



Penyhil
Felindre
Brecon
Powys
LD3 0SU

To:
Claire Pillman CEO NRW
Sir James Bevan CEO EA
Sir David Henshaw Chairman NRW
Emma Howard Boyd Chair EA

25 September 2019

Dear Ms Pillman, Sir James, Sir David and Ms Boyd,

I am writing to highlight the plight of Atlantic Salmon in the River Wye and to confirm our support for positive, non-confrontational, engagement in finding solutions.

The plight of Atlantic Salmon is recognised as a significant Global environmental issue. **They are one of the most important indicator species in global waters**, showing whether rivers and oceans are clean, healthy and supportive of life. We believe a **state of emergency** now exists with respect to Salmon stocks in the Wye and indeed other Severn Estuary rivers. We wish to register that fact with you.

Catches have dwindled to such an extent that we have been urging NRW to change its policies for some time and certainly before salmon become extinct as a self-regenerating species. However, observations during this season are likely to confirm that in our opinion, without urgent action, we will reach the point of no return very soon.

As I am sure you are aware the Wye was one of Britain's foremost Salmon rivers, at its peak over 50,000 salmon a year were running the river with many returning adults supporting stocks in other estuarine rivers such as Severn, Usk and Parrot. As with most other estuary rivers there is no fish counter in operation on the Wye, runs of Salmon are estimated based on anglers reported catches. In its annual fisheries statistics report NRW show the river as failing its Conservation [egg deposition] Level, its projected compliance described as 'probably at risk' with an uncertain trend, a trend now felt by WSA as "at risk". Last year just 506 salmon were caught and returned by anglers. The two previously lower figures on record are 357 in 2002 and 460 the following year. This year, 2019, seems likely to be <400, a 94% collapse since it peak, it is plain to see the Wye Atlantic Salmon is in serious trouble. Low salmon numbers returning to the river to spawn have compromised conservation levels and as a result natural regeneration is at serious risk.

In 2012 fishery owners, anglers and gillies formed The Wye Salmon Association [WSA] with the primary aim of protecting the species. Since that time membership of WSA has steadily grown and in recent months membership has accelerated again. From feedback this appears mainly due to specific concerns for salmon stocks and the water quality of the river.; Both these issues raising serious concerns in relation to the Wye's SAC status.

A significant reversal in the currently declining number Atlantic Salmon running the river as its major indicator species, would have a huge economic and wellbeing benefit to the whole area as well as relieving concerns about the Wye's future as a SAC.

The reality is options for recovery of salmon stocks are very, very limited. The Wye and Usk Foundation has carried much valuable work in improving the physical aspects of the river, unfortunately, the number of Salmon returning has continued in decline since 1992 along with the number of juveniles getting away to sea safely. It is too simplistic to blame changing weather patterns, or what is happening to salmon at sea. The reason for the decline is multi-faceted with the uncontrolled explosion of fish-eating birds [FEBs] contributing significantly to the problem. The reality is that it's a numbers game. The more fit young fish thrive and survive in the rivers in a safe and clean environmental habitat, the more they are likely to migrate to sea and the more we will see increased numbers returning.

We believe options that will help redress the situation should and can be developed without putting the genetic integrity and fitness of salmon at risk. We would be more than happy to discuss these options from an operational, financial and scientific point of view directly with yourselves. WSA have previously, successfully funded, managed and delivered on projects working with both NRW, EA and other organisations.

In a recent email, Caroline Moscrop, South Powys Environment Team Leader, NRW, commented *'the survival of salmon in some rivers is now threatened, whilst across Wales all of our salmon and most of our sea trout stocks are now at risk of further decline to biologically unsafe levels. All evidence reinforces the need to take 'bold and urgent action'*. David Hudson, Environment Manager, EA supporting recent angling byelaw changes commented; *'there are a variety of environmental factors that have led to the decline in salmon stocks in the Severn estuary, it's not just about the number taken through fishing. Only by acting now, and through the co-operation of others, will we manage to protect this iconic fish in the Severn for future generations. Doing nothing is not an option'*,

In our view the problems need *'bold and urgent action'*. Comment made by David Hudson regarding the whole Severn Estuary catchment for Atlantic Salmon *'doing nothing is not an option'* is to be applauded. However, continuing doing the same in singular hope that things will eventually get better is not a viable option when recognising global change in the fortunes of Atlantic Salmon.

We believe our proposals can offer, by working with others, the impact needed to help the Wye recovery, helping the Global plight of the Atlantic Salmon. What a headline that would make.

We look forward to your positive response and opportunity to engage more formally on the matter.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Smith
Chairman
Wye Salmon Association

cc.
Board Members NRW
Board Members EA
Principle Fisheries Specialists NRW & EA
Management Team Leaders NRW & EA
Jesse Norman MP
Kirsty Williams AM
Jane Dodds MP