



WEST WALES RIVERS TRUST

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH AFONYDD
GORLLEWIN CYMRU

West Wales Rivers Trust
Llys Afon, Hawthorn Rise
Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire,
SA61 2BQ

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Re: Consultation on our regulatory fees and charges for 2023/2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

West Wales Rivers Trust (WWRT) was formed in 2017 following the amalgamation of the Teifi and Pembrokeshire Rivers Trusts. The Trust now covers the entirety of West Wales, including the counties of Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, where we aim to protect, restore and enhance rivers, lakes and wetlands for people and wildlife. Our ethos focuses on working with local communities to deliver long lasting and cost-effective solutions for river issues while educating and empowering people to take their own steps to improve our water environments. We pride ourselves in getting our feet wet and our hands dirty to get things done, including water quality, habitat, fish passage and natural flood management projects.

WWRT are writing to express our concerns regarding the consultation on regulatory fees and charges for 2023/2024. Our response follows the response of our umbrella Trust, Afonydd Cymru (AC), in December 2022 (available at <https://afonyddcymru.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Afonydd-Cymru-Response-to-Charges-Consultation.pdf>) of which we are in full agreement. Of particular concern to us, as an organisation working on the ground to deliver improvements, are the proposed charges in Appendix 2 for 'Water Resources - Abstraction/ Impoundment'.

It is a sad reality that the majority of our rivers are suffering water quality and habitat issues, and, as a result, failures under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) are extensive. This is not just evident in data parameters – Wales have this year recorded the lowest catches of both salmon and sea trout since consistent records began in the 1970s. A significant contributor to poor river health and biodiversity in our river systems, and subsequently WFD failures, are the presence impounding structures, such as weirs, fords and culverts, which present barriers to fish migration and reduce the quality of available habitat.

This year, on top of previous permitting requirements, the Welsh Rivers Trusts have been informed that we must now also apply for a two-stage application to remove impoundments in Wales. Where existing impoundments are unpermitted (a statutory responsibility of NRW), we are now required to first permit the asset and then apply again to vary the licence to remove it. Under the proposed 2023/2024 fees, the fee for a New Bespoke impoundment licence is proposed to increase from £135 to £1,500 to £6,327 and the fee for an application to subsequently remove an impoundment is going from £135 to £1,500 to £4,810. We also note that the charges consultation does not make reference to the current charges for Flood Risk Activity Permits, of which charges range from £270 - £540. **This results in a total possible charge of £11,677 for permits alone for the removal of a single weir.**

The impact of this potential cost increase on the delivery of environmental improvements by third sector organisations should not be underestimated. This total fee is in many cases larger than the



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cost of the physical removal of smaller structures and will price us out of many smaller funding opportunities, in an already limited funding market. Where funds are available for such works, this increase in costs would substantially reduce the number of structures that can be removed within project budgets. As an example, WWRT are currently delivering 10 barrier modification and removal projects across South and West Wales under the 2022 – 2023 Strategic Allocated Funding (SAF) from NRW. This would take the costs of NRW consenting from as low as £5,400 to as high as £116,770 – an increase of £111,370 or 2062.4%. This increased value is almost equivalent to the total value of funding from which the Trust is delivering these works. Therefore, this increase has the potential to reduce by more than two thirds the number of barriers that could be removed in the next year alone.

This proposed increase in costs is particularly relevant when a third sector organisation is funded from public sources via NRW to carry out such activities, as funds are simply returned to NRW with no improvements seen. In comparison, in England, the Environment Agency have a split charging structure for environmentally beneficial activities, where the charge is reduced from £1,500 in normal cases to £135, which both recognises the need for such projects and allows for cost-effective delivery.

WWRT have no issue with NRW claiming full cost recovery where proposals are at the detriment of the environment, however NRW have a statutory responsibility to improve the health of rivers and it makes limited sense to charge others to assist them in doing so. There are thousands of weirs in Wales and currently 84 waterbody failures under WFD that are directly linked to barriers. The challenge of addressing these is already enormous and the new proposed charges will only hinder, delay or prevent the delivery of important schemes required for such environmental improvements.

In conclusion, we strongly concur with the recommendations of AC, including a simplified process for permitting Nature Based solutions and proportionate charges to support their delivery, as well as a waiver system or differentiation of charges for permits for environmental improvement works. WWRT entirely object to an increase in fees for any works to improve the environment, which will reduce improvement works at a time where they are needed most.

Yours sincerely

Harriet Alvis, Chief Executive Officer