

Minutes of the Wiltshire fishery Association Annual Meeting held on Saturday March 24th 2018 at Langford Lakes.

Present: Tom Davis (Chairman) Mike Denny (Hon. Treasurer) Bob Wellard (acting Hon. Sec) Robin Mulholland, Stuart McTeare, Peter Nash, Tony Wells, Dianne Matthews (NE), Steve Skuce, Rob Leachman, Martijn Antheunisse, Roger Fagan, Sir William & Lady Mahon, David Holroyd, Nick Gooderham, Peter Baker and seven other members.

- 1. The Chairman** opened the meeting at 10.30am and welcomed members and guests.
- 2. The Chairman** reported apologies from Bob Male (Hon Sec), Peter Hayes, Martin Browne, Noel Flint, David Willis, Bryan Gordon-Smith, Austin Thorpe
- 3. The minutes** of the last AGM were adopted as correct without disagreement, proposed by Robin Mulholland and seconded by Bob Wellard.
- 4. Matters arising** Robin Mulholland asked if there was any news from Wessex Water regarding the water supply grid. Bob Wellard confirmed he had recently raised the same question with WW and, after a lot of chasing, received a response suggesting trials of the grid would commence in April.

Details of WW's email to BW provided below.

The main Grid infrastructure has now been installed and we are in the process of operating flow trials to prove the capacity of the system. Within the locality of the river Wylfe, the main transfer pumping stations at Monkton Deverill and Codford water treatment works have been completed along with the main interconnecting pipework linking the south of the Wessex region with the new treated water storage tank in the Deverills and across to Salisbury. This has been installed to ensure security of supply to customers and to make up the shortfall in demand following the agreed reduction to our licence abstractions in both the River Wylfe and River Avon catchment areas.

The changes in licence as agreed with the Environment Agency (EA) are applicable from April this year. This will see our abstraction licence for the Wylfe catchment from our two water treatment works at Brixton Deverill and Codford reduced to a third of its historical value during dry weather flows. The overall annual licence is also reduced to reflect this. The triggers for going between what is termed winter and summer flows will be the level within the River Wylfe as recorded at key gauging stations by the Environment Agency. These levels are monitored daily and there is close liaison between the EA and Wessex Water to ensure there is no exceedance to the licence constraint.

If you would like any further updates, please contact us at operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk.

Michael Panayiotiou
Wessex Water - Customer Relations

- 5. The Hon. Treasurer** Mike Denny presented the accounts for the year 2017, and commented briefly on some of the salient issues, including a reduction in subscription income and the health of the weed management fund, which he considered to be adequate for the next two years.

He confirmed the weed extraction levy for 2018 would remain the same as it was in 2017, although with there being improved flows and potentially more weed, it's likely costs will be slightly higher this year.

He confirmed the cost of the weed boom installation, operation and extraction of weed in 2017 amounted to £3,573 on the Avon and £1,603 on the Wylfe and that the current agreement to share the costs 50:50 with the EA would continue as in previous years.

Tony Wells suggested there was some disparity in the amounts the WFA donated to WWT (£60) and WCSRT (£1,000) and that he felt this did not reflect the amount of support WWT had provided with river restoration projects in recent years, particularly in the upper Avon, compared to WCSRT. Tom Davis confirmed the WFA's donation to the WCSRT also supported the work of the Wessex Chalk Streams Project, which consists of a number of catchment partners, including the WCSRT & WWT, and that Martijn Antheunisse (WWT Freshwater Team) has a leading role in the project. Tom confirmed that no decisions had been made for 2018 and that the WFA committee would continue to review the WFA's support of project partners on an annual basis.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Roger Fagan seconded by Stuart McTeare, and carried unanimously.

A copy of the accounts for the year 2017 is available on the WFA website.

6. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman gave his report, which is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Tom Davis reiterated the need for the WFA to play an advocacy role and that we would continue to ensure water quality and water quality remained a top priority.

Tony Wells raised his concerns, suggesting 'the perfect storm looming on the horizon' with the Stonehenge tunnel & Ratfyn waste water discharge.

In response Tom Davis said of the proposed Stonehenge Tunnel construction consultation, which closes in late April, that the committee will be examining the proposals in detail, and in particular the concerns associated with the discharge of pumped groundwater during the construction phase and how drainage will be managed in the operational phase.

The sewage treatment works on the Avon at Upavon, Ratfyn and West Amesbury present an unacceptable threat to wildlife and this unique chalkstream ecosystem, and supported the challenge by S&TC, UK & S&DAC that "the EA needs to take action to ensure that Wessex Water carries out a major upgrade of its sewage treatment works and for its phosphate stripping capability to be radically improved." Is being widely supported by WFA members.

A copy of S&TC,UK Press Release is attached as Appendix 2.

7. Election of officers.

The Chairman thanked the committee for all their hard work throughout the year, particularly Bob Male who had done an excellent job for the past three and a half years, and who would be stepping down from his role as Hon. Secretary. The Chairman confirmed Bob Wellard, with the support of the Piscatorial Society committee, was willing to take on the role of Hon. Secretary for a period of 3 years, as proposed by Robin Mulholland and seconded by Peter Nash.

Mike Denny was re-elected as Hon. Treasurer, proposed by Bob Wellard and seconded by Stuart McTeare. Tom Davis was re-elected Chairman, proposed by Peter Nash and seconded by Tony Wells.

All members of the Committee were willing to stand again, and were duly elected, proposed by Rob Leachman and seconded by Roger Fagan.

8. Report on the 2017 Season

Bob Wellard gave a PowerPoint presentation on the fishing year. Amongst various topics, which included a video of otters and details of the Piscatorial Society's electric fishing surveys on the Wylfe, he commented on the need for WFA members to report information about pollution incidents to the both the EA, using the pollution hotline (0800 80 70 60) and to the WFA, so that we can continue to build a database of incidents we can use to raise awareness and apply pressure to the regulators to take action. He also suggested that fishing clubs and landowners might want to consider how they can support the process of invertebrate benchmarking on our rivers, which is now gathering pace and, along with a number of attendees, he expressed the hope that such information would be shared with, and used effectively by, those organisations that had the political clout to make a difference.

A summary of his presentation is available on the WFA's website.

9. Report on the Swan Action Management Project (SWAMP)

Stuart McTeare said he had encountered some difficulties with NE having apparently lost some of the licenced report records submitted by various keepers in 2017. He had subsequently resolved these issues by ensuring all SWAMP licence returns are first sent to him, to be copied onto a database, before he sends them on to NE. He suggested that whilst the swan population appears to be stable WFA members should continue to gather photographic evidence of excessive swan grazing and damage caused to river ecology.

A copy of his Report is attached as Appendix 3.

The Chairman thanked Stuart, and everyone else involved in the SWAMP on behalf of the Association.

10.A.O.B.

Tom Davis asked if there was wider support for designating the Wylfe a Wild Trout Protection Zone. Bob Wellard suggested that whilst the concept was something we should all aspire to, it was already being done voluntarily in most parts of the river. BW also suggested a voluntary approach would retain

a degree flexibility to allow stocking in the event wild trout numbers fell below a sustainable level. Stress events, caused by climate change and anthropogenic pressures associated with abstraction and water quality, remain a serious concern. There followed a lengthy discussion about stocking on the Avon, catering for the needs of anglers who want to take 'one for the pot'. Aside from Wild Trout Protection Zones, there was wide support for a voluntary reduction in stocking, particularly in improved reaches, and for providing opportunities for wild trout fishing wherever possible.

The business meeting closed at 12.10, and members remained for a buffet lunch.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017/18 – Appendix 1.

Last year we decided to switch the annual meeting from the traditional time in autumn/early winter to New Year/late winter, on grounds that diaries are less crowded at that time and it is after the end of the shooting season, and we were therefore more likely to get better attendance. It was unfortunate that our planned meeting on 3rd March had to be cancelled due to the unseasonal weather conditions with accumulations of snow and ice. It was all the more a pity because we had an excellent speaker lined up and we were anticipating good attendance numbers. Although Don Stazicker was available for today's meeting we took a decision to put him off until later in the year when we think we're likely to get better attendance numbers. The point of telling you all of this is to say that this report concerns activities to date, rather than just matters to the end of 2017.

Bob Wellard will report to you in more detail about the 2017 fishing season: but it is worth noting just what a low water year it was. By the end of the season river flows were well down. By Christmas the springs had not yet broken and it wasn't until January that ground water levels began to rise and river levels recover. I'm pleased to say that despite the pain involved with the "Beast from the East" it, or at least the melt that followed it, seems to have done our rivers much good and they are currently enjoying a good flush through.

2017 was not a heavy weed growth year. In general terms the weed cutting and clearing went well, though there was still the occasional errant on the upper Avon. The costs of weed boom operation and clearance by the EA amounted to £3573 on the Avon and £1603 on the Wylde. The current agreement to share the costs 50:50 with the EA will continue. Club/owner contributions to the WFA share will remain at 2017 levels for the 2018 season. In order to accommodate fishing day bookings it has been agreed to set the dates a year in advance.

Following the successful workshop in autumn 2016 on the new permitting regime for in-river work, we have been in discussion with our EA Wessex region colleagues about ways to streamline the permitting of routine river work and reducing the bureaucratic burden which is otherwise considerable for those operating on SSSI and SAC rivers – the majority of WFA waters. The proposal we have jointly come up with is a sort of management agreement (or Area Permit) under which a trusted river owner/ club with a track record

of sensitive river management may undertake specified types of restoration work on low flood risk reaches without having to apply for a Bespoke Permit. For higher flood risk reaches approval would need to be sought right up to a full Bespoke Permit. We propose to pilot the idea on the Wilton Club water over the next year. If successful, and the EA are happy that flood risk is adequately covered the plan will be to roll it out to other trusted clubs/syndicates/riparian owners within the WFA. We will keep you apprised of how things go.

On the subject of flood risk permitting (what used to be called Flood Defence Consent), you have probably heard about the EA's proposed new charges for permitting. Broadly, they are looking to recover the cost of regulation through charges for permits, advice provided, etc rather than pay for it out of tax revenue. That meant massive increases on the standard charges for all environmental permitting, including for 'Flood Risk Activities': under which river restoration and management work is categorised. The scale of charges proposed meant that for smaller scale restoration projects on designated rivers the permitting costs would highly likely have been greater than actual delivery costs. Not surprisingly there was uproar within the river restoration and management community. We put together a robust response on behalf of the WFA to the consultation proposals. Our key points were that the proposed system is overly bureaucratic and not fit-for-purpose, and that it is complete nonsense to charge volunteer organisations for undertaking work which is directed at achieving the Government's own objectives. There was quite a significant reaction from the river restoration community nationally along very similar lines to our own expressed concerns. The good news is that we heard this week that the EA have backed down from increasing charges for river restoration work which will now remain at the current levels for the foreseeable future. A success!

While on the subject of consultations the A303 Stonehenge and Winterbourne Stoke bypass proposals went out for consultation early in 2017. Again, we put in a robust response alongside many amongst the Till valley community to press for the northern route option for the Winterbourne Stoke bypass on account of much reduced impacts on the perennial section of the Till. This, I am pleased to report, was also successful. The second stage of the consultation on the Stonehenge tunnel is currently active, closing in late April. We shall be examining the proposals in detail, and in particular the concerns associated with the discharge of pumped groundwater during the construction phase and the way in which drainage is to be managed in the operational phase.

Over the last 18 months it has become increasingly clear that the WFA's advocacy role, particularly in relation to abstraction and water quality, remains as important as ever. The Rivers Trust has made it clear that they see their role as more focused on river restoration, habitat enhancement, delivery of solutions, research and education, and less on this sort of advocacy. It remains, therefore, the role of the WFA to do this, adopting the constructive, engaging, and sober approach that has been our tradition and which has historically earned considerable respect from the environmental authorities, water companies, and others. As you know, we don't have large resources ourselves and will need, from time to time, to call on the likes of

S&TC UK, the Angling Trust, Fish Legal, and others for assistance. Our main strength is as the eyes and ears on the river bank, and we are currently developing ways to facilitate identification, reporting and recording of instances and incidents to provide the evidence to press the authorities for action.

I'm sorry to report that there have been two acute pollution incidents during the year, both on the Upper Avon, fortunately with no long term serious impacts. However, the effects of chronic diffuse pollution continue to impact our rivers, particularly in relation to nutrients and delivery of fine sediment. The establishment of a network of Invertebrate Fingerprinting (which measures the biological response to pollution and other stresses) is particularly important here. SADAC and the S&TC UK have recently highlighted a dramatic increase in the impact of phosphate discharges on the Upper Avon associated with sewage treatment works. This is especially important in the context of the increased discharges (and abstraction) associated with the Army re-basing programme. We fully support this initiative.

We have seen a number of staff changes in the organisations that we work closely with over the last 18 months. Richard Battersby, our EA Fisheries and Biodiversity Team Leader, has been promoted to a new role in asset management. Richard has been a real ally of ours and will be greatly missed. We await an announcement on his replacement. At the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust Paul Jose, the Director, has decided to move on for family reasons. We are extremely pleased that Martijn Antheunisse, who is well known to us as our Wessex Chalk Stream Project Officer, will be taking over from Paul full-time from mid-April. Leanne Sargeant, our catchment partnership officer at the Trust, has also moved on to be replaced by Liam Reynolds who has already made a significant mark.

Finally, I must thank the members of your committee for all their hard work and especially Bob Male, our retiring Secretary, for all his efforts over the last 3-and-a-half years. I look forward to working with our new Secretary, Bob Wellard, who is well known to us all.

Tom Davis, WFA Chairman

S&TC,UK PRESS RELEASE - Appendix 2.



Press Release

Issued by: Salmon & Trout Conservation

Study shows sewage treatment plants are deadly for world-famous river

Wild fish charity, Salmon & Trout Conservation (S&TC) and Salisbury & District Angling Club have recently submitted a scientifically-backed formal warning to the Environment Agency about the rapid destruction of one of our most highly protected chalkstreams – the Upper Avon in Wiltshire.

Scientific monitoring by Salmon & Trout Conservation has highlighted that this once bursting with life chalkstream has suffered a dramatic decline in water quality with a consequential loss of water insect life – the base of the aquatic food chain. The Riverfly Census covered reaches on the river Avon from Stonehenge and Amesbury to Stratford sub Castle in Salisbury, to provide a 3-year data baseline of life in the river.

A major source of this pollution is caused by phosphates. Effluent discharges from three sewage treatment works in the catchment are recognised as a major source of these damaging phosphates into the river. Phosphates are widely acknowledged as a major cause of water quality deterioration in the River Avon.

Significantly, these discharges have been increasing at an alarming rate since 2015. Population forecasts show that this situation will deteriorate even further because of increased housing developments and the re-basing of many thousands of servicemen and their families.

Jan Szakowski from the Salisbury and District Angling Club said, “We have issued a formal notification to the Environment Agency of the severe environmental damage that has been caused and continues to be caused by phosphate effluent from sewage treatment works operated by Wessex Water. Unless something is done immediately there is an imminent threat that the damage will become even worse.”

Nick Measham from Salmon & Trout Conservation said “For several years fishermen and river keepers have reported deterioration in the Avon with

increased siltation, reduced riverfly hatches and a reduction in *Ranunculus* growth, which is the signature of a healthy chalkstream.

“Matters came to a head when river ‘benchmarking’* by S&TC confirmed with certainty how dramatically insects in the river had declined. It is no exaggeration to say that we have an environmental disaster on our hands and the river is being destroyed.”

Nick Measham explains the results of the monitoring, “Phosphate levels in the affected river have increased by 50% and the levels are more than double the maximum required for a healthy river. At the same time, we have measured a shocking decrease of invertebrate life of more than 90% in the same period. For example, mayfly numbers in West Amesbury have gone from 1,903 in 2015 to just four in 2017.”

Why does this matter? Nick Measham explains, “As well as the destruction of mayflies, birds, fish and other animals all depend on mayfly and invertebrate life for survival. The data shows that this vital food source is being wiped out.”

Although it is recognised that phosphate effluent is not the only harmful factor affecting the health of our rivers, sewage effluent presents a clear and continuing threat. Even Wessex Water acknowledges that the sewer catchment is unable to cope with the planned increase in housing developments.

Jan Szakowski concludes, “The River Avon has precious environmental value and is designated a Special Area of Conservation. Currently the sewage treatment works on the Avon at Upavon, Ratfyn and West Amesbury present an unacceptable threat to wildlife and this unique chalkstream ecosystem. As a Government regulator, the Environment Agency is responsible for protecting our fresh waters and we hope that they will now exercise their regulatory powers. They need to take action to ensure that Wessex Water carries out a major upgrade of its sewage treatment works and for its phosphate stripping capability to be radically improved.”

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Nick Measham adds, “It is not just the Avon that is suffering from high levels of phosphate and sediment pollution. Our three-year national Riverfly Census has identified that many other rivers are suffering from effluent discharged from antiquated sewage treatment works too. Our data shows that this is having a disastrous impact on our water insects and in turn our aquatic wildlife. We have provided incontrovertible evidence and it is now up to Government authorities to make polluters pay and crucially, to act before it is too late.”

Salmon & Trout Conservation and the Salisbury and District Angling Club have arranged a summit meeting with the Environment Agency shortly after Easter to discuss these concerns.

For further information on this press release or images, please contact:
Morag Walker – mobile: 07736 124097 or email: morag@salmon-trout.org

Salmon & Trout Conservation (S&TC) was established as the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) in 1903 to address the damage done to our rivers by the polluting effects of the Industrial Revolution. S&TC is the UK's leading campaigning wild fish charity. We work to increase awareness of the growing need to protect our wild fish stocks and the rivers, lakes and oceans upon which they depend, in the face of issues such as pollution, over abstraction and insensitive salmon farming. Our aim is to achieve better protection for fish, aquatic wildlife and the places where they live for future generations to enjoy.

SWAMP REPORT 2018 Stuart McTeare – Appendix 3.

2018 will be the tenth year of the SWAMP project, the project by now really needs little introduction but its original thrust was to stabilise the Mute Swan population in the Upper Avon Catchment and thus reduce the ongoing damage to the Runuculus community. The area covered extends from upstream of the Longford Estate which is on the main river Avon close to Downtown right up into the head waters. I took over from Robin Mulholland, who set the project up, last year as license holder and coordinator and although I have experienced some issues with NE losing some of the keeper's paper work we now seem to have got over this glitch and the license is in place for the coming year. Robin historically reported the out lined methodology involved so I won't repeat it again but the table below gives the gist of what is going on.

Year	Nests with Eggs	Eggs Laid	Eggs Removed	Cygnets Recorded *
2009	44	299	200	29
2010	44	287	181	66
2011	31	197	96	52
2012	31	179	123	54
2013	47	299	204	83
2014	51	292	184	42
2015	36	220	145	29
2016	42	259	166	40
2017	38	227	155	46
Total	364	2259	1454	441

I know Robin has also documented previously that we have not sought any publicity for our project but last year I did present SWAMP to a Test and Itchen Association meeting, who are seeking to acquire a license on their catchments. It would appear they are edging closer to achieving their goal, which may have a knock on benefit for the Avon.

On the Piscatorial Society waters last year, we had some very good weed across the Wylve and Avon but we did suffer from swan grazing on a couple of reaches on the Avon but I note at this point the swans aren't present on those beats so I'm hopeful with the winters rainfall that we have some good growth this season.

David Stone is still documenting swan numbers and it would appear we have some stabilisation of the swan population and although David will not be present at the AGM, I would like to thank him for his ongoing support of the project. I think it is safe to say without his input the project would not have been possible. Indeed, he was very appreciative of the WFA donation towards his ringing expenses last year and I hope going forward this could be considered as an annual expense for the WFA?

I would just like to highlight after last year's issues with data being lost that this year there will be a change in procedure and I would ask keepers and fishery managers to send me the data direct and I will then forward it to NE hopefully to avoid any further glitches. I discussed the process at the spring keepers meeting yesterday. Finally, I would also like to thank Lucy James at NE who was been very helpful last year and is now moving on to the catchment sensitive farming department, our paths may cross again.

Summary of Swan Population Upper Avon Catchment 2014-2017

Wylve & Lower Till	2014	2015	2017	LTA
Breeding pairs	26	19	18	21
Territorial pairs 4	4	3	4	
April non-breeders	66	45	55	88
Avon (Salisbury N)				
Breeding pairs	24	21	20	26
Territorial pairs 8	3	3	6	
April non-breeders	44	54	30	79

LTA = Long Term Average 1978-2009

Stuart McTeare
SWAMP Coordinator