

Welsh Government reported to European Commission over agricultural pollution in rivers

Afonydd Cymru, the representative body for Wales's six Rivers Trusts, has today submitted a complaint to the European Commission (EC) about the Welsh Government's performance on managing agricultural pollution. The NGO alleges that the government has failed to put appropriate regulation, enforcement and other measures and support in place to comply with standards set by European environmental legislation. The Water Framework Directive states that deteriorations in water quality must not happen and the UK government has already included the Directive in our own legislation.

Over past decade, the dairy and beef industry has intensified and the poultry industry has expanded by over 1000% in Wales. The complaint claims that national policy and local government planning has consistently avoided the requirement for applicants to put in controls to avoid consequential water pollution. It goes on to argue that huge quantities of slurry and poultry manure are spread on farm land and that the rules and guidelines governing how this should be done are invariably broken. These state that spreading on slopes, in wet weather and during winter should be avoided and limited amounts only should be spread.

However, the complaint focusses on damage to the Special Areas of Conservation rivers: Tywi, Cleddau, Teifi and Wye as well as other catchments in West Wales. It claims that spreading has taken place almost daily since Christmas and in quantities far above recommended or safe levels. Welsh Government had previously promised to act and agreed that whatever is put in place will apply right across Wales. Despite this, the complaint states that little more than lax, unenforced voluntary arrangements remain and another winter of slurry spreading will again have polluted these rivers.

Commenting on the complaint to the EC, **Dr Stephen Marsh-Smith OBE**, Chief Executive Officer of Afonydd Cymru said: “Despite Wales having some of the best environmental legislation in the world, we have some of the poorest outcomes for our rivers. No thought is given as to how the intensification in dairy, beef or poultry industry will affect our environment. It is now a familiar sight to see excessive algal growth and bright green rivers in the summer wherever this type of farming takes place. These are symptoms of excessive phosphate levels resulting from the spreading of manure on an industrial scale. The smell locally can be intolerable to many people”

He added: “The promise of sustainable management of our natural resources has not been applied to farming. Valuable fish populations, especially salmon, have declined to such an extent that Natural Resources Wales has produced a draconian set of bylaws. Sadly, these will not deal with the cause of the problem and fisheries in parts of Wales will simply cease altogether.

The cost of water purification is borne by the water rate payers, so here in Wales, the polluter doesn't pay and instead is allowed a competitive advantage by cutting costs and using rivers to dispose of unwanted effluent.”

Ends:

Notes for Editors:

1. For more information on the complaint on agricultural pollution in Welsh rivers and for photos, please contact Stephen Marsh-Smith, Chief Executive Officer of Afonydd Cymru on 07812 118 065 or stephen@afonyddcymru.org
2. Afonydd Cymru is the umbrella organisation and representative of Wales' six Rivers Trusts, who in turn deliver projects that help to restore our rivers. Wales once had some of the best salmon and sea trout fishing in the country but this has been badly affected by pollution, especially in the west, northeast and Anglesey. Many letters have been exchanged with Welsh Government concerning pollution but the situation has progressively worsened.

Afonydd Cymru believes only robust regulation/legislation and enforcement will bring about any meaningful change.

More details at www.afonyddcymru.org pictures of pollution:

<http://afonyddcymru.org/what-are-the-issues-facing-our-rivers>

3. Progress has already being made by Rivers Trusts in Wales who have developed schemes to support farmers with pragmatic solutions to reduce pollution while helping to maintain business sustainability

4. The EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD) came into force in 2000. This created a classification system for streams and rivers, taking account of a broad range of parameters including fish, invertebrates and plant life, algae (Phytobenthos) as well as phosphate, nitrate and dissolved oxygen levels. The status of each parameter is combined to give an overall health classification which can range from Bad, Poor, Moderate, Good to High.

For more information on the directive, please see here:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html

4. For more information on Welsh Government, please see here: <http://gov.wales/?lang=en>

5. For more information on Natural Resources Wales, please see here:

<https://naturalresources.wales/splash?orig=%2f&lang=cy>
