

P-06-1525 Preserve the unique character of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal for the future generations of Wales - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 5th May 2025

Response to the letter from Huw Irranca-Davies

Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Petition

- I note that CRT were first invited to apply for a licence in September 2019 and that limiting conditions came into force in December 2022.
- I note the findings of the Water Resources modelling task and finish group and the priority for water to allow migratory fish to reach their spawning sites.

Since its inception over 200 years earlier the canal system of the Mon and Brecon like other canals in the UK network has had mixed fortunes. The current 35-mile navigable stretch had until 2019 relied on its supply of water being free of charge. The Abstraction of Water Act being a more recent piece of legislation.

The dependency of Canal and River Trust on Government funding has decreased since its formation in 2011 although it continues to receive an annual fixed grant from DEFRA. Much of its income now comes from utilities, property rentals and boat and mooring licences.

It is now being told that it must pay for water abstraction by another Government department in the form of National Resources Wales a devolved government body. This is unfair. In simple terms this is robbing Peter to pay Paul. I therefore believe that NRW and possibly DEFRA have a role to play in finding a long-term solution.

Post Second World War the canal has evolved and developed into a place for many leisure activities and a plethora of businesses have grown up around it and our communities depend upon it. Much of the canal sits in the natural beauty of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and it is visited by 3 million people annually from around the world (a scroll through the petition data reveals how far and wide its beauty is known).

It's great to hear that WG through Visit Wales has supported the Mon and Brecon triangle project with £2.75 millions of funding to date.

But what will happen to our communities, our boat yards, marina's, pleasure craft, pubs, hotels and the very many associated tourist businesses if the canal is allowed to fail?

It is important to note that the Canal and River Trust holds responsibility over waterways but also holds guardianship over reservoirs and a wide range of heritage buildings. The lime kiln trail forms part of our World Heritage and its attractiveness as a destination should not be underestimated.

I am encouraged to note that NRW remains committed to balancing the ecological needs of the rivers with the operational requirements of the canal ensuring sustainable water management for all stakeholders.

The future health of the River Usk and Afon Llwyd and the protection of the Special Area of Conservation are of vital importance in maintaining the integrity of the Severn Estuary.

However, over time a secondary (manmade) but linked eco-system has developed in the shape of the Mon and Brec canal as it is today. It is important to note that water that enters the canal is not actually consumed but is returned to the rivers having followed a separate course. This does not permit the movement of migratory fish, but I would suggest is very much part of the essential ecology of the catchment.

What work has been done on the impact of failure of the canal both on flood management and the ecology of the wider Usk Catchment?

We are living through a period of spring and summer droughts followed by winter deluges. Climate data modelling suggests this is likely to worsen.

Does the canal have a wider role to play in flood management?

I was also very relieved to hear of the short-term agreement that has been reached between Dwr Cymru and CRT which may have saved this season but has done little to ease the anxiety of businesses and the wider economy going forward. A long-term solution needs to be found with some degree of urgency.

It is my understanding that various alternative sources of water are being considered including the Grwyne Fawr reservoir in Powys which has been decommissioned by Dwr Cymru as a source of drinking water due to the build-up of peat sediment.

Will this water which is brackish have a detrimental effect on the ecology of the canal and the river Usk if it is used?

Does NRW have a role to play here in the management of land surrounding the reservoir?

I have allowed the petition to continue to run since it reached the 10,000-signature threshold. Today it exceeds 13,790. The most important thing to note is that every area of Wales is represented and there are over 10,000 signatures from Wales. This should be a clear message to all MS's not only to those whose communities are directly affected.

I look forward to the petition being considered in due course and hope that this will be in a full debate allowing MS's from across the country to participate.

An urgent solution is needed.

Jan Butler