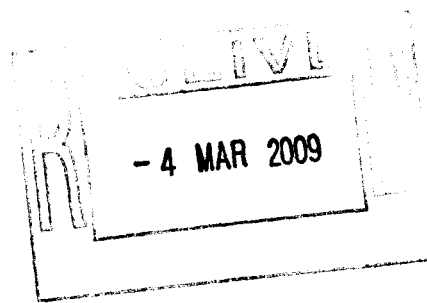


COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

Love the countryside



Val Lloyd AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

VAL LLOYD AM
CHAIR
PETITIONS COMMITTEE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES
CARDIFF BAY
CARDIFF CF99 1NA

ADZ

2 March 2009

Dear Mrs Lloyd.

I am writing to you as the Wales Director of the Countryside Alliance to highlight the concerns of a growing number of our members about calls by the Welsh Canoeing Association (WCA) for unrestricted "access along inland water." As your Committee undertakes its inquiry into this important issue, I thought it might be helpful for me to outline some of the concerns of our members, a great number of whom are anglers.

The "petition" that prompted the Committee's inquiry calls for a Bill which "must provide and permit access to and along non-tidal water in the face of the massive lack of legal clarity and restrictions that exist at present, which act as a barrier to sport and recreation". Contrary to the perception presented by the WCA, this "non-tidal water" already provides "sport and recreation" for tens of thousands of anglers who are actively engaged in the management and conservation of Wales's 240 salmon and trout fishing rivers, several hundred natural lake fisheries, more than 20 large reservoirs and over 200 small stocked still-water fisheries.

While access to, and enjoyment of, Wales's natural resources must not be monopolised by one group at the expense of another, the Alliance is concerned that the number of people taking part in fishing, and contributing to the management of the water environment, through the rod licence and their own conservation efforts, has been underplayed by the WCA.

In the evidence heard by the Petitions Committee on 4 December 2008, the WCA claimed that of the 71,122 rod licences sold in Wales in 2007 only 6,982 permitted game fishing and that "restrictions imposed on canoeing by fishing clubs" were to protect these few fishermen. The 6,982 who the WCA said represent game fishermen is actually the figure for licences sold in Wales for salmon and sewin fishing alone. It does not include the tens of thousands of Welsh anglers who target game fish like trout and grayling, or the many species of coarse fish in our rivers. It also does not include the thousands of

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Welsh anglers under the age of 12 who do not have to buy a rod licence or the thousands of anglers from England who come, with rod licences valid on both sides of the border, to fish in our rivers and support our rural economy.

In fact, the 2003 *Strategy for the Recreational Fisheries of Wales* stated that:

“Each year the recreational fisheries of Wales provide leisure opportunities for some 100,000 anglers living in Wales, with a further 60,000 anglers visiting solely for a fishing holiday and more than 400,000 visitors making fishing in Wales part of their package of holiday activities.”

It is against this background that angling is worth many millions to Wales’s rural economy. The last major economic survey in 2000 put the value of angling at £75 million and since then the Welsh Assembly Government has measured an additional £36 million of income generated, in part at least, by the ‘Fishing Wales’ initiative. These are significant sums of money supporting livelihoods across rural Wales and must be factored into any report that the Committee submits to the Minister.

The Welsh Assembly Government’s own *Wales Fisheries Strategy 2008* has highlighted the economic importance of visiting anglers to Wales, stating that:

“A huge number of visits are made to Wales by anglers from elsewhere each year, with in excess of 700,000 angling visits in 2004-05 alone. These visiting anglers provided a benefit to the wider economy not just angling based businesses (bait and equipment shops) but also pubs, restaurants and local amenities.”

Anglers also contribute hugely towards the conservation of rivers and lakes, not just through the £1.2 million of rod licence revenue ring fenced for environmental work, but also through practical river management, the value of which is immeasurable.

The WCA’s evidence also relied heavily on the example of Scotland and the rights afforded to canoeists there. It did not, however, mention that in Scotland there is no rod licence and the fact that Scottish anglers operate in a very different legislative environment to those in Wales.

There is, however, no reason that angling and canoeing cannot co-exist and there are numerous examples where both groups are using stretches of river amicably and sensibly. What we cannot have, however, is a situation where fishermen are taking responsibility for the conservation of rivers and paying to fish both through the statutory rod licence and club membership or day tickets, whilst canoeists are given such access with no commensurate contribution, financial or environmental. It is noticeable that the WCA petitioners have not presented the Committee with a middle way of a licensing scheme for canoeists or, indeed, other ways in which they can make a contribution to the conservation of our important inland waterway habitats.

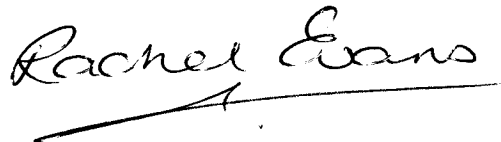
Therefore, we do not feel it appropriate that access should be granted in such a blanket way as is being sought by the petition before the Committee. Access must be tailored to local situations and respond to specific considerations of use, geography and habitat. *The Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review* advised, in Recommendation 192 of its Report, that:

“The Government should not legislate for unrestricted public access to land along water courses or onto the water itself. If Government decides that there are circumstances in which it might wish to improve public access to such land and water, this should be considered locally on a case by case basis and there should be full consultation with all those who have legal rights.”

While the Alliance acknowledges the frustration of some canoeists at the often slow process of negotiating voluntary access agreements on Welsh rivers, the proposal for unqualified access is neither sensible nor responsible. We would, on behalf of the tens of thousands of Welsh anglers, and the significant contribution they make to the economy and environment of Wales, ask the Committee to consider carefully the access needs and contributions of all groups before agreeing a report for submission to the Minister. To avoid a feeling of injustice, and possible associated tensions, between anglers and canoeists, it is vital that the extension of access for canoeists should not be granted without canoeists having to accept similar responsibilities to those that anglers have long taken on board and acted upon.

I have, for their information, circulated this letter to the other members of the Petitions Committee and the Ministers for Rural Affairs and Environment, Sustainability and Housing. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Rachel Evans

Wales Director / Cyfarwyddwraig dros Gymru
Countryside Alliance / Cyngrair Cefn Gwlad
Gosen