

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

Note - At present we don't have the printing files for this issue so only a few articles appear



Issue 2 - April 2007

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Now that Tony has taken over NABO News, I almost forgot I still had to write a chairman's column!

I am sure you can imagine giving up the magazine after six years has been a wrench as well as a relief for me, but 'needs must' and I don't want to hear any complaints while our new editor is finding his feet.

Waterways in dire decay?

One thing that seems to have got lost in the hand-over was the text that went with the mysterious graph near the back of the previous issue. Might well have been my fault - but it was to show how a relatively small cut in the Grant-in-Aid could cause serious long term effects on the system.

Since then I have seen BW's paper to the EFRA Sub-committee on the subject, which, although dubbed 'opaque', is along the same lines but in much more detail with proper figures. and uses the same basic curve. They point out that the system is **not** in crisis, but, in relation to how much

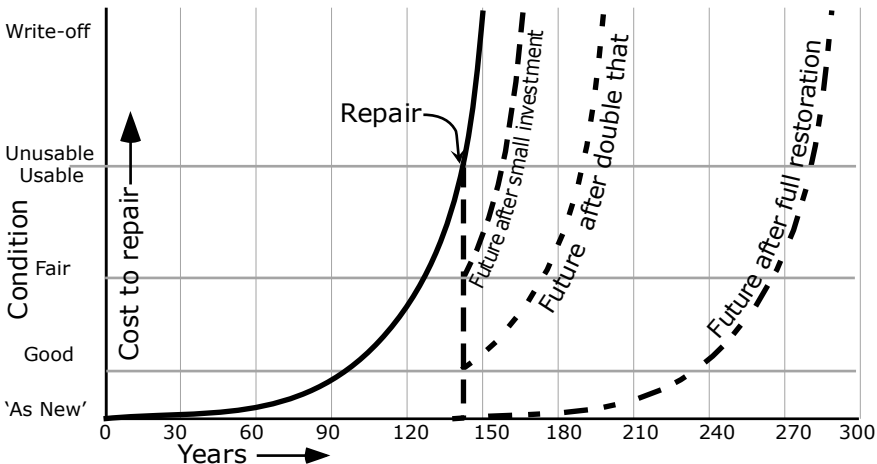
money is needed to maintain a 'steady state', they say, '*...we cannot at present achieve a fully 'fit for purpose' network. In the short term, we can manage risk at an acceptable level on these figures, but they are unsustainable in the long term.*'

So I pray your indulgence and include my diagram again, because it is at the core of why people have been out in force waving banners and placards.

It goes something like this:-

- 1) Most of the money for looking after the system goes on day-to-day expenditure like vegetation management, litter clearing, inspections, lock-keepers etc.
- 2) Only the remainder is available for mending things, and it is out of this that BW has to save those 'few million pounds' – a much bigger proportion.

The curve below can be applied to almost anything from housework to aqueducts. It shows what it costs in money or effort to restore the item to a particular standard according to how long it has been left to deteriorate.



Let's use it on the life expectancy of a BW 'asset' which is about to become unusable after 145 years of service. If BW spends just enough to restore it to a 'fair' condition it will only be about 20 years before it is unusable again. If twice that amount was spent, bringing it up to a 'good' condition, the asset would remain usable for nearly three times as long. Restore it to 'As New', which may not cost that much more, and you get another 145 years of use.

Bearing in mind there is also a fixed amount to be spent on each repair in administration and getting the gear on site, it really does make sense to go round the worst cases first and do them up properly. If BW isn't given enough funds to do that, it won't be long before the previously repaired assets need doing again at the same time as other ones are due to become unusable. The problem is that the people in DEFRA holding the purse strings will be long gone before they can hear the words '*We told you so*'.

As far as the campaign is concerned, unfortunately DEFRA hasn't given BW any money back, but there are encouraging signs regarding what is happening on the political front. The EFRA Select Committee, which is the body of non-ministerial MPs from various parties that reports on the department, has already delivered a damning statement about its financial incompetence, and that is before their sub-committee is due to make any views known about British Waterways specifically.

I am racking my brains to remember which book I was reading, but in it, a senior government politician was 'promoted' to DEFRA as the ultimate vote of no confidence. Fiction, but how true to life!

Global Warming or Fizzy Pop?

Someone has said my columns are less thought provoking these days, so please allow me this little digression about the 'E' of DEFRA – I will show its relevance to waterways:–

Whether this is fiction or not I can't say, but Channel 4 produced a very interesting reality check regarding global warming which said that the amount of carbon dioxide in the air was the **result** of temperature changes **not the cause** of it, and the biggest source of the gas was CO₂ dissolved in the oceans, not mankind. This makes sense if you think of the oceans like pop - heat them up and more fizz comes out.

They said the temperature changes were actually more likely to be due to cloud cover. Clouds are formed when 'cosmic ray' particles trigger condensation in the air, but before they reach the Earth these particles can be blown aside by solar winds, which vary according to sunspot activity. When invisible, water vapour causes much more greenhouse effect than CO₂, heating the Earth, but when condensed as white clouds it reflects the sun's rays and lets the Earth's surface cool, so:–

More sun spots > more solar wind >
less cosmic particles > less cloud >
more sunshine > more invisible water
in the air > more greenhouse effect >
warmer climate > more CO₂ driven
out of the oceans > more panic!

The documentary then went on to say that the whole carbon emissions issue is now almost a religion with political support – should we call it '*Carbodioxyphobia*'? Any scientist who dares oppose it is labelled a heretic and loses research funding.

For David Miliband, DEFRA's minister and a firm believer in man-made global warming, any truth in this could be

unsettling. DEFRA has invested a lot of tax payers' money in climate committees etc. Could this be ill spent too?

How the waterways community should react I dare not say. It has many positive spin-offs for us regarding promotion of 'greener' freight transport, the benefits of waterways as a holiday destination that avoids flying and so on. But - whoops! – what I have just said just goes to show how global warming can be used as an excuse for promoting unrelated causes. Everyone is at it. There is far too much invested now in *carbodioxyphobia* for anybody to listen to independent thinking scientists any more, but they had better not burn the dissenters at the stake for fear of adding more CO₂ to the atmosphere!

NABO Seal of Approval?

Back to matters much closer to NABO, and some 'word eating'. Some months back I waxed lyrical about consultation and how the new working groups were helping BW steer clear of the giant faux pas of the likes of the 147% increase for continuous cruisers and the ultra vires 'Mooring Code'.

However there is danger that our willingness to be involved can be used against us. One example is the new BW proposal to trial the **auctioning** of

vacant moorings – '*after discussions with a working group including representatives from IWA, NABO, RBOA ...*'. Our name has even been mentioned in connection with the approval of business barges on the River Lee! The fact that we oppose something 'in camera' it is not always reported, and if we try to pre-empt this with a press release we are accused of scare-mongering or publicising confidential discussions.

This is a worrying trend. Of course we must do what we can to improve things for boaters, and take the blame if we fail to represent the true feelings of our members, but rest assured, if the authorities abuse our 'seal of approval' we won't be keeping quiet about it.

Between writing this and it arriving on your doorstep I might manage to get afloat! There is a chance I could be giving evidence to the EFRA committee on BSS, Standedge Tunnel or the effect of vandalism on the waterways and I should also have been to a Boating Issues Meeting. Read all about it in the next issue, or in the online bulletins.

Happy cruising

Stuart

SELECT COMMITTEE INVESTIGATE BW

If you have been following the Save Our Waterways campaign you should have heard that British Waterways is now the subject of an inquiry by the 'EFRA Committee'. They have appointed a sub-committee to carry this out, the full committee being tasked with overseeing DEFRA itself, but that in no way diminishes the power of scrutiny, as those with any knowledge of the MPs involved would readily appreciate. It comprises:-

Mr David Drew MP

Rt Hon Michael Jack MP

Mr David Lepper MP

Mrs Madeleine Moon MP

Sir Peter Soulsby MP

Mr Roger Williams MP

The story so far is that all interested parties have been given the chance to submit written evidence, which you will have seen from the invitation printed in the December NABO News.

NABO submitted a paper and so did some individual members. The Sub-committee then chose to talk face to face with representatives from various groups, gathering 'oral evidence'. NABO was not called, which presumably meant that they didn't feel we had anything further to add, or that what we wrote was clear enough to stand on its own.

The sub-committee has interviewed:-

Monday 26 February 2007

Inland Waterways Association

England's Regional Development Agencies

Institution of Civil Engineers

Monday 5 March 2007

British Marine Federation

Environment Agency

Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council

Monday 12 March 2007

Sea & Water

Commercial Boat Operators Association

British Waterways

'Uncorrected' transcripts (in that the contributors have not had the chance to check them) are available on www.parliament.uk and following through 'business > committees > Environment, Food and Rural Affairs >...'

It has yet to interview:-

Monday 16 April 2007 (To be held at the National Waterways Museum, Gloucester)

The Waterways Trust

Individuals chosen from those who applied by 15 March 2007.

Monday 23 April 2007

Parliamentary Waterways Group

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

How much effect the report that results has, we have yet to see, but from the transcripts so far the sub-committee is doing a thorough job and all the evidence, transcripts and recommendations will be published. Campaigners will then need to ensure its findings are made known to the people who can influence government policy, and in a democracy that includes the general public.

NABO EMAIL CHANGES

We have a new system for NABO email addresses based on 'job titles'

There are two reasons for the change. One is part of our ongoing campaign against SPAM. The second is to make the system a bit more flexible.

This year the new addresses incorporate the old version, or a shortened option of it, and add '.07' before the '@'. See the back of the magazine for the full details.

So, south.07@nabo.org.uk refers to who is South Region Secretary in 2007. An advantage of this is that, if next year someone has been dealing with whoever was in that job in 2007, they will reach the same person even if the jobs have been reshuffled in 2008 (assuming that person hasn't left altogether). If they want the new person they change the '07' in the address to '08'.

As far as spam is concerned, one member of NABO has accused us of being arrogant and requiring everyone to change their contact details just because 'sixteen people can't be bothered to arrange spam filters'. If everyone just soaks up spam rather than applauding someone trying to reduce it, the spammers are winning. Someone might see their message while sorting through their junk mailboxes and respond, and if spammers send enough the chances are someone will.

If, however, the message is bounced straight back, either with an automated response for the benefit of humans or just a delivery failure message, then the spam will not be read by any human and the sender gains nothing. Also this traffic can no longer clog up the forwarding system or any mailboxes.

The reason spam was going to NABO addresses was because the addresses have been automatically 'harvested' from the NABO website and added to lists that are sold on from spammer to spammer. The new addresses are not on the website in a form that automated address collectors (spam bots) can recognise, so they shouldn't get added to lists.

There are many articles on the Web about how to counter spam and what we have done follows that advice. We would like say we are sorry for any inconvenience caused but how do we say that in a way that means anything these days?

WATERWAY REPORT BOARDS GET A NEW ENGINE

In the last issue we pointed out that you had to log into the reporting boards as a defence against 'SPAM BOTS'. This is now no longer needed as we have upgraded the system to the 'Professional' version which has greatly improved defences.

Since this system has the potential to really improve the waterways it made sense to run it on something a bit better than the 'FreeWare' version. You will notice a different look to the pages which we hope is clearer.

Please make use of the boards and do something practical to preserve our heritage as well as everyone's enjoyment of it.