

Canoe Trespass Must be Tackled Say Angling and Countryside Groups

A dossier launched today provides new evidence that the British Canoe Union has potentially misled its members and the public about the law relating to navigation on rivers and acted against the government's policy of supporting voluntary access agreements. The document is published by the Angling Trust, which has called on Ministers to intervene and to consider withdrawing public funding from organisations which refuse to respect the law of the land.

The British Canoe Union (BCU), and its national arms Canoe England (CE) and Canoe Wales (CW) have provided what appears to be confusing and at times conflicting guidance to their members and the public which suggests that there might be access to and along all rivers by canoes and other vessels. The Angling Trust believes this has contributed to a widespread upsurge in unlawful canoeing and trespass throughout England and Wales. This is impacting on the legitimate rights of millions of anglers and poses a serious and increased environmental threat of damage to fish spawn and spawning fish, which is a criminal offence. Uncontrolled canoeing also endangers unsuspecting anglers wading on smaller rivers and streams. Canoeing can in many circumstances make fishing pointless or impossible for many hours as the fish are too frightened to feed. Angling contributes £3.5 billion to the UK economy and employs nearly 40,000 people and needs to be protected.

The dossier shows that the canoeing governing bodies have also ordered their staff not to sign voluntary access agreements (VAAs) with angling clubs and other owners of river rights, unless they offer unlimited access to rivers. The bodies even threatened their staff with disciplinary action and/or the sack if they do sign any agreement with restrictions. The England and Wales governments both have policies supporting VAAs, and despite many angling clubs being willing to agree legitimate access for some of the year, the intransigence of the BCU, CE and CW has meant that many negotiations have ended in stalemate.

It appears that these actions are part of a campaign for universal, unlimited river access funded by the BCU through its national arms at CE and CW, which is actually leading to less access for canoeists and more conflict on the riverbank. The Angling Trust supports an increase in canoe access to rivers, but only if it is governed by rules and regulations to avoid damage to fisheries and angling and is responsive to local requirements.

The dossier is published the week after the launch of the Sustainable Access Campaign Cymru ("SACC") website (www.accesscymru.org) by the Angling Trust and partners in Wales. Following the launch of the campaign, the Welsh Assembly Government has announced that a green paper regarding changes to access in Wales, due in the autumn, is to be delayed at least until the end of January 2014. Hundreds of anglers, farmers and landowners in Wales have written to Assembly Members expressing their concern. Implementation of proposals for universal, unregulated access would in effect take away the legitimate property rights of many thousands of people and adversely affect important businesses which employ many people.

Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Angling Trust said: "anglers are quite willing to share rivers with others, but in a crowded country we all have to accept that there have to be rules about how we manage our precious natural resources. VAAs make it possible for rules to be established for each river to reflect the particular natural conditions, the species of fish present, the timing of their spawning, and the type of fishing carried out. Anglers have numerous by-laws, close seasons and other restrictions on their activity, they pay a licence fee to the Environment Agency and buy a permit to fish. Our dossier shows that the canoeing governing bodies have been unreasonable, irrational and misleading and we call on Ministers to intervene to stop this unacceptable behaviour by publicly-funded organisations."

Rachel Evans, Director for Wales for the Countryside Alliance said "Anglers and landowners have come to the table with offerings of local VAAs but there has been very little take up from Canoe clubs and indeed individuals. Prior to 2008 there was an active and well managed agreement on the River Tawe but this agreement was withdrawn by the canoe club, claiming that they had been advised to withdraw in order to make way for legislation in favour of free and unfettered access 365 days a year. Canoe Wales use the excuse that they cannot broker agreements but the real issue is that they have done absolutely nothing whatsoever to encourage signing agreements resulting in a negative impact on the many opportunities offered by anglers and landowners."

Ben Underwood, Director for Wales of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) said: "The CLA wholeheartedly agree with the Angling Trust that voluntary agreements are the best way forward. Partnerships between local people, landowners and anglers will achieve the kind of access that everyone wants and needs."

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Notes to Editors

1. The dossier can be downloaded [HERE](#)

2. Contact (media enquiries only) mark.lloyd@anglingtrust.net or 07973 468198

3. The Angling Trust is the representative and national governing body for angling www.anglingtrust.net 0844 7700616 (office hours).