

Customer Focus Meeting

Bristol Reservoirs Fly Fishing Association

January 2017



- Address points raised in the feedback document;
 - including raising visibility of the management team
- Update members on:
 - what we have been up to
 - some of the challenges that we have faced
 - how we have been trying to improve
- Future challenges and opportunities



- Introducing the team
- Orientation: previous 24 months
 - *BRFFA members only via committee contact (Martin Cottis)*
- Specific points raised in feedback document
- Further Q&A

Introducing the organisation and team

Please note: The audience for this slide pack now includes BRFFA members not in attendance at the meeting. Some of the slide responses have been modified to include written context that was provided by 'voice-over' in the meeting. This makes the slides a bit 'wordy' in some places – our apologies – we felt it better to provide this information.

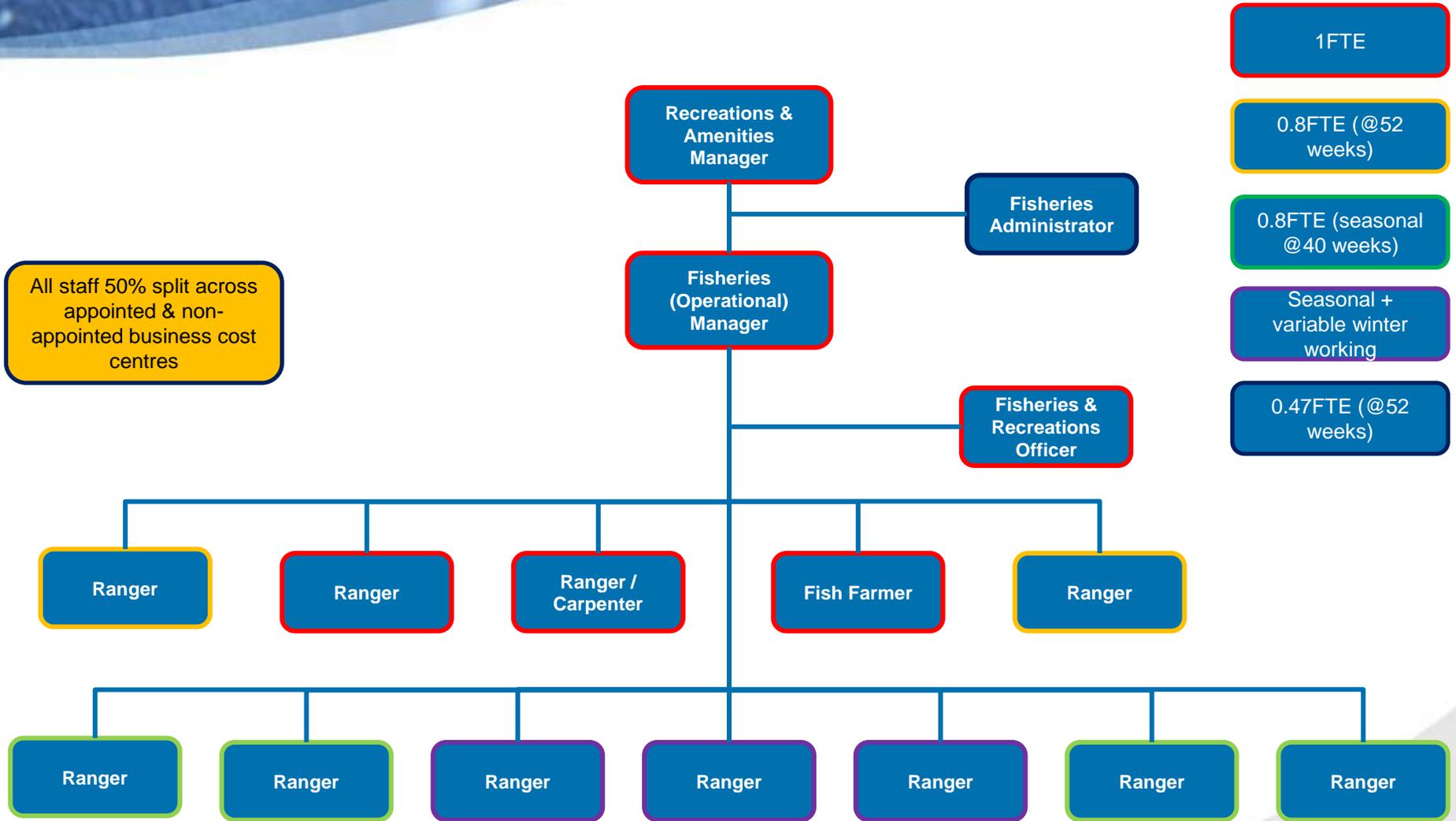
Information on the management team is provided in specific response to requests from members.

What is Bristol Water Leisure?

- Leisure services & business portfolio
 - Mixture of appointed (*statutory*) & non-appointed (*'choose to'*)
 - Amenities e.g. cafes/restaurants, car parks, picnic areas, footpaths
 - Recreations: e.g. angling, sailing / watersports clubs, bird-watching, 'permit only' areas,
 - Angling remit includes Bristol Water Fisheries (non-appointed – wholly owned & operated) and provision through 3rd party rights/leaseholds e.g. Knowle Anglers, Cheddar Angling Club
- Waterside reservoir services
 - e.g. river compensation (*a dynamic activity to meet statutory Environment Agency flow levels*), sampling, security & safety
- Drivers
 - Statutory Obligations: *Conservation, Access and Recreation – 1991 Water Industry Act*
 - Cost effectiveness of a waterside team vs staffing from HQ
 - Brand reputation / visitor experience
- Orientation
 - Mendip reservoirs; 0.5M visits, 16K angling
 - Team-size: 6 FT, 10 PT. 50% recharge between apptd / non-apptd



Existing Organisation



Steve Smith: Recreations & Amenities Manager

- **Remit:** All aspects of public access and recreation across BW land, water & property
- **Reports to:** Customer Services Director
- Overall leadership: strategy, accountability, reporting
- Champion Leisure; internal BW & external
- Leasehold portfolio
- Asset owner; Leisure assets, land & property
- Manage Leisure budgets, including Fisheries
- Capital improvement schemes
- Community focal point



Alan Dymock: Fisheries (Operational) Manager

- **Remit:** Mainly Fisheries & Reservoir Services
- Responsible for all operational aspects of Leisure & Reservoir Services
- Staff shift rota & line management
- Logistics (e.g. vehicles, boats, equipment)
- Manage fish farm & boat yard / workshop
 - Stocking policy
- Custodian for Blagdon Pumping Station area
- Compensation control



John Harris: Fisheries & Recreations Officer

- **Remit:** Mainly Fisheries & Recreations
- Responsible for all aspects of customer service and transactions
- Front of house & tackle shops
- Point of Sale & banking
- Competition / event co-ordination
- Marketing & promotion
- Pricing & permit policy
- Chew 'site champion'



Orientation: previous 24 months

BRFFA members only via committee contact

Please speak to BRFFA committee member for a summary of what was presented

Martin Cottis as proposed point of contact

Received BRFFA Feedback Q&A

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Why are 10k+ stocked before the season instead of half that then trickle stock every 10 days or so? Hearing people early doors bragging of catching 50+ fish and over 100 to the boat is obscene IMO.

- We stock approximately every 4-6 weeks, depending on competition schedule
- Pre-season stocking represents about 25% of what we stock in total.
- We always treat each season as a 'clean bowl' in terms of stocking; because we cannot monitor density over winter with strong confidence
- This may change as we evaluate the impact of triploid trout stocking; it may be that greater numbers are overwintering. This will evolve from years of experience.
- Early season is the most sensible time of year to stock to get overall densities up; better stocked into cooler waters and being caught by anglers, than be lost to temperature related stress or winter predation caused by stocking later in the season
- We cannot control whether the fish choose to shoal up in a single area of the lake
- We agree that anglers do not need to 'sit on fish'; potentially harming fish and reducing the chances of good fishing later in the season. The privilege of boat fishing on Chew and Blagdon should be about more than just going to one area and sitting on fish!

Why are fish only being stocked at Woodford, the corner of dam and from cages being released?

- They aren't!
- We continue to stock fish at other areas of the lake
- Over half of the fish stocked into CVL were from the cages
- Nunnery and Herons Green have been stocked heavier than the likes of Woodford or the Dam in 2016.
- The only area with stocking constraints on CVL is Wick Green, where stocking here is dependent on water heights.

Stocking sizes and quality of fish have fluctuated this year. What plans are in place to stock a more consistent size and quality of fish? (2 part answer on 2 slides)

Size

- Generally we felt that cracking fish were being caught in season 16. However, there was one notable occasion where the size of fish stocked into the lakes didn't meet our usual high standards.
- A mistake was made by our team regarding average weights stocked in a single net cage on a single occasion; this resulted in smaller fish being stocked into Chew than we would have liked.
- We do have procedures to reduce the chance of this happening, but it did happen in 2016
- We also accept that sometimes, specifically with regard to releasing fish from net cages at Chew, a proportion of fish will be slightly smaller in size than we would like to stock. This is because whilst we grade the fish before they go into the cage, once in cages some fish grow faster and stronger than others. The fish cannot be graded again before being released.

Quality

- We suffered fish losses of around 40,000 on our fish farm in 2016. Disastrous! We stretched our finances and purchased 20,000; but whenever we have to buy fish in (instead of rear / on-grow from eggs ourselves) we lose some of the quality control that we pride ourselves on

Stocking sizes and quality of fish have fluctuated this year. What plans are in place to stock a more consistent size and quality of fish?

What plans are in place?

- Firstly, we keep on doing the things that we do well!
 - We genuinely take pride in the quality of the fish that we rear and stock
 - All of the fish that go into the lakes are hand graded. This is a very time consuming job but we believe it helps to ensure a uniform and quality product.
 - We always aim to stock fish with a minimum weight of 2lb at Chew Valley, Blagdon and Litton
 - We believe (with many external validations) that our trout reared in the valley are real ‘fighting’ fish; providing top quality sport – we feel that our customers value this – but do you agree?
- We are also reviewing the future of the fish farm, including whether we can increase our fish farming capacity at Blagdon Pumping Station to enable us to cease operations at Ubley Hatchery
 - Reduce fish losses; Ubley Hatchery houses units for on-growing trout, but the facility provides considerably less favourable conditions compared to our units at Blagdon Pumping Station.
 - If we can avoid the need to buy fish to replace fish lost to diseases on the farm then we have greater control over quality (and a more efficient & sustainable operation)
 - The review is currently on-going: we have no news to announce at this time

Why can't the lakes be Trickle stocked every week rather than less frequent large stockings to help avoid feast and famine?

- The competition calendar precludes this, but also:
- We have to starve a fish farm unit for a couple of days before we can transport and stock fish into the lakes; clearly this stunts growth and we have a limited number of units
- We have tried 'boat and net' trickle stocking from the net cages during the season but found that it stressed the fish and led to fish losses or fish not feeding; better to simply release the net cage

The bigger picture

- There is a LOT more to whether fishing is 'feast or famine' than just the stocking policy!
- We monitor the quality of the fishing every day of every week in the season; JH and AD have weekly (and sometimes more frequently) conversations regarding whether to stock
- If we feel that the lakes need stocking to ease the fishing, then we stock fish if we feel it will genuinely make a difference (*and rarely, but sometimes, even just to appease anglers even if we quietly suspect that it won't make a difference!*)
- Whilst we try to avoid it, sometimes we stock even if the fishing doesn't require it for various reasons e.g. fish farm units need clearing for lifecycle progression or we need to stock sooner to avoid a competition date

Why is the stocking density per acre usually higher at Blagdon than Chew?

- Our experience validates external expertise; identifying that larger lakes typically require a lower stocking density to yield similar rod averages than smaller lakes
- We have found this to be the case; and we have over 60 years of experience of stocking fish into nearby 'larger and smaller' reservoirs at Chew and Blagdon!
- Fish tend to spread better in Blagdon and we have always found that the higher stocking density at Blagdon Lake works well
- The 5 year rod average for Chew is 3.7 fish per person. At Blagdon it is 3.5. The 3 year rod average at Chew is 3.6. At Blagdon it is 3.4
- An example to (try!) to explain: as fish often seem to shoal up in a small number of area of the lake; anglers tend to end up in those areas. This means that the same amount of fish going into a larger or a smaller reservoir yields the same 'pockets of fish' that drive the rod averages

Why are fewer fish being stocked into the lakes?

- At the peak around the late 90s we stocked ~10,000 small brown trout, taking stocking numbers into the 95,000 - 100,000 region
- Stocking policy changed to a much smaller quantity (3,000) of larger browns instead; to reduce predation and poaching. Customers liked catching beautiful larger brownies!
- In 2015 and 2016 we have stocked a smaller quantity (5-10% of fish over the whole season)
- The reasons for this were
 - Early stages of 2016 the rod averages were good to exceptional
 - When rod averages dropped at Chew we put more fish in and found that it made little to no difference
 - The fish just weren't feeding! With reports from anglers with fish finders that there were plenty of fish. Chew is a relatively shallow reservoir and water temperatures can become an issue
 - We lost 40,000 fish on our fish farm; participation is declining and budgets are tight, so we purchased 20,000 more fish and stocked when we felt it would yield results

What benefits are there of rearing fish at BW? Many other fisheries successfully buy their fish in

- Purchasing 100,000 trout at stocking size to go into our lakes would cost ~£380,000
- This value exceeds the entire day and season permit income from fly fishing
- We have sunken costs in infrastructure and water supplies that allow us to rear fish relatively cost effectively, benefiting from staffing costs shared via recharges to reservoir services
- We have greater control over the provenance and quality of our fish for stocking
- Customers tell us that our fish provide exceptional fighting quality; we value this as a unique selling proposition into the angling market

Could the hatchery be used to generate revenue by selling fish commercially to other fisheries and or retail outlets?

- By Hatchery we presume that you mean our fish farm
- We start our rearing cycle from sterilised (pressure treated) eggs that we buy in
- This is due to a change in legislation, not a BW decision
- Ubley Hatchery now only provides extra units for on-growing fish that help us to rear the quantity of fish that we need for stocking (*if we don't lose too many at Ubley!*)
- We already sell fish to Knowle Anglers, Yeo Valley and Cameley trout lakes
- We don't have the capacity to rear more fish than this currently
- Investment to increase capacity is difficult to attract when the overall sport of fly fishing appears to be in decline; but we are still working on it!

Could a varied Catch limit be introduced? Not everyone wants to retain 8 fish these days. Why not offer a cheaper ticket based on C&R ideally with the option to retain 2 fish as was the case in the last Evening League?

- We have a varied catch limit through day and half day offerings (8,4)
- Anglers are encouraged to practice C&R responsibly on any of our permit offerings
 - e.g. with good handling practices and when environmental conditions allows
- Nobody is forced to retain fish!

On prices

- We understand that anglers want cheaper fishing – who doesn't want cheaper prices!
- We just don't believe that cheaper prices will yield sustainable overall earnings; remember that our costs are rising!
- We don't believe that our prices cause anglers to fish elsewhere, if they are going elsewhere we think it is for other reasons
- Cheap tickets on your local waters are great; until you no longer have a fishery on your local waters!

Why is C&R the same price as 8 fish kill? Surely C&R should be cheaper

- Please see previous slide
- We aim to stock 100,000 fish per season and to provide good quality boats and bank fishing facilities
- C&R customers still need a boat or a swim, they still need fish to catch
- We are geared to be a premium national level fishery; we have staff and infrastructure costs accordingly
- Concurrent boat fishing on Chew and Blagdon, the current stocking levels and the boat fleet sizes to cater for major competitions all drive the scale of our fishery and associated costs
- Reducing stocking levels wouldn't yield a proportionate saving because we are geared to be most efficient when catering for large-scale stocking & demand
- Lower gearings would not likely support concurrent boat fishing at Chew and Blagdon

Could a loyalty card be introduced? X number of visits secures a free permit

- Our bank fishing loyalty scheme is addressed via the season ticket options and 'books of ten'
- We currently also offer a number of loyalty related schemes for boat fly fishing
 - Boat discounts for season ticket holders: up to £12 saving on full day and £8 on a half day
 - 'holiday package': 9% saving when booking 3 boats in a week, 12% when booking 5 in a week (*effectively buy 5 boat tickets in a week and get the 5th one at less than half price*)
- We will look again at this but our initial view is that...
 - Competition anglers come here for competitions (*holiday package suitable for extra days!*)
 - A relatively modest number of local pleasure anglers come here because it is convenient...
 - ...and/or they love the challenge of trying to catch our locally reared trout ...
 - ...and/or they have a special connection with these beautiful lakes and wildlife
 - Our existing offers and saving schemes are targeted to encourage these valued customers
 - We can see how a loyalty card would make fishing cheaper for existing customers; but in the particular market conditions that we operate in for fly fishing we struggle to see how it would generate sufficient new sales volume to make financial sense

Will afternoon boats be reintroduced in 2017?

- We have reviewed this in light of customer feedback
- In season 2017 there will be a simple half day boat offering; no 'morning or afternoon' boats
- Half day boats will permit 6 hours fishing from 9am or 6 hours fishing prior to sunset.
- This option will include a 4 fish limit and is available at Blagdon or Chew Valley lakes.

Half day boats - lots of boats were unused mid-week so why not reinstate the half day boats.

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When water temperatures reach a certain level and rod averages are so poor and it is clear Chew reservoir isn't fishing. Why are fisherman still being charged full price for substandard conditions? Would you pay full price for a cold meal or if half the food was missing!

- This is a very surprising question and analogy! Surely all members are aware that we do not serve up trout into anglers nets? We are not talking about buying a hot meal here!
- Our commitment is to stock the lakes, ready boats, equipment and bank facilities, and to provide angler support services. We invest our money into doing this as a business and we hope to get our money back! We do not have obligations to provide a premier fishery that doesn't pay for itself!
- The rest is down to the angler...every angler assesses the conditions and decides whether to pay to go fishing!
- We cannot control the weather, environmental conditions, where the fish decide to go in the lake or whether the fish are feeding
- We publish a weekly catch report online and we will give a straight answer to a question about what we think of the conditions for fishing and of what have heard regarding whether the lakes are fishing well
- Remember, things can change on a daily basis; sometimes the weather changes during the day and people are catching fish again

Do Bristol Water Fisheries believe they offer a value for money fishing experience at their lakes? (3 part answer on 3 slides)

- YES. Bristol Water believes that the tickets offered by its fishery represent good value for money
- Whether anglers agree is dependent on their criteria for value for money, for example how anglers assign value to:
 - how many fish they caught per £ spent
 - the broader aspects of tranquillity, natural interest, exclusivity and amenity
 - the quality of boats & banks
 - the presentation & the fighting quality of stocked fish
 - an appreciation of the costs involved in making this type of angling service available
- Our fishery exists on the basis that ‘value for money’ decisions are based on more than how many fish anglers have caught for £ spent
- We hope that privileged access to our waters in beautiful surroundings, surrounded by wildlife, and the satisfaction gained from working hard to catch a beautiful brace of fighting fish is enjoyable and attractive for anglers
- Value for money is clearly a subjective matter; the next 2 slides offers our perspectives addressing both competition and pleasure angling

Do Bristol Water Fisheries believe they offer a value for money fishing experience at their lakes? (3 part answer on 3 slides)

- Competition anglers: we feel that Chew and Blagdon are highly suited to competitions, including events at the national and international level; for this we need aim to provide
 - car parking & amenities e.g. tackle shop, WCs, catering options
 - sufficient quantity of boats equipped & maintained to a high standard
 - angler services e.g. check in & enquiries
 - and most importantly for major events...good quality fish stocked...and the right quantity...to differentiate and reward top anglers for their combined skill and effort, whilst still providing an enjoyable day for the majority
- We believe that anglers also benefit from good local food, stunning countryside & local attractions for themselves and friends / family that may be visiting with them
- Next slide: Pleasure anglers

Do Bristol Water Fisheries believe they offer a value for money fishing experience at their lakes? (3 part answer on 3 slides)

- Pleasure anglers:
- The current scale of our fishery is set on the basis that privileged access to our waters in beautiful surroundings, surrounded by wildlife, and the satisfaction gained from working hard to catch a beautiful brace of fighting fish is enjoyable and attractive for anglers
- Whilst we aim to always provide the opportunity for anglers to catch a beautiful brace of fish, we accept that the natural constraints of our waters mean that there will be times when the fishing 'goes tough'
- In response we aim to consistently make available:
 - a safe and enjoyable experience afloat for boat anglers, with attractive, well maintained & equipped boats
 - as much privileged access to our banks and waters for anglers to explore as the conservation designation (& practicable bank maintenance constraints) permit us
 - friendly & helpful support staff
 - angling community engagement & weekly catch reports; with advice on what methods are working well & which areas of the waters appear to be offering fish
 - a sense of tranquillity, natural interest & escapism in stunning countryside

Is there any news on what is happening at Woodford Lodge?

- YES! We are delighted to announce that Bristol Water Fisheries are expecting a fantastic new cafe / restaurant tenant to join us at Woodford Lodge this season!
- Subject to contract, we're expecting that the new operator will be up and running by Easter. Major internal refurbishment works are happening now and throughout the coming weeks.
- **For safety reasons, we will be closing off access into Woodford Lodge until 2nd February. Our sincere apologies for any inconvenience.**
- **Bristol Water Fisheries are still open for business via telephone and social media.** You can also tap on the lakeside office windows during business hours and we will do our utmost to help!
- We are passionate about getting this lodge loved again! We really hope that you will enjoy an improved overall experience at Chew in the coming season

Future challenges and opportunities

Future challenges and opportunities

- Decline in participation in fly fishing
 - Supply and demand relationship
- New tenant at Woodford
 - Pathways into the sport: joint working with BRFFA?
- Sustainment Group
 - Launching Q2 2017
- Blagdon pike fishing
 - Review on-going currently; BRFFA consultation expected
- Reservoir services & recharges
 - Review on-going currently
- Fish farm efficiency improvements
 - Potential closure of Ubley Hatchery: centralisation at Blagdon PS
 - Review on-going currently
- Biosecurity