

Presentment to the Verderers Court 20th June 2012

1. Introduction

Official Verderer, Members of the Court, I am Fiona Macdonald BVMS MRCVS, veterinary surgeon. I have been involved with Aquaculture since 1984, and am the Secretary of the Fish Veterinary Society as well as an Honorary Life Member of the Society.

My reason for coming to the Court this morning is to raise my concerns about the potential effects of the proposed Latchmore project on the resident Sea Trout population in the Latchmore Brook.

In my professional opinion I feel that the proposed restoration does not take adequate account of the potentially serious effects on the resident Sea Trout population of Latchmore and no specific assessments have been carried out.

May I also say that my own concern is shared by a number of fish experts, including the Fish Veterinary Society President, Professor James Turnbull MRCVS, who is the Deputy Director of the University of Stirling Institute of Aquaculture and the Fish Veterinary Society Senior Vice President, Mr Peter Scott FRCVS, who has worked with DEFRA's Animal Welfare Department for many years, and is a specialist Veterinary Advisor to the Environment Agency.

2. Concerns

My concerns are as follows:-

- 2.1 Sea Trout are a protected species. They are classified as Species "of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity" covered under section 41 (England) of the NERC Act (2006) and therefore need to be taken into consideration by a public body when performing any of its functions with a view to conserving biodiversity.
- 2.2 They are classified as 'threatened'.
- 2.3 Sea Trout are also a protected species under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and a priority species for river restoration. The presence of sea trout within rivers is also a significant criterion for meeting Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) standards.
- 2.4 They are genetically pre-programmed to return to spawn where they were originally hatched. If they are prevented from doing this either by a marked change in their previous habitat, obstructions or poor water quality such as excessively high temperatures in unshaded shallow meanders, they will either try somewhere else, or they will give up and in time die. The net effect will be the long-term loss of this unique genetic material to this particular stream.
- 2.5 Sea Trout have been seen and filmed as recently as this week trying to return upstream but their way is blocked with the new dams which have deliberately been created by the recent tree felling.

3. The Message

- 3.1 There has not been any specific assessment on Latchmore Brook and the effects the proposed work, including the importation of 10,000 tonnes of gravel and stone and clay mix to the existing stream, will have on the resident and returning fish population.
- 3.2 The planned meanders are unlikely to provide a suitable habitat since there is no provision to plant and deciduous trees or other suitable vegetation to provide essential shade, and a recent Southampton University study concluded that the water temperatures in the open meanders could exceed 25°C, which would be lethal for these fish.
- 3.3 Other similar restorations such as Dames Slough have resulted in high weed and silt content in the meanders which is totally unsuitable for fish
- 3.4 During a site visit it was suggested that some gravel could be moved from the existing spawning grounds and moved to the meanders as a substitute for the existing spawning areas. However, Sea Trout are wild fish which have to spend their lives avoiding predation and other threats, so any substantial change in the familiarity of their chosen stream is likely to result in them turning back either to sea, where they will not spawn.
- 3.5 Once this genetic material has been lost from this stream, it's gone for good, and so a threatened species which hitherto has enjoyed specific protection under National and European Legislation is very much at risk because of this proposed project.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion I would urge the Verderers to reconsider their support for this project until a full, specific and appropriate Impact Assessments have been carried out which will take account of the potential effects on this precious fish, before it is lost to this stream.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this Presentment.