



WEST WALES RIVERS TRUST

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH AFONYDD
GORLLEWIN CYMRU

Llys Afon, Hawthorn Rise
Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire,
SA61 2BQ

Dear Sir/Madam,

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.

Whilst we appreciate that this is a result of a combination of multiple factors and is not simple to address, we think it can be agreed that this is in part due to a failure of both environmental protection and regulation. It is no surprise that these declines have contributed to a reduction in the number of anglers choosing to fish on rivers, with many anglers in despair about the numbers of returning fish which they are seeing year on year.

West Wales Rivers Trust (WWRT) are therefore disappointed that in response to a reduction in income from decreasing rod license sales, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have decided to consider increasing fees, despite no improvements to fish numbers and therefore no improvement to the quality of fishing. Such an increase will penalise and deter those anglers wishing to continue fishing.

WWRT believe that it is essential that we have 'eyes and ears' on the ground in the form of people spending time by rivers, so that they can identify issues such as pollution or habitat destruction and help us to target opportunities for improvements. Engagement with rivers is generally poor throughout Wales, with many people in communities we work with confessing to having never accessed their local river, despite often being less than a mile from it. Whilst this is something that can be improved going forward, anglers already exist as a group with intimate knowledge of their rivers and are often the ones who stand up for their health and are regularly involved in conservation activities. By adding another barrier to accessing fishing, we will lose these essential supporters of our rivers and it is likely that the health of these systems will subsequently suffer.

The Welsh Government, and indeed NRW, have put regular investment into programmes to get people into fishing. It strikes us that this increase will have the opposite effect to the aims of these programmes. Fishing has multiple benefits for mental and physical wellbeing; however, for many, it is already an expensive and difficult sport to access, and this price increase will represent a further barrier to participation. This issue is enhanced with the current cost of living crisis.

In summary, WWRT believe that NRW should look at the larger picture and consider whether a financial hit on rod license fees may actually be a worthwhile investment in securing enhanced community engagement with their rivers. WWRT therefore strongly urge NRW to consider pausing any increase in fees until salmonid declines show signs of reversing.

Yours sincerely

Harriet Alvis, Chief Executive Officer