

FACT Media Release

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Anglers call on Canoe Union to get real

Anglers expressed their disappointment that the British Canoe Union is continuing to campaign for unregulated access to rivers when appropriate local agreements are being shown to work. Following an Early Day Motion that went nowhere in 2007, the BCU have now again secured the support of John Grogan, MP for Selby, for yet another EDM (No. 1331). Ministers have repeatedly made it very clear that the Government does not and will not support unfettered access to rivers and canals.

For example, the Environment Minister Jonathan Shaw made a statement in the House of Commons on 6 February 2008: *“The Government share canoeists’, and other user groups’, aspirations for more and better access to inland water and have been working, through our agencies, to deliver this over a number of years. The Government’s view is that a statutory right of access to inland waterways is not appropriate. The evidence indicates that the demand for access would more effectively be met by a targeted approach, which involves identifying where access is needed, and then creating access agreements with the landowner and other interested parties.”*

While the BCU continues to maintain a dogmatic position demanding access to all areas, at all times, free of charge, the reality on the river bank is that local joint access agreements are working and proliferating. New agreements have recently been signed on the Dee, Wye and Usk, and webcams installed to make it clear when canoeing is allowed. Anglers and riparian owners are very keen to work with local canoe clubs to draw up these agreements, but this positive work is being damaged by the BCU’s stance, which is generating misunderstanding and ill feeling.

Unregulated canoe access could be very damaging to local economies reliant on income from angling, which is worth £3bn each year to the UK economy. It would also impact on the riparian rights of angling clubs and landowners and could damage delicate ecosystems which need to be protected at particular times. Each river has a unique flow regime, array of sensitive habitats and faces particular local issues. To legislate nationally for such a local issue would be quite wrong.

Anglers spend hundreds of millions of pounds each year maintaining and improving rivers to protect fish and other wildlife. They pay £21m in rod licences to contribute to the Environment Agency’s work protecting fisheries. Angling clubs and riparian owners have spent billions buying the angling and access rights to rivers.

Jim Glasspool, Chairman of Fisheries and Angling Conservation Trust, said: “The BCU’s demand for unregulated, free access, without making any contribution to the maintenance or improvement of the resource is unrealistic. It is an organisation that seems to be increasingly out of touch with its membership and we urge them to focus instead on supporting locally-agreed joint access agreements”

FACT is asking anglers and riparian owners to write to their local MP re-stressing the need for local managed agreements for access to rivers. You can find your MP easily at <http://www.writetothem.com/> and write to him or her directly from that website or at <http://www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm>. An outline letter is available at www.factuk.co.uk

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