

## March 2009

It used to be the case that Non Government Organisations (NGOs) told Government departments and agencies where they were going wrong, but didn't necessarily suggest what they needed to do to put it right. Hollering from the sidelines, and getting supporters to do the same, was enough to justify the NGO's existence.

I think times have changed, especially if we want genuine influence in the way policies are produced and delivered. Soap box politics were all very well in the past, but I believe we have to be a bit more proactive and positive these days. We still have to be watchdogs – that bit hasn't changed – but we must back that up with credible alternatives when we think official bodies are going astray, or could do with some help. Even more positively, we have to influence policy at the formation stage, not during consultation, when most issues are already decided.

Better still, we should be able to offer evidence to support our influence, and this is where S&TA's charitable activities are really beginning to bite. Having established our Science Department, we are now collecting scientific evidence to support our arguments. We are already in a position to say to, for example, the Environment Agency (EA), we can actually help you over various issues; so turning the negative approach into a positive, and far more influential one.

I recently had a high level meeting with EA directors, where we particularly discussed the Water Framework Directive (WFD) draft River Basin Plans, which are out for consultation at the moment. Okay, so we said the usual stuff about the plans being short on ambition, and questioned some of the process leading up to the consultation, but we were then able to say exactly how we thought anglers could play their part in delivering WFD objectives through S&TA involvement.

For a start, the Flylife Partnership (FP), which operates from within S&TA and, I am proud to say, we chair, has a massive role to play in monitoring the effectiveness of measures designed to deliver good ecological status (GES) in our water bodies. The RP brings together angling/fisheries organisations, entomologists, conservationists and the Natural History Museum, with the EA, Natural England, SEPA etc, to teach sampling and identification techniques so that amateur groups can regularly monitor the water quality in their local rivers by sampling invertebrates. We already cover all EA regions and, by the end of this season, all EA areas as well. And because the monitoring groups are all volunteers, our gearing on funding is massive – in 2008, we delivered £300K's worth of monitoring for an actual spend of less than £60K.

So, we have been able to say to the EA, increase your financial and Environmental Assessment support for RP, and we will deliver monitoring data far greater than you could achieve alone. Anglers will really be playing an active role in improving the ecological status of their rivers, and the benefit – and Kudos - from that will reach far

beyond the fisheries world. Much better than sitting on the sidelines bleating that the EA don't have the resources to do their job properly!

On the strictly scientific front, S&TA is very conscious that there is no national standard set for fine sediment loads in rivers to achieve GES. The UK Technical Advisory Group (UKTAG) was unable to come up with a suitable standard, and so the 25 mg/ltr in the Freshwater Fish Directive is being used instead. Not good enough, we said, but then went out and joined forces with ADAS to set about finding a suitable way of setting standards – not nationally, but at a water body level, so that local conditions and experience could be taken in to account to deliver maximum effective control of fine sediment, one of the most serious issues affecting GES in rivers. And when Defra realised that an NGO was involved, they came on board too, and there is strong chance that this could now lead to a massive investment by the Government in seeking sedimentation measures to put into the second cycle of WFD, starting in 2015.

These are just two examples of our expanding scientific work – so much so, that we are having to take on another Science student this summer to help with the workload. So, when S&TA says that we are backing up our influencing work with sound scientific evidence, we mean it! And by supporting the Association, you are not just adding your voice to a tired old tirade of negative officialdom-bashing – you are doing something genuinely positive and proactive towards the future health of our water environment, and the fish, invertebrates and many other species which depend upon it for the existence.

As an angler, that you should make you feel good; it does me.