

Doc 1 Summary of points raised by objectors for the 2024 net licence duties.

Common issues raised:

- Cost of living crisis.
- With the cost of living at the highest it has been for years this increase will only put unneeded pressure on fishers and their families.
- Reduction in Season, and 2020 byelaws not taken into consideration.
- Terrible state of our Waterways and Pollution.
- Use of expensive hotels for meetings.
- Heritage licence rejection.
- Loss of income because of introduction of a Heritage Licence.
- Want to be able to take sea fish.
- Anglers have not had such limited fishing conditions placed upon them.
- Status of stocks and scrutiny of rod fisheries and their regulation.

NRWs responses to these objections:

Cost of living crisis

NRW's charging schemes are based on the principle of full cost recovery in line with Managing Welsh Public Money, HM Treasury rules and obligations under the Natural Resources Body for Wales (Establishment) Order 2012. Our aim is to develop a charging scheme that applies the right charges to our activities and that the cost of our permitting and compliance work is recovered from those we regulate, avoiding subsidy through the public purse (Grant in Aid). By fully cost recovering, this helps ensure NRW is better able to regulate and protect the environment of Wales, contributing to the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources.

NRW is committed to continually improving our processes making them as streamlined and efficient as possible, providing a valuable service and a reduced burden on business. The existing net duties structure was set in 1996 with individual net fishery duties calculated on average catch of salmon and sea trout per licensee (the higher the average catch the greater the duty). This was deemed the fairest way to set duties at the time and gained Ministerial approval following consultation.

The duties increased again in 2006, 2010 and 2023 but by inflation only by overall 19%. By comparison, rod licence duties have increased by 20% since 2006, a full migratory salmonid rod licence costs £86.10. Whilst inflation (2010-2024) has increased by some 47%. It has been confirmed following advertisement and consultation that Rod licence duties for salmon and sea trout will rise from 1st April 2024 by 4% to £90.40. We do of course recognise the difficult economic position many people find themselves in at present, however, we do need to adjust some charges to ensure we effectively manage inflationary pressure.

Net licence duties were increased in 2010 and 2023 and since then, sales and income have been declining whilst high inflation in recent years has reduced the spending power of the income we receive from sales. It has, therefore, become necessary to again seek to increase duties with the aim of at least being able to maintain current levels of service. It would not be appropriate to seek additional Grant in Aid for regulatory activities that should be covered by charges, and we cannot cross-subsidise from other income streams.

When proposing new fees and charges, we follow the requirements set out in Managing Welsh Public Money ensuring that only eligible costs are included within calculations. We recognise the financial impact our charging proposals might have on some business sectors, especially as our proposals coincide with wider financial pressures from inflation and the increased cost of living. However, a failure to manage our charging schemes to ensure they reflect full cost recovery would impose significant resource implications, a reduction in our technical skill base and, therefore, an inability to ensure that our natural resources are sustainably maintained, enhanced, and used, now and in the future.

The advertised increase in Net Licence duties for 2024 are modest, and in line with other increases in fees proposed by NRW.

With the cost of living at the highest it has been for years this increase will only put unneeded pressure on fishers and their families.

We do of course recognise the difficult economic position many people find themselves in at present, however, net licence duties were last increased in 2010 and 2023 since then, sales and charge income have been declining whilst high inflation in recent years has reduced the spending power of the charge income we receive from sales. It has, therefore, become necessary to again seek to increase duties with the aim of at least being able to maintain current levels of service. The advertised increase (4%) in Net Licence duties for 2024 are modest, and in line with other increases in fees proposed by NRW.

Recent exploitation constraints have not been taken into account.

There was a strong feeling amongst the objectors that the duties should now be reduced given the reduction in season length arising from the introduction of the new byelaws introduced in 2020. We pointed out that the new byelaws are a necessary minimum requirement aimed at protecting stocks and that the duties were not originally based on season length, but rather on average catch per licensee on individual fisheries. Following the outcome of the Byelaw Inquiry – where the Inspector concluded “the proposed byelaws to be a measured response to declining fish stocks in Wales; accordingly, they are necessary, proportionate, and reasonable in view of salmon and sea trout stocks throughout Wales.” The salmon and sea trout byelaws received Ministerial approval and came into effect on 1st January 2020 in Wales. NRW is clear that the first principle in managing fish stocks must be that the exploitation and harvest of fish stocks should only take place when the stock is sustainable. Stocks of both salmon and sea trout (particularly early running sea trout) have been in decline for several years and it is now important that spawning escapement is protected. The Byelaws have a ‘sunset’ clause and will expire in 10 years. We are committed to a review of the byelaws after 5 years. There has been no reduction in the NRW resources required to administer and regulate the fishery (indeed costs have increased markedly), hence we did not therefore consider it appropriate to change the duties following the introduction of measures to protect vulnerable stocks.

Costs of Netsmen’s meetings held at expensive hotels, lack of commitment by NRW to nets, embrace the digital age.

We held 3 meetings with netsmen in 2023, to explain our approach. The meeting for the North Wales nets meeting was held at Oakley Arms, a venue that was central to the bets form the Conwy, Mawddach and Dyfi the room hire was less than £100 for the evening. Similarly, the meeting at the Mariners Hotel in Haverfordwest for the Tywi, Taf, Cleddau and, Nevern and Teifi nets was again less than £100. The Third meeting was held online for those unable to attend and had no associated room costs. Our salmon and sea trout fisheries remain a priority for NRW. We welcome input from both netsmen and rod anglers alike. We run several Local Fishery Groups at which netsmen attend both the West Wales and Ceredigion Local Fishery Groups. It is unfortunate that there is not an overall netsmen’s group that could attend the Wales Fisheries Forum.

The Wales Fisheries Forum is made up of a wide range of stakeholders who are coming together to share ideas and function as ambassadors for Welsh fisheries. The goal is to ensure our freshwater and migratory fish stocks are protected for generations to come. We want this group to represent everyone who cares about

fish, not just rod and net licence holders; angling clubs; fishery and riparian owners, but also conservation organisations; rivers trusts; volunteers and other fish and fisheries-related businesses and professionals.

There is no one silver bullet to solve the many issues and challenges facing fisheries, the solutions can be found in a combination of different changes, all of which need to be supported by new ways of thinking. By working together, the forum will be a channel for the exchange of ideas and best practice and will help inform NRW's fisheries work on, among other areas, strategy, promotion, and partnership working. We note the request to embrace the digital age when issuing and recording a change in licence details. Whilst the application process is on paper, licencees can of course call or email for a change in licence details, the costs associated with this were abolished some 15 years ago. We will look to issue application forms via email in future however please note less than 80% of netsmen have an email address.

Water Quality (Terrible state of our Waterways and Pollution)

Addressing Water Quality remains a priority for NRW. Water quality issues continue to be the subject of intense public and political scrutiny, and we have had to significantly re-prioritise and adjust our workplan priorities to respond. For example, we have set up a programme to address the problem of phosphates in SAC rivers, with detailed plans to bring failing catchments back to favourable condition. We are reviewing our regulatory position on storm overflows and how and if NRW needs to develop its regulatory response. NRW is chair of the Task force set up between Water Companies, Ofwat, Welsh Government and NRW, who have developed a storm overflow roadmap and action plan to drive forward improvement in the performance of storm overflows in Wales.

The Investment Water Companies make through Ofwat's Price review will be critical to addressing the Nature Emergency, alongside action by others. We continue to work with others to take forward action in the storm overflow Roadmap to review our approach to the regulation of storm overflows and to drive forward the Actions NRW committed to take in the SAC Rivers action plan. We welcome the continued capital funding from WG which means that we will be able to continue investing in our Nature and Climate Emergencies capital programme which includes water quality, metal mine remediation, peatland restoration and nature projects.

As an example, NRW has started a new project on the Teifi – landowners, industries and regulators join forces for pilot 'demonstrator catchment' project. The Afon Teifi is one of our nine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Rivers in Wales, designated due to the rare species it supports, including lamprey, Atlantic salmon, otter, and floating water-plantain. It meanders 122km through three local authorities - Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, and Pembrokeshire - as well as through National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Like many of our other SAC rivers, sadly the Teifi is in an unfavourable condition, and in 2021 it was reported that it was exceeding acceptable water quality targets for phosphorus.

This project will involve partners, land and water management sectors and others, to highlight collaborative approaches to water quality and water resource improvements and building riverine habitat resilience through sustainable land and water management. Within this project we will adopt agile and innovative approaches and the learning developed will be scaled up and out across Wales bringing multiple benefits to other river systems.

This is a great opportunity to act now to work with land management and water sector partners and communities to reverse the trends we are seeing and to improve water quality, ecology and habitat, and support the resilience of local communities and the benefits that come from their natural environment.

Status of stocks and scrutiny of rod fisheries and their regulation.

In 2019 a Local Inquiry examined NRW's approach to salmon and sea trout stocks and our proposals. The Inspectors report and the Ministers response can be found here: [Written Statement: Outcome of the Local Inquiry on Natural Resources Wales' proposed 'All Wales Salmon and Sea Trout Byelaws'](#). The Inspector found them to be necessary, proportionate, and reasonable in view of the decline of salmon and sea trout stocks throughout Wales.

The measures introduced by the byelaws had a similar effect on both nets and rods. The degree of scrutiny for the rod fishery has been same. We acknowledge that there will be a mortality of salmon because of continued fishing even under catch and release restrictions both with nets and rods.

Survival following angling is greater than 90%, over 96% for fly fishing. We have introduced restrictions to improve survival including banning bait fishing for salmon, the use of barbed hooks and treble hooks. We have never sought to blame either netmen or anglers for the decline in stocks, however continuing to kill fish when there is such a large deficit in the number of spawners required to maintain populations is not sustainable. It is important to note that any additions to the spawning stocks are particularly valuable when stocks are at low levels. Even relatively small numbers of fish are crucial to recover stocks in as short a time as possible. Every spawner Matters.

Heritage Licence

NRW recognises that some fishing methods, including some which have been in existence for several hundred years, represent traditional activities and may therefore have heritage value. These fisheries include the well-known coracle net operations on the Tywi and Teifi, but also the Cleddau compass nets and the Black Rock lave net fishery. This view has been supported in a report commissioned by the Environment Agency (2004).

NRW's purpose is to ensure that the environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, sustainably enhanced, and sustainably used. In this context sustainability means with a view to benefiting, and in a manner designed to benefit, the people, environment, and economy of Wales now and in the future. Importantly we are proposing a new category of licence for 2024. Recognising that stocks and catches have markedly decreased in recent years this will allow netmen to continue to participate in the fisheries, whilst helping protect stocks maintaining many of their heritage and cultural values whilst restricting the catch to less than 10 sea trout.

Only 11 netmen in 2023, caught more than 10 sea trout, the average median catch of sea trout was 8 in 2023. The Heritage licence category is voluntary. Netmen can either pay the full amount for their licence without any catch limits on the numbers of tags or apply for a Heritage licence that will be capped at a maximum of 10 tags. The cost of the Heritage Licence has been proposed as £90, the same as a full migratory salmonid rod licence. There are no limits on the number of Heritage licences available in each fishery, up to the maximum set within the Net Limitation Order. In every other way, other than the total permissible catch and that once the Licencee has caught their maximum number of 10 fish they must cease fishing the licence is identical to the full licence. They must adhere to the same byelaws and NLO restrictions as the full Licence. Once a netmen has taken out a Licence with the catch restrictions, they would not be able to revert to a full licence in the same season. It would however not stop them for applying for a full licence in future.

Captures of sea fish should be allowed.

The net licence issued by NRW is a "Licence to fish for Salmon and Migratory Trout with an instrument other than rod and line." It does not entitle licence holders to take sea fish.