

DEVON AVON WATER QUALITY GROUP

Notes of a meeting at Follaton House, Totnes: Monday 1st June 2015

Attendance:

Stuart Watts – Chair (SW)
Kelvin Broad (KB)
Glenis Pewsey (GP)
Roger Furniss (RF)
Chris Klee (CK)
Scott West (SCW)
Trevor Cronin (TC)
John Roberts (JR)
Mike Cooper (MC)

Representing:

Chair, Aune Conservation Association (ACA)
Environment Agency (EA) - Fisheries Technical Specialist
South West Water (SWW) – Resources Strategist
South West Rivers Association
Formerly of SW Fisheries Advisory Committee; Chair, Kingsbridge NH Society
Education & Development Manager (WRT)
EA Catchment Coordinator – South Devon
Chair, Avon Fishing Association (AFA)
AFA

Apologies:

Nigel Mortimer (NM) South Devon AONB
Peter Marsh (PM) ACA
Bruce Stockley (BS) Head of Fisheries, WRT
Peter Downes (PD) Plymouth Univ., Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences

1. **Welcome & Introductions** TC is standing in, temporarily, for Emma-Rose Herrera.

2. **DAG, SHRImp & South Devon Catchment Partnership (SDCP)**

SW reminded the meeting of the origins of DAG in the EA's request for 'grass roots' support to meet Water Framework Directive (WFD) standards for water quality in the Avon based on the original Waterbody Information Pack - available on the ACA website at <http://auneconservation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Avon-WIP-10.01.11.pdf>. He stated that SHRImp had ended on 31st March and thanked SCW (project manager) for his excellent practical contribution to progress since his arrival, especially on diminishing the barriers to fish movement. Early problems with project organisation and timing had meant that some of the other work, e.g. fish tagging, had not been completed according to the original proposal. A detailed written report on SHRImp is currently in preparation and is expected "soon".

ACTION: BS/SCW

Whilst continuation of work on water releases from the Avon dam, on gravel augmentation and on river bank/land management is planned to continue under different funding (see below), the fish tracking programme and electro-fishing will need to be funded from, as yet, unidentified sources if they are to continue.

During its first year, the new SDCP is likely to focus on nutrient management in the Kingsbridge/Salcombe Estuary and Slapton Ley with some possible spin-off for phosphate reduction in the Avon. *(Note from NM following the DAG meeting: The South Devon Catchments Partnership (SDCP) is preparing a South Devon Catchments Action Plan – including all the catchments and sub-catchments between the Yealm and Teign. Olivia Cresswell (WRT) is coordinating that at the moment and is initially using the outcomes of the catchment workshops that were held last October, the outstanding rivers improvement actions, etc. to form the main structure of the Action Plan. The actions proposed will be prioritised and naturally there is a question of funding these).*

i) Devon Avon map

At the SHRImp PAG meeting in November 2014, it was agreed that the EA would produce an up-to-date map of the Avon showing the assignment of Waterbody nos. to the different river stretches of the Avon catchment. TC agreed to complete a simple version (Appendix 1).

ACTION: TC

In addition, SCW would enquire about the possibilities and cost of creating an inter-active, layered pdf document for the Devon Avon to encompass all available information e.g. delivery, status, opportunities, etc.

ACTION: SCW

RF would liaise with Laurence Couldrick (WRT, CEO) about a single GIS mapping tool for all catchments.

ACTION: RF

ii) Minimising obstacles to fish movement

The major obstacles in the Avon have been eliminated.

Venn Weir: Major work to repair flood damage has been completed.

Crackhill Weir: Sill repairs completed.

Brent Island Weir: Repairs completed in April 2015.

Although the main focus has been on obstacles for upstream migration, smolts and eels migrating downstream (escapement) can also encounter important obstacles such as predation - especially in dry conditions. The EA's priority list of barriers would not include those for downstream migration.

According to SCW, BS is preparing a barriers 'map' for the rivers of the South West; timescale to completion is a couple of months. If the map were based on 'SNIFFER' data, obstacles to escapement could be included. RF would liaise with BS regarding the map.

ACTION: BS/RF

iii) Fish tracking and electro-fishing

No fish tracking work had been carried out owing to constraints of timing and seasonal fish movement although the measuring equipment had been set up.

17-20 electro-fishing sites have been established on the Avon by WRT. SCW had prepared and circulated a semi-quantitative electro-fishing report on the SHRImp work in January 2015 (available on the ACA website at <http://auneconservation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/SHRImp-EF-Report-2104.pdf>). Electro-fishing by the EA is carried out annually at 2 sites - near the Avon Mill Garden Centre and on Glazebrook. SCW would provide the 2013 EA data to all present.

ACTION: SCW

It was generally agreed that a more comprehensive programme of electro-fishing over a number of years is needed to provide an accurate, scientific picture of fish population dynamics in the river. However, no funding has been identified to support this work. RF stated that DEFRA will not fund monitoring work and that the current WRF cost/ site is £120 for a summer examination. He would circulate the results of a WRT electro-fishing programme in the Fowey catchment to illustrate the value of such a programme in understanding fish population dynamics over a number of years.

ACTION: RF

The use of volunteers to assist in future work would be problematic for safety reasons unless they had received recent training or had prior experience.

iv) Water Releases from Avon Dam

SCW stated that the trials undertaken under SHRImp will be documented in the WRT report and provide a good basis for going forward.

GP reminded the meeting of her recently circulated note (available on the ACA website at http://auneconservation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Fishes-Bank-Reservoir-water-release_2015.docx) giving details of the likely trials in 2015/16 which would be based on the recent, April 2015, 'fisheries release'. KB would provide the DAG with notice of future releases for 'fisheries purposes'.

ACTION: KB

General feedback from the meeting was that the recent release in April had been successful. The timing was perfect, coinciding with a natural dry period. SWW and the EA had been able to test both their communications and the correct functioning of SWW's equipment at the dam. JR stated that anecdotal evidence from AFA members suggested a greater movement of smolt had been observed just after the water release than might otherwise be expected given the conditions: NB no advance notice of the water release had been provided to AFA members to alert them to this likelihood. KB agreed to make available the Loddiswell gauging station detailed data to show the increase in water level at that site during the time of release (predicted by GP to be about 9cm).

ACTION: KB

v) Gravel augmentation

SCW outlined the gravel augmentation that had taken place last year under SHRImp and confirmed it will be

documented in the report. There had been some difficulties obtaining permission from landowners for access to the river but there had been one winter's monitoring of gravel movement at two sites on the upper Avon (Bala brook & 'main river' near to Badworthy). SCW would circulate copies of the interim, gravel monitoring report from Plymouth University. **ACTION: SCW**

GP advised that SWW had obtained agreement from OFWAT to provide the funding for the gravel augmentation work for the 5-year period 2015-2020 at £20,000/year to build on this early work and help meet WFD targets for the Highly Modified Water Body that is the upper Avon (see map, Appendix 1). SWW is hoping to contract the project out to WRT, working in collaboration with PD and a PhD student from Plymouth University. SWW/EA and WRT will be meeting next week to progress the project.

vi) River bank/ land management

Work carried out via SHRImp will be documented in the final report.

ACTION: BS

JR stated that the AFA is preparing a schedule of works for bank management, clearance of minor tributaries, etc. and would make this generally available to the DAG.

ACTION: JR

RF would circulate a work programme devised for the Fowey catchment as a possible template. **ACTION: RF**

vii) Clarification of EA and DCC responsibilities

Construction work around the weir and hydro-electric plant at Curtisknowle had resulted in some confusion about the respective responsibilities for consent to work on different parts of the river i.e. 'main river' versus tributaries. The current understanding is that 'main river' ends at the Loddiswell (Avon Mill Garden Centre). For flood-related interests and in-river work, 'main river' responsibilities fall to the EA. For non-main river, the responsibility is that of DCC; the responsible contact is Richard Rainbow. TC would clarify the separation of responsibilities with DCC.

ACTION: TC

3. Where next - future funding

Future funding for Devon Avon improvement is uncertain beyond that described above. Liaison with the SDCP will be essential in identifying alternative sources of finance. Volunteer working might provide some opportunities. JR described a recent AFA collaboration with the Devon Wildlife Trust on a river fly monitoring programme at 4 sites on the Avon (South Brent, Gara bridge, Loddiswell Gauging Station & Knapp Mill). CK added that this is a Salmon & Trout Association initiative that trains clubs to monitor a small range of indicator invertebrates in rivers to assess ecological quality. This 'citizen science' is accepted by the EA as valid data (post-meeting observation from SW: once upon a time, such data would have been collected by the EA, themselves, under the RIVPACS scheme which, apparently, the late John Peters (ACA) was involved in developing; see - <http://www.ceh.ac.uk/products/software/rivpacs.html>). The results suggested that the water quality was of a high standard at those sites.

SW hoped that such work programmes, if publicised, might help recruit volunteers for important river works from other than amongst AFA membership, if that would be acceptable.

SW commented that some netting activity had been spotted in the estuary during the last week and had been reported to the police. The correct contact for these reports is Matt Mander at IFCA but the ACA would be happy to pass any reports on. JR reported that Tom Sneddon had recently been appointed as 'fish bailiff' for the Avon & Erme, replacing Mike Maslin of the EA. SW stated that it would be a tragedy if the good works accomplished through the SHRImp programme in trying to improve river quality and fish numbers upstream were to be rendered worthless by the actions of fish poachers in the estuary.

4. AOB

Next Meeting TBA for late November/early December 2015.

ACTION: SW

SDMW: 02 June 2015

Appendix 1:

