

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
NRW 2015 – 77
Natural Resources Wales – Annual Scrutiny 2015
Response from Neil Evans

Dear Sir / Madam,

1. I once petitioned the National Assembly to ban single use plastic bags. We didn't get a ban but they did introduce the charge and as a result use has dropped by nearly 90 %. I attended many committee's and was impressed with the environmental commitment demonstrated by the AM's I met. To be honest, I hadn't expected them to be so knowledgeable or for them to be so sympathetic. It's because of that experience that I am encouraged to add to the correspondence being sent to you in relation to the plight of our rivers and the current ineffectuality of NRW.
2. I, like many others, became interested in the environment through my love of fishing. When I was growing up in the 1970's and 80's the Tywi was literally stuffed with fish. When the water was low in the summer months, we used to sit transfixed as shoals, containing hundreds of fish, took up residence of the pool in front of us. All that has gone. Today, you'd be elated if you saw a single fish in that same pool. This is not an exaggeration, it's completely true.
3. Many of the causes of the decline were known back then. As a child I read about acid rain, poaching, over fishing by nets in the estuary and the same on the high seas. I even read about the 'green house effect'. But despite all the warnings and the letters and various campaigns by many good people, we've allowed it to come to this. Why?
4. Another memory I have of childhood was when ex. US President Jimmy Carter came to fish our river for its magical sewin. He was joined over the years by many other notable people from all over the world...and why not..after all the Tywi was the best sewin (sea trout) river in Europe! But the Tywi wasn't just a playground for the rich it was our playground too. We'd walk miles along the banks of our rivers trying to catch just one of those magical fish. More often than not we failed but, nevertheless, they were very happy days. No one had heard of the word 'obesity' then.
5. So why has it come to this? Would it be too simple to suggest that it's because short term economic interests have, almost without exception, been allowed to take precedent over the environment?
6. Returning to American politics, I recall that Bill Clinton, during his 1992 election campaign, used the catchphrase, 'It's the economy stupid!' when appealing to voters concerned with an earlier recession. How I'd love to hear a prominent politician come out with, 'it's the environment stupid!'. After all what good is any job or even a good education if you have no food to eat, no water to drink or no air to breathe. The environment is the base on which everything else is built. Without it there is nothing else. Why can't we take better care of it?
7. At the present time we are being consulted on the 'Wales we want'. This is what I'd like to see :

A Country that moves away from a 'jobs at any cost' mentality to one that uses its resources in a truly sustainable way. A Country that grows its own internal green businesses' rather than one that seeks to encourage in multi-nationals that will inevitably, pull the plug at some point further down the line.

A Country committed to restoring the richness of its environment so that future generations of children can enjoy the kind of upbringing we enjoyed.
8. I have written this letter from the perspective of an angler although I understand and sympathise with others who are equally concerned with declines in other wildlife populations. I imagine that many of the responses will come from others like me but that is understandable given that there are as many as 60,000 rod licences sold in Wales each year.
9. I can assure you that there are extreme levels of interest from angling circles in this consultation. Anglers are desperate for Government to step up to the plate and reverse decades of decline. Given the number of anglers in Wales I'm surprised this has not been spoken of during the current election campaigns.
10. Many others have written to you criticising NRW and those that went before them for presiding over this decline. Those correspondents have also indicated at length reasons for the deterioration in our environment. In its current form and with its current financing NRW has no hope of fulfilling the role it was created for. We hope that you'll act but most are sceptical – please prove them wrong!

Regards

Neil Evans