

Antrim and District Angling Association,
154 Ballyrobert Road,
Ballyclare,
County Antrim.
6 February 2011

Dear Minister Poots,

At a recent meeting of the Antrim and District Angling Association, members asked me to write to you in connection with the draft budget for the period 2011 to 2015 for your Department.

The Association is astounded at the reduction in Environmental Protection budget which shows a reduction in monitoring, inspections and regulations. This comes at a time when our river, The Six Mile Water, has had yet another major fish kill at Ballyclare. At the area of pollution there is a sewage works which some feel is defective. There are also two nearby car washes which are operating without planning permission and from what we can observe there appears to be a lack of the necessary infrastructure to enable them to operate within the law. These are just three of the many problems on this river system.

This also has to be seen in the context of one of the worst pollution incidents in the province when there was a fish wipe out from Mallusk to Lough Neagh in June 2008. This latest incident means that the bulk of the main river from Ballyclare to Lough Neagh, with the exception of a stretch from Doagh to Templepatrick, has had a total fish kill within the past two and half years. This quite frankly is a disgrace and also a disaster for the community in the surrounding areas. The problems at Mallusk continue and you and your Department have been contacted on many occasions in this regard.

The Association is at a total loss as to how you and your Department permits this type of situation and at the same time reduces expenditure on a budget heading which clearly has enormous problems. The Association acknowledges the current economic situation in the Country but it seems our interests are of little importance.

It is clear from the draft budget that you and your Department appear to have little regard for the natural environment and more specifically the health of the population. In relation to the latter we must remind you that 40% of the province's drinking water comes from Lough Neagh. We would be interested to know if you have taken the opportunity to let your colleagues in the Assembly and also the public at large know that a large proportion of their drinking water is being seriously contaminated in this way

Your Department's apparent lack of caring continues to be highlighted by reducing spend on the NIEA's Event Programme, a slow down in the rate of the declaration of ASSI's, a reduction in the level of grants to biodiversity project delivery bodies, a reduction on contracts associated with biodiversity issues, a reduction in proactive pollution prevention and monitoring to establish pollution sources and the removal of the river restoration scheme.

On a more personal note members of the Association are greatly disappointed that you as a local politician and as a Minister are not being seen to protect our interests. In this situation it is unfortunate from a local political leadership point of view that the European Union has to take a lead on these matters. These are issues which matter to a great number of people locally and if taken care of could create employment opportunities and improve the quality of life for many.

The Association looks forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Maurice Parkinson, Chairman of the Antrim and District Angling Association.