

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **Waterway Grant Cuts**
- **BW 'Boating Issues' Update**
- **Little Ships on Big Canal**



Issue 6 October 2006

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2006 CALENDAR	
Council meeting	Copy date
Nov 18th	AGM
Nov 25th	Dec 7th

GRANT CUTS WILL DAMAGE YOUR WATERWAYS

- COMPLAIN TO YOUR MP, MINISTERS & THE MEDIA

THE PROBLEM FOR BW

BW's grant comes from both DEFRA and the Scottish Executive. This year BW originally planned on the basis of receiving £73.5m income. Of this, £62.5m was to come from DEFRA and £10.9m from the Scottish Executive.

The Scottish Executive will be paying its grant to BW in full in 2006/07. DEFRA have decided **not** to pay BW the £62.5m originally agreed.

In March 2006, DEFRA advised BW that the grant was to be cut by 5% (£3.1m) for 2006/07. Although this was only just before the start of the financial year, BW absorbed this cut and adjusted its business plans.

DEFRA's financial position then worsened. The department is expected to pay a large fine to the EU for its failure to make prompt payments to farmers, and they are also incurring substantial overspends to do with putting the service to farmers right, bird flu and failure to make the internal economies expected of all departments by the Treasury.

In July, BW was told that its grant for £2006/07 would be cut by a further 7.5% (£4.5m) with the possibility of a further cut of 2.5% (£1.5m) in the autumn.

DEFRA is now briefing BW with regard to 2008/09 to 2010/11 and has advised it that its grant will be required to decrease still further and it has to be prepared to make savings of £10-12m p.a. during this period. Over the 5 year period 2006/7 to 2010/11, BW could lose up to £60 million of funding.

THE CONSEQUENCES

No options have been ruled out yet. At a headline level, major savings being considered are:

- Delay or abandonment of restoration programmes
- Closure of stretches of waterway
- Job losses
- Increases in boat licence fees



ACTION

Politicians are supposed to make the decisions, not civil servants, so the best way forward is to create pressure which is felt in terms of 'political cost' by DEFRA ministers primarily and secondarily by other ministers and Labour MPs.

NABO members can create 'political cost' by:-

- raising issues which will attract widespread interest, e.g. heritage loss
- raising issues that might cause grief in constituencies important to the government, e.g. marginal ones or those of ministers.
- creating large volumes of strongly expressed concern e.g. letters and meetings which cause diverting work for civil servants and inconvenience and embarrassment to ministers.

We therefore need to highlight the consequences of the funding cuts on the politicians' support, both from the electorate and bodies with whom they have dealings, e.g. local councils. Politicians care much more about the threat of closures, abandonment of regeneration projects, loss of heritage, local tourism, employment, the Olympics and the like, than boaters pockets.

It would be good to create a very significant post bag for civil servants and ministers to deal with, and encourage numerous meetings between stakeholder bodies and trade unions with ministers, parliamentary questions, written, oral and to relevant committees. Also we need significant sympathetic media coverage – Plans are afoot for a banner-bearing flotilla past the Houses of Parliament.

TIMING

In the period September to Christmas, DEFRA ministers must be made to understand that cutting grant allocation to BW will be very unpopular. A specific drive to spoil their run up to Christmas may be effective.

In Spring 2007 DEFRA ministers will apportion the budget that they get from Treasury – the so called ‘divvy up.’, so another burst might help then.

Please write to both your local MP, the Waterways Minister, Barry Gardiner and DEFRA S.of.S. David Miliband. Letters should be in the style of the writer, not to a template which can be dismissed with an easy stock reply.

We are considering using the Freedom of Information Act to find out how and why Defra is cutting funding and if this is being done rationally and fairly.

Get writing, to your MP at:-

The House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

or use **www.writetothem.com** on the internet, or try emailing them. Most people in Parliament have an email address with their last name followed immediately by their first initial then **@parliament.uk**, e.g.

gardinerb@parliament.uk for Barry Gardiner, Waterways minister,
milibandd@parliament.uk for the Secretary of State for DEFRA

Alternatively for the DEFRA ministers:-

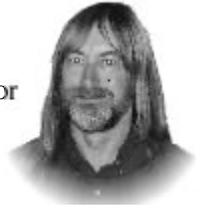
forename.surname@defra.gsi.gov.uk e.g. **david.miliband@defra.gsi.gov.uk**

Suggest you use both!

Note, BW isn't the only victim, the EA is under DEFRA too so don't forget them

**Canals spawned the Industrial Revolution –
Industry spawned the Labour Party –
The Labour party owes it to the canals**

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Ouch!

The stock answer to a minor collision is that 'boating is a contact sport'. What I didn't realise until recently is that it is also an extreme sport requiring the wearing of helmets – if you choose to cruise under overhanging oak and horse chestnut trees in autumn!

Sadly as I start this we are about to moor up for the winter and we seem to have rushed around from commitment to commitment without actually having ventured very far. We have been no further north than the Mersey or south of Gloucester, and ignored the eastern half of the country altogether. Nor have we done any tideways, but we have done 95% of the BCN and most of the Manchester Ship Canal. That is another story, told later in this issue.

BW Grant Cut Meeting

BW's financial crisis has already been covered, but for me it meant yet another requirement to be in a certain place at a certain time. It was almost a summons to 'appear before Robin Evans' on 14th of August, and I suspect BW would have sent a helicopter to airlift me from the boat had I not been in a position to get to a station! Certainly they were desperate to share their troubles with the 'leaders of the passionate user groups' as soon as the gravity of the situation became clear.

However much we may want to scorn BW, it can't look after our waterways without enough money and the ability to plan its budgets, so it is in all our interests to put political pressure on the Government to save cuts on the 'cut'.

In his Waterways World article, *A Broader View*, Adrian Stott thinks BW should be given an endowment of

property in exchange for never coming cap-in-hand to the Government again. This could help in the longer term, but would take years to set up. It would also mean that towpath users would no longer be paying for the waterways through their taxes and it would shift even more emphasis away from BW's core activity. This trend is already evident from the appointment of three new 'non-exec' board members, still leaving only one with any demonstrable interests in the original purpose of the canal network. Still, DEFRA appoints the BW Board, then takes away the money it needs to run the waterways – what more need we say!

Whatever happens we must do our bit to get the cuts reduced now. Joining a demonstration convoy up the Thames past the Houses of Parliament is one idea, perhaps linked with the London Boat Show. Blockades were suggested – the one against Peel Holdings when Thorne Marine was threatened was well covered by the press. Something on that line might help, but not at Fradley Junction as it wouldn't look out of the ordinary!

Any other ideas welcome: we are a campaigning organisation, let's do some campaigning.

Inspection launch duties

Another commitment followed a couple of weeks later. It was like the old canal days when the directors inspected their waterway by boat. In this case that boat was ours, the waterway was the Stratford Canal from Wilmecote to Bancroft Basin and the Director was the new Customer

Operations Director, Vince Moran, accompanied by the External Relations Manager, Eugene Baston. The only difference being they were given windlasses and told to work the locks!

They saw: vision-obscuring vegetation; missing lock brickwork; overflowing rubbish skips; obstructed water point moorings and an unsatisfactory sanitary station.

We were temporarily grounded due to lack of depth in one of the Stratford pounds, and only just found somewhere to moor in the basin – so they got a short taster of boating as it really is, and nearly a parking ticket in Stratford due to the delay.

It also appeared that word had got around – I saw more BW logos embroidered on blue that day than in the previous two months on BW waters.

Meanwhile Simon Robbins has taken another BW Director, Simon Salem, out boating in London and we promise more. Maybe one day we will have the Chief Executive ‘hands-on’ with toilet cassette to empty!

Boaters’ Facilities Workshop

This was another meeting for which BW was prepared to pay my travelling expenses. It goes to show how much they are now valuing our input.

‘Workshops’ are BW’s response to our pleas for early consultation. From your point of view they may not be the ideal solution as you have to put a lot of trust in your representatives. In the ‘Terms of Reference’ we are expected to sound out the opinions of our members but at the same time not divulge what was discussed. This is difficult, but it is a whole universe better than how things were done before.

What they don’t want is the threat of sensational headlines preventing radical ideas being discussed freely. This is more of a problem with the Moorings Contracts Workshop which Simon Robbins attends on your behalf.

What I learnt at the facilities workshop is the results of the ‘clipboard survey’. I can say that there were few surprises, even down to the fact that the surveys were taking longer than anticipated because boaters had a lot to say!

We have been sent away with homework in terms of deciding if anything, and if so what, needs to be specified for a facility to qualify. e.g. a water point does not qualify if there is nowhere to tie up to use it.

Once the definitions are decided, BW then needs to find out what it has in place before it can decide where extra is needed. With this you can help. Either go online or to your local BW office and get a copy of the Waterscape Boaters’ Guide for an area you have recently boated and know well, and give it the once over for inaccuracies.

Report to me or to the address given in the guide introduction, or both. If what Adrian has found for the Lee and Stort is anything to go by, there is plenty to go at.

Council Meeting

I only mention this because it was another commitment. We moored in Oldbury and walked - how’s that for saving your money!

BW Board Dinner

This set the end of our cruise as it was held in Leeds near where we live. As a new venture, BW is inviting user representatives to ‘Board Dinners’.

The BW Board meets around six times a year - a bit like NABO Council, but in different parts of the country each

time. On the day before their formal meeting, they usually have a 'field trip', this time on the theme of freight, and then the dinner.

They tended to invite local business and municipal guests, and the mood would be grey suit, power dressing, 'partnership talk' and mutual back slapping until – Laurence Morgan (Gen.Manager, Yorkshire) made the mistake of inviting me!

I must confess to not owning a grey business suit, so, with a lot of backing, financial, moral and practical, from your Gen.Sec, I went attired in honour of the body that hasn't cut BW's grant, the Scottish Executive. This injected some colour into proceedings and I hoped that what I had to say injected some true colour of life on the cut.

It was a welcome opportunity to see BW from another point of view, and hopefully for them to hear about the waterways from a different point of view. The meal was good too, not extravagant but went down very well.

So, you may wonder, am I now working for BW. No, I am trying to make things better for boaters and if

that involves eating slow roasted lamb in the company of the BW Board at their expense, then so be it. But then again if it means sacrificing a dawdle up the Staffordshire and Worcester to dash to Birmingham to get to a meeting, so be that too.

And finally

My usual plea at this time of year – try to make the AGM. NABO is your association, this is your best chance to question and even change anything you don't like. Don't shy off for fear of getting roped in, nominations had to be in 42 days in advance, i.e. long gone when you read this.

See you there (details in pullout pages in the middle of this issue). You might also like to look at the list on page 14 to see what else you can do to help NABO and boating in general without too much commitment.

In the meantime happy cruising, if you are lucky enough to still be afloat.

Stuart



Stop Press - BW licences to rise 2.7% in April

VHF ON THE TIDAL THAMES

From 1 September 2006, all boats over 13.7m (45ft) must be equipped with and use VHF radio, except narrowboats cruising between Brentford and Teddington, or members of a flotilla cruising west of Bow Creek, whose lead vessel has VHF and has other means to communicate effectively with the other boats in the convoy.

Convoys must give 7 days notice, and solo boats immediate notice by phone, of their planned departure and arrival times to London VTS - **020 8855 0315**

Working VHF channel **14** - call sign '*London VTS*'

For more information about all safety rules on the tidal Thames visit www.portoflondon.co.uk

TWO REPORTS –

BW ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2005/06

The Annual Report and Accounts of British Waterway have been published and members are urged to obtain a copy from BW head office at Watford, if only because as boaters and tax payers you contribute doubly to the coffers of BW.

The theme of the report is the public benefits derived from historic waterways under the stewardship of BW. Attracting more visitors continues to be a major goal for the organisation and they have carried out extensive customer satisfaction surveys and complaints audits. They have also surveyed their entire workforce to glean their perceptions of their employer.

Great stress is placed on the major waterway expansion projects being undertaken including restoration schemes assisted by lottery funds and partnership funding.

Putting the customer first is a constant theme throughout the report - working with businesses, encouraging new marina developments, regeneration and the waterside pub partnership, delivering value and engaging with local communities and including all sections of society including disabled, disadvantaged and minority groups. The latter is exemplified by the inclusion of many photographs of ethnic persons being delighted by their experience of the waterways. The openness and accountability theme and the instigation of BWAF (the BW Advisory Forum) feature in the report together with the major public consultation exercises that have taken place over the past year.

Sustainability and responsible use of resources and addressing energy efficiency are highlighted as examples of BW as an environmentally responsible nationalised body.

On the financial front, BW increased its income considerably thanks to increased Government grants and joint venture income, giving it a small operating profit compared with the previous year's loss.

An interesting snippet in the corporate governance report reveals that BW has re-defined the respective roles and responsibilities of board members and executive directors. Prior to May 2006 the Board considered that its exclusively non-executive membership gave it sufficiently strong independence. Now it has appointed its Vice-Chairman, Dr Campbell Christie, as its senior independent director.

This change would have had limited significance had an article on the very topic not appeared in NABO News in April 2006. You may recall the article on BW Scrutiny in which your Treasurer asked the question - "who should scrutinise BW" - given that the Board comprises exclusively non-exec directors unlike the boards of commercial and financial bodies who have a mix of full-time directors and independent directors. We know NABO News is eagerly awaited and is read avidly by people at the highest level within BW. The move by BW to identify the board member with senior responsibility for applying independence of mind may just have been triggered by our perceptive comments.

WATERWAY OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT

As you may remember, BW set up a committee to appoint and support a new Waterways Ombudsman, and Hilary Bainbridge was chosen for the job. She has followed an impressive career in Ombudsman work including eight years as Director of Investigations for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and has earned a reputation for not leaving stones unturned. This is evident from the report of her first year in the role.



In the year 2005/6 the number of enquiries doubled on the previous year and three times as many decisions were made - twenty-seven complaints in all of which 17 were upheld in whole or in part.

Hilary emphasises that, to present a complaint to her for consideration, you have to go through the BW Internal Complaints Procedure first, starting at local or manager level, i.e. to the Service Manager of the business unit or the External Relations Manager for headquarters complaints, and if you can't sort things out to your satisfaction proceed to the Director level. Only if you get no joy then should you approach the Ombudsman.

The fact that this is simpler to do than the old four step procedure may be why she has had more cases, and, combined with the hand-over of responsibility, there have been some inevitable delays. She has set up a simple computerised record system, registered under the data Protection Act, to help her handle this increased workload.

Another factor is the widening of her remit. She can now consider 'unfair treatment' as well as maladministration, advise on cases involving some 'legal interpretation' and deal with businesses with less than £1 million turnover.

When investigating complaints she doesn't just sit in her office with the papers, she talks to everyone concerned and may even visit the scene of the problem. Having gone through all that she is sometimes frustrated that her recommendations are not carried out or unreasonably delayed.

The report goes on to summarise the cases where decisions have been made, the majority it appears coming from boaters and complaints about BW moorings seem to be prevalent.

There have been less relevant enquiries, including one woman wanting 'an Ombudsman for her washing machine'. We wish her all power in this vital but thankless task.

She is coming to our AGM – do come and meet her.

FOR YOUR SAFETY ...

Alrewas Fatality

You may have heard that a man lost his life in Alrewas earlier this year having fallen from a reversing boat. NABO was contacted by the Marine Accident Investigation Board (MAIB) who were collecting statistics about similar accidents, and we were able to say that they were very rare.



Since then we have received some 'Accident Flyers' from MAIB intended to prevent as far as possible such a fatality happening again. The 'Narrative' states that a Canaltime boat was leaving Alrewas and rounded the bend below Bagnall Lock only to find the lock landing already occupied by another boat waiting to go up. He was travelling too fast to pull in behind and so had to stop and back up. In the process the boat slewed across the channel, the stern glanced off the stern of the waiting boat and went into the bank. At this point a crew member jumped off with a rope and turned round but all he could see of the helmsman was his legs trying to hook over the stern rail. Then the helmsman disappeared from view altogether so the crew member jumped back aboard, took the engine out of reverse but still saw no sign of the helmsman. He was later freed from under the boat but pronounced dead at the scene.

The MAIB made four recommendations:-

- 1. Although serious accidents are rare on the inland waterways, boaters, and particularly those new to boating, should be aware of the potential hazard posed by a rotating propeller.*
- 2. All responsible people on board should be familiar with the actions to take in an emergency and be able to stop the propeller quickly if needed.*
- 3. Boaters should check canal maps for potential obstacles such as locks and bridges, and slow down if the view ahead is obscured to avoid having to make difficult manoeuvres at short notice.*
- 4. Although guard rails are not required on narrow boats, where they are fitted, they should be of an appropriate height to prevent people from falling overboard near the propeller.*

We have also heard that Canaltime have been asking their customers to sign an indemnity freeing them from liability from any accident if the helmsman remains seated on the rail when the boat is going astern.

From this it would seem that what actually happened is that the rudder fouled the bed of the canal or something in the water by the bank and the momentum of the boat swung the blade round causing the tiller to knock the helmsman off the rail into the water. It is likely that he was then drawn into the propeller by entanglement of loose clothing.

There is nothing specific to Canaltime in the cause of this accident, it could have happened to anyone on any tiller steered boat, although without a rail the helmsman may have been thrown clear. As far as we know the MAIB is not pressing for any compulsory measures, as accidents like this are very rare, but people should be very wary of standing or sitting beside the tiller if the boat is going astern anywhere where the rudder blade could contact anything under the water.

BW BOATING ISSUES MEETING

NABO put four items on the agenda for this meeting, held at Hatton on the 4th of October. In fact we ‘jumped the gun’ a bit by proffering them before BW issued the request. It is a good thing we did, as the request never reached our chairman for reasons best known to the gods of email. For reasons known to BW rather than said gods, the final agenda didn’t arrive till the day before the meeting.

So the meeting began with profuse apologies. However no apologies were offered for the meeting proper starting with a presentation by the Head of Boating Development outlining the ‘framework’ of her activities to date, displayed as a series of ‘slides’ on a screen, each containing a bullet pointed list of headings which she read out and commented on. We have been grumbling for many years about ‘Death by Powerpoint’ at BW meetings. For those in blissful ignorance, Powerpoint is a Microsoft computer program inflicted upon the business world to create ‘slideshows’ which have the power either to bore audiences to tears at meetings, or lift them to new levels of enlightenment.

Although what she was saying was important and useful, many delegates wanted to get to grips with issues that mattered to them. This meant that when vaguely relevant headings came up there was a tendency to deviate and so debates about items that were due to be covered later on the agenda ‘went off at half cock’. It was a test of your chairman’s patience as he felt he was being denied the chance to introduce NABO’s items properly.

However, that chance did come for everyone after the presentation.

Low-season structure manning

This came from complaints to NABO about arrangements to save money on the Severn and G&S canal where all locks and swing bridges are currently operated by keepers. In the winter the manpower cost for one passage from Stourport to Sharpness, which might be the only passage in that day for each lock or bridge, could cost more than the vessel’s annual licence! Understandably savings can be made by having one mobile keeper to see the boat through several bridges or locks.

However BW Southwest has proposed a system requiring advanced booking during the ‘low season’ which effectively denies users freedom and the chance to take advantage of good weather, or not, as the case may be. NABO requested a much more flexible approach with boaters arranging passages directly with the keeper through his/her mobile phone, a technology that has come in since the ‘24/48 hour in advance’ was needed for office booking. NABO also asked that this approach should be adopted nationwide where possible. The idea was generally supported so BW will look into it.

Stoppage Notification

Another request from NABO for consistency across the system and the novel idea of displaying stoppage information beyond the boundaries of the Business Unit! We asked for standard, easily recognised, legible signs and notices displaying the

location and dates of a stoppage of any sort, placed at least at the last junction and last winding point before encountering it, and on all information boards in the area. There was also discussion about email notification and Waterscape.

Dredging

Yes - Adrian Stott was there as an 'observer' but that didn't stop him speaking! Unfortunately BW's Technical Director was not there to field the questions but other delegates confirmed that many canals were becoming 'thick' with sediment.

Adrian praised BW London's cooperation with him regarding the River Stort and hoped similar work could be done elsewhere - consistency again.

Vegetation

Another NABO request but considered sufficiently important to be brought up with Vince Moran, the new Customer Operations Director, 'present' via a video link at lunch time. He is in fact to be 'Captain Consistency' and heard our complaints. The 'Veg Pledge' was confirmed as a promise of one full width cut a year plus intermediate cuts as necessary. No commitment of how wide and how often. Mention was made of the TMGs, the Towpath Mowing Guidelines. Your chairman acknowledged that we had been consulted on these, but they were just a set of differing standards laid down to help BW define what needs to be done. There has not been any consultation on which standards should be applied where. Nobody denied this.

There was also discussion of BW's failure to control invasive weeds such as floating pennywort and ragwort.

Signage

Brought up by the IWA regarding mainly river signs, legibility, cleanliness and visibility - and consistency, especially of strong stream indicators. Someone suggested a little arrow above the coping stones pointing down to the gauge. good idea!

Moorings and Licences

Short discussion regarding trading licences, which are still being discussed with the trade. Beware, this is being kept a little quiet and NABO members trading from their boats could be affected. If you don't think you are being consulted or properly represented let us know.

Under 'Moorings' was NABO Council's request for a fresh look at unreserved moorings time limits. We advocate: using the term 'Visitor Mooring' only where there is something or somewhere to visit; the creation of '24 Hr Transit Moorings' e.g. at the top and bottom of long lock flights; 24 hour limits at pubs and restaurants; longer periods for those 'weekending' their boats and the abandonment of restrictions, or even any signs, on rural stretches where boaters can 'chill out'. A 'pro-active' request for a consistent national policy.

Consistency

The keyword for this meeting. Much of what we ask isn't expensive, we look forward to the results.

STOPPAGE NOTICE

NABO News

Page 13

October to December 2006

Details:- This page is a remainder page with severe safety problems due to its number. We regret having to close it due to lack of Grant-in-Aid to maintain it.

*Don't let this happen
on the waterways,
divert to Page 3*

HELP!

NABO NEEDS YOU!

NABO is the largest of the boating user groups, with more paid up directly represented members than any other. It has been said that Stuart and I are doing far too much for the organisation (we've known this for years!), so that the impression is given that NABO is a very small organisation, which is definitely not the case. Nor can we carry on with the present workload. You, the members, seem reluctant to stand for Council, but there are many other ways in which you can help.

PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE IT TO OTHER PEOPLE: if no volunteers come forward, jobs will not get done. Here's how you can help.

Rallies

NABO members always seem to be pleased to see our stand at the main rallies, but where are the helpers? Helping on other stands, it seems. Ideally, we need a dedicated Rally Organiser. Otherwise, we need someone to agree to be responsible for the stand at the 2007 national rally at St Ives (Nene). NABO will pay for your boat + you + family member to attend in return for you being the kingpin: being there to help erect and take down, and organise the manning from the volunteers. If no-one agrees to do this, NABO will not be attending next year.

User Group meetings

Some Regional Secretaries have difficulty in attending meetings due to the distance involved. It is important that all these meetings are covered as quite often, something that is 'tried out' and 'accepted' locally becomes the national default, almost as if measures are being implemented through the back door. We need to be vigilant. If you can help with any of the following, let me know.

Each area should hold two meetings per year, usually in Spring and Autumn.

Wales & Border Counties Nantwich area

Yorkshire

Doncaster + York and Leeds if I am still boating

Southeast

Milton Keynes and Foxton

PLUS reserves for all areas.

It is perfectly acceptable to take a partner with you, and you would be briefed beforehand.

Webmaster

We already have a volunteer, but it would be better if the person is a member of NABO. You would need to be computer literate, and have an interest in website management. Stuart is prepared to work with a comparative beginner for up to two years before handing over responsibility, and he would continue with certain aspects of the work. This is a golden opportunity for the right person to learn about web design and operation.

PHOTOS FOR DEFRA CAMPAIGN - *THIS IS IMPORTANT AND SERIOUS.*

If you do nothing, you will seem to be unconcerned at the prospect of having to pay a lot extra for your licence, and be accepting less maintenance and the prospect of canal closure.

Council needs photographs which illustrate the current state of the inland waterways network, as follows:

Bridges - showing seriously cracked structures, or subsidence etc.

Locks - showing lack of pointing, bricks missing, and chambers where large chunks of the side wall is missing, plant growth in the lock sides or on gates

Vegetation - examples of growth which limits visibility, on bends, into bridgeholes etc.

Towpath - collapsed, overgrown etc.

Bank - showing coping stones etc. which have collapsed into the water etc.



Please label your photograph with the exact location and waterway, and your name and address if you want it back. We need examples from EVERY waterway, to show that these examples are not isolated, but consistent across the country.

If you know of a location which would illustrate any of the above, please also let me know: we could then get someone who lives nearby to go and take a picture.

DO NOT LEAVE IT UNTIL NEXT YEAR. We need the photos now.

Members' Action Summary

How many boxes can you tick? Should there be an award for the most?

<i>Action</i>	<i>Page</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Contact</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Write to Minister/your MP re grant cuts	4	a.s.a.p.	Copy to NABO?
<input type="checkbox"/> Come to the AGM	p/o	18/11/06	Just do it!
<input type="checkbox"/> Send in photos for DEFRA presentation	15	2006	News editor
<input type="checkbox"/> Join protest cruise in London	5	16/1/07	Louis Jankel
<input type="checkbox"/> Comment on BW Moorings Policy	25	Now	Simon Robbins
<input type="checkbox"/> Send in waterway reports - web or text*	17	Any time	*07930 419 981
<input type="checkbox"/> Check BW Boaters' Guide accuracy	6	Now	BW &/or Stuart
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for 2007 Event stand manning	14	a.s.a.p.	Gen Sec
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit more members (and claim reward)		Any time.	Just do it!
<input type="checkbox"/> Write article/letter for NABO News		Any time	News editor
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend your local User Group Meetings	14		Gen Sec

RCR Advert

NOTICES

**Text your
waterway
reports to:**

07930 419 981

07961 001814

07989 441674

POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 7/06 the editor will be ashore so please send items by email to news.editor@nabo.org.uk

Failing that by post to:-

48 Old Lane, Bramhope,
Leeds LS16 9AZ

Membership Numbers

In the interests of economy, NABO does not issue membership cards so members should make a note of their membership number for future reference. It can be found on your subscription renewal reminder and also on the address label when you receive NABO News.

The number can be useful when taking up special offers such as the River & Canal Rescue special deal and the insurance discount offered by Mardon.

The Treasurer does not have access to the numbers (he only takes your money!) and if you are in any doubt you should contact our Administrator, Melanie, at admin@nabo.org.uk

I'm afraid the cost of good living has gone up again.

FloGas, the supplier to the DBA bottled propane scheme, has notified me that rises in global energy prices have forced it to increase its prices to members of the scheme by 3p/litre for bottles of 9 kg and larger, and by 50p/cylinder for smaller sizes, as of 2006 August 1.

Adrian

£5 off your sub

Money back for you when a new member joins up having put **your** name in the 'introduced by' box on his or her application form (up to a maximum of 3)

Life membership for £150
+ £50 for each 'family member'



RIVERS



A Message from Louis Jankel to Thames boaters

I am delighted to respond to anyone who wishes to contact me on any Environment Agency (EA)- Thames Region - related matters.

There is much "national" detail I am involved with through my membership of the Thames RFERAC, but specific questions that relate to EA Anglia region (Nene and Great Ouse) and EA Southern Region (Medway) may be beyond my 'ken'.

E-mail me at nabo@tugn.org.uk. I am afloat from April to October and can be found on nb. MADAM.

My comments in reply to any communication will not be NABO policy but I promise to copy Tony with the correspondence. Certainly my responses will be my views with the benefit of 'informed' EA data and policy. Those that know me will confirm I am inclined to speak my mind. I am generally supportive of the main aims of the EA but I am certainly not forgiving of their failings.

The current funding strategy is a topic I have been vociferously opposing for some 15 months and have advocated that a credible investment strategy must be in place before any realistic boat registration rate for future years can be set. However it is imperative we do have a three year budget strategy as part of a rolling 21 year plan. The EA registration rate increase is used for all charges levied by the EA including moorings.

I look forward to receiving members views.

RNLI SEA SAFETY GUIDE

Unlike boating on the inland waterways, there are no compulsory safety requirements for leisure boats sailing in coastal waters. No Boat Safety Scheme; no requirement for insurance; not even basic training.

Having said that, only a complete fool would venture on to tidal waters without first considering his own safety and that of his family and crew. A good starting point would be a new booklet produced by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution entitled "Sea Safety - the Complete Guide". The guide has sections covering all aspects of safety for boats venturing out to sea and has an accompanying interactive CD-Rom on which you can test your knowledge on topics such as weather, navigation, safety equipment, engine care and emergency procedures.

Increasing numbers of boats based on rivers are designed for use on open tidal waters and every year their owners take them out to sea for short or protracted cruises. Some of them are NABO members. Most of them have enjoyable, uneventful experiences but one does get to hear about accidents and mishaps that could have been avoided. Problems such as dirty fuel, engine failure, hitting

underwater obstructions, encountering bad weather or having to call on the emergency services happen all too regularly and are usually caused by lack of preparation and inexperience on the part of the boat owner. Always take advice and don't take risks.

Obtain a copy of this free RNLI guide by phoning 0800 328 0600 and improve your chances of a safe voyage.

EA 'HARMONISATION' PROGRESS

- Will it be length times beam after all?

Surprise, surprise! – more delays. The Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO), which the EA is hoping will replace the separate legislation in force for each of its regions, is still bogged down with DEFRA lawyers. It seems that every enquiry is technically an '*objection*' and, due to the number of these, the TWAO will almost certainly be subject to either a Public Hearing or a Public Enquiry. The cost of the latter is huge, but so is the cost to EA, and User Groups, if the work done so far is totally abandoned. The EA is desperate for it to be handled by a 'Hearing' so is trying to satisfy as many objectors as possible.

Just to remind you, the TWAO sets out the EA's possible future statutory powers and obligations regarding: registration requirements; provision of information about boats; construction standards; insurance; vessel inspections; charging schemes; handling of offences; consultation obligations; and more.

The Harmony Forum, which last met on the 6th October, is generally happy with the latest draft. There is better wording regarding giving out information which should satisfy NABO's reservations. You or your insurance company will be able to find out who owns a boat that has damaged yours or been seen to do so in your absence, as this is '*reasonable cause*'. However information about boats would no longer be made readily accessible to the public.

There could be *objections* with the charging regime. As we understand it, the limitation of a TWAO in the legislation world may not be able to allow EA to create a fee structure '*as it sees fit*' – the structure may have to be set in stone within the TWAO leaving the Secretary of State as judge and jury on this, as well as the final arbiter on the Grant in Aid. A most undesirable situation.

The fall-back is to take the charging issue right out of the TWAO and presumably leave existing legislation in place on this subject. The only legislation which specifies a charging structure is for the Thames, so, to 'harmonise', all boats would be charged length by beam. This is not popular, particularly with the barge and large cruiser owners, and also would scupper plans to harmonise with BW who have no appetite for such a drastic change.

However the EA has powers to offer discounts, even on the Thames, so they could offer a discount based on beam and end up with a length only scheme, but the whole object of the exercise is to simplify!

What say you to length **plus** beam?

Feeling Annoyed about Something on the Waterways?

Then WELCOME – Welcome to Grumpy Old Boaters Corner.

Welcome you say! There are places where you know boaters are far from welcome, areas where 'No Mooring' signs abound. You get the unwelcome feeling that you can't tie up anywhere. Yes, and on some rivers they want a large mooring fee at the places where they condescend to allow you to moor. You feel that you are only welcome if you are rich, otherwise keep away!

Have you seen the welcome sign for the Kennet and Avon canal? CAN you see it for the overgrowth surrounding it? Can you read it for the graffiti?

The EA too can be unwelcoming. I phoned to check because there was a strong stream warning sign at Dukes Cut. I was told that there was no strong stream alert and all the signs had been taken down. Huh, all except the one I was looking at! I thought, 'Are they trying to tell me something?'

What about the Northampton Arm? The sign there says welcome to British Waterways. No marks out of ten to the local council for their 'Welcome' – 'Welcome to the corporation tip' would be more appropriate. The whole area is covered with black plastic bags split open with all sorts of rubbish laying about and stuck in the bushes.

What about, '**You're Welcome**'?

Someone helps you with, say, a lock gate and you say 'Thank you' and they reply 'You're Welcome'. I hate that Americanism! Seems to me that they are not able to accept thanks graciously, or being determined to have the last word. Quick, someone think up a response!

So it goes....'Thank You.' - 'You're Welcome.' - 'Thank You for the welcome'
I'm sure you can think of a much wittier repost.

What else, along the waterways, really irritates you?

Notices and signs? Joggers? Cyclists?

The way people moor? Shallow Waters? Fisherpeople?

People who say things like 'fisherpeople' and carry political correctness to ridiculous extremes.

Get it off your chest, and share your moans with '**Grumpy Old Boaters**'. You may find others suffering from the same irritations. Don't worry you don't have to be old to have your say, just grumpy!

Send your comments, in plain text only, to - gob@nabo.org.uk

Or phone the Grump Coordinator on 07748454576

Come on, do it now, you may feel better for it!

‘THE WATERWAYS NEED AN ENDOWMENT, NOT GRANTS’,

Adrian Stott

Boaters are demanding that DEFRA does not cut the budgets of BW and EA. However, this isn't going to work, probably not this year and certainly not in the long term. For the waterways to survive, they need different, secure, funding. They need an endowment, and NABO should lead the call for one.

The canal companies went broke because waterways can no longer survive on boating income. They have to have government support, which is justified by the benefits they provide to non-customers.

Waterways need reliable long term funding, because they need proper maintenance every year. If it is skimped, the catch-up costs more when it is eventually done, and usability and safety suffer in the meantime. Maintenance plans for long-lasting structures must also be long-lasting, and dependable income that is just as long-lasting is needed to implement them.

Government grant cannot be dependable. It is set politically each year, based not on need but on competition. If the government feels a higher funding priority, the waterways grant will be cut, and waterways are always lower priority than hospitals or schools. So the grant was cut last year, is being cut this year, and for sure will be cut in future.

Fortunately, grant is not the only form of waterways income. BW makes considerable money from developing and leasing its property, which pays towards operating its waterways. It could make much more, if it had more property.

The government has a lot of property.

So there's the answer. The government should transfer substantial additional property (not necessarily near the water) to BW, as a capital endowment. BW would add this to its present holdings, and manage it for profit and income.

BW would be required to ensure that the total value of the holdings not decrease, so the transfer would not be classed as government spending. However, if it were big enough (probably about £1.5 billion), the annual waterways grant could be cancelled completely, which would be classed as a politically-valuable government spending reduction.

The endowment would provide the secure income needed. In theory, the government could take it back at any time, but it would have little reason to compared to the strong annual temptation to cut the grant.

Yes, let's fight for the grant to be reinstated this year, so important maintenance won't be interrupted. But NABO should lead the waterways community in requesting the real solution, a one-time endowment which makes both financial and political sense. Then we won't have to fight in future years.

LITTLE SHIPS ON A BIG CANAL



Photo of NABO convoy
courtesy of Martin Pleece
aboard 'Snowdrop'

The 'NABO Challenging Cruise' this year tackled the Manchester Ship Canal - more of a challenge for the organiser than the skippers, as she explains later, but first: the impressions of Dick of 'Toerag', the unfortunate loser of the Short Straw Draw held to nominate the poor soul who has to write the article:-

As we gently chug our way up to Ellesmere Port from our base in Sharpness, little do we realise how our tranquil life is about to change.

It's the weekend before the NABO cruise on the Manchester Ship Canal and all the boats have assembled at the top of Cholmondston lock for an obligatory M.S.C. seaworthiness certificate. It's a fairly basic affair comprising of a visual inspection of hull, lights, horn, bilge pump, fire extinguishers, life jackets, anchor and two 50 foot lines. It took about 10 minutes and cost each boat £25.00.

As you probably recall, the end of July was hot - very hot. Shady moorings were at a premium, especially on the Shroppie with its towpath on the eastern side, so when we found a cool spot, we stopped as long as we could before a last minute dash to Ellesmere Port. As we approached Chester the mobile rings. Bad news from BW. The lock from Ellesmere Port into the M.S.C. is unsafe and cannot be used. The trip is off.

Over a glass of wine on the towpath at Chester, we have a group pow-wow and after several phone calls are made to BW the trip is back on again - via Weston Lock on the River Weaver.

Seventeen hours of locking and cruising in sub-tropical temperatures, later finds most of the group in very relaxed mood, supping afternoon drinks at the Devil's Garden, a delightful mooring on the river Weaver. We are now down to nine boats as one has dropped out because of rudder problems.

Friday 28th July: the day of the cruise and a beautiful misty morning. All nine boats are assembled in Weston Marsh lock and we are out on the Manchester Ship canal by 9:10. It's big and the sky seems to merge with the water. Unfortunately the M.S.C.Co. insist that narrowboats travel breasted up in pairs. We soon realise that this is reducing our speed by some 12%. A GPS reading informs us that we are going at only 3.8 mph, when at these revs. we would normally be doing 4.3 mph. It doesn't sound much but it could add at least another hour to our journey.

Four blistering hot hours later and we arrive at Latchford locks. They are big, really big, really VERY big, and our 50 foot lines are long enough to go just one way, up to the top where the lockkeeper ties them off. Only two boats need to do this as the rest raft up. The filling is very gentle and we are soon on our way again.

As we approach Irlam lock, it appears to be full - not with water but with a very large ship! The 'Arklow Rover', a bulk carrier, has been made to wait in the lock until our flotilla of 'whirligig beetles' has taken refuge in the weir stream. After it has made its very gentle departure and we are safely rafted up in the lock, it is our turn to wait. Fifteen minutes later, preceded by a wall of white water, 'Snowdrop' appears. A fairly large passenger ship, which does a regular Liverpool to Manchester run. This snugly fits into the lock behind us, much to the amusement of its passengers. Again our flotilla is asked to wait in the weir stream to enable 'Snowdrop' to pass us in safety. Some of us dog owners use this pause to give our cross-legged pets a comfort stop.

Apart from the relentless sun, the rest of the trip is uneventful. We just see, in the distance, the Barton road and canal bridges being swung for 'Snowdrop' to pass, but they are firmly closed as we pass underneath some 20 minutes later.

It's 7:00pm as we enter Salford Quays and moor up on the public moorings behind the Lowry Centre. It has been a long day in blistering heat and we are all a little weary. We are made very welcome by a representative from Salford Quays, and find all the usual facilities there, water with hose, toilets and Elsan disposal. All that is missing are the boats! It's just 'Snowdrop' and us and all this empty water.

Next morning, we all locked up through Pamona lock in shifts, mooring up in the Castlefield Arm for our end of trip 'Bash'. Each boat prepared at least one dish and provided a table and chairs. In spite of it raining halfway through the 'do', we all had a very enjoyable evening - discussing the merits of 'breasting up' - when BW should take over the running of Salford Quays and Pamona Lock - next years NABO trip - Oh - and eating too much food, especially the Coronation Chicken!



It had better stop!

It might never have happened, as organiser, Carole Sampson, explains:

I'm beginning to think somebody doesn't like me!

When I had the original idea for a series of Challenging Cruises for members, I never envisaged them being as challenging as this one! Everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong.

- The M.S.C.Co. took over six weeks to send me the licence application forms - how long does it take to put some A4 pieces of paper into an envelope?
- At the eleventh hour, it decided it would take longer than twenty-four hours to process those applications, so the inspections for the Certificates of Seaworthiness had to be rearranged earlier and at a different location
- The BW guy who would pen us down onto the canal didn't/wouldn't take my details or note the date, so that by the time seven boats had arrived in Chester, I'd had no notice that a lock restraining wall was about to collapse, and in any case, there wasn't enough water in the bottom pound, so we had to charge around the system like determined hirers to get from Chester to Marsh Lock on the Weaver to lock out that way. All this is the extreme heat of the late July sun.

BW, I think, is at it's best in a crisis, and BW Wales & Border certainly pulled out the stops, allowing us to book passage on the Anderton Lift with no charge, and to make late arrangements for the use of Marsh Lock.

The participating NABO members were superb. I didn't hear a single grumble or complaint, and every single one of them made the effort and completed the cruise, albeit a day later than previously planned. Once the day itself arrived, everything went smoothly: what a relief it was to see the BW van driving down the towpath towards Marsh Lock, and the Ship Canal control made us feel most welcome. We were blessed with another sunny day, so the commercial vessels, the bridges and the locks all looked impressive. The passage took ten hours: a tiring day but I think everyone enjoyed it. By the night of the bash, it was raining. What did our stalwarts do? They sat out with their brollies! And what a fun evening it was! (Happy birthday, Sharon)

Things learned: a) Invite a group of boaters for drinks and you'll end up with more wine than you started with

b) It's a good idea to close all the paddles at one end of a lock before opening the ones at the other end

c) Clive is good for £20 if you look the part and sell him a realistic sob story

d) $4 + 5 = 9$ (Perhaps I'd better explain this - if two's company and three's a crowd, what is four and five?)



FLY ON THE WALL



It was a bronzed Council that reconvened in Oldbury after the summer boating. In fact some were still boating and had come from different places to usual. Your Chairman and Secretary had come from mooring just around the corner!

The AGM was the first main topic. So **DON'T FORGET** you've a heavy date on 18th November at the Bonded Warehouse, Stourbridge at 11am. The Ombudsman will arrive at lunch time and you'll be away by teatime.

And so back to discussion and reports on BW's permanent moorings policy. There will be a meeting with BW to discuss formalising renewals and to consider the length of time of mooring agreements. Would three years be a possibility in some places? Council could also see the sense and administrative saving in having long term permits.

It was acknowledged that there has still been no changes to visitor mooring durations in some places despite the complaints submitted to the Ombudsman last year. Your Council will make a strong case for the revision and push for a national policy.

Council discussed various aspects of mooring durations

- those outside supermarkets are usually short duration, 2 or 4 hours depending on mooring availability. Are they a waste of

space overnight? e.g. if you moored later than, say, 5pm you could stay till 8 in the morning.

- moorings on pub gardens are usually for customers only and at the convenience of the landlord. Often the only places to moor in an area are near a pub or on the opposite bank. Should they be timed moorings?

- there should be mooring sites at each end of a lock flight outside the lock moorings, so that the exhausted can stay overnight after the flight or before tackling it.

- longer duration moorings should be provided where you may want to leave your boat, i.e. near a town or station, but standardised to one week or two.

- countryside moorings with no facilities and nowhere special to visit should not be time limited, or even signed as 'visitor' moorings.

- restrictions should be lifted during the 'winter' season, except at honeypot sites and supermarkets.

- visitor moorings at any one site should not all be made into permanent winter moorings, maybe no more than 25%?

- use small basins for additional mooring etc in the winter, an IWA suggestion supported by Council.

The consequences of BW and the Environment Agency having their budgets cut without notice was discussed. It has already led to some unfortunate short term proposals such as staff cuts, licence payment increases, restoration restrictions and even some canal closures.

It is proposed to make the River Severn and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal difficult for the casual boater in the winter by sacking most of the lock and bridge keepers, employing seasonal staff

spring and summer and using 'on call' keepers at the other seasons for commercial craft and those wanting to cruise. Pre-booking would be obligatory. Council is opposing these proposals which are also being introduced on other rivers and canals.

Council is helping BW to find out where you think there's a lack of facilities: what you need and where. Let them know!

AND if you see signs of obvious neglect in your travels take a photo for them.

See you at the AGM.

Till then

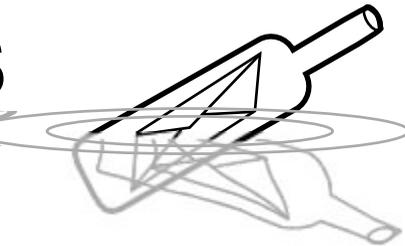
Byeeeee



BW enlists help with Veg Pledge - near Bullocks Bridge we are given to believe!
Photo courtesy of Frank Spragg

Stop Press (again!) - BW West Midlands Business Unit to be assimilated by Central Shires as part of 180 job loss programme, mainly of office based staff, according to BW Press release.

LETTERS



The **D**epartment for the **E**limination of **F**inancing **R**ecreational **A**ctivities.!

Following my reading the news that DEFRA are going to be the cause of BW having to increase our license fees, owing to their being fined for failing to reach the EU's timing for payment of farming subsidies, I wrote to David Miliband venting my disgust. I pointed out that through their mismanagement, our licence fees would have to increase, forcing many boat owners to leave the waterways and seek council housing

accommodation which the state would have to provide. We have had more than enough of these licence increases over recent years and now it is going beyond a joke. Why should we be penalised for their mistake?

My reply came from a Mr Mark Quinlan, Customer Contact Unit in which he said that for the waterways to remain sustainable, boaters will need to contribute a **FAIR AND REASONABLE AMOUNT** towards the running of the waterways through registration fees.

26 **Note** – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

This he pointed out was expected to be 48% over the next three years! He also pointed out that this would equate to around £55 year on year for 3 years for a typical 14 metre boat on the Thames! We all know the average Thames cruiser is relatively short and much taller than the average narrowboat. The Thames licence has always been notorious for being expensive, that's why most narrowboats aren't moored on it! I leave it for the rich boaters to cruise a couple of locks at weekends in their shiny gin palaces. THEY don't live aboard but go home to their extremely expensive posh pads. The narrowboat has always been a refuge for the working class and today even more so with the shocking rise of house prices.

We have only just successfully opposed BW's proposed huge increases in our licence fees and now the war is on again! For once I feel sympathy for BW! Perhaps if we pay these extortionate new licence fees, we will have locks manned by uniformed lock keepers and enjoy having the canals all dredged out to a depth sufficient for navigation! Mr Quinlan didn't take as an example the licence fees paid in the Fens, because they would have been lower! If there was any justice in this world, perhaps we would see the likes of him dredging out canals up to his ears in muck and weed! Instead, we will submit tamely to his outrageous demands and continue to finance his equally outrageous salary. I wish my pension was going up by 48%!!

COME ON EVERYBODY, WRITE, OR

Note – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

RING, BUT DO KICK UP A FUSS!

Off now to find my blood pressure tablets!

Graham Lambden.
nb Penny Peace.

Why Queue?

The practice of every boat in a lock queue moving forward when the boat at the head of the queue enters the lock is daft. It is difficult to do smoothly; it requires labour to untie, push off (the shallow landing), stop, and tie up again each time; it is noisy; and it wastes fuel. This is not the way it is done in mainland Europe. There, each boat arrives, ties up, and doesn't move again until it is its turn for the lock. Everyone simply notices the order boats arrive in (i.e. which boats arrive later), and the boats enter the lock in that order (unless directed otherwise by the lockie). Anyone trying to jump the queue is soon made to realise the error of his ways. Perhaps while to give our lot time to get used to this sensible system in UK, we might install "take-a-number" machines at busy UK locks?

Adrian Stott

Why connect?

This isn't originally my idea but I believe it to be worthy of further discussion.

Why only build marinas by connected waterways? Many boats don't ever leave their moorings so how about using lakes and gravel pits or even digging a hole in a field to provide extra moorings. They would provide an alternative income for farmers and satisfy the needs of both the weekend cottage and some residential boaters.

Sue Burchett

Why not?

I've had a bright idea! (Not another one I hear you mutter).

There has been a lot of publicity recently concerning the amount of rubbish in the waterway environment, and who is responsible for clearing it up.

The EA shows no interest in removing fallen trees or accumulations of rubbish from our rivers - there has been a furore in Worcester where the anglers have now volunteered to tidy up the river. And the EA has no desire to remove fallen vegetation along the Trent.

BW and other navigation bodies have limited resources or simply no wish to remove floating or submerged debris. As the navigation body on the river Severn, BW will not deal with anything that is not obstructing the navigable channel - and that means nothing within 30 feet of either bank!

So, why not mobilise a national body of folks to help keep our waterways clean? I mean BOATERS.

If we could get some commercial concern to sponsor the initiative we could provide boat owners with a suitable plastic container or basket into which they could place collected rubbish they encounter along the waterways. And for those based on rivers with small dinghies or tenders, why not spend half an hour picking up rubbish rather than having youngsters racing back and forth and annoying everyone? I am sure marinas and boatyards would allow the rubbish to be dumped in their waste containers as a public-spirited gesture.

Note – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

Common sense would be needed to ensure personal safety and protection but I think we would see a big improvement in our environment. Do other NABO members agree?

Stephen Peters
m.y. Nattajack

The boat's fault?

Returning home to a pile of Waterways Worlds, I was interested in the correspondence after Adrian Stott's article where he puts the onus for a comfortable mooring on the moored boat. I too try to use 'spring' lines to curb the fore and aft movement when boats pass, but I have somewhere to tie them where they don't cause a trip hazard. Most narrowboats don't, as they only have the traditional dollies and T posts. These were perfectly adequate when almost all boats were full length and rings spaced to suit that length, but now that is far from the case.

If you have a narrowboat and any choice, get a beefed up 'fender eye' let into the gunwale either end of the straight bits.

As for placing the blame on bad mooring - yes, there is a lot of it, even on home moorings. I never cease to be amazed at the number of roof ropes tied downwards on to rings, or even pins - the boat isn't in danger of taking to the skies, is it? This is a sure way to ensure it heels over when boats pass,

Even so, I still think courtesy is in order, especially to boats which are clearly occupied and may be tied up temporarily.

Stuart Sampson
m.v. Sulaskar

COUNTER POINTS



*Views from the
tiller 'dahn sarf'
by Canaldrifter*

As I write more sad news is coming in of a boat being broken into, then set ablaze. Obviously a boat left on a remote linear mooring is vulnerable, but the most recent report is of a live-aboard on a busy mooring where resident boaters normally kept an eye on other folks' boats. The attack was timed when they were out for the day. What dismay they must have felt on returning to find their home gutted. I am told they only have third party insurance too. A local collection is being made by supportive boaters.

But this highlights the importance of having fully comprehensive cover on a boat, and obeying the small print, especially with regard to storing fuel in cans. It also makes me wonder what we can do about such attacks. Obviously our boats are an easy target when we're not aboard. These jobs don't give a damn for the heartbreak they cause. The only way to protect our boating investment is to form and support Canal Watch Schemes in local areas. They work. They don't cost much, and it is easy to find sponsorship for notices etc. from local firms. NABO will give encouragement and help to any member willing to start such a scheme.

On a much brighter note, I have just returned from four days cruising on the Isis, as the guest of friends on their brand new boat. It was such a

pleasure to actually get off the canal that I'm not allowed to mention, on to 'fresh ground'. What a beautiful river the Upper Thames is! It is certainly worthwhile to turn right out of Kings Cut, and to keep going all the way to Inglesham and back. Unfortunately, the cost of this exercise is due to soar, thanks to DEFRA cuts of grant-in-aid. I am determined to do the trip again in my own boat before licence fee increases and loss of derogation (sic) make the cost prohibitive.

By the time you read this the decision about the future of the canal I can't mention will have been announced. Lets hope my misgivings are wrong.

I have been lobbied by a member who thinks that NABO should improve its corporate image. Looking at the mug shots on the back of NABO News, I can see where he's coming from. Council does tend to appear to be a bunch of... well..... boaters actually. That's what we are. This is what we look like. I was brought up to believe that it is the person within that count(erpoint)s. I mean, I can think of several extremely well-dressed incompetents in politics and elsewhere. I also think that at this time we have one of the strongest and most able Councils for a long time. Hopefully, after the AGM, it should get even better. See you there?

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