

ANNUAL MEETING 2008

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SESSION

Tony Hales, BW

Thank you Robin for a real tour de force. I am sure one or two of you thought he just, occasionally touched on speaking bollards, but most of that time, that joke, for the chief executive was very much in touch with what is going on across the country in all sorts of areas and to speak like that for nearly 40 minutes without a note was a terrific job Robin.

Now question time, lets deal with the bollards first then.

Q. Tony Collins, Coventry Canal Society

The bollards that were built into the canal 200 years ago were circular. Therefore when ram them they would slide. The square ones have more or less a 45 degree slant with an inch at the most and they will snag and as Robin pointed out there are very much more dangerous situations on the canals than putting three bollards in. I was at Minworth last week and the paddle gear is virtually inoperable the pinion didn't meet the paddle, reported it, but there were guys putting in bollards.

A. Jim Stirling, Technical Director, BW

There is no doubt that if you are going to put bollards in they need to be useful and they have got to be practical. And if we are putting bollards in and I cannot talk about the detail of a particular place, that don't have properly rounded corners and are not allowing the ropes to slide then there is something wrong with the bollard. I couldn't possibly defend that. We could go back again and talk about whether we should be putting the bollards in the first place, we believe it is a risk we should mitigate. Possibly we should have done it over a longer period of time but if the bollards are not good bollards then I am not going to stand here and defend them. Something will have to be done to make sure the ropes do move around the bollards.

A. Tony Hales, BW: I know this is a hot issue so if there are any more questions on bollards or cill markings can we deal with them now.

Q. Martin Ludgate, Canal Boat Magazine

On safety standards in general, and bollards in particular, has anything been done to quantify the risk that these are being installed to mitigate in terms of the number of accidents there have been that would not have happened if the bollards had been there or the various other things to be brought into as part of the same exercise.

A. Robin Evans, BW

Our duty is to assess, and be aware of, all the risks that are apparent on the network. What we should do is look to see what is the way of mitigating that risk, how difficult is it, how practical is it and once we have done that, then we decide whether we should proceed with that mitigation. As far as we saw, we did a risk assessment, we believe there is a foreseeable risk of boats snagging up on cills, boats snagging up on the lock gates if they didn't have proper places to tie up to. The mitigation for that risk is points to tie up to, and these are points if you are a single boater, or a boat owner of a small boat, so the mitigation is relatively simple, no difficulty in it. The only issue is the cost. The cost of doing it. And as I said I think what we underestimated is the cost of doing those mitigation measures against the cost of doing the mitigation measures on other equal and perhaps even more risky elements. We haven't put a value to all the risks but I have acknowledged that what we have done is right but there are probably other areas and other things on the network which need earlier attention than bollards.

Q. Pam Pickett, narrowboatworld.com

Speaking on the Health and Safety issue of these bollards, as far as I am concerned it is counter-productive anyway, but isn't it true that Health & Safety itself is now coming into question and is going to be sort of cut back to a degree because it is beginning to run everything in our life's and often, though it was brought up to protect people from bad employers and bad circumstance it is now sort of gained a life of its own. Now these bollards I happen to be aware of two boaters, one decided to put a rope around one of the additional bollards in the lock and nearly ended up falling in the lock, and another one has had a rope caught up and had to have it cut free. I really don't see the point of having those two additional bollards. Particularly so when you've got hire boaters who are not experienced and don't really know the thing to do. Surely to goodness there is enough already there, it has lasted us for 200 years without going to all this extra trouble and all this extra cost. And as for the cill markings, well I'm sorry; when they start going onto remainder

waterways which haven't seen a boat for 200 years then I really have to object. To tell you to keep back from the cill is, just such a waste when there is so much that needs doing.

A. Robin Evans, BW

The first point, I don't think Health & Safety is wrong, I don't think it rules our life's incorrectly. In fact I think it is a bit like the European Union it is an easy thing to criticise, it's the shorthand if you want to get an escape clause you blame the European Union or Health & Safety. We don't do it that way. We do it properly, we assess the risk properly, we feel very responsible for everyone who uses, or visits or enjoys our network and those are everyone from the 70 year old enthusiastic boater who has had 50 years experience, to the 21 year old going on for the first time in charge of a 60 foot narrow boat with his mates. We have to cater for them all and we take very seriously that role and we look to mitigate the risks in proportion to the amount of money we have available. We have had many, many discussions about use of bollards and I am not going to be able to persuade you today that what we are doing and our approach is right. But I am convinced that the advice I have received is right as I say, I repeat, perhaps we were overzealous in trying to implement and deal with that risk too quickly.

Q. David Stevenson, Foxton Inclined Plane Trust

Robin quite honestly the bollard situation is bollocks! But what I would like you to do is to be an honest man and answer the previous question which you managed to avoid. Give him a straight answer please.

A. Tony Hales, BW: Say it again, what was the question you thought was avoided.

A. David Stevenson, Foxton Inclined Plane Trust: The question about did you get a proper study of accidents in the past before reaching your conclusions. Our friend from the Canal boat was the questioner.

A. Robin Evans, BW

I thought I did answer that David. We don't look back and do a whole lot of research when we have done a risk assessment. What we did was we did a risk assessment and we believed there was a foreseeable risk there. Going back and saying has anyone had an accident is an indicator, but is not the absolute indicator as to whether there is a risk there or not. So we foresee, we did a risk assessment and we said there was a reasonable risk there of boats hanging up on the cill or the gate and therefore even if it hadn't have happened today we may have five accidents tomorrow. So history is not an indicator of whether there is a risk there.

A. David Stevenson, Foxton Inclined Plane Trust: That is your view and the answer to him is no. **A. Robin Evans, BW:** Yes, my answer to him is no.

Q. Stuart Sampson, National Association of Boat Owners

We met last week for the first time on the Customer Services Safety Standards Panel and we met as individuals so I was not actually representing NABO. We looked at these safety standards objectively amongst users for the first time nearly a year after they were actually introduced, and previous to that the Boaters Facility Group actually met and part of their deliberations went into becoming the start of the safety standards but there was virtually a two year period in which the users were not actually consulted at all as experts or customers about the standards these were actually for. And I think what has happened is that you have done these risk assessments, they have condensed down into what I call the hour glass effect into a little document which is about the size of your hand for general purpose of handing out to staff. Then those staff have had to take a single sentence out of those standards and turn it into a workable solution. Quite often, the problem is they didn't know what the original problem was and the fact that there are bollards being placed on locks with about one foot drop or less, or the fact they are being put on waterways that are not even being used at all, or certainly the cill standard notices, due to the fact that the spirit of the risk assessment which says we are trying to prevent for enough movement in the lock is actually being lost on the people who are actually trying to apply those standards so I think that is where the problem is. There has not been any consultation with real users throughout that period when the standards were being formed.

A. Robin Evans, BW

Stuart, I think I had acknowledged that, it would have been better if we had consulted users. I think you make an interesting point about the interpretation of the standards. I see that both ways, I will just be very clear about this. I think that it is the job of Technical Director, Operations Director, British Waterways Safety Team to decide what the risk is and decide what the mitigation odds are and then say this is the Minimum Safety Standard we require around the waterways. We have many examples from British Waterways in the past where we have sent something out and it has been interpreted locally incredibly differently, from 'that doesn't apply to me', to 'I need one thousand of those', what ever it is. You then great inconsistencies across the network and people then get very cross with us because they don't understand in one place they have something and in another place they don't, and vice versa. So we are trying to get consistency, much more consistency through British Waterways. We are trying to reduce the amount of local interpretation and avoidance but there is a real danger which you point out that in doing that,

1. the networks become bland, they become universal, they don't have their characteristics,
2. we do things which are unnecessary because they are stupid in the local circumstances.

So there is really important balancing act to be made from having consistency across the network but also appreciating and understanding local difficulties.

Q. Stan Holland

My only claim to fame is I have been around a hell of a long time, too long some might say. This may be a way of bringing this discussion about bollards and cills to a close. We had any questions broadcast from Birmingham here, week or so ago, and listeners to this program may know, Jonathan Dimpleby will often get the audience to vote on a particular issue. Now I wonder if you all are prepared to take the risk.

A. Tony Hales, BW

I am perfectly prepared to take the risk, so all those in the audience who believe in the bollards would you like to raise the hands, and all those who are against the bollard policy raise their hands. It wasn't quite such a clear majority as I thought you might have got. I think there was a majority against. You asked for democracy and you had democracy. I think Robin has been as reasonably fair as he could be in terms of the execution and the communication. This has not been the greatest hour and glory of the British Waterways team. So As Chairman, I will apologise for that. I think the terms and principles of having Health & Safety have got to be first. Our waterways are inherently dangerous, we do have people die in them in the main because of their fool hardiness, and judgements have to be taken. I think in the main our Executive team do take the right judgements but on occasion we may need to be a little more sensitive. I have to say the lady saying that we put something up on the wall on a remainder waterway that does not sound very great news.

So perhaps we move now on, the Board has heard your points of view on that, its registered. We are going to keep doing some of the Health & Safety things which you may feel are a bit tough but we will listen to you and we will really have a stronger level of dialogue as we go forward on that.

Can we take a different point now?

Q. James Griffin, Wyvern Shipping Company

Can I just talk a moment about British Waterways carbon footprint which is very seldom spoken about? About five years ago you closed all the local offices on the South East region and had one big office in the middle of Milton Keynes which I understand to be rented. The idea was to then lease out all the canal side offices and make a fortune to cover the rent of the Milton Keynes offices. Now this never really happen, what did happen the workforce then had to travel to a remote office in Milton Keynes which nobody could find, nobody could visit and the result was you lost contact with your customers, your overheads considerably rose, you had to on a part-time basis open up the waterside offices because you lost contact totally with your customers and so we got the set up of what's known as back street offices so where you now have people who work for British Waterways who had never been on a boat and never even seen the waterway because they are so remote from the waterway that they are supposed to be working for. You have people who have to get in cars to drive very long ways to a central office they then need to park at considerable cost, they get into vans to get to the waterways they are supposed to be working for. Because you no longer believe local people looking after the local sections of the canal. Then if you want to have a cup of tea on one of your new pods you have to start up a £6,000 generator, is this really good news for us all? What is the result? All money seems to have gone in overheads and when I want a lock paddle repaired at Three Locks, I have to wait 18 months. I have a hole in the towpath opposite our offices which I have offered to repair myself, oh no you can't do it yourself, we haven't done a risk assessment on you doing it, you are not capable of filling a hole in a towpath, and it is still there two years later. So it goes on. I would like to know when are we going to get back to local people, working on local sections of the canal to the benefit of all. Thank you.

A. Robin Evans, BW

James, that was so full of inaccuracies I don't quite know where to start but I do understand the sentiment of it. You and I have had constant discussions on this, it is not much different from what you have said many times before. We believe in localness, we believe in local people and there are local people and we do have a strong local element. Our overheads, all our money has not gone on overheads. We have made incredible savings on our overheads through the office relocations and the reduction in staffing and the closure of offices, and I challenge anyone to think that we could have continued the way we had with 35 waterway offices, 6 regional offices, and the immense overhead that was in reducing it down to 8 units. Of course it means that when you do that you sometimes have to travel a bit further. But I reject entirely that there is any less localness. We did react, how can we become criticised for when you, the people out there who use the waterways say we would like to see a little bit more of you, can you come and open up an office, we listen to that and

we say yes we will open it up and then you throw it back to me that we had to re-go and redo it. We do listen to you and we do open up Braunston for a few days a week so people can pay their licence fees in person on Mondays and Tuesdays. I would have thought that was a good thing. So I entirely reject that we have squandered money, entirely reject that we don't care about localness, and entirely reject that it is now more expensive. We are all striving to make the waterways more effective and efficient. I put a graph up there just as one indication about the challenge of controlling costs, and we are controlling costs. We don't have the money to have all the people, located in all the areas, servicing all the customers we would wish. You have genuine concerns and criticisms about some of the decisions we are doing, the delays in getting some of the areas repaired, on your local waterway. I know you are in constant discussion with Jeff Whyatt about those, I have full confidence in Jeff in making those decisions in the correct way.

Q. John Dodwell, Commercial Boat Operators' Association

We have heard a fair amount of talk today on what's happening on the visible part of the waterways. Many of us are concerned about what you can't see under the water, particularly maintenance standards and dredging. Now I think last year it was reported that the summer floods 2007 had caused a lot of trouble and there was talk of getting £8 million off Brussels to help clear the consequences of the extra silting. In Robin's address he mentioned that £1 million had been spent in the last financial year on dredging out from floods. Can I ask for an update on whether all the silting from now 15 months ago has been dredged out and if not, is there a deadline when you expect to have the waterways back to their proper navigable depth.

A. Robin Evans, BW

Just to be clear we have spent £1 million dredging out the flood as you say, but we spent another £5 million on dredging generally around the network and I think another £1 million on dredging to Minimum Safety Standards. As far as the flood dredging and the £8 million in the Yorkshire area we got no money from Government or European Union for the £8 million that we applied for. I seem to think, Sarah Nason is here and maybe she will remember the figures, I think the claim from the UK into Europe was in the billions. Europe then confirmed that they would pay £100 million towards that. But then such are the rules of the European Law the first £70 million of that had to come from the home country so there was only £30 million and that £30 million was farmed to local communities and government as they were the ones who had the biggest expenditure through the emergency services and everyone else. So we got no extra money. No extra dredging has been done on those areas, they still need to be dredged and I can't tell you when we will get the funding and when that will be sufficiently high up on our priority to undertake that.

Q. Keith Langston, Towpath Talk

There has been a lot of talk about the funding gap and I don't envy you in your situation in trying to deal with that. And you've spoken a lot about plans for the future and how you want to develop the waterways and so-on. Fair enough, but the nightmare for some people is that we might have a waterway system that's got more income, less Government subsidiary but is not available for everybody, or at least possibly available for the less than well off to come and look at the nice boats like the wealthy. As you are developing plans for the future are you bearing in mind the need to continue involving all sectors of society.

A. Tony Hales, BW

Well I think we are obliged to charge a commercial rate by law for the services we give. So there is a balance to be struck there. That is our overriding requirement by Government, it is not to act as a social body.

A. Robin Evans, BW

I think what I would add to that is that we are very keen to make the waterways available to as many people as possible. It is not my job to make boating cheap. There are many ways in which people can enjoy boating, from owning a boat, to hiring a boat to making use of community boats. But it is absolutely our intention to continue to attempt to have all standards of facilities, standards of moorings, standards of the licences available so we make as big an opportunity for people to enjoy the waterways of all means as possible. It is not in the waterways interest to make them an exclusive to anyone.

Q. Rupert Smedley, Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club

I just wondered how BW were doing about this pub partnership they have. I have a local pub next to me on the Caldon and British Waterways now own the building, Scottish & Newcastle or whatever they are called these days, have got the contract to run it as a pub. They have let the lease to somebody else who then employs the landlord and we now have a pub that has less local beer and because it is governed by Scottish & Newcastle rules, we have about four tiers of management, all taking their cut. I just wondered how successful it was as a partnership across the country and whether it had been a good investment.

A. Vince Moran, Customer Operations Director, Pub Partnership Board, BW

There's quite a number of things in there and I'm not going to be able to give you the whole history of the pub partnership. Is the pub The Hollybush? **Yes.**

The pub partnership started with around 30 pubs and we are now up to 44-45 so in terms of growth, it is a success. The pub business as I am sure many people in the audience will know is not any easy business to be in right now. We had a presentation I think, only last week at the BW Board about the progress on the pub partnership and it's progressing in terms of growth, it's not delivery massive profits yet and our position is we've really got to sit tight like a lot of businesses are doing and ride out the storm of the current credit crunch, etc. It is a healthy business at a base level but times are hard. In terms of beer that's a real dilemma because that pub when it was operating before the pub partnership took it over, was not a successful business. It's a question as to how you judge that. The pub partnership took it over, they've tied the beer to Scottish & Newcastle. British Waterways will get a share of that income that will go back into the canal network. I'm sorry if they are not serving the whole range of local beers that the previous tenant was serving. But Scottish & Newcastle are our expert partners in running pubs and we have to take their advice from a business point of view.

A. Tony Hales, BW

I think as a general point the primary role of all our ventures is to generate cash to go back into the waterways. The pub partnership is generating cash that goes back into the waterways. It has been quite well leveraged up and we also mitigate our own risk in running these joint ventures by getting experts to do it. So I don't think we would expect our management to take a lead on this, indeed we don't on these ventures, we expect the experts to be the lead, in this case Scottish & Newcastle.

Unknown: We have three guest beers at Foxton! **Tony Hales, BW:** Very good!

Q. Adrian Stott

Possibly contrary to the impressions of some people here British Waterways has acknowledged that when a boat navigates a waterway, its size has no significant impact on British Waterways costs. It's also previously acknowledged that boat size should not be used to indicate the ability to pay its owner because size is so weakly correlated with the value of the boat and more important because the biggest boats are often residential. So their value represents what the owner must pay for a home, not what a richer man can afford for a hobby. Yet British Waterways is increasing, or proposing to increase, the emphasis on size by backing the suggestion of the Advisory Forum that the licence fee should vary with beam. BW apparently wants to give the owners of narrowboats a break by keeping their

charges down at the expense of those with wider craft who may now face an unjustifiable fee increase of over 100%. But being a minority they are an easy target. Isn't it really time for British Waterways to reconsider the whole rationality in setting its prices to eliminate such discrimination as sizism?

A. Robin Evans, BW

I think again, I have been here on numerous occasions and heard the waterway boating movement tell me that I need to take more notice of the common view and how they think the waterways and the boat licence scheme should be run and I can't remember when it was, Sally's around somewhere, was it five years ago? We had a complete revision of the licensing, a complete large consultation on licensing. The end result of that big consultation was to let's keep it much the same as it was. More recently, when we've been looking to say I'm afraid we have to get more out of our licence income because of the cost challenges we've had. We've had another round of discussions with the boating community who are represented by BWAFF and they said, and lots of you have said to us, you should let us have a go at this, you should let us consider this, you should let the boating movement come up with their cross-party recommendation because not everyone on BWAFF has the same views. They came up with the view as suggested that we should change the licensing to increase licences for wide boats. And I think that we are caught between a rock and a hard place here because that is what the majority of our paying customers, or their representatives appear to want. It is a cost neutral or an income neutral scheme for us if that's the right way to go and if that's the way the boating movement want to go then I think it's on us to take good notice of that. I don't think that another comprehensive relook at licensing would be of great value at the moment. It is only a few years since we last did it.

A. Adrian Stott

First of all there has not been a comprehensive look at licensing that I have ever seen. There has been a number, usually about once every two years, of exercises what I would call tinkering around the edges. The result is the licence scheme is now incredibly complex, delivers very questionable messages to those who pay the licences, doesn't optimise your income and is really in need of a proper review. And secondly, you are a monopoly supplier with respect to navigation, not for mooring but navigation. And I think to use a boating system for the majority rule in respect to your charges for, that is entirely wrong because if you have customers 80% who have narrowboats, of course they're going to say charge the wide ones more, what else are they going to say, because they will pay less. But there's no justice and no equity in that.

A. Tony Hales, BW

It is a great subject. It was discussed at BAAF and I think a number of the non-executive directors were there and it was fascinating for us to hear people arguing that the old should pay less than the young, that those who had width should not pay any more, there were different views on length and there were those suggesting that green boats should pay less. There are many, many different points of view. John Bridgeman was a Director General of the Office of Fair Trading, he is a director who takes very specific interest in pricing issues. I have asked him to have a word with you Adrian, afterwards, indeed with anybody else. John do you want to say something.

A. John Bridgeman CBE, Non-executive Board Member, BW

I would just like to say one thing. To have a fair basis for licensing is not easy and there is no magic fix. Fairness generally has to be acceptable to the vast majority, might not seem sometimes to be fair to a small minority of people but we have to understand why. If people don't think something is fair in British Waterways it is because we are not explaining it right and that is the point.

Q. Heather Holmes, British Horse Society

Equestrians throughout the country, we are in dire need of more safe off-road riding routes my question is, basically are you planning to include equestrian access in your future plans you are discussing today. Not only does horse riding bring with it many health, educational and environmental benefits but it also plays a large part in heritage and tourism which you have talked about a lot today.

A. Robin Evans, BW

Is Sue Day here today? Yes. We encourage horse boating although Sue sometimes think's we don't but we do. And we work very hard in trying to get more horse boating, boats powered by horse on the network. We do have concerns about horses generally using the towpath because of the mix of towpath. We already have a lot of conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and fishermen and introducing horses is another element. Is Debbie Lumb here today, because I know we had an experiment up in Debbie's region about three years ago where we opened up the towpath for equestrian use and I think that we had some issues with it. So you ask the question, are we planning it? There are no plans to open up our towpaths for more private equestrian use but it is a good question and I would certainly hope it will be something you would raise in our consultation and that would get us thinking and tackling that issue. But I have to say that introducing horses, big powerful horses onto a

narrow towpath with water on one side and you have families with young children, fishermen and cyclists, does have its issues.

Q. Pam Pickett, narrowboatworld.com

I actually agree with that, for once. On the Grantham Canal we have a bridleway and we have horses, we have cyclists and we have pedestrians. When you've got responsible cyclists, or responsible riders there is no problem. It is quite wide actually along there. When they are irresponsible, you take your life in your hands, horses, people, children, just don't go I'm afraid unless it is monitored all the time. But to let it just open would to me, stop me walking on our local towpath.

A. Sue Day, Life member of British Horse Society

I am a very keen, experienced horse rider and am totally in favour of horse riding but I must say unfortunately even I, to your surprise, don't support horse riding on the towpaths very much. I think what British Waterways has done in the past, there are very few areas which are public bridleways on the towing paths and I think a few areas can be looked at like that, but I think what most horse riders don't realise is the huge danger of the bridges, you can't often safely get ridden horses ridden safely under bridges. A horse and the rider are in danger of falling in. A lot of riding horses over the years have accidentally fallen in. I have to agree that you need a very steady horse and you need a very committed rider who will walk as opposed to unfortunately, teenagers who are inclined to trot and cantor on the towpaths. So yes, very disappointing but even I cannot support horse riding. Heritage wise yes there were very few boats where the horses were ridden at a very fast trot or even a cantor and we hope one day we may do some re-enactments but they will have to be done very, very carefully with permission and control. So yes I support the British Horse Society but not very much for horse riding on the towing paths and I am very happy to speak to you later about it. As Robin said, perhaps I don't feel that horse boating is supported, I would like to say that British Waterways has done a huge amount to support the Horse boating Society. Ever since it was bought, we were founded in 2001, our biggest major problem where I feel we are not supported is the motorbike barriers. We cannot get along a lot of the towing paths because still a lot of the motorbike paths are impassable to horses. That's where I don't think we are being supported. But in general, as a principle British Waterways have been absolutely fantastic and I would like to say today, thank you.

A. Tony Hales, BW: Thank you.

Q. Colin Tuck, Boating Association

We mainly represent broad beam cruisers on the rivers and the estuaries. Having listened to your very positive presentations today regarding the inland waterways, I was disappointed that there was no mention of rivers whatsoever. Although British Waterways do have authority over certain major rivers we have. In our experience the rivers are not benefiting from the input, in fact in the main they seem to be deteriorating. Is it possible that perhaps British Waterways are prepared to give up the authority of the rivers?

A. Tony Hales, BW: No is the answer to that.

A. Robin Evans, BW

Colin, I have heard you say that before and we've had conversations about your concern and your members concern about becoming sort of second class citizens on river navigations. It is something I took back and talked about with my colleagues and is not something that we recognise. I think that I am very careful and if we'd had time, which I won't, if you would like to listen to my speech again, but I always talk about waterways, very rarely talk about canals because they embrace everything except where activities on a canal not a river. The thing about rivers is generally the infrastructure is hugely more expensive and is bigger and therefore what tends to happen is you get less for your pound on a river than on a canal. So what you see there may be equal levels of expenditure or relative levels of expenditure but what you see may not be as much. I think it is also fair to say that we find delivering the waterside activity on rivers much more challenging than we do on canals and that is generally because we don't have the same ownership, we don't have the same powers on a river than we do on a canal where we own the towpath, we own the canal and we sometimes own some other land. So the challenges of getting other people to do work, to get the local authorities to do work, to get the regeneration to get the activities much, much greater on rivers than they are on canals. It is a frustration for us in towns like Leicester for example, we have tried for a long, long time to really engage and get something going on there and we have found it very difficult so it is not a good answer for you. When you did last mention to me, I did go back and I did consult our local people and I did consult my fellow directors, are we spending enough on our rivers and the view I got back was yes but perhaps we need to continue that dialogue and have some more specific examples.

Q. Mike Stone, Grantham Canal Society

You mentioned, right from the outset chairman, the bird watching organisation and the fact that there are more bird watchers than there are people supporting the waterways. Can we bring that into the volunteer area where there are six times more regular volunteers in the RSPB than there are full time employees? That is a tremendous financial asset they

volunteer at all levels from council downwards, management right through to someone picking up litter. I do get the impression within BW that there is more thought given to 'lets have a volunteer picking up litter' than actually a volunteer managing projects, or volunteers delivering serious opportunities.

A. Tony Hales, BW

I am absolutely 100% in favour of your principle and as the Executive known personally as been pushing and pushing saying we have to get more volunteers engaged not only for the value of the work they do but because of the fact that we are embracing a whole wider group of society. Health & Safety of course is one of the big issues. We are dealing with an inherently dangerous area and hence a sort of licensing approach has been taken. Vince this is your piece again, you lead on the Executive point of view, would you like to say a few words about the progress we are making.

A. Vince Moran, Customer Operations Director, BW

As Robin said in his speech, 8,000 volunteer days a year, if you do the calculation that is about 40 full time people every week doing work of value on the canal. I think one thing we have learnt fairly recently, as we have began to start understanding volunteering, is we've got to understand what the volunteers want. It is not right for us to say 'we have got this for you to do'. Particularly if that is litter picking. I don't think there are many volunteer organisations that beat a path to our door to do litter picking. It is an important issue, we try to concentrate litter picking on people like the Royal Bank of Scotland and other worthy groups. Because we did have 200 Royal Bank of Scotland volunteers up in the North West a few weeks ago for just one day. They did a lot of litter picking and it was fantastic and hopefully they will do some more. So my message is 'we really want to understand what's in it for volunteers' rather than 'what's in it for British Waterways in getting volunteers'. That's the challenge on us as we go forward.

A. Tony Hales, BW

Its just not enough yet and I think we are going into some sticky times, there's going to be a lot more people going to be unemployed. There's particularly going to be more young people coming out of school who are going to be unemployed. And we have an opportunity to engage with them through this and indeed to give them some skills and I hope that is one of the things that we will have a dialogue with government about and is one of the public benefits that we can help deliver.

Q. Clive Henderson, Chair, Inland Waterways Association

Robin, you rightly played tribute to your staff and I think we would applaud that but you also put up a slide where you are proud of the fact that your real time labour costs in real money has fallen over the recent years and I suspect that there is an element of smoke and mirrors. The IWA and I know many others, are concerned that many of the people on the waterways now don't know anything about them. You've actually lost the services of a lot of long experienced people, they've possibly stepped over a line and joined an organisation that you now re-employ as consultants or third party workers and I think it is a little bit smoke and mirrors and why have you lost some of that skill and experience over the years? We are very concerned.

A. Robin Evans, BW

I know that is a view, I don't share it I have to say and I certainly don't accept that people we have lost are still working for us as consultants. There is always an example but there is certainly no swop and there certainly is no smoke and mirrors about it. My challenge for running an organisation such as British Waterways is that we rely hugely on the talent and knowledge and experience of our people. Absolutely hugely. But is not only their knowledge of the local waterway, its knowledge of a whole range of things, professional engineering, surveying, accountancy and everything else. One of the things we mustn't do is bottle ourselves in and not have new experience and new energy, new ideas coming into us. So it is very dangerous for an organisation to just think we have got lots of people who know how this was run over the last 30 years, we don't need to worry about it because those people are not having the influences and are not being exposed to new ideas. So I think it is very important to have a churn in an organisation. The other thing we have to do is, and what I tell my children is, they won't have careers in the future, they will have many jobs and they will unfortunately loose some of those jobs. It is the way I think in which this world is go. It is very difficult for an organisation to become wholly reliant on individuals of expertise. We need to have a lot more written down, we need to have a lot more rigour in our process so that we know the right thing to do will be done whether the person has been here for 30 years or 3 days. Because that is the only right way to run the waterway. I am very conscience that there are a lot of very, very good people, very knowledgeable. And we mustn't loose that experience. I think there is a real issue about the boating experience within British Waterways and I have acknowledged that before, and I have only been talking to Jim Stirling about it recently about how we get that boating experience available to us. Because I don't think we can necessarily seek out the best technical experts or engineer, the best surveyor, the best environmentalist, the best accountant and require them to have boating experience, and require all our operative to have that level of boating experience as you in this room have. And I think that is something that we need to engage better with you

and tap into better. I think the bollards is a prime example of where we need to have that expertise coming into British Waterways in a much more formal way.

A. Tony Hales, BW

Clive, thank you very much, the new chairman of IWA. We've talked a bit about the IWA today, I think it is suitable that you finish the close of session this morning.