

Presentation to DARD Committee re Reservoirs Bill

The Ulster Angling Federation is the representative body for game angling associations in Northern Ireland. We have a membership of some 60 associations with a total individual membership of some 7,000 anglers. The Federation represents anglers in discussions with Public Bodies, Government and other NGO's and has been in existence since 1930. We are represented on a wide range of committees to ensure the concerns of anglers are heard.

Our member Angling Associations are very concerned about the effects of these proposals on their Reservoirs.

It is important for tourism and local clubs that we allow existing fish populations to prosper.

The Pricewaterhouse Coopers Report of July 2007 for DCAL on the social and economic value of angling in NI, states that all forms of angling in NI support some 780 full time equivalent jobs, and are worth some £40m p.a. to the NI economy, mostly from game angling. If these jobs/economic benefits are to be maintained and enhanced, the provision of good water quality and satisfactory fish stocks are absolutely vital for our fisheries and tourism. The following comments are made in that light.

The publication of the first State of the Environment Report for Northern Ireland in 2008, together with the introduction of annual Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics reports in 2009, means that we now have an extensive set of indicators on the Northern Ireland environment. The following are an extract from the "Conclusions & Key Challenges" from the most recent State of the Environment Report prepared by Government in 2013.

As a result we are better able to assess the effectiveness of environmental policies over the longer term and to base decisions on how we manage and protect our environment, on appropriate evidence.

The challenge of sustainable rural land use remains but it is too soon to judge the impacts of planning policy changes and agri-environment schemes. However, it is clear from new evidence from the marine environment, from biodiversity indicators and the status of our waters that key ecosystems remain under threat. A fully integrated approach to the management of our

land and water environment is needed.

Response and Opportunities

To address these challenges we need to recognise the full value of the services our environment provides in achieving a healthy economy, prosperity and well-being in all our decision-making. The key principles underpinning the way forward are already widely recognised:

1. Working to achieve resilient, diverse ecosystems capable of providing vital services while absorbing pressures and responding to change.
2. Valuing and managing natural resources to support economic and social prosperity.
3. Protecting the quality of life by reducing pollution, protecting heritage and promoting sustainable land use.
4. Taking advantage of new opportunities and developing innovative solutions that protect and enhance our environment will not only provide a clean and safe place to live but also make Northern Ireland an attractive place for investment in our key agriculture, food and tourism sectors.

With this in mind we need very careful consideration of the proposed Reservoirs Bill, The UAF is not opposed to the Bill in fact we welcome it as it brings us into line with the rest of the UK and the greater focus on human life.

We have some 140 reservoirs of which some are Council owned some belong to NI Water and approximately 28% of these are privately owned, which includes some of our members. The Federation have grave concerns about the cost of obtaining a Panel Engineers Report which could cost in the region of £10,000 as most clubs will not have the financial resources to pay such a bill. There is a real danger therefore that these type of Reservoirs will be lost as an amenity and I refer back to my previous comments on State of the Environment **Valuing and managing natural resources to support economic and social prosperity. Also develop innovative solutions that protect and enhance our environment.**

With this in mind there is a real need for Government to provide a grant Scheme to allow those clubs etc to comply with the new legislation. Otherwise you may find that clubs will declare themselves bankrupt and walk away from the reservoir leaving Government to pick up the bill anyway. All fees associated

with the legislation need to be waived in the case of clubs etc who are providing an amenity for local and tourist anglers.

This is an extract from the recent Strategic Review of Angling in Northern Ireland “Derelict Waters: One of the issues highlighted was the development of derelict waters for angling under the 1966 Fisheries Act. Derelict waters may offer the potential to increase opportunities for angling where there is a shortage of opportunities to meet the needs of local communities, which, it was suggested, is particularly acute around Belfast.

Again any loss of amenity where a shortage exists is not acceptable.

The current proposal is that a structure with the capacity to hold 10,000 cubic meters or more above the natural level of the surrounding land will be regarded as a controlled reservoir. There may be an argument to raise this to 15,000 cubic meters which would allow some reservoirs to opt out of the legislation. In addition the Department have not been able to provide the formula which has been applied for the escapement of the 10,000 cubic meters above natural land level. Many reservoirs have been created from existing lakes with the addition of a wall or walls to provide more water. If a breach occurs the reservoir will only spill that quantity of water which is above the natural land line and we have no idea how this has been calculated. In other words there appears to be a flaw in the legislation as there is going to be a quantity of water still retained within the natural lie of the land.

R F Marshall

Development Officer

Ulster Angling Federation