

PressRelease

A View From the Carp Society

An extract from a recent column in the angling press questioned why we had discontinued our funding of the Specialist Anglers' Alliance. This was a policy decision realigning our political support on a more national platform. Our thought processes recognised that where angling politics are concerned there are many bodies of opinion and support which, wherever directed, can only be of benefit to angling in general.

The EA have recorded sales of around one-million rod licences. Of those the industry generally recognises that in the UK the carp sector comprises some 70,000-90,000 dedicated carp anglers. That's our carp scene statistical base. Staying with numbers the SAA is made up of around 300 paid-up members. This number swells to around 3000 using the block vote principle when the Society numbers are included. Therefore the SAA individual membership represents some 0.375% of specimen anglers (sic) and 3.75% when the carp angling vote is added – not a figure designed for power and influence.

So if power and influence are in anyway reflected numerically it's pretty obvious to us that the SAA have little chance of changing the hearts and minds of the government of the day based on number alone, unless they had a strong enough cause to bring influence to bear. This does not invalidate the existence of pressure groups such as the SAA and ECHO, or their causes. Both they and the Society contain passionately committed volunteers trying in their own way to do their bit to improve the lot of anglers, and as such we should respect that commitment. However the decision to channel our financial support elsewhere was made on a much wider nationally based political basis, and the Society has chosen instead to affiliate to an existing nationally recognised political pressure group, the Countryside Alliance.

Why choose the Countryside Alliance? Well at a national level we currently have a very pro-angling Sports Minister in Richard Caborn, ably advised by the MP for Reading, Martin Slater, another pro-angling campaigner. Add to this Charles Jardine MP, the angling spokesman for the Countryside Alliance, and we have extremely creditable representation right through to the seat of parliament where these officials actually have the power to influence.

The real threat to angling is likely to come from an anti-angling lobby group such as PETA. This group is said to be funded to the tune of \$40m. Therefore the Society decided to financially support an organisation that everyone knows has both true political support and the financial might to contest any threat that may target the angling industry. We continue to support the SAA and ECHO to promote their causes. Both organisations have been offered a regular two-page slot in our magazine at no cost and free floor space at our annual winter show. That alone is worth £1000. These offers are made not because we have to, but because we want to.

Everyone I have spoken to in the thinking specialist angling world arena is appalled at this decision, and the way in which it was taken. Just who did take it? In the latest Carp Fisher there are what I would consider to be three political editorials, and not one of them even hints that the Society is about to jump the SAA ship and affiliate to the Countryside Alliance – although there is clearly some support shown for the Alliance. At the time of writing there certainly hasn't been a recent AGM where such a decision could be discussed and ratified.

There is a case to be made for belonging to both organisations, but... The wider case for the protection of angling from without is already in the good hands of the NFA, the NAA and all their member organisations. The Countryside Alliance? OK, but I feel very comfortable to be lined up with the game anglers when it comes to the overall protection of angling. They have voices in the corridors of power, and in the ears of royalty. A good QC would ride a coach and horses through the petty arguments of PETA, the CAA, and the other anti-angling pressure groups.

But where does the old school tie network stand on the otter issue, which is likely to become an increasingly serious threat to carp fisheries? And on the basis of the Society's arguments, who represents carp anglers in terms of possible threats to carp-fishing itself – from within angling? That protection was the main reason for the formation of the Society in the first place, as a glance at the Aims and Objectives of the Society will show. What threats? Ask Alvin Roy! Do any of our readers

belong to a club or association with an anti-carp-angler bias? Anyone face bans on boilies, or buzzers, or bivvies, or bedchairs, or sleeping, or night fishing, or 101 other things that pleasure and club anglers find offensive – or even merely irritating – about carp fishing?

As carp-fishing grows carp anglers will increasingly become the villains of the piece on general fisheries. Suppose there was a national ban proposed on any, or all, of the above? If we aren't represented in the political discussions and able to argue our case then we have to lie back and take whatever is thrown at us.

If it weren't for the formation of ECHO the Society's decision would be disastrous. As it is ECHO had already pledged substantial per capita and other financial support for the SAA prior to the Society making their announcement (although the SAA needs all the additional financial and manpower support it can get). We have written a lengthy letter to the Society explaining why we are withdrawing all support and transferring our allegiance to ECHO, and continuing our long-pledged support for the SAA. The Society was founded as a democratic, political organisation. Recent events suggest that neither description now applies.

For the record the Society's statistical appraisal early in their press release is both inaccurate and meaningless. It is inaccurate because numerous specialist groups are affiliated to the SAA, and meaningless because the SAA is, in turn, affiliated to a much larger angling political pressure group, the NAA. The Society spokesperson who compiled the press release was either unaware of these facts, or chose to ignore them.

*The Society has, at a single ill-advised stroke, made ECHO the premier carp fishing organisation in this country. Support them. You will find their advert elsewhere in this issue of Carpworld. Society, where would you be without Horseshoe? Think about it, and for heaven's sake drop the "We'll show 'em!" mentality before it's too late. The Society was founded to represent carp anglers in all political arenas. I know. I wrote the Aims and Objectives and they were enthusiastically embraced by successive highly-attended general meetings. **Tim Paisley***