

Petition: P-05-745 Increased provision for off road motorsports

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 21 Mawrth 2016
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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-745

Petition title: **Increased provision for off road motorsports**

Petition text:

We call upon the Welsh Assembly to provide more support through Natural Resources Wales in making provision for off road motorcycles. We further ask that the Assembly provides direction for local authorities and the police in line with the Welsh Off Road Motors Steering Group (WORMS). We lastly ask that Ministers meet with some of those involved in off road provision to discuss the support that we seek.

Additional Information

The issue of "off road motorcycle" use in Wales has been one that has often polarised views with those in support against others. This has resulted in many legitimate off road users being demonised, treated unfairly and being tarred with the same brush as those that do ride anti-socially.

The issue of off road vehicles in Wales is worth many millions of pounds to the Welsh economy every year. In 2002 the Auto-Cycle Union (ACU) carried out a survey on behalf of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and it was estimated there were 10,000 off road bikes and vehicles in use in that one council area. Local businesses are seeing constant increases in bike use year on year. Most of those involved in the sport do try and engage legally, however with very few venues and a reduction in the amount of available Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS) more and more are falling short of the law. Whilst this is ongoing the police are often targeting off road users including those that are conducting themselves legally and responsibly.

The Welsh Off Road Motors Steering group which advises the Welsh Assembly, as well as all

22 local authorities and 4 Welsh police forces, concludes that the only way to stop illegal activity is through a three pronged approach of education, enforcement and provision. Whilst education and enforcement are regularly carried out, it seems little is done in the way to provide for off road users. In South Wales there is currently one motocross track that is open to the general public which is simply not enough and only caters for motocross riders. Many of the BOATs are being closed or put under Traffic Regulation Orders and initiatives to make provision are being stopped by the police or National Resources Wales.

The issue of anti-social use of motorcycles could be massively reduced by making areas which could be used for off road motorcycling. In Merthyr Tydfil, a dedicated mountain biking track has been created by NRW, attracting 66000 visitors in its first year.

Background

Wales Off-Road Motors Steering Group

The Wales Off-Road Motors Steering (WORMS) Group is administered by [Natural Resources Wales \(NRW\)](#) and is made up of off-roading interests, including motorcyclists, and representatives from local authorities, national park authorities and other interested parties. The group meets to share experience and best practice in relation to three main issues:

- Effective enforcement of existing laws;
- Provision/management of appropriate opportunities; and
- Responsible use and education.

The NRW website says the group meets a number of times a year, whereas the Cabinet Secretary's letter (see below) says the group has not met since 2014.

Byways Open to All Traffic

Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS) are public rights of way which are open to walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, horse-drawn vehicles and motor vehicles.

The *Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984* enables local authorities to restrict, prohibit or regulate the use of highways (including rights of way) through Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). TROs can be permanent, temporary or experimental, and can apply all year round or at specific times of the year.

NRW's position on making provision for off-road motorcycling

NRW's [Outdoor Recreation and Access Enabling Plan, Action Plan 2015 – 2020 \(PDF 496.0 KB\)](#) states:

We will continue to develop our position on motorised recreational activity on our own managed land ... Encompassing our continuing work with the Motor Sports Association, Wales Rally GB etc, and the feasibility of new opportunities.

Welsh Government action

Consultation on outdoor access

The Welsh Government consulted on a Green Paper in 2015 entitled '[Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation](#)' (PDF 318KB) in 2015. The consultation included a question on how legislation could strike a better balance between the demands of motorised users, landowners and the natural environment.

The Welsh Government later published a [summary of responses](#) (PDF 123KB) to the consultation. On motorised vehicles, it says:

The majority of responses that stated a view on motorised access off-road and on public rights of way were negative. However, of these very few differentiated between legal and illegal vehicular use. **A number suggested segregating motorised and non-motorised users, for example, restricting use to NRW managed land, in particular, forestry areas.** [Research Service emphasis]

On 13 February 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, issued a Written Statement on '[Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for recreation](#)'. In the statement she said that following the Green Paper consultation she would consult further on improvements in 'key areas', including:

- Achieving consistency in the opportunities available for participation in different activities and how activities are restricted and regulated; and
- Improving existing advisory forums and how access rights and responsibilities are communicated to all interests.

No indication was given for when the consultation will take place.

Cabinet Secretary's letter

The Cabinet Secretary wrote to the Committee on 15 February 2017. She said that off-roading is a very emotive issue and described the provision of access for off-road motorcycles as follows:

Provision in Wales is limited due to a number of factors, including opposition to planning applications for managed tracks and to the recording of rights of way for motorised users. However Natural Resources Wales (NRW) already provides access to many parts of its estate for use by a range of users, including motorcyclists and other off-road vehicles as long as they are road legal, taxed and insured as required.

She also said that:

- The WORMS Group was a very useful group that provided advice and expertise to both the Welsh and UK Governments, but it has not met since 2014;
- The WORMS Group contributed to guidance on regulating off-road motoring published in 2005. The law on off-roading has not changed since then but the Cabinet Secretary said her officials will review the guidance to ensure it is up to date; and

- Her officials will meet the petitioners to discuss their concerns and listen to suggestions for increasing provision for off-roaders.

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.