

**Title of Meeting:** Wales Fisheries Forum

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**Date of Meeting:** 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020      Time: 10.00    Venue: Skype

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**Present:** David Mee (NRW)  
Emma Keenan (NRW)  
Patrick Lindley (NRW)  
Peter Gough (NRW)  
Robert Vaughan (NRW)  
Steve Ormerod (Chair, NRW)  
Adrian Simpson (Countryside Alliance) for Rachel Evans  
Alan Winstone (Afonydd Cymru)  
Chris White (Campaign for the Protection of Welsh Fisheries; North Wales LFGs)  
Creighton Harvey (SW LFGs)  
Dylan Roberts (Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust)  
James Legge (Countryside Alliance)  
John O'Connor (Angling Cymru) for Carl Tonner  
Julian Bray (Welsh Government)  
Mark Owen (Angling Trust)  
Mark Tilling (Welsh Government)  
Nicola Teague (IFM)  
Paul Edwards (Welsh Salmon and Trout Angling Association)  
Richard Garner Williams (Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru)  
Shaun Leonard (Wild Trout Trust) for Denise Ashton  
Stephen Marsh Smith (Afonydd Cymru)  
Tony Harrington (DCWW)

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**Apologies:** Ruth Jenkins (NRW)

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## 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

- Steve Ormerod (SO) opened the meeting, welcomed several new participants and deputies and gave a brief overview of how the meeting would-be run-in order that participants could get the most out of using Skype.

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## 2. Admin Matters

- Minutes from November 2019 were approved – any outstanding actions were addressed.
  - Approval of minutes is now to be streamlined – draft minutes are to be sent to members within two weeks of each meeting and then amended where necessary prior to approval
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via email comment. If no comments are received within two weeks of despatch, the minutes will be approved to enable them to be circulated more widely and more quickly.

- The forum was reminded that members are expected to discuss the issues to be raised at the meetings with others, where appropriate, so that their views may also be brought to the meetings. Members were asked to note that documents marked as 'draft' or 'not for further circulation' are not to be passed on - including minutes prior to approval.
- The ToR has been amended to reflect the current membership list. Reference to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) has been added to reflect issues around prevention of public sharing of members private email addresses Email addresses may be shared amongst the forum only if consent has been given, and email addresses from forum must not be shared publicly.
  - **ACTION** ALL – please consider, and then if you agree, sign and return Annex 2 form from the ToR to EK. Electronic copies and signatures are acceptable.
- New membership – NRW supports representation of all LFGs (Local Fishery Groups) at the WFF. One new nominated LFG member, CH, recently joined the forum to represent LFGs in SW Wales, and existing WFF members SMS and CW agreed to represent SE and N Wales respectively.as representatives. Some LFGs have since expressed a desire for specific representation and this will be discussed at forthcoming meetings of each LFG and reported back to the WFF.
  - SMS – we should only be accepting representatives from groups where appropriate process is followed.
  - **ACTION** CH and PG to discuss SW LFG representation; PG to report back on any nominations from LFGs

It was noted that there is currently there is no overall ToR for LFGs.

- **ACTION** DM and PG to develop a working ToR for LFGs.

It was noted that NRW CEO Clare Pillman will attend the second combined LFG meetings in SE Wales, for Taff, Usk and Wye members, on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.

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### 3. Introduction of new member

- Dylan Roberts from GWCT gave a presentation on GWCT Salmon & Trout research work – this will be circulated to members with the minutes.
- Questions:
  - PG When carrying out the netting procedure described, the commercial netsmen would have presumably been doing their best to catch sea trout and this might over-represent the scale of bycatch in the fishery
    - DR – We're looking to catch fish for genetics and were fishing in areas where fishermen could fish and were likely to catch sea trout as bycatch. We will seek to scale this work up next year off the North Cornwall and North Devon coast. Difficult to quantify bycatch. Looking to see if there needs to be tighter regulation.
  - PG Could you share the evidence from the North Devon report?
  - Shaun Leonard: Where is the information from SAMARCH available?
    - Still in the data collection phase and this will be pulled together and put into a report.

- **ACTION** DR to provide information referred to above.

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#### 4. Agricultural Regulations

- Bob Vaughan from NRW gave a presentation and updated the Forum on Water Regulations:
    - September 2016 Welsh Government reviewed NVZ;
    - December 2017 WG decided to go for an all Wales approach;
    - November 2018 WG decided that regulations would come into place in January 2020;
    - 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020 Minister made a statement on the draft regulations for stakeholders. A final decision as to whether these will be introduced is yet to be made and is likely to be delayed due to Covid19.
    - The DRAFT regulations may be found here:  
[Draft Water Resources \(Control of Agricultural Pollution\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#)
    - The draft regs include a requirement for WG to review them and consider any proposals for an alternative suite of measures within 18 months of regulations coming into force to help regs fit better and be more effective.
    - The WLMF sub group members put forward their comments on the regulations and the Regulatory Impact assessment (RIA) prepared to support the Regulations. These comments parallel the earlier report provided by the group to the Minister. This report developed 5 components, including regulatory improvements, which all the members of the sub group believe are needed to tackle agricultural pollution and nutrient management.  
[Progress report by the Wales Land Management Forum \(WLMF\) sub-group on agricultural pollution](#)
    - WG has been developing a replacement for the Basic Payment Scheme, the Glastir Scheme and the Economic Resilience Scheme to promote a Sustainable Land Management Scheme which would need to dovetail with the new regulations;
    - An all Wales approach: -
      - places requirements on farmers to invest in storage;
      - places restrictions on when they can spread;
      - only focuses on nitrogen.
    - The RIA undertaken appears to suggest that the regulations will primarily reduce the production of greenhouse gases rather than impacts on water quality. It had been commended that all nutrient management should be covered.
    - There are concerns that farms will look to avoid slurry produced indoors by putting stock out over winter to reduce slurry production and this could create an unforeseen increased pollution risk which would have negative impacts on soil and water resources.
  - COMMENTS:
    - MO – Transition period without regulation, how long will it be?
      - A: It will be 18 months. The transition period will be slightly longer as it will be expensive and time consuming for farms to build new infrastructure.
    - RG – Main comment is of some dismay. The initial announcement came from the Minister without consultation and was that regs would be brought in by Jan 2020. But
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there has been more delay and an additional transition period. Will we ever see anything realistic brought in that will make a difference?

- A: The regulations are a step forward but there is still a lot of work to do before we see any impact on reducing pollution risk..

DR – is there capacity within the guidelines, or to develop guidelines, to prevent farmers from upscaling their production and have a greater number of animals on their fields unless they have the capacity to deal with the additional slurry storage?

- A: This has been discussed at WLMF sub group and within NRW and we are reviewing the existing legislation to explore how we may use the powers more effectively rather than waiting until a pollution has occurred. We are looking at a wide range of issues, including planning and regulation, so that we can put into place controls that will work. Once we can identify gaps that need to be filled, we can approach WG with a means to fix this so that we can use the regulation we have to its best effect

MO - is this regulation going to be seen as a measure in river basin management plans?

- A: We use WFD monitoring as a way of identifying problems across Wales, homing in on those areas to work with farmers to prevent these issues and to help farmers to understand the impact of their actions.

SL – Was concerned that NRW appeared to have consented the dumping of milk which is being dumped in large quantities

- A: The Covid19 response has had a marked impact on farming. Many farms have contracts with processing plants and those who have contracts with the hospitality market have seen demand stop overnight which is why you've seen news items about the possibility of milk being poured away. Many farms already have a waste permit (U10) to allow disposal of milk on site but there are controls on what and how this is safely done. This is a last resort action. WG, with support from NRW, have also been working with processing plants to find alternative markets for this milk to be used. Where you have been seeing dumping it has mostly been going into slurry tanks and where it is spread on land it must be greatly diluted. The waste hierarchy comes into play very early on before produce is disposed of.

SMS – A comment: throughout the time on WLMF it is evident that it is not representative of the full picture: members are either NRW or farmers and only 2 NGO members are there. There has been a history of voluntary schemes over regulation. Teams have identified diffuse pollution problems at many farms and there isn't a mechanism to deal effectively with slurry when they are over-capacity. We as a fisheries group depend on good water quality which isn't being tackled appropriately. The regulations in place are not enough to control the problems that are ongoing.

- A: The WLMF is the only place where we are trying to pull together an approach to deal with this and to guide the sector to see that what is happening is not acceptable. Not just regulation but there are other methods being considered. Regulation needs to be firm enough to deal with those who are not following guidance and advice. There also needs to be a level of professionalism in the

sector. We need to work with the sector so that they can see the impacts of their actions rather than solving their problems for them. The forum itself was set up the same way as this forum and has brought in other members to give us another perspective. This forum has come about as the sector itself also sees that there needs to be a change.

- There was strong and resolute feeling from the forum that the announcement was disappointing, both in terms of the proposed regulations and the further delays in bringing in effective regulation and the resources to ensure we see a sustained reduction in pollution incidents and diffuse pollution from agriculture.
  - **ACTION:** SO will write to the CEO and Chairman of NRW to express the angst and deep frustration that is felt in this forum so that they can bring this up with the Minister.
- CH: The work that has been done is under the assumption that the pollution problem is wholly a nutrients issue. The minutes from the WLMF subgroup have been published up until September 2019. As the subsequent minutes are yet to be approved (awaiting information from WG) and placed on the website however, (he could report that) those meetings (October and November) picked up on other issues including bad practice. There is a transition period in relation to the new regulations, and there is also the review period. Will we be satisfied that those two provisions will have been enforced once the 18 months closes?
  - A: The 18 months won't start until the pandemic ends**ACTION:** SO, PG and RV to pursue the points that SMS and CH raised outside the meeting, to raise the issues to NRW Chair/CEO and to inform Welsh Government.
- SO also concerned over ability to detect issues in our waterbodies but also any beneficial effects of any changes implemented.

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## 5. Fish-eating Birds

PL gave a presentation on the NRW Fish-eating Birds Advisory Group set in the context of the previous work undertaken by the Group and of the need to reconvene the Group as part of the review of NRW's approach to the shooting and trapping of wild birds in Wales

- Reference was made to the [Wild Trout Trust FEB Paper](#).

- **COMMENTS**

SMS – in this presentation there was a slowing down in bird population growth. Do you think this is down to a decrease fish populations or to recording? Do you think there may be a legal challenge from those whose income comes from fisheries if no action is taken?

- A: The trend data is sourced from the BTO's UK Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Wales Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). The next stage will be to look at Wales only data. The UK BBS trends suggests a decrease in breeding goosanders and cormorants but the WeBS (Wales) trends show increasing wintering cormorant and goosander, though we have to be careful of wintering trends as WeBS do not sufficiently cover all inland waterways. All statutory nature conservation bodies (SNCBs), including NRW are under

close legal scrutiny from current campaign groups, such as Wild Justice, at the moment and it seems to be in relation to challenges on any weakness or our interpretation of current environmental legislation.

DR – I never saw FEBs in SW Wales, but now they are everywhere so there has been an expansion in numbers and range. Can you clarify the review is going to be a literature review of current work and for the whole of the UK?

- A: Final agreement of the scope of the delivery programme is very much down to the NRW FEB Advisory Group.. Both policy and evidence reviews have been undertaken in Scotland and England, we have assessed these reviews for their applicability to Wales to help us determine the indicative scope of our work in Wales

AW – You refer to non-lethal methods of controlling FEBS, will this involve habitat quality and protecting habitat?

- A: As in any licencing of lethal controls, NRW as the competent licencing authority must be satisfied that there are no other satisfactory solution and dependent on the licence type the applicant must provide evidence that suitable, legal non-lethal methods for control have been tried. NRW has reviewed and assessed that there are no satisfactory solution when we issued our new general licences on 1 January 2019,. With regard to FEBs, individual licence applicants generally feel that birds quickly become habituated to non-lethal scaring methods and are just moved further down/up stream.

PG – There is a lot of experience using habitat adjustments to protect fish, largely in still water fisheries. We will be making use of long experience in that field, so we won't be starting from scratch. We are also looking at wild and stocked fisheries as there are also problems in non-salmonid fisheries across Wales. We have seen the activities of Wild Justice, is there any scope to engage them with this process?

- A: We have extended invitations to engage with Wild Justice, firstly as an opening meeting to understand their general concerns. They feel that environmental legislation has not been legally abided by. Initial response was favourable, but since then they have declined to meet with NRW. It is something we should possibly pursue to engage in positive dialogue. This approach would be sensible during our wider review.

SO – there is a conservation issue around salmonid protection under the Habitat Regulations, and this seriously tests an organisation making a position on controlling FEBs.

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## 6. Plan of Action for Salmon and Sea Trout – Paper

- The PoA represents contributions from this Forum's working group and from LFG and other stakeholders brought together on this topic. The PoA has now been signed off by the minister. NRW would like to thank all those that took time and engaged in the process to help produce the plan.
  - There are 9 'themes' represented by the all-important Action Tables - The issues covered are: -
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1. Evidence – understanding the status of stocks;
2. Managing exploitation;
3. Protecting stocks through effective enforcement;
4. Tackling physical habitat constraints in the freshwater environment;
5. Safeguarding water quality and quantity;
6. Addressing land management, and associated risks to water quality;
7. Addressing predation on salmonids: fish-eating birds and seals;
8. Understanding marine Pressures;
9. Understanding new and emerging potential pressures.

## COMMENTS

RGW – We need to aim to return to sustainable harvest, relevant for West Wales fisheries (nets). Not just socio-economical but protected geographical indication also and value of migratory fisheries to local economies. Include final ambition of returning to harvestable population for all methods not just rod and line.

SO – Need to consider not just resourcing the plan but the potential investment of the plan too.

DR – avoid falling into trap of blaming climate change. There are lots of other pressures that we can target.

DM – in the action tables we are not blaming climate change, but also lots of other issues: effective stock management and exploitation controls, ensuring our stocks are sustainable. There is focus on environmental pressures such as water quality, agricultural issues and habitat as well as bird predation.

We will need to consider what reporting we will be doing on the plan of action, both to Welsh Government and the pivotal role the WFF will play in progressing the plan and future implementation of the actions.

The plan is now publicly available, will be circulated and discussed in the forthcoming rounds of Local Fishery Groups. It will also be available through our web site.

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## 7. Provisional Stock Assessments – Papers

- These are still in draft format: we will share more widely once these have been confirmed.
- The annual report to ICES on the status of salmon stocks is normally published by CEFAS at the end of May.  
**ACTION** We will circulate to the Forum along with the two summary documents for salmon and sea trout that we provide each year.
- These assessments do not form part of WFD classification and focuses solely on the adult component of the stock. They were implemented following Ministerial Direction and are an integral part of our reporting to ICES and commitment to NASCO. They are based on estimates of spawner abundance against conservation limits – and this metric isn't considered in the WFD process. These assessments are catchment-scale rather than for individual waterbodies. WFD only considers the juvenile component of the stock.

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## COMMENTS

SMS – when you were considering bringing in the byelaws for salmon, it was more optimistic than it is now for sea trout, will you bring in more restrictions for sea trout?

- A: PG - this is an annual process which is extremely time consuming. We will also be looking at the decision structure. As and when we need, we identify a need for further restraint, such as that suggested, we will not hesitate to bring in stakeholders and take action that is needed.

AW – Looking at catchments around the Llyn Peninsula, the assessments are more optimistic, but they only have small salmon catches which may give a more misleading picture of improvement?

- A: PG - This has to be interpreted carefully and this is why we are also looking at a more sophisticated stock assessment tool that uses juvenile stocks. There will be a report on that work.

SO – Looking at these maps is worrying and looking at the pressures we have it won't be long that we can hang on to our salmon and sea trout stocks in Wales.

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## 8. Angling Promotion

- DM provided a brief update on the Fishing in Wales Project and played an example promotional video.
  - The 'Fishing in Wales' website is nearing completion and content is currently being uploaded. Were it not for Covid-19 it would have been launched this month;
  - Therefore, due to the current situation the site launch will be delayed until it is appropriate for us to promote angling again.
  - The initiative has been funded by Visit Wales (VW) and NRW. VW has scaled down their own promotional activity in light of COVID 19 and has advised the project to do the same.
  - Upon launch, the website will include information on all angling club waters, private fisheries and sea fishing locations in Wales (a total of over 1200 entries).
  - Some parts of the project are already up and running more information in the links below:

[Fishing Wales Facebook](#)

[Fishing in Wales Instagram](#)

[Wales Fishing Instagram](#)

[Angling Trust Fishing in Wales Info \(news release\)](#)

### COMMENTS

CW – Would like to highlight an issue with NRW's website concerning simplification of the byelaws. The information is extremely difficult to find: i.e. how close you can fish to obstructions. This information is under 'safety near obstructions' rather than restrictions by river.

- A: Due to the nature of site traffic being mainly through mobile devices, the site needs to be laid out in this way to improve accessibility. It can be improved, and we will continue to make adjustments to help improve it.

SO – Images on the video and often in angling magazines can often portray images of anglers of similar demographics. What can be done to increase diversity of representation in the way we promote angling?

- A: DM - yes this is something we are mindful of, and there are various initiatives to take people fishing. We will ensure that the project address this.



MO – There are members who would fit the missed demographics that would be willing to be in videos or photographs. All countries are seeing a decline in rod licences, but it is improving in countries where they have done similar tourist style initiatives.

PE – are there any initiatives to target youths to encourage them to take up fishing?

- A: DM - at the moment there are not many. Unfortunately, we only have a few projects and initiatives around angling participation.

JO – Groups in SW and N Wales are addressing these issues, encouraging youth participation, although we were not involved in this project. These schemes are funded through Sport Wales and NRW

There are a number of issues around introducing youths to angling to be considered, and clubs are struggling to engage with younger members. There is a lack of uptake in areas where there are more options to keep youths busy.

Additionally, with the lack of fish it is difficult to hold their attention and encourage them to take up the sport. Angling coaches are being deterred by the qualifications required by Sport Wales due to costs and the expectations that come with having a qualification. However, Level 1 is important as this covers child protection.

SMS – the uptake in angling is correlated with the numbers of fish. As the numbers of fish continue to fall, so will angling uptake. If the rivers aren't in a good condition, they won't be very appealing.

JO – This is also reflecting in sea angling. We tend to take youngsters to coarse fisheries where they can much more easily catch fish which gets them more involved and keener on angling as they can catch fish.

AW – EA used to put a lot of resource into angling participation which has now ended, is there likely to be a similar scheme? FiW doesn't address the work on the ground required.

- A: PG - there has been some investment from Visit Wales however these initiatives are only as good as the upkeep.

SL - reflecting on the stock status maps. When those maps land on WG desks, do you sense any appreciation among policy makers of the enormity of the picture they paint? We might look at them as anglers and/or conservationists but of course they're indicative of a massive environmental issue.

- A: JB - WG have seen the status maps and the direction of travel. For this reason, the Minister asked NRW to bring together the Plan of Action and additional resources have recently been offered.

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## 9. Updates from Other Fora – Papers (taken as read)

- [Wales Water Management Forum](#)

COMMENT: SMS – Planning needs to be considered to prevent too many chicken sheds being built as these don't just affect air quality but also water quality.

- [Wales Land Management Forum](#)

- COMMENT: CH – there is an amount of evidence that will change views on agricultural pollution, and it is important that the industry changes the way that matters should be addressed.
- See previous comments in Section 4

- [National Access Forum for Wales](#)

– COMMENTS:

SMS – access to navigation on waterways is a concern at the moment as we need to find a solution to this ongoing problem. The consideration of any future access needs

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to take into consideration riparian owners views. There is an opportunity to change things but not take the attitude that there should be no activity on rivers but outline areas that are more suited to these activities.

- RGW – No specific mention that biodiversity of freshwater and conservation should take priority over access.
- CW – It's not anglers trying to arrange voluntary access agreements but other members of the access forum who refuse to engage unless they are allowed 24/7 access 365 days a year. There needs to be more emphasis to protect spawning fish that are continuously disturbed by adventure activities prior to them being able to spawn. This needs to be addressed. There have been angling byelaws to protect fish, but it needs to go further to protect the fish once they return to the river. I am concerned that fish are not being fully protected especially when they are vulnerable in the small upland streams.
  - NOTE: PG – this is featured as an action in the PoA
- SMS – Access has been successfully agreed in some areas noting however, that not all parties had been involved.

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## 10. Other Updates

- Government directions in relation to Covid19 and outdoor activities has effectively closed fishing. The requirements on social distancing mean you should not be leaving your house in order to go fishing recreationally. We have received a number of reports of people fishing: these issues have been passed onto the police rather than NRW enforcement and they have dealt with some of them.

See:

[Angling Trust Covid19 Support Hub](#)

This is a [good](#) resource of guidance and information for anglers and angling clubs.

[Whilst](#) primarily aimed at English anglers it also contains information relevant to Wales:

“We must all do what is required of us by the Government for the benefit of our own health and that of our communities, and we should therefore refrain from fishing and work together to fight this pandemic and save lives.”

See also:

<https://www.anglingcymru.org.uk/>

- Licence sales have been much reduced since the Covid 19 restrictions were introduced. NRW are currently discussing with EA the implications of this, as this will effect the rod licence income to NRW for fisheries work. Once measures are lifted there will be communications around buying licences and getting people out angling again. There have also been some enquires on rebates for fishing licences and as it stands nothing is in place, but this is being discussed with EA. Following discussion, the general view of members is that they would not support any approach to refund fishing licence fees, as the income from licences is vital for positive work and supporting fisheries. However, there may be a need to consider a different approach for fishing leases and angling clubs.
- The [NASCO Implementation Plan](#) is currently being revised, largely in relation to aquaculture matters that are not relevant to Wales.

**ACTION** To be circulated when finalised

The annual progress report is in draft (draft was circulated with original meeting content (members are requested not to circulate further). This will be finalised soon.

**ACTION:** NRW will circulate final copy as soon as possible

#### COMMENT

CW – there has been a stock assessment working group set up, has there been any input from angling clubs or NGO interests?

- A: DM – There are no NGOs on that group. Our commitments to review the stock assessment were set out in the implementation plan and once this has been completed, we will be able to seek comments.

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#### 11.AOB

- CH – Concerns regarding Incident Reporting. Since 2016 incidents have been reported however incident/reference numbers have not been received as a matter of course - they often need to be asked for. This can create a feeling of mistrust of NRW on the ground. It would help engender greater confidence in the system and NRW if the reference numbers were given out automatically without asking for them. – reassuring the callers that the incident was being logged and acted upon.
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  - A: Agreed that reference numbers should be given as a matter of recourse when reporting incidents, but callers should request them if not offered.
- **ACTION:** NRW - DM and PG, to raise issue with incident management team to look at protocol and to review this.
- MO – There has been an Angling Pathway Plan developed to prevent the spread of INNS (Invasive non-native species), can we discuss actions from this in our next meeting?
- Date of next meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> November (proposed).
  - Members generally gave positive feedback from the Skype meeting noting that in these unprecedented times face to face meetings are not possible.
  - Venue of next meeting to be determined in future and dependant upon restrictions on social distancing being relaxed

#### CLOSING COMMENT

- JO Closing comments: regarding agriculture regulations
    - Voluntary measures don't work.
    - Will new regulations be policed?
    - Minister is responsible for both the environment and land use which are a conflict of interest.
  - CH – Commented that enforceability should not affect whether you bring in regulations or not.
-