

Broads Authority Bill passed

The Broads Authority Bill has now become law. Compulsory third party insurance will not be required for small unpowered vessels where length x beam is less than 6m². Neither will such vessels be required to pay licence fees when on adjacent waters. Water skiing will be controlled more strictly. The tidal Haddiscoe Cut between the Yare and the Waveney is to retain its right of navigation even though owned by the EA.

Quality not speed

People must travel slower but savour the experience more, according to Nic Marks, founder of the New Economics Foundation, as part of a low carbon society. Fair enough once we have faced up to those who say we must go elsewhere and that they have the legislation to force us to do so. If the Government want us to travel less they must allow us to stay on our own waters.

Angling catches to be ignored

Fisheries Minister Huw Irranca-Davies has managed to block EU plans for recreational sea angling catches to be recorded as part of the quota allowed to commercial fishermen. He argued successfully that much more evidence is needed before 'any action should ever be considered.' This is a rather different approach from the precautionary principle used by such bodies as CCW and Natural England who want the public to be kept away from wildlife in case there is a negative impact, even when they are unclear on the present situation.

that involve the payment of rents to enable us to access the fishing.'

Paddlers International replied 'Thank you for your response. I am well aware of the positions of the other parties you mention. I was asking specifically about the position of the Angling Trust. From your response, it seems correct to say that the Angling Trust can produce virtually no evidence to support their position. Please advise me if that is not correct and you can produce such evidence.'

'For the record, three of the four showcase schemes by Brighton University left access on the relevant rivers in a worse state than before they became involved, with the Teme probably the worst of the four. The EA and DEFRA have been no more successful than yourselves at producing evidence to support this position. If there was evidence they would be only too keen to produce it.'

No further evidence was forthcoming. The AT seem to be poorly informed on even what little progress there has been.

Whose rivers?

A campaign has been launched under the name Our Rivers, calling for Government proposals 'to be more ambitious if they are to deliver the positive change needed to protect Britain's rivers'. So who are 'we'? Apparently the WWF, RSPB, Angling Trust and Association of River Trusts. Conspicuously absent are major users of the river environment such as boaters, walkers and cyclists.

Paddlers International took up the issue. The case that will come immediately to mind for many is the Yorkshire Derwent, involving an unholy alliance of players at the front of the present group. On that occasion, money which had been donated by the public to WWF, in the expectation that it would be used for saving pandas and the like, was given to anglers on the Derwent to keep boats off this navigation. Even environmentally friendly boats like canoes were banned when they could easily have been exempted and this has since had an adverse effect on our legal position which nobody has attempted to resolve. A body with WWF and anglers prominent will be treated with great suspicion by the boating fraternity. We have been campaigning openly against the EA and their predecessors for decades. That does not mean that we are prepared to trust leading bodies within this group without a very clear indication of a change of heart, which we have not seen so far. The fact that EA ex CEO Barbara Young was formerly head of the RSPB also results in a shadow being cast on the RSPB in many minds. We have been following the WFD since it was launched and see that it has potential for good but also for harm, as we pointed out at the recent PIANC symposium in London.

An RSPB spokesman said 'I don't know the issues around the Derwent but... the coalition is not campaigning for or against access.'

'The RSPB will take a view on specific sensitive waters where disturbance would be a real issue to wildlife but our work on right to roam in the uplands and the more recent debate on coastal access shows we try to take a balanced view. After all if people can't enjoy the countryside they are very unlikely to value it in the choices they make.'

'Anyway I'm sorry if you are suspicious of our motives, with so much going on with water and wetlands I can honestly say that, beyond the occasional discussions about a canal in Wales and industrial port expansion, I've never been involved in any work on navigation.'

Our point is not what they are doing at the moment but what WWF, the anglers and Barbara Young have done in the past, which is likely to colour the views of anyone looking at this campaign before they go any further. While the campaign might be perfectly laudable,

there could be better people to lead it, especially as boaters, walkers and cyclists are conspicuously absent from the lineup. Paddlers International's offer to talk face to face was not taken up.

The launch of WWF's Rivers on the Edge campaign on May 12th was followed the next day, co-incidentally, by the Rivers (England) Adjournment Debate about the state of English rivers (although Welsh MPs present widened the debate's scope). Centre stage were the chalk streams of southern England and their declining water levels, blamed on over-abstraction. Some attention was given to the suggestion that houses should be built where there is adequate water available rather than building them to suit planning requirements and then ordering water companies to obtain enough water to supply them. The hard surfacing they introduce was blamed for flash runoff instead of aquifer recharge. Much of the pollution is caused by agriculture, it was claimed.

Oliver Heald (Con, NE Herts) led the debate and talked of his local rivers as 'great and could be greater leisure resources.' Mostly, however, it sounded like an anglers' convention. Martin Salter (Lab, Reading W) took great exception to the use of the Kennet & Avon Canal by boats, resulting in silt being carried into the adjacent River Kennet and reducing fish catches. Robert Key (Con, Salisbury, a former Waterways Minister) opposed a Severn barrage which would affect spawning salmon and Salter threatened to oppose it in the courts because a salmon river could not be replaced.

Boating interests had no input, perhaps too busy elsewhere with the Marine & Coastal Access Bill, until Roger Williams (LD, Brecon & Radnorshire) asked the Minister to comment on the ongoing conflict between anglers and canoeists. This brought Salter to his feet immediately, claiming that previous Ministers had all opposed the 'absurd campaign' for canoeists to be allowed to use the rivers of England and Wales and that the latest should do likewise, threatening 'problems if he does not'.

Huw Irranca-Davies, the EFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, wanted to see more development on agreements but Williams pointed out that canoeists are no longer willing to renew the agreement on the Usk.

Not lost, stolen

The Chartered Institution of Water & Environmental Management have given their Living Wetlands Award to the Strategic Restoration & Management of the River Avon. Given that no public boating is allowed on any non tidal river at all in Hampshire while in Wiltshire there is only a kilometre or two of agreed access on the Avon at Salisbury (apart from the Thames between Cricklade and Lechlade), Paddlers International asked what the CIWEM position is on recreation (particularly touring by boat, part of their remit) on what they have named as an award winning river scheme on the Avon. According to Brundtland's definition, to be sustainable a policy has to meet the needs of the present as well as the future, not just selected needs. Why have CIWEM chosen a project which is, by definition, not sustainable? CIWEM declined at reply.

Natural England has carried out a survey which suggests only 24% of children visit a patch of nature near home on a weekly basis, compared with 53% of their parents who did. Commenting on the findings in an article entitled *Have we lost the call of the wild?* the CIWEM magazine *Water & Environment Manager* says all the right things except for a very conspicuous absence of reference to those who want to be on the water. Perhaps the problem is one for which they themselves bear a direct share of the responsibility. Proposals such as 'Launch a new interactive website for children and families designed around a wildlife gardening accreditation scheme' sounds better for couch potatoes than for allowing kids to enjoy nature and