

**National Assembly for Wales**

**Environment and Sustainability Committee**

**Natural Resources Wales – Annual Scrutiny 2015**

**Response from The Midland Flyfishers ( MFF)**

- 1. This response is written on behalf of the membership of MFF whose Members live mainly in the West Midlands and the Border Counties.**
  
- 2. The Club was founded over 75 years ago and owns four miles of the Welsh Dee above Llangollen.**
  
- 3. Members fish for salmon and seatrout from May to mid-October, often staying in local hotels and bed-and breakfasts, patronising local restaurants, shops and other facilities, thus contributing significantly to the £150 million generated for the Welsh economy annually by angling activity.**
  
- 4. The MFF has supported over many years the work of EAW particularly in habitat improvement and restocking. The Club was one of the first in Wales to promote and encourage the practice of catch and release on a voluntary basis and currently achieves over 80% release rates on the Dee.**

**The Club has been instrumental in the reactivation and on going support of the Dee Fishery Association and the Welsh Dee Trust. The Club has been at the forefront in seeking a voluntary consensus between local fishing and canoeing clubs to permit agreed access to sections of the river in appropriate conditions, avoiding disturbance of salmon spawning areas, potential damage to the fragile eco structure of the river and bearing in mind that the river is not subject to Navigation Rights. This strategy has been followed in accord with the recommendation of the Welsh Assembly for access agreements between anglers and paddlers.**

- 5. The Club regrets and deplores the loss of active support for matters relating to river habitat in general and the salmon and seatrout fisheries in particular, since the inception of Natural Resources Wales.**
  
- 6. The delegation of responsibility for maintenance and improvement of river habitat to the woefully underfunded river trusts, failure to address the discrepancy between the close seasons for commercial nets – which kill all that they catch – and for anglers – who return the majority of what they catch - , failure to address the problems caused by predatory**

birds and the progressive loss of effective enforcement staff are some of the factors which are the basis of a widespread absence of confidence in the management of NRW.

7. We are particularly concerned by the closure of the Maerdy hatchery. This, and the current policy towards restocking, appears to have been based on entirely spurious evidence and in the face of facts presented by a number of highly credible sources. The decision seems to have been taken by senior management before a dubious consultation process, the majority opinions of which were then ignored. There remains a statutory obligation to maintain mitigation stocking following the construction of the Celyn dam. To rely on stocking from the south of Wales does not seem credible.
  
8. In short we have no confidence in the senior management at NRW.



**RYLAND THOMAS. Chairman Midland Flyfishers.**

**4<sup>th</sup> April 2015**