



MERTHYR TYDFIL ANGLING ASSOCIATION

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Response to SUS Meeting at RWS Builth on Tuesday 21st July 2009

Dear Sir

Many thanks for inviting the fishermen to attend the above meeting on Access to Water held at the above show. This is Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association's response as you requested

Water rights are a complex issue and for the Canoeists to say that they have a right to use any water they please goes against all the principles and laws that have governed water rights over the years. Although water falls from the sky free the minute it is impounded or forms streams it becomes subject to all manner of restrictions on how it can be used. These vary from statutory laws that govern Abstraction and discharge, to Fishing rights that have been bought and sold over many years, in each case payment is involved. The following statement by Val Lloyd : 'Access should not be based on the vagaries of permissions bestowed or ability to pay, but on the fundamentals of equity and social justice' and 'the rivers of Wales are a natural 'gift' that everyone should have the right to enjoy'. While not disagreeing with her statement the ability to pay part will, if unfettered access be given to canoeists, be equally relevant to Anglers.

Anglers have to pay for permits to fish rivers ponds lakes and streams and canals as well as a Rod licence to the Environment Agency. Even on areas of river covered by Navigation Rights the Environment Agency charges fees. Boats using these rights also need identification. It should also be remembered that navigation rights were imposed in those far off days to enable Goods to be moved in a cost effective and quick mode to towns that had the benefit of a river passing by. The claim by the canoeists that they take nothing is getting increasing irrelevant as Anglers are being encouraged to practice more and more catch and release. In other words we do not take anything from the water.

It seems morally and legally unfair that a **Small** group of people who are heavily funded as a sport now wish to take for granted what anglers have achieved by hard work and their own investment. This investment also includes the maintenance of the river banks the removal of fallen trees (this is work we now have to carry out due to

Founder Associations: Merthyr & District AA, St Tydfils AA, Treharris AA

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Cuts in Environment Agency budget) and recently with the advent of the Rivers Trusts (formed mainly by fishermen) the onerous task of combating invasive weeds ie knotweed. We do not see other water users or proposed users keen to offer finance or voluntary help on the scale the angling fraternity does. The facilities currently run by the canoe governing Body and the new one due to open soon on the River Ely that runs into Cardiff Bay can only be used if payment is made.

Since the turn of the last century when most angling rights were either owned by the Crown or the Lord of the Manor, anglers, and in particular in Wales, Angling Associations, have spent large sums of money on the purchase of fishing rights. The result of this is that voters over a large spectrum are now able to enjoy fishing at very reasonable cost making angling the largest participant sport in the country. Anglers have been called feudal by the canoeists, but are we, when we have opened up so much of our waterways for all classes of people by breaking down what was undoubtedly one hundred years ago a rich mans preserve.

We are open to negotiation to allow canoeing and other water sports access but feel this access must not be at the expense of present users. One of our main fears are the people who buy a small piece of land abutting a river and then run very lucrative businesses with no thought other than for themselves. They think nothing of sending large quantities of Rafts and canoes down a river or stream with total disregard for any other water user. They also charge substantial sums to people who use their facilities.

The people who are pushing for a change in the law are experts in the field of canoeing, capable of handling all circumstances that a wild river can throw at them. They are only a small minority as far as canoeing is concerned and increasingly those canoeists who do not belong to Canoe Wales or the BCU are getting fed up with their attitude. There have been an increased number of fatalities associated with canoeing this year alone, one can only imagine the amount of fatalities that will occur on a regular basis should unsupervised free for all access be allowed. The push for open access does not seem to assess the health and safety aspect. Who will be available to supervise and look after the totally inexperienced people who will be encouraged to go canoeing, wild swimming, gorge walking,?

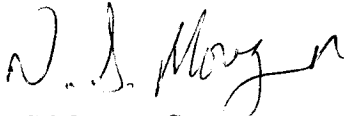
Griff Rhys Jones in his recent programme went out of his way to show the merits of canoeing. What was not shown however or mentioned was all the backup he had in case an accident or incident occurred and it would be interesting to see the risk assessment that the BBC had to carry out before embarking on the programme.

The new complaint regarding access being put forward by canoeists is that no one will enter into agreements with them. This claim is totally untrue as they are now refusing to enter into any agreements. This is only true of the small amount of people who are represented by Canoe Wales. Angling is known to be and recognised by the Sports Council for Wales as the largest participant outdoor sport. The turnover generated from Angling into the Welsh economy is over £150 million with 1,500 jobs and Environment Agency figure show that £63 million of this gross total remains in Wales. These are proven facts and not fictitious figures that are being bandied about by Canoe Wales.

Many people including Canoeists believe the Environment Agency stock the rivers for the anglers. This is totally untrue and has never happen even historically in the days of the old River Boards.

The petitions committee did not even scratch the surface in it's deliberations on access to water. We hope that your committee will be more proactive, investigate all claims made by the canoeists, and make sure that all the bodies that represent the countryside are invited to make representation personally on this matter.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. S. Morgan', written in a cursive style.

N S Morgan Secretary