



George Eustice MP
 Defra
 Nobel House
 17 Smith Square
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24 October 2014



Dear Minister,

Thank you for giving up your valuable time to attend the Angling Summit on 21 October. Please also pass on our thanks to Delyth Dyne and Marc Owen for working closely with us to organise the event at Defra and to all the Defra officials and Environment Agency staff who attended. We felt that it was an important opportunity to discuss progress with the National Angling Strategy and to highlight some particular areas where all the organisations in the fisheries and angling sector feel that urgent action is needed for the benefit of fish and fishing.

We welcome your confirmation of the government's support of the National Angling Strategy at the Summit and we hope that its delivery will continue to be funded in the future with rod licence revenues.

The support from Defra and the Environment Agency for the concept of Catchment Fishery Plans is also very welcome. Many of the organisations represented at the Summit will take these forward at a local level as part of the Catchment Based Approach. They will liaise with your officials to bring together a national group to provide leadership to the development of the plans and also to collate feedback to generate a national picture of the strategic actions required by government and its agencies which will become apparent from the repeated themes in the local plans.

We had a very wide-ranging discussion and so I thought it might be useful if we were to summarise the key points as we saw them to try and drive action over the next few months and into the next Parliament. We think it would be useful to review these points at the next Summit and to check on progress.

1. Freshwater fish stocks

We emphasised the point that salmon stocks throughout the Atlantic are in crisis, and urged you to consider the actions proposed in our recent joint letter. Our freshwater environment is severely degraded, with only 23% of waterbodies achieving good ecological status and very little improvement has been achieved at a national scale in the past 6 year cycle of Water Framework Directive delivery. A shift in gear is required, now.

We noted that Government funding for solutions and rod licence revenues are both declining, and stressed that we need more concerted and urgent regulatory and enforcement action to tackle agricultural pollution. Farming is probably the country's largest state-subsidised industry, and yet

bad farming practices on many farms are causing endemic pollution and water run-off which are heaping costs and flooding misery on the rest of society. £2 billion of Single Farm Payments dished out from taxpayers should be made to work much harder and there is considerable scope to tighten up the requirements that farmers need to meet in order to receive these payments. We will be writing to you separately in conjunction with RSPB and WWF with more details on this subject.

Also in the context of strained public finances, we emphasised that many of the actions required to restore our degraded rivers – for example, farm advice, fisheries management, surveying, monitoring, removal of barriers and restoration of physical habitat – are far more cost-effectively delivered by the third sector than by government and its agencies. Overheads are lower, charitable status generates good will from landowners, and additional funds can be leveraged from other sources including Water Companies & the EU (particularly if there are long term funding agreements in place). Farm advice is more likely to be followed if provided by a local friendly charity rather than by the man from the ministry, and the staff will be much cheaper to employ.

Third sector organisations are collaborating to deliver the Catchment Based Approach, and to encourage fishery owners and angling clubs to carry out habitat improvement works, but there needs to be a clear strategy for delivery that formally gives them a bigger role and allows them to plan, and secure match funding from other sources.

The much-delayed Fish Passage Regulations need to be implemented as soon as possible. Recent evidence suggests that downstream migration of fish can be severely impeded by barriers to migration, particularly in rivers suffering from low flows, and that this can be even more population-limiting than hindrance to upstream migration.

Action on mixed-stock nets targeting salmon and sea trout needs to be accelerated not only to protect stocks but also to prevent Greenland and the Faroes recommencing netting of MSW fish. We requested funding support for the buy-out of the North East drift nets, but you indicated that this was unlikely, which was disappointing.

We raised the issue of the draft plan to build an off shore fish farm in Cornish waters and of the many risks this poses to already-threatened diadromous and marine fish stocks. We are particularly concerned that this ill-conceived proposal seems to have been instigated, and is being promoted, by CEFAS, a Defra agency; this risks creating a number of conflicts of interest and reputational damage to both CEFAS and DEFRA. We urged you to ask CEFAS to reconsider.

2. Marine fish stocks

Sea angling needs to be recognised by government and its agencies as a significant industry in its own right and recreational anglers' interests need to be regarded as at least as important as the much smaller commercial fishing industry. We raised concerns about the representation of anglers on the IFCAs and the dominance of commercial fishing interests, but it wasn't clear that these were accepted by officials. Please can you exert your influence on the MMO and the IFCAs to ensure that new appointments reflect the far greater economic and social importance of recreational angling, to ensure that decisions by IFCAs are taken in the long term interests of fish stocks rather than short term commercial gain.

We welcome the draft proposals for restoring bass stocks which have emerged from the EU discussions and there are some good measures being talked about. The Angling Trust and B. A.S.S. have written to you separately with detailed reasons why unilateral measures to protect stocks should be adopted by the UK government immediately, as Ireland and the Netherlands have done. We welcome your agreement to revisit the important issue of the bass Minimum Landing Size and to finish the review which was announced by your predecessor Richard Benyon but never published.

3. Angling participation

Government marketing restrictions, applied to the Environment Agency, have led to the loss of millions of pounds of revenue from rod licence sales. The Cabinet Office needs to be persuaded to make the marketing exemption permanent so that campaigns can be planned well in advance. The impact of these marketing restrictions has been so great that there is now insufficient funding available to market rod licences effectively. Budget cuts to enforcement have increased non-compliance and the future for what was at its peak a £25 million source of revenue looks bleak. A decade of increasing revenues is being followed by a decade of decline.

We requested once again that funding should be made available to provide support for the sea angling industry which was identified in Sea Angling 2012 as a major economic benefit to the country and many deprived communities. We will work with your officials to progress a funding bid of some sort to help build a sustainable infrastructure to maintain and grow sea angling participation.

4. Conclusion

Whilst we welcome the attendance at the summit of so many of your senior officials, and your own commitment of time to meet with us, there is a feeling of great frustration in the angling and conservation community about the lack of progress with restoring freshwater and marine fish stocks and an apparent failure by government and its agencies to grasp the urgency and severity of the situation facing some species, in particular bass, sea trout and salmon.

We hope very much that the proposals we have set out in our letter and at the Summit will be adopted.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive
Angling Trust & Fish Legal

On behalf of: Angling Trades Association, Atlantic Salmon Trust, Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society, Countryside Alliance, Institute of Fisheries Management, Salmon & Trout Association, The Rivers Trust, Wild Trout Trust