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For the attention of Virginia Hawkins,
Clerk to the Sustainability Committee,
Welsh Assembly Government,
Cardiff, CF99 1NA

Dear Ms. Hawkins,

I represent Ffynnon Taf Angling Club (FTAC) and would like to submit this contribution to your inquiry into Access to Inland Waters in Wales. I belong to the Projects Group of the South East Wales Rivers Trust which undertakes environmental improvements on the rivers of South East Wales, I design and administer the web site for the trust and represent FTAC on the local Fisheries Group which liaises with the Environment Agency.

Our club has over ninety members who fish the River Taff between Upper Boat and Morganstown. Our aim is to provide affordable fishing to local people on low incomes and we have succeeded in that aim. We allow children to fish for free when accompanied by adults and issue day tickets to share our angling with visitors. It is a popular club and a valuable asset to the local community who enjoy the leisure it affords.

In this letter I refer to canoes for convenience but the points made apply to all watercraft including boats and rafts.

We lease our water or are granted access to our waters by the riparian owners of the river. We regard the river as property and lease it in the way we would lease a field to farm. By leasing the fishing rights we expect to be able to fish that water in an uninterrupted manner without intrusions and disruption by third parties. We are happy with this arrangement as anglers have been for centuries and have no desire to change the laws which have worked well for many years. In the past canoeists recognised that navigation rights did not exist on non tidal lengths of river and respected the law leaving the rivers of Wales to the quiet enjoyment of anglers.

It is only over the last four or five years that our club has begun to experience canoeists regularly trespassing on our waters. Some are from commercial organisations which are charging their clients to enjoy the waters that we rent at the expense of our sport. None of them have taken steps to contact FTAC to seek permission to navigate the river we manage.



My club view the fishing rights which we lease as an exclusive entitlement to access the river. Members are becoming increasingly frustrated by having their fishing spoiled by groups of canoeists who seem to believe that we are being unreasonable in this assertion. Please take the time to consider why canoes have an adverse effect on fishing.

Fly fishing for trout and grayling, the main quarry for club members, requires the fish to be feeding confidently. Fish can be seen rising to the water's surface at regular intervals feeding on the aquatic invertebrates which ascend to the surface of the river in order to breed. Fish rise to feed from the surface at differing rates depending on the abundance of the hatch of flies and sometimes the period between the rises can extend to several minutes. Anglers take a great deal of time tying imitations of the natural flies and a great deal of time learning how to present their imitations of these flies in as natural a way as possible to fool the fish. Finding a rising fish can be difficult at the best of times and approaching the fish to get within reach of a cast takes a great deal of care. A cast to a rising fish is the culmination of a significant investment of the angler's time. Apart from this investment in time we also pay for the right to cast to these fish.

It is because of all these factors that canoeists and anglers do not coexist happily on a river. Having finally discovered an undisturbed fish feeding confidently nothing is more upsetting to our club members than the illegal intrusion of a canoe or group of canoes which invariably scare the fish away. Following the disturbance from the canoes it can take a considerable time for the fish to come back on the feed again. As a consequence of the canoeists unauthorised intrusion all of the anglers guile and stealth can go to waste and the hours which they have found time to spend fishing have their much anticipated pleasure diminished.

Over the last four or five years it has become apparent there is a strong possibility that another group of canoes could come down the river at any time and spoil the fishing once more, a situation the club regards as unacceptable.

Our club fish for trout from spring through to the autumn. We fish for grayling from the autumn through to spring and are blessed with a river ecology that produces hatches of flies in every month of the year. The only time our members do not fish is when the river is in high flood. We would consider allowing canoes to have access at these times but we do not want canoeists on our waters when we fish it.

We pay for the privilege to fish the water twice, once when we buy our fishing licences from the government and again when we pay a fee to fish a particular place on a chosen river. Anglers can be identified by fishing licences and club permits, and are obliged to carry valid licences and identification by law. Our sport is being spoiled by unidentifiable groups, individuals and commercial organisations that are trespassing on the water which we pay for. We can only prevent their intrusion by force but have no wish to embark on that course of action which leaves us in an unenviable position of being unable to challenge trespass which is being exploited by the canoeists and their representative organisations.



Our club believes that we could accommodate canoeists in times of flood throughout the year, however we feel that canoeists should buy a licence to access inland waterways and pay to access particular places on the rivers and lakes of Wales as anglers do. We would like canoes to be compelled by law to display a registration number that is easily identifiable and for individuals to be prosecuted for illegally accessing non navigable water as anglers are if they fish illegally. We also feel that canoeists are well catered for in the Cardiff area, there is a vast area of water accessible to canoeists in Cardiff Bay and the local tidal waters of neighbouring rivers are all open to navigation - our waters are not.

I hope the sustainability committee will give the above points due consideration and take steps to preserve an ancient sport which is coming under pressure from a modern fad which has none of the innate affinity with water or the instinctive environmental custodianship which rests deeply seated in the souls of Welsh anglers.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Chapman

