

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet
dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Climate Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1525
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/00666/25

Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

28 April 2025

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your letter from the Petitions Committee regarding Petition P-06-1525 Preserve the unique character of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal for the future generations of Wales. I am aware of the concerns expressed by the Canal & Rivers Trust (CRT) and users of the canal regarding limitations on abstracting water to feed the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal imposed by National Resources Wales (NRW).

The issues raised in the petition are longstanding issues which have developed over a period of years. In September 2019 the CRT applied to NRW for licences to abstract water from Trosnant Spring at Pontypool and the River Usk Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Brecon to feed the Montgomeryshire and Brecon Canal. Licences were issued in December 2022 with conditions limiting the amount of water that could be abstracted.

The volumes licensed are in line with the findings of the Water Resources Modelling task and finish group (NRW, Wye and Usk Foundation, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and CRT) to protect the SAC. These volumes were lower than evidenced by CRT in their applications but were necessary to meet Habitats Directive requirements. Ensuring there is enough water in the Afon Llwyd and Usk to enable migratory fish to reach spawning sites is critical to maintaining the integrity of the Severn Estuary and River Usk Special Areas of Conservation.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Having completed a Habitats Regulation Assessment, NRW concluded the limitations on abstraction were necessary to protect our natural environment. The Canal & Rivers Trust appealed against the limitations, seeking to abstract more water than they had applied for. However, Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) refused the appeals as the Trust were not able to show doing so would not harm the River Severn Estuary and River Usk Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). These areas are critical habitats for various species, including migratory fish, and are protected under environmental legislation to maintain their ecological integrity.

The Welsh Government recognises the significance of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal and its benefits to the community. Through Visit Wales, it supported the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle project with £2.75 million of ERDF and Welsh Government funding from the Tourism Attractor Destination programme.

The project's aim was to enhance outdoor recreation, tourism, and leisure activities along the canal, including infrastructure improvements such as new moorings, towpath enhancements, and dredging in Torfaen and Caerphilly. Additionally, new lodges, an outdoor adventure play area, mountain bike cross-country trails, a car park, and lakeside improvements were developed at Cwmcarn Forest along the Crumlin arm of the canal. Improved footpaths on Mynydd Maen and Twmbarlwm were also established to link the two arms of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal.

NRW remains committed to balancing the ecological needs of the rivers with the operational requirements of the canals, ensuring sustainable water management for all stakeholders. Although the appeals were dismissed, it remains open to the Trust to look at all possible solutions including investment in infrastructure as well as working with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water on a potential solution.

I have noted that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and the Canal and Rivers Trust have successfully reached an agreement on a short-term solution to the ongoing issue and are continuing their discussions. Although the Welsh Government is not involved in these commercial negotiations and abstraction licensing considerations, it remains cognisant of the situation and is actively monitoring it.

Thank you again for seeking my views on this petition. I understand it has now surpassed 10,000-signature threshold to be considered for debate in Plenary and I look forward to hearing from the Committee in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

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