

**National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
NRW 2015 – 03
Natural Resources Wales – Annual Scrutiny 2015
Response from Mr G Thomas**

I am so glad I have been given this opportunity to comment on the newly formed NRW.

I am going to keep this very simple and honest and comment on the disastrous declining Sea trout (sewin) and Salmon runs on the River Towy in Carmarthenshire.

The previous Environment Agency and now NRW are fully aware of the declining stocks but still allows various netting out in Carmarthen Bay and also 8 Coracle licenses for coracle net fishing in Carmarthen itself.

I have fished the River Towy for many years, and during the last couple of decades the river has seen a steady decline in fish runs, with last season's fish returns possibly being the worst on record. It was certainly the worst on record for my local angling club Carmarthen Amateur Angling Association. The members within our club are trying their very best to maintain fish numbers, last season returning to the river, 56% of sewin and returning 76% of salmon caught. Also new by-laws have been introduced in to the club whereby any sewin caught over 6lb must be returned to the river.

I know many other clubs on the River Towy are also practising voluntary catch and release with percentage figures returned to the river also fairly high.

In this day and age and with the River Towy on its knees how can the netting of fish continue. First of all the fish have to pass the trawlers out at sea, clear the seine nets in Carmarthen Bay and then finally pass the coracle nets in Carmarthen town centre, before trying to move up river to spawn. These nets are not returning any fish to the river but us rod & line fishermen/women are practising catch and release up to 76% to help restore stocks to our river.

Currently the coracle nets in Carmarthen fish for 5 days of the week and sometimes two tides a day, and return no fish to the river, every fish is killed unless it is a salmon, which is caught before their salmon season starts.

As a start I would urge you to cut the coracle fishery in Carmarthen down to a maximum of 2 to 3 days a week to help protect our fishery, the river can no longer sustain such a heavy load of netting or cut their netting season from 5 months down to 3 months. The NRW have provided me with the recorded coracle catches for last season on the River Towy and they are shocking ! This slaughter surely cannot continue.

Membership numbers in our fishing clubs are continuing to drop, with vital monies coming in to our communities from fishing tourism being lost. I believe fishing tourism ploughs over £3 million a year in to our economy in Carmarthenshire.

I urge WAG and the NRW to please listen to our concerns before it is too late, we need our future generations to enjoy fishing our river.

These are the following confirmed figures for 2014 catches which gives you an indication of the net damage being done.

Coracle caught sewin 791 – C.A.A.A (My club with over 350 members)
caught sewin 189 – with 76% returned to the river.