

## No progress with Environmental Stewardship

After 21 years, Environmental Stewardship now covers 50,000km<sup>2</sup> of England, twice the area of Wales. Its funding is supposed to promote public access to the countryside as one of its aims. It has created 4,800km of footpaths and 2,400km of cycle paths and bridleways but still no access at all for river users.

## The real polluters

At an International Navigation Association seminar on the inland waterways, a paper on Whittingham Country Park in the Broads threw up the interesting information that although a 1.5km rowing course could be installed, there is no angling or fish stocking yet. It seems that fish could lower the water quality. Environmentalists are steadily calling for ever cleaner water but fish and other wildlife could be a significant part of the problem. After all, there is much more wildlife around sewage outfalls than in very clean water such as Loch Ness.

## Parking in Perthshire

Perth & Kinross Council have put up new information signs at Burnmouth and Thistlebrig. The Burnmouth carpark will be available except during March and September to mid October, popular angling seasons, when paddlers will need to park in the lane outside the gate, as before. This should reduce the amount of paddling for those who don't want to do the run from Burnmouth down to Thistlebrig.

The hotel at Grandtully is under new ownership. Paddlers are no longer allowed to use the hotel carpark.

concerns. They welcome DEFRA's acknowledgement that 'productive' includes economic and social prosperity in the marine context. Crucially, they say that planning in the marine area must be suited to its needs rather than just recreating a land based planning system offshore. Recreational boating causes negligible or no significant damage and can be well managed without over prescriptive legislation. The BMF wish to be represented on the proposed marine planning steering group in order to disseminate information to their interest groups. Existing activities should not be excluded under Marine Plans without clear scientific evidence of impacts. Even then, socio-economic impacts should also be taken into account. The BMF support the principle of the polluter paying but any polluter should be accurately identified, not just assumed. The acceptance that tourism and recreation will be largely exempt from the constraints is noted and welcomed. The need for an adequate appeals process is flagged up. A University of Hull study had said that there were three high risk unlicensed activities, bait digging, unlicensed commercial fishing and motorized water based recreation. The BMF are amazed that the latter remains just 'water based recreation' even though both they and the RYA pointed out the error in a previous consultation. Indeed, there is no evidence that even motorized water based recreation produces significant damage. Voluntary initiatives such as Green Blue should take precedence over new bye-laws. Fixed penalty notices are of dubious practicality. The enforcement proposals have not been sufficiently worked out and the proposed staffing levels are entirely inadequate. Education of the public is preferable to enforcement. The leisure marine sector should be represented on the Marine Management Organization board. The non departmental nature of this public body is welcomed. Its headquarters needs to be outside London, preferably on the coast, and setting it up and moving existing staff there must be at Government expense, not funded by licence payers. Also, there is no reference to training of staff. There needs to be a clear indication of the costs to small businesses, lacking so far.

- Discovery of an additional 79,000 scoters off Blackpool means that the British population is now known to be more than twice the previously believed figure. They have also been found up to 20km from the coast, not just close inshore as previously thought. The Habitat Mapping for Conservation & Management of the Southern Irish Sea project has also found a sea spider and a polychaete worm which they did not know were there. CCW have just discovered Cardigan Bay dolphins roam as far as Liverpool Bay and that Risso's dolphins use a rare horse mussel reef. While this is welcome news, it is worrying that people with massive new powers to close down areas of the sea under the Marine Bill can be so far out in the level of knowledge on which they are basing their decisions. Perhaps they need to get out there and look or talk to those who do go out on the sea.

- The workshop to discuss the process for selecting Highly Protected Marine Reserves in Wales, on Apr 16th in Llandudno, was hardly over-run with those who might be affected. Recreational boating was represented by just the Welsh Yachting Association, the Aberdovey Partnership and ISKA. There were over a dozen anglers and commercial fishermen but no divers at all. The other 80% were mostly environmentalists and scientists.

Sue Gubbay, a council member of the hosts, the Countryside Council for Wales, explained how sites would be protected from activities involving extraction and deposition. Other damaging and disturbing activities will also be banned. ISKA made two unsuccessful attempts to obtain some examples of recreational activities which might be damaging or disturbing. A commercial fisherman asked researcher Callum Roberts of York University for the best method of catching fish, again not getting a straight answer. The track record of

environmentalists, the enormous power they now wield and their evasive manner means that they are bound to be distrusted by the public at large.

The preferred model for a selection process seemed to be the one which involved the most consultation with stakeholders. Significantly, the Post It note which generated the most support read 'CCW are not seen as honest brokers', something they need to consider seriously.

The first of these reviews is to be in place by 2012. With over half the Welsh coastline likely to receive designations of varying severity, the boating public cannot just sit back and hope that all will be well.

Environmentalists cannot be allowed to take a blinkered approach. Less eyes on the water will assist poachers, as is happening on rivers, and also drug runners and other smugglers.

Drawing a line on a map is not enough. There are no hedges, paths or fences on the sea, as there are on land, to mark boundaries. Any no go areas need to be fully buoyed. If this closes off bolt holes in deteriorating weather or makes small boats go out to sea it will result in danger and deaths so environmentalists will need to address the additional rescue measures they will need to put in place.

Environmental bodies need to be aware that many kayaks are on the sea because they have been banned from rivers or because they are looking at wildlife by the most environmentally friendly method. Often, wildlife goes to look at sea kayaks rather than the converse.

Stakeholders need to be fully involved, rather than just consulted, and they need to be given honest answers to questions rather than the evasive ones so far. A backlash against environmentalists could well be on its way if they are not very careful and it will not help anyone, least of all the wildlife.

- An International Navigation Association symposium on ports, coasts and the Water Framework Directive in London in April produced some contrasting attitudes. Early speakers from DEFRA and the EA were enthusiastic about driving forward standards for the environment for as many interested parties as possible with ecological and chemical targets for 8,000 bodies of water in England and Wales. They had completed two out of eight steps in preparing plans, which have to be completed by the end of June 2008. River Basin Management Plans must be submitted this year to comply with EU requirements.

While the early speakers sounded like excited children with a new toy, the later speakers from ports authorities seemed to be trying to bring an air of realism. There is a difference in view between not doing what would be unreasonably expensive and not doing what cannot possibly be afforded by anybody. Stephen Hull of ABPmer drew attention to the nonsense of not creating dirty water by dredging in a silt laden estuary such as Southampton Water (confusing when environmentalists are so keen on mudflats). John Brien of Harwich Haven Authority talked of the need for an evidence based and impact led process. This is very much of concern to us. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Apparently there is one critical difference between the 11 River Basin Management Plans being prepared and the Local EA Plans which have led up to them. Martin Booth of the EA admitted to Paddlers International that the LEAPs had needed to consult stakeholders but there had been no need to pay any attention to what they said, an interesting observation for those who thought the EA consultations were simply a whitewash and an indication of how far the EA should be trusted by the public. On the other hand, the RBMPs must pay attention to submissions from the public, so it is essential that the views of canoeists are recorded as widely as possible. Consultation times are likely to be short with little notice, based on previous experience, but it is important that the plans do not just become a mouthpiece for more extreme environmentalists.