agency and Rivers Trusts are running educational programmes, such as taking salmon eggs to schools where the

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children can watch them turn to fry before releasing them into the local river, whilst explaining the risk to the future of the fish population from; pollution, habitat destruction, poaching and much more. We have to engage more with youngsters and encourage them to take up angling or other water sports: anything to take them away from cyber space and out into the countryside and the reality of the natural world. We have to address the increase in apathy and encourage awareness of, and interaction with our environment. The Welsh Government is perceived by many to be “Big Brother”, dictatorial and populated by politicians motivated by greed and self interest. We have to change this attitude and educate people in the belief that by talking to the Welsh Government and its representatives they can actually make a difference.

D. As a motivator of improvement and enhancement of our inland fisheries. Our inland fisheries need more active support from those that use them, to assist in their recovery and long term improvement. There has to be link between the theoreticians, the scientists, the politicians and the real world. There must be meaningful dialogue: our motivations may diverge but our aims are shared. We all want to see better water quality, environmental improvements, sustained and improved fish stocks and greater use of our inland fisheries.

2. How does the proposed stakeholder engagement structure accommodate the future needs of fishery stakeholder interests in Wales?

The proposals appear to replicate much of the existing structure whilst increasing the number of stakeholder representatives. It remains to be seen whether or not they will become talking shops or and effective means of communications. I think the groups should be charged with aims designed to address specific objectives thus having the potential for having a meaningful impact on Welsh Government action as well as those of stakeholders.

I strongly disagree with the possibility of there being three regions namely:

1. South West.
2. South East.
3. North and Central.

As stated in the consultation document, the number of willing volunteers is limited and many are older, it seems to me therefore a contradiction to then set up only three geographically and widely spread areas from which to draw representation. This will add to travel time and expenses and potentially discourage participation by many enthusiasts. I therefore think including North and Central in the same geographical package flies in the face of the stated aim of encouraging a greater number of participants: it is more likely to make the representative groups “elitist”. Travel costs are rapidly increasing. I think it prudent to divide North and Central Wales into two representative areas, whilst remaining open to the possibility of actually increasing the number of regional groups.

These groups could and should be charged with:

- a) Being innovative and perhaps recommending alternative strategies.
- b) Identifying issues and clearly defining them.
- c) Investigating those issues in a positive and meaningful manner.
- d) Reporting back with recommendations, with particular emphasis on improvements than can be gained at no or low cost by the structured involvement of volunteers.

I think it important to record here the fact that historically the relationship between the Environment Agency and the angling community has not been as good or as meaningful as it could have been: however in recent years there has been a dramatic change in attitudes. The fisheries department of the Agency, with particular reference to the Bangor office in North Wales, and the angling community in that area have been working together in a truly meaningful way. My opinion is that

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the Environment Agency Fisheries Staff have been a credit to themselves and the Agency in the manner in which they have conducted their business with the angling community. It would be a tragedy, if the hard work, co-operation and mutual respect earned by each for the other were to be lost! It would also send a very worrying message to the angling community.

3. How can these proposed stakeholder engagement arrangements be improved?

One of the biggest problems currently stifling participation and engagement is poor communication. Most anglers, for instance, are ignorant of the existence of FERAC and the LFAG's and have no idea of the current or proposed involvement of the Welsh Government in fisheries of any kind. I think it essential that the work of the proposed representative groups be publicised. Much could be achieved by the simple expedient of producing newsletters, passing them to angling club representatives, via email, and asking that they be included in club mail communication, such as newsletters, which many clubs issue to their members. This will not facilitate improved communications with all anglers but it will make the work known to many more than at present and may help counter growing apathy.

Apathy is one of our greatest challenges; we have to encourage greater and more meaningful engagement with a far greater number of stakeholders. There must be more dialogue which is genuinely two way, lecturing and talking down to people is patronising and ineffectual. There has been a welcomed change in the structure of the North Wales LFAG, whereby once a year there have been for the last three years a sort of open day, the first of which, was a particular success, and is to be replicated this year. Numbers however are to be limited to members and a guest. Why? These "get togethers" offer a great opportunity to involve and educate the wider angling community. If cost is an issue, then a small charge would address that issue, however the cost benefit of greater involvement would repay the outlay many fold. Limiting attendance is a great opportunity missed.

4. How can we make better use of electronic communications to engage directly with individual stakeholders and stakeholder interest groups not currently represented on the existing Local Fishery Groups maintained by the Environment Agency in Wales?

There has been a noticeable increase in the use of emails to communicate with those that are known to be already active participants in current formal groups, yet there is no database of email addresses for say angling club secretaries, which makes it almost impossible to gain good coverage of grass roots opinion or to publicise successes.

There is an i phone "app", issued by the Environment Agency in partnership with Bristol University, which enables anybody with interest to identify, photograph and record the location of invasive weed species and download the details directly to the university for verification prior to adding to a nationwide mapping system. It is possible to easily make personalised "apps" free through such sites as "Appgyser": it takes less than a minute to set up a simple app: I know because I have done so, and I am an old codger! The issue of such issue specific "apps" would simply, cheaply and effectively improve communications, add a sense of personal involvement and greatly enhance the effectiveness of communications.

The existing Welsh Government web site is without doubt, "all singing and dancing" and quite user friendly when compared with the quagmire that is the current Environment Agency effort for example. However finding fisheries under the tag heading fisheries and food, given the other links listed with it under the same heading does create the impression that the fisheries is likely to relate to commercial fisheries. There is also no reference to fisheries or the ongoing initiatives in the Gwlad magazine, which is disappointing as land owners and land use impact greatly on fisheries and fishery users. It would be helpful to have a link to fisheries under the Culture and Sport, as

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angling is a sport, as well as or rather that Environment and Countryside. Youngsters or their parents visiting the Welsh Government web site are more likely to look for angling related material for their children under Sport and we need a higher profile.

5. Are there any other fishery stakeholder interest groups omitted from Table 1 that should be included?

Yes, I think there should be representation by sea fisheries groups: the iconic Welsh sewin and salmon migrate to the sea, returning to inlands fisheries only to breed. I feel that the Welsh Government needs to minimise bad publicity and improve its communications protocols. For example, a great furore was generated by the proposed Marine Conservation Zones, even at the consultation stage. I would be interested to know why these zones could not have been established by increasing the no access area around the wind farms sited off our coast to one mile. Hopefully the windmills will create a great reef off our coast, which will encourage prey species to multiply and thus enhance fish stocks and perhaps even provide a more abundant food supply for our sewin. There is also much confusion as to the legality and location of nets set out on our beaches, the reporting of which is important.

6. How, often do you envisage these groups meeting and what are your views on administrative arrangements for servicing these groups?

I think the overarching groups, representing national issues need only meet quarterly, with the proviso, that its membership is made up of representatives from the local groups and that those representatives views are taken seriously and that the minutes of the meeting are either made public or issued to the members of the regional groups.

I think bi monthly meetings are more appropriate for the regional groups, and that the minutes of these meetings be made available to riparian owners, club secretaries or syndicate representatives for dissemination to the wider angling community

Both groups should be free to call emergency or extraordinary meetings if and when considered by them to be appropriate.

7. How can we achieve effective stakeholder engagement on issues affecting the three cross-border rivers (Wye, Severn and Dee) where their integrated management has been split between separate Governments and the respective agencies in England and Wales?

I have insufficient knowledge of these areas to comment.

Addendum: My final comments.

I think we have to accept that at least one motivation in establishing the new body: Natural Recourses Wales was to save money and there can be few arguments against that. However it will be a shame if all the saving realised are swallowed up by the Welsh Government and existing fisheries budgets cut further. Fisheries costs as well as staff accounted for around 3% of the Environment Agency budget and staff, yet recreational fisheries generate in excess of £100 million in revenue to the Welsh economy and that amount could and should, with a little support, grow considerably. Angling is still the sport with most participants in the whole of the United Kingdom and Wales has a lot to offer to all sections of the sport, yet we never see angling included in our advertising campaigns to encourage visitors to Wales. Why? I believe we are missing a trick in failing to actively promote angling in Wales. Whilst angling is seen to be an isolated and solitary

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pastime, anglers themselves are for the most part gregarious and enthusiastic in communicating with other anglers about their sport and welcome strangers to the fraternity with enthusiasm. Our angling clubs risk serious decline as the participant's demographic changes: we are all aging, and our clubs need more support. Income from visiting anglers is crucial to many clubs and much of that income is spent on riverside maintenance and environmental improvements. One local club offered fishing in North Wales as a raffle prize, the winners: from the English Midlands had no idea that such wonderful angling was so near at hand and so affordable. They regularly travel all over the U.K. in search of good fishing. These are the sort of members that will bring income to our clubs and help facilitate our river improvement work; they will also spend money whilst in Wales which our local small businesses need.

The infrastructure here in Wales precludes the growth of commercial sea fisheries of any major size: it generates little of our GDP, however recreational fishing is growing. Norway is currently considering limiting the number of visiting anglers because of their impact on fish stocks. We have no idea how many anglers visit Wales! We do know that they are insufficient to damage our fish stocks however. As stated above if the MCZ's had been located in an area of sea stretching one mile from the wind turbines located off our coast, then the growth in fish species in those zones would have spread to Welsh Coastal waters and improves our recreational sea as well as inland fisheries: the approach would have been accepted as logical, complaints would have been limited and another public relations blunder would have been avoided.

Finally I appeal to the Welsh Government for an increase in funding:

- a. Our fisheries need greater protection: bailiff numbers are laughable low.
- b. The fisheries section of Natural Resources Wales need ring fenced and increased funding to allow them to build on the work they are doing currently and successfully in engaging with the voluntary sector to enhance and protect our inland fisheries. The increased investment will show a many fold return.
- c. Promote the inland fisheries of Wales: include them predominantly in national advertising campaigns. The sewin of Wales are an iconic species, much sought after and cherishes by anglers. What's more as a result of education, more and more are being voluntarily released by anglers.

For and on behalf of the inhabitants of the inland fisheries of Wales.