

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Medi 2016
Petitions Committee | 12 September 2016

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-703

Petition title: **Proposals to Postpone the Restrictions on Fishing in Welsh Rivers**

Text of petition:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure an immediate postponement of the 10-year catch & release proposal for all salmon on Welsh rivers, whilst a full and proper impact assessment is carried out into the effects on local business and tourist economy, at a time when the Welsh economy is already suffering due to the decline in steel production. We believe this matter requires urgent attention.

I am chairman of Abergwili Angling Club, based in Carmarthen and I'm concerned by recent proposals by NRW to impose a ten-year catch and release only policy for salmon on all Welsh rivers, with no scientific evidence that pleasure anglers are responsible for the decline in migratory salmon stock.

A high percentage of our Club members travel into Wales bringing much needed revenue into the local economy. Below you will find extracts from the NRW's own technical report that highlights the losses that may well be incurred, following the expected loss of anglers coming to Wales, should NRW go ahead with a 10-year Salmon catch & release programme.

Background

There are 31 rivers in Wales that contain some [salmon stocks](#) and of these [23 are classified as principal salmon rivers](#). Of these 23 rivers four are designated as Special Areas of

Conservation (SAC's) under the European Habitats Directive. Conservation limits and management targets are in place for the principal rivers.

Responsibility for managing inland fisheries and salmon fisheries in Wales rests with Natural Resources Wales (NRW). NRW like other fisheries authorities in the UK has powers to create national and local bylaws to assist with the conservation of fish stocks in Welsh rivers. These bylaws put in place a number of effort control measures to ensure that the exploitation of stocks takes place at sustainable levels. These can include measures such as restrictions on what gear can be used to fish different species, the times of year in which different species can be fished and the locations at where different species can be fished. One such method of effort control is known as catch and release. This is a requirement for all anglers to return any fish they catch to the river.

There are a [number of national and local bylaws](#) already in place for salmon fisheries in Wales. These include a national bylaw which states that any salmon in Wales caught before 16 June 2016 should be returned to the river. Catch and release local bylaws are also already in place on the Wye and Taff and Ely rivers.

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) in conjunction with NRW in Wales and the Environment Agency in England produce an [annual report on salmon stocks and fisheries](#) in England and Wales. The preliminary assessment on stock levels for 2015 was published in May 2016. The report provides annual advice on the stock status of principle salmon rivers in England and Wales. The stock status is measured according to four categories:

- Rivers where there is at least a 95 per cent chance conservation and management targets being met are classified as being 'not at risk';
- Rivers where there is at least a 50–95 per cent chance of meeting conservation and management targets are classified as being 'probably not at risk';
- Rivers where there is only between a 5–50 per chance of meeting conservation and management targets are classified as being 'probably at risk; and
- Rivers where there is less than a 5 per cent chance of meeting conservation and management targets are classified as being 'at risk'.

Of the 23 principal salmon rivers in Wales NRW states that all but 2 of these rivers are classified as at risk or probably at risk. All four rivers designated as SAC's are deemed to be in an unfavourable conservation status. A list of the classifications for the individual rivers can be found [on page 65 of the CEFAS report](#).

Welsh Government action

NRW has responsibility for managing salmon fisheries in Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government. NRW has been going through a process of considering what additional actions, if any, may be required to address declines in salmon stocks in Welsh rivers.

On 17 March 2016 [a paper](#) was presented to the NRW Board which provided an update on the action taken by NRW in the last year to address declines and outlines proposals for further action. The paper states that whilst NRW does not believe fishing by rods and nets is the main cause of stock decline it believes that increasing the numbers of fish surviving to spawn in Welsh rivers in the short term 'can only be achieved if rod and net fishermen stop killing altogether'. NRW has stated that catch and release is favourable to the complete closure of a fisheries as it enable many of the socio-economic benefits of the fisheries to be maintained.

NRW states that it has undertaken formal and informal consultation on possible actions to manage salmon stocks with anglers and local fisheries groups including the issuing of a questionnaire. NRW expects to undertake a formal consultation on proposals to address the issue in the autumn of 2016 or early 2017. The earliest that any possible new measures could be in pace would be the 2017 fishing season.

National Assembly for Wales action

This issue has not yet been considered by the Assembly.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.