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24 August 2009

Ms Virginia Hawkins
Clerk to the Committee
Sustainability Committee
Welsh Assembly
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Madam

**SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
RIPARIAN ACCESS**

I was surprised to receive a letter from my Fishing Landlord last week broadly advising me that a Committee had been set up to consider a petition from the Welsh Canoeing Association for unrestricted access to all rivers in Wales at all times of the year. I understand that the Committee is taking written evidence from all interested parties until mid September. I am surprised not to have been advised of this matter earlier by the Welsh Assembly as it would have been particularly easy to contact all Anglers who would be affected by these proposals by using the Fishing Licence database which would have been available from the Environment Agency. Nonetheless, I take this opportunity to make a number of points which I have outlined below.

I fish on the River Dee near Overton, Wrexham on the Bryn-y-Pys Estate. At present, and over the last 15 years or so which I have been fishing in this stretch of river, the laws of access/trespass appear clear and well defined on this stretch of river in that it is clearly trespass to go on the river above the tide which is in private ownership – without the owners' prior permission. Furthermore I see no reason to change the law of trespass apart from imposing stronger penalties.

In short, I think it will be extremely undesirable to allow yet further access to canoeists into non-tidal stretches of rivers for the following reasons:-

1. Damage and disturbance to salmon spawning grounds.
2. Any increase in canoeing areas should be dealt with by negotiation with land owners with land and riparian owners – as would be the norm.
3. Significant subscription fees and rod licence revenues all go to improve habitat and water quality on Welsh Rivers for the benefit of those who use the river legally.

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4. Having also fished in Scotland and seen the uneasy relationship between canoeists and riparian owners on some of the larger rivers north of the boarder, e.g. The Tay, Spey, etc, it would be unwise for canoeists to try to navigate smaller Welsh rivers famed for their Sea Trout Fishing, and would give cause for concern both in terms of the potential damage to the environment and to fishing revenues so important to the rural economy.

5. If unrestricted access to canoeists was granted, very substantial capital sums would be required to compensate riparian owners, local businesses, etc, who rely on the river for their income (much in the same way as will be required if the coastal footpath scheme ever comes to fruition).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J A Mellis', written in a cursive style.

J A Mellis