

MOLE FISHKILL – UPDATE 2

The Chairman and Secretary spoke to Stuart Hunter, the EA Area Base Controller, on Monday 5 Aug to get an update on the incident. Mr Hunter confirmed that the pollutant release had occurred overnight 30/31 July and that it had been self-reported. The EA had responded and were on site within 30 minutes of the call. The EA confirmed it was a digestate spill of some magnitude that had affected some 5kms of the river below the entry point north east of South Molton down to the junction with the Molland Yeo. The EA believe that an influx of water from the Molland Yeo diluted the pollutant slug sufficiently to prevent further fish kills downstream of the junction.

The EA have revised their initial estimate of the fish kill up from 6,000 to 10,000. That includes salmonids, eels, lampreys, loach, bullheads and some coarse fish. The EA have undertaken to give a breakdown by species in due course. We have lost juvenile and adult brown trout, sea trout up to 2lbs and juvenile salmon, but fortunately no adult salmon. The EA continue to work on the site conducting fish and invertebrate surveys. They have undertaken to deliver a preliminary report by the week's end.

Mr Hunter undertook to respond in writing to a series of prepared RTFA questions and his response is awaited so that we can keep the membership properly informed as events unfold.

The Chairman spoke to a representative of Fish Legal who are now standing by to give legal advice and assistance to those riparian owners who are Fish Legal members and who may wish to seek compensation. That would be separate from any legal proceedings the EA may decide to take against the polluter.

The Chairman spoke to the Acting Chief Executive of the Angling Trust (AT) and briefed him on the incident. The AT has agreed to act in support and to provide advice where required as have the South West Rivers Association.

As many will know the RTFA in conjunction with the Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) have organised a programme of river work this year. This includes gravel cleaning and trash dam removal work. The Chairman has spoken to officials from the WRT in order to identify some flex in the programme to be able to re-direct some of this work to rehabilitation of the affected areas of the river Mole should a requirement be identified.

As members will be aware, the Association has been concerned from some time about the danger of pollution from biodigesters and STWs on the Taw system. It was thought that the biodigester threat would come from some malfunction around the biodigester plants themselves, not from digestate spread by third parties. This pollution incident should lead to lessons being learned and appropriate regulations being put in place.