

S&TA AND AST BRIEF MAJOR LORDS DEBATE ON HYDROPOWER

EA Chair Lord Smith commits to maintaining balance in favour of sustainable hydropower

Lord Dear introduced a debate in the House of Lords on Tuesday, November 3rd, concerning hydropower schemes in rivers and their potential to impede the passage of migratory fish. This was especially important in the light of the Government's recent decision to delay fish passage legislation until May 2011 at the earliest.

Paul Knight of the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) and Ivor Llewelyn of the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) briefed Lord Dear for his speech, and also sent briefing papers to other peers who spoke during the debate.

Lord Dear highlighted his concerns about the delay in legislation, which had come about in order to help small businesses and landowners, who might be responsible for providing fish passes in obstructions, at a time when many are under economic pressure

"While understandable, these concerns seem misconceived," said Lord Dear. "Granting additional powers to the Environment Agency need not mean that they would immediately be used. I would in any case expect the Agency to use any new powers sensitively. But the suggested powers would enable the Agency to respond much more effectively to proposals for new hydropower schemes, and in ways that do not jeopardise the attainment of WFD objectives."

Lord Smith, Chairman of the Environment Agency, also spoke, and made some interesting comments, including; “we need to bear in mind two potentially conflicting environmental objectives: on the one hand, the quality of water, the level of flow and the ability of fish to swim up the river in the way that they would naturally wish to do; and, on the other hand, the need to encourage as much as we can the development of renewable energy resources for this country. This is a classic issue where there is a dilemma of environmental objectives. We in the Environment Agency will seek to achieve a balance wherever we can. Where we cannot, where it is impossible to have sustainable small-scale hydropower, we will say that it is not sustainable and that we should not do it. Where it is possible to achieve both objectives, we want very much to achieve them.”

Paul Knight, S&TA Chief Executive, said; “we were very grateful to Lord Dear for introducing the debate – the first fisheries based debate in the Lords since 2004. These are two very topical and vital issues as the Water Framework Directive Basin Plans come on stream in December. Lord Dear’s debate has put hydropower and fish passage together into the political arena, and gives us a great opportunity for future lobbying on behalf of our migratory fish species and the environment on which they depend.”

Ivor Llewelyn added; “It is essential that the Government and the Environment Agency act to improve the ability of fish of all species to migrate within rivers. While we regret the delay in introducing new legislation, we are pleased that in his response to Lord Dear the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Defra, Lord Davies, confirmed that The EA and government must ensure that they safeguard the

interests of fishing and protect species that might otherwise be threatened by issues such as barriers to migration.”

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) was established in 1903 to address the damage done to our rivers by the polluting effects of the Industrial Revolution. For 105 years, the Association has worked tirelessly to protect fisheries, fish stocks and the wider aquatic environment on behalf of game angling and fisheries. In 2008 it was granted charitable status. S&TA's charitable objectives empowers it to use its highly regarded influencing skills to address all issues affecting fish and the aquatic environment, backed up by strong scientific evidence from its burgeoning Science Department – a vital factor in 21st century policy and decision making processes. Its charitable status enables it to take the widest possible remit in protecting salmonid fish stocks, and everything on which they depend. www.salmon-trout.org.
2. The Atlantic Salmon Trust is a UK based organisation with Atlantic wide interests which champions the wild salmon and sea trout - it does not represent any other interests or body, only the fish themselves. Although called the 'Atlantic Salmon Trust', it is equally concerned with sea trout. Set up in 1967, the Trust address concerns many people have about the decline of fish stocks, as well as the need for practical research into the problems that have become apparent.