

Home Address:

Date:

Mr Alex Attwood MLA
Minister of the Environment
Clarence Court
10 – 18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

Dear Minister

I am writing to you to register my complete dismay at the environmental disaster that is occurring on one of the most important salmon rivers in Northern Ireland. The River Camowen in Omagh, Co. Tyrone holds the brood stock of 23% – 28% of salmon for the Foyle system. This small river has been the subject of several plans for hydroelectric schemes and although it is widely known that Ireland must reduce its carbon footprint, the question must be asked at what cost to the rest of the environment. The local Council have recently installed a hydroelectric plant to produce electricity for the local Leisure Centre and to sell to the grid.

Salmon fishing in Northern Ireland is a very important tourist commodity with over £40 million per annum brought in by visiting anglers (Price Waterhouse 2007). In the west of Northern Ireland, angling is one of the few attractions that brings tourists on a regular basis. However, with NIEA starting to promote hydroelectric schemes on salmon rivers and having no care or thought for salmon or trout, we ask you to suspend any further promotions by this body. We have seen recently (15 March 2012) in Omagh where the local Omagh District Council have tested the hydro to such devastating effect. The river between the start of where the water was taken and where it was returned to the river was almost completely dry. This had the result of leaving juvenile fish at the mercy of grey crows and herons. No prior warning was given to the fishery body, the Loughs Agency, and the Council are denying any wrong doing. There was no water left for safe fish movement or passage and fish were left floundering in small rock pools.

How can a body charged with protecting the environment continue to promote these schemes on rivers that are of such importance to salmon at a time when salmon numbers are in serious decline and other groups including the Minister of DCAL are looking at protecting them? I ask you to suspend this scheme in Omagh and also to suspend any further applications for such hydro schemes on our rivers to help protect salmon. (There are plans for another scheme several miles upstream nearer the nursery grounds of the salmon spawning areas.)

I look forward to an urgent response from you on this matter before it is too late to protect salmon and the damage has been done.

Yours sincerely
