



**Notes of Boating Issues Meeting
Held at BW Offices, Hatton
Wednesday 4 October 2006**

PRESENT:

User Groups

David Pearce	Association of Waterways' Cruising Club
Edward Burrell	Barge Association, The
Adrian Stott	Observer
David Dare	Observer (IWAAC)
Mike Bools	Boating Association, The
Bernard Hales	Heritage Afloat
Sue Day	Horse Boating Society
John Baylis	Inland Waterways Association
Stuart Sampson	National Association of Boat Owners
Beryl McDowall	Residential Boat Owners' Association
John Crisp	Royal Yachting Association
Kevin East	British Canoe Union

British Waterways:

Simon Salem	Marketing & Customer Service Director
Eugene Baston	External Relations Manager
Sally Ash	Head of Boating Development

Apologies:

Alan Meegan	Amateur Rowing Association
Barry Smith	Canal Boat Builders' Association
Terry Fell	National Federation of Anglers
Mark Lloyd	Anglers Conservation Association
Paul Bryan	National Community Boat Association
David Kent	National Federation of Anglers
Rebecca Dixon	Ramblers' Association
Hazel Rainer	Towpath Action Group
Adrian Birtles	The Steam Boat Association of Great Britain
Sam Bourne	The Yacht Harbour Association
Phil Prettyman	Historic Narrow Boat Owners' Club
Peter Wade	British Waterways

These notes are also circulated to British Waterways' Chief Executive, Executive Directors & other key senior managers.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Simon Salem welcomed the group and introduced new faces. He offered BW's apologies for not meeting the usual standards of administration prior to the meeting and offered to discuss expectations for the future under Any Other Business.

It was noted that a link on the 'Accountability' part of BW's web site was currently broken. This would be rectified.

EB

1. MATTERS ARISING

1.1 Ragwort disposal guidance

Sue Day recalled an action from the last meeting which was for BW to re-circulate its internal guidance on the management of ragwort on its property so that staff were fully aware of BW's responsibilities. It was confirmed that this had been done. Sue went on to comment that after asking some BW staff whether they were aware of the guidance, the response had been negative in some instances. Vince Moran would liaise with environmental colleagues to reinforce the presence of the guidance and BW's need to comply with it.

VM

2.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF BOATING - PRESENTATION

The presentation was made by Sally Ash, Head of Boating Development. Sally would email a copy of the presentation to all group members regardless of their attendance at the meeting so that they could remain informed of future boating developments.

SA

Sally explained that this was the group's opportunity to understand what was being planned to develop boating on the network over the next few months. Her work dovetailed with an overall marketing strategy for BW that had recently been endorsed by BW's Board. The strategy placed a strong focus on the needs of boaters and how these could be effectively met in to the future. It recognised that service levels were not currently meeting the expectations of boaters.

There are three over-arching principles to the Boating Strategy:

- Improvements in the quality of the boating experience which deliver value for money
- Policies and actions for implementation that are informed by the views of boaters
- Involvement of waterside boating businesses to help deliver better individual boating experiences such as facilities and services' provision.

Considering the recent Ecotec analysis of boating services and facilities which many individuals and user group representatives had contributed to, Sally commented that the findings were very informative. They would be used to attract additional private investment in basic boatyard facilities by showing the demand for such facilities, along with guiding BW in its own provision of services and facilities in to the future.

Moorings: Sally explained the planned work areas that would be undertaken over the next 12 months in this area. The development of a national moorings' strategy would involve:

- Attracting off-line moorings' investment
- The reduction of on-line moorings (one for every ten off-line moorings created)
- Continuation of the work of Residential Boating Issues Group, including assessment of residential boating demand for the future and developing policies to manage demand
- Development of visitor and short term moorings with emphasis on the development of more informal, rural visitor moorings through improved dredging programme and towpath vegetation management
- Ensuring that local moorings strategies adhered to published national policies
- Developing even greater transparency of the contract terms and annual pricing of BW's directly managed on-line moorings.

Promotion of boating activity: this area of work would focus on;

- The holiday-boating market, to secure early interest in future ownership of a boat
- Boats trading as businesses, such as trip/restaurant boats, and future investment in

these as a source of generating further visitor numbers/providing waterside services & facilities

- Increasing awareness of trailable boating activities and improving accessibility for these types of boats.

Revenue protection & enforcement: existing work in this area would focus on;

- Improving the consistency and monitoring of patrol officer activities
- Refining the processes behind the annual National Boat Check Week
- Further development of the 'temporary non cruising' consent principle

3.0 LOW SEASON STRUCTURE MANNING

This item was raised by Stuart Sampson who described his concerns over the recently published proposals for cost savings measures on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and River Severn. If implemented the proposals would require users of the two waterways to pre-book a passage between November and Easter each year. Stuart felt that this took away any spontaneity associated with boating and questioned whether the proposals should be subjected to a national consultation process.

In response, Simon explained that the 12-week consultation period was ongoing and that these legitimate views should be communicated through the published channels. He could not accept that a national consultation was necessary when the scope of the existing regional consultation was considered. This included work with regional representatives of the main boating user groups, extensive publicity in both printed and internet-based waterways media titles and plans for an open meeting. He accepted the suggestion that licence holders known to extensively use these waterways could be alerted to the proposals and would seek assurances from the South West's general manager that this would happen.

EB

John Baylis reported that while the existing proposals did not feature user operation of structures, such systems had been in place for up to ten years on the River Trent and SSYN waterways and they worked extremely well. He commended the system for consideration during the consultation process.

David Pearce was content with the proposals for winter operation on London's waterways. He stressed that a flexible approach built on effective communication channels between users and BW staff was the key to the smooth running of these established systems. Adrian Stott commended the local consultation process undertaken by BW London when considering operating times for tidal structures in the capital.

Views were expressed on the operation and availability of locks allowing access to and from the River Trent. It was generally felt that BW needed to be more inclusive in its approach to making contact details for lock keepers at Keadby available. Mike Bools from The Boating Association pointed to the work conducted with East Midlands waterways and the operation of West Stockwith lock as a possible template for future consideration of user views when deciding low season structure operation issues.

It was generally agreed that a single booking system for access to structures connected through normal navigation needs, for example, Keadby and West Stockwith locks, would help considerably in delivering a good level of customer access and service. Attendees asked BW to consider how cross-unit structures such as these and others around the network could be joined up with the result that a better level of consistent customer service would be achieved.

SA

It was felt overall that a simple set of nationally agreed principles for low season structure manning would help guide the delivery of services in specific locations. Sally invited attendees and their organisations to submit views ahead of the next meeting.

User groups/SA

4.0 STOPPAGE NOTIFICATION POLICY

Stuart Sampson commented on experiences from his extended summer cruise predominantly around the Midlands' canals. He used an example of being informed of a waterway closure, via a towpath sign, immediately before the actual closure, and suggested that BW could improve its communications systems for stoppage notices to deliver a better level of customer

service.

John Baylis referred to work he'd undertaken with Stewart Sim to develop a consistent approach to the writing, production and displaying of notices for stoppages, restrictions and information. From his recent experiences he felt that consistency of approach and general awareness within BW of this guidance had weakened. It was agreed that the advice would be reissued to service teams across BW.

EB

General comment was made concerning BW's use of electronic means to communicate information concerning boaters' ability to navigate. Once again inconsistencies between different parts of BW was a key source of irritation, with attendees calling on BW to supplement the advice for the production of written notices with advice and minimum standards for electronic communications. It was agreed that advice would be drafted and circulated internally in the first part of 2007.

SA/EB

Stuart reminded attendees of the existing facility provided by NABO – Waterway Report Boards. He explained that recent difficulties with unwanted 'spam' disrupting the site had now been largely overcome, and he was keen to see ways in which BW could adopt the reporting system through its own Waterscape function. Simon agreed that where resources within BW were available to take this project forward they would be provided.

SS

5.0 VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Vince Moran, Customer Operations Director, joined the meeting via video link for this item. He explained that through his own experiences, along with those brought to his attention, he recognised the importance visitors placed on a well-maintained waterway with active vegetation management practices in evidence. In attending the meeting he wanted to hear views from user group representatives that he would then take forward within BW.

Beryl McDowall spoke of her concerns about the impact of Floating Pennywort on the environment and how it also affected the ability to navigate easily. She felt that her efforts to provide early notice to East Midlands waterway unit were not always appreciated, and as a result of delays in then subsequently dealing with aquatic plant the problem became larger and more costly to deal with. Vince would raise this with Caroline Killeavy

VM

Adrian Stott asked if Vince was aware of the non-delivery of the 'Veg Pledge' on the River Lea, and in particular no full edge-to-edge cut during the last two years. Vince would seek assurances from local management that plans were in place to complete the minimum specification for vegetation management.

VM

Sue Day described her ongoing concerns about the presence of Ragwort on BW's property, which was subject to legal controls by landowners because of its poisonous nature. She had previously requested that guidance on dealing with this plant be widely circulated within BW. Eugene confirmed that this had been done after the last meeting and that the action would be repeated.

VM

There was a general discussion on offside vegetation management, with attendees recognising the additional issues of land ownership and safety at work that BW had to contend with. Vince agreed that a consistently described approach to management of this type of vegetation would also improve the overall efficiency of resources allocated to dealing with it. He would look to the Technical Director and environmental colleagues for the development of this favoured approach.

VM

Turning to the Towpath Mowing Guidelines (TMG), Vince confirmed that these set standards to which colleagues could apply resources to and subsequently deliver to a nationally consistent and cost efficient standard. He accepted that there was room for improvement and felt confident this was achievable, particularly as BW reviewed localised vegetation management contracts and considered the approach of other national agencies with vegetation management responsibilities such as the Highways Agency.

6.0 DREDGING

Adrian Stott reported that he had found the Technical Director's answers to the questions posed at the Spring meeting to be inconclusive. He felt that previous nationally negotiated agreements with user group representatives had now been forgotten and that BW had changed its policy without proper notification. Simon accepted that Adrian remained concerned about BW's intentions for dredging activities and recommended that a meeting be convened between Jim Stirling, BW's Technical Director, Adrian, Bernard Hales, representing boaters with an interest in deep-draughted historic craft, and other interested groups. JS

A suggestion was made that off-side farming land owners should be encouraged to fence off access to waterways to prevent cattle from churning up bank edges and subsequently contributing to materials that fall into the navigation channel. After discussion it was felt that any attempt to do this would be met with only limited take-up by the farming community and the resources necessary to encourage compliance would be excessive against the end results.

Management of dredging on the River Wey was discussed. It was thought that while the EA conducted dredging of the main river channel, as a part of flood control management activities, the National Trust, as the Wey's navigation authority, limited its dredging expenditure to lock approach channels only. Attendees encouraged BW to investigate this arrangement and see whether it could be applied to BW's river navigations. JS

Adrian specifically reported on recent experiences on London's waterways where users' views on the extent and profile of dredging activities had been actively sought. He commended this approach.

7.0 PINCH POINTS

BW's approach to the removal of pinch points across the network was questioned. It was confirmed that this remained the same: where remedial works to lock and bridge structures was planned, this would include the structure being returned to its original dimensions.

8.0 SIGNAGE

8.1 Tunnel signage

John Baylis spoke of his concerns about inconsistencies in advisory notices placed near to tunnel entrances. These concerns ranged from dirty and obscured signs to directional arrows placed on tunnel roofs indicating the closest exit to the boat's position.

Sally requested that views, experiences and opinions be sent to her. These would then be considered as a part of overall work to introduce standards for signage across the network. SA/VM

8.2 River navigation signage

Speaking about where canals and rivers meet, John Baylis described how he had discovered that some sections did not provide water level boards to assist in safe navigation. This meant that boaters were not properly advised about the state of the navigation they were approaching, and in such circumstances they could unwittingly get into difficulties if river sections had large volumes of water running through them. Attendees were invited to submit (to Eugene) examples of where this circumstance was found so that it could be addressed. User groups

One other concern raised by John was how some water level boards were hard to find when approaching a lock above or below a river section. He asked if thought could be given to simple signage that would indicate clearly where a boater needed to look to benefit from river level indicators. He also asked whether there were any standard arrangements in place for the periodic inspection of river navigation signs to ensure that they remained clean and unobstructed. BW would report back. EB/VM

9.0 MOORINGS & LICENCES

A paper produced by Stuart Sampson proposing a range of time durations for formal visitor moorings was circulated. Comments were invited on the proposals from those attending the meeting: these are to be provided to Sally Ash ahead of the next meeting. Sally would also give a review of this work at the next meeting.

SA

Beryl asked for a progress report on the review of Low Intensity Trading licences which was undertaken as a part of the 2005 Licence Fee Structure consultation. Sally replied that this was still work in progress, and that she hoped to seek views on a developing simple tariff structure that took account of individual waterside businesses' viability whilst also reflecting BW's commitment to the promotion of boating activity on the waterways. These views would contribute to a formal consultation anticipated during 2007.

Sally agreed to confirm for Beryl whether a Gold Licence was available for those owners trading from their vessels.

SA

10.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A general discussion took place on meeting attendees' expectations for the administration of future meetings. The following was agreed:

Four weeks prior to a meeting:	invitees reminded of the date and agenda items invited.
Two weeks prior to the meeting :	agenda closed and issued with a list of confirmed attendees
At the meeting:	Agenda papers, supporting papers and a list of attendees available
Post meeting:	Meeting notes issued within three weeks of the meeting taking place, including publication on BW.co.uk.

BW would continue to establish meeting dates for the following year and inform possible attendees well in advance of these dates. It was agreed that hosting meetings at Hatton was as good a venue as any other when the various difficulties of travelling were taken into account.

In summary, Simon thanked everyone for attending and contributing to a positive meeting. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being Wednesday 7 March 2007 at Hatton, starting at 10.30am.