



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

S&TA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE, **PAUL KNIGHT**, REFLECTS ON A TUMULTUOUS 2011 AND IDENTIFIES THE KEY ISSUES FOR 2012

It has been a tumultuous time in the Association and the aquatic world since the spring issue of *Gamefisher*. A new office opened with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) in April has enabled us to work closely with GWCT's fisheries and land management scientists on issues vital to efficient delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives over the coming years. And events out in the field have highlighted just how much work is needed if we are to get anywhere near achieving those objectives, with low flows in many rivers accentuating the problems of excessive water abstraction, diffuse pollution, fish passage, hydropower and so on.

We cover all of these issues elsewhere in the magazine, along with our continuing high profile work on salmon farming and mixed stock netting. But it is the state of our rivers that gives rise to great concern at the moment, and the subsequent effect on resident freshwater species, especially wild brown trout.

Trout are topical creatures at the moment, with the Environment Agency (EA)'s Trout and Grayling Strategy still proving controversial. Again we cover this issue within the magazine, together with our own members' survey of individual perceptions as to the health of wild trout stocks. Whether or not to stock triploids has cornered the discussion pages of many magazine articles of late, and our members are still split on that subject. However, there seems overwhelming agreement that, whatever the rights or wrongs of triploids, the main problems affecting the wellbeing of our wild trout stocks stem from a generally degraded aquatic environment that has meant only 26 percent of our waterways reached good ecological status under the EA's WFD designation. This is not a percentage of which to be proud, and should be of greatest alarm to those of us genuinely concerned for the future wellbeing of our wild brown trout populations.

There is still some scepticism over the political will to truly protect the water environment. The recently published Defra Environment White Paper was well



Above: Paul Knight.

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received by those involved in terrestrial conservation, but there was precious little to encourage those of us interested in fish, rivers and lakes. We are promised better things in the forthcoming Water White Paper, but we remain cynics waiting to be proved wrong; there is little in the ongoing management of our waterways to make us feel otherwise at the moment. Precious water is wasted, silt continues to pour into

our rivers and hydropower schemes are licensed by a regulator more interested in spurious 'green energy production' headlines than in the reality of the potential damage to fish stocks.

All is not gloom, though. We have seen how the power of a good environmental lawyer can shake official entrenched views,

and legal pressure, backed up by sound science, will assuredly be a strong S&TA weapon to support our future lobbying work!

Meanwhile, thanks to all our volunteers for their great work at both national and local level, and to the continuing support of the Fishmongers' Company. Despite concerns over the state of our watery natural resources, I have never felt stronger that S&TA is having a major influence over many issues, nor have I felt more confident that the pressure will eventually result in long term change for the good!