



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

S&TA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE, **PAUL KNIGHT**, OUTLINES THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE ASSOCIATION'S WORK.

During recent discussions over hydropower, it has become obvious that many people do not understand the difference between angling and fisheries. To many there is no difference at all. To others, especially sea anglers, fishermen are commercial operators who sell their catch for a living. However, in the freshwater environment, fisheries has a very different meaning, at least to NGOs such as S&TA when we are trying to influence national decision makers.

Fisheries basically refers to the resource. In other words, it is the rivers, streams, stillwaters, and the life which depends upon them for their existence, especially the fish. It is the whole aquatic ecosystem upon which fish survive, and so the Environment Agency's statutory duty is to 'maintain, improve and develop' fisheries as ecosystems, not necessarily as just a resource for us to exploit. Angling, on the other hand, is an activity which relies upon that resource for its existence. The two are inextricably linked as far as angling is concerned, but fisheries are still relevant without angling in terms of environmental management and conservation issues. Therefore, anglers can influence decision makers over policies affecting fisheries which can be legitimately seen as conservation based, rather than merely the demands of a single interest group.

Delivery of measures to achieve 'good ecological status' under the EU Water

Framework Directive (WFD) began in January, following publication of the final River Basin Plans in December 2009. In theory at least, WFD provides a tremendous opportunity for anglers to achieve benefits to fish stocks and their habitats. The challenge for us is to fit fisheries into the much wider aquatic environmental scene, and realise that many of our objectives can be achieved by influencing issues such as water resource allocation, water quality, hydropower generation, diffuse agricultural pollution, urban run-off and the like.

FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Importantly, by working on these issues, we do so for the public good, even though we also act under 'enlightened self interest'. This makes our arguments even more powerful, especially if we support our policies with sound, peer reviewed scientific evidence. S&TA has operated like this for most of our 107 years of history, but it has become the bedrock of our work since we achieved charitable status two years ago. By employing a scientist, we add much more credibility to our influencing role, so much so that our future plans include expanding our Science Department to address the increasing amount of work required from it.

The other aspect of fisheries work is that, although it can be targeted at individual species, such as the salmonids, the majority of environmental issues



Above: Paul Knight.

benefit all species within a river system. Building a fish pass at a hydropower unit will help salmon and sea trout reach upland spawning areas, but if it is constructed properly, eels will disperse over a wider area and coarse fish will migrate within the river, a vital component of their life cycles which was not widely recognised until comparatively recently.

David Bellamy called anglers the 'eyes and ears' of the river bank, and said that, without our work over the years, many of our rivers would still be running sewers. Our future influence needs to be just as energetic, but much more science based to underline our credibility. If we get it right, everyone will benefit, not just anglers, although anglers will continue to gain plaudits for our environmental credentials.

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