

**INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS**

**NABO**



**NEWS**

- **What Veg Pledge?**
- **EFRA Committee BW Report Out**
- **Tendering Trials - Your Views**



**Issue 5 August 2007**

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## Various pages - YOU SAY

This is a collection of boaters' comments on a featured aspect of the waterways, this time generators and engines running. Any short and preferably humorous comments on other subjects would be much appreciated for future issues.

### 2007 CALENDAR

**Council meeting**      **NN Copy date**

**15th Sept**      **6th Oct**

**AGM 17th Nov**

**24th Nov**      **1st Dec**

## TRIALS SET BACK BW/NABO RELATIONSHIP

NABO is complaining formally via BW's Internal Complaints Procedure about the consultation process, or lack of, regarding the Moorings Tenders trials. Although the trials affect relatively few boaters directly, the letters later in this magazine show that the very principle strikes fear and horror into a much wider section of the boating community. Even Adrian Stott, a fervent supporter of the tendering process, blames BW's poor communication for its poor reception:-

*'It [the strength of feeling] also typifies the depth and breadth of misunderstanding of the issue. BW is the major cause, as it has introduced and generally handled this enormously beneficial initiative extremely badly. All the more reason for a proper discussion of it by NABO before arriving at a policy, rather than adopting a knee jerk negative position.'*

One of the main bones of contention regarding the Moorings Tender trial seems to be the unfair treatment of those on waiting lists, and NABO is prepared to bring this aspect into the complaint if members feel it is appropriate. If you are on a waiting list that is being 'suspended' and feel you are being unfairly treated, we ask you to contact Simon Robbins, our moorings guru (details on back cover) with the following information - at least:-

- Name
- Membership Number
- BW region where you're seeking a mooring
- Approximate time or estimated position on waiting list
- Email address/phone number
- Which petitions you have signed (IWA and/or No 10 Downing Street) [optional]

Of course we are also willing to hear from those who do actually feel this method of allocating vacant berths is worth pursuing (see also Adrian's letter on page 16).

Although this issue only directly affects those seeking BW on-line moorings, it has severely set back a number of positive BW/User group initiatives previously in progress with the 'Boating Development' department, such as Customer Service Standards; Visitor Moorings duration evaluations and Facility Gap Analysis, all of which should benefit BW boating customers generally.

NABO feels it is being forced back into the position of 'BW bashing', a stance its Council has been striving hard to move away from. We hope for a speedy resumption of progress on the positive initiatives and must express thanks that at least BW is renewing its support for the NABO Waterway Reports Forum after a strongly worded plea from the NABO chairman. He felt the complete absence of any link to the Forum from Waterscape, at a time when Waterscape was showing no hesitation to develop pages for the tendering trials, added insult to injury. His words mentioned 'gift horses' and hopefully have been taken to heart.

# WILL IT GO UNDER?

## *Some thoughts from the helm*

With raised water levels common this 'summer', even narrowboat skippers have to ask themselves sometimes, with chimneys, water cans and an increasing variety of other paraphernalia on the roof, whether a bridge is high enough to pass under. Most other boats have some sort of shelter for the steersman and so it is a definite worry for them when exploring new waters, or even familiar waters in the conditions we have been experiencing recently.

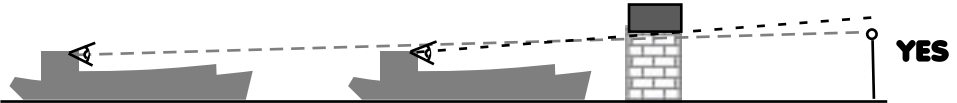
We have a narrow beam Dutch barge type boat with a fold-down wheelhouse giving an air draft (height above the waterline) of 7 foot 5 inches or thereabout. This is probably similar to other shelters or canopies on narrowboat shells that are built high enough to give good visibility, so I hope the techniques I use will not be too specific to us.

The first one is pretty general. When approaching a suspicious bridge I 'stand tall' and look at it from as near the highest point on the boat as I can. If I can see anything I know to be taller beyond the bridge, then we will go through.

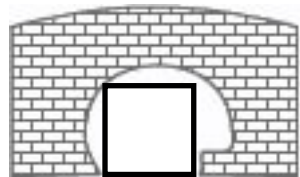
If not then I try to note something beyond the bridge to act as a top marker. If it disappears from view as we approach then we will not go through.



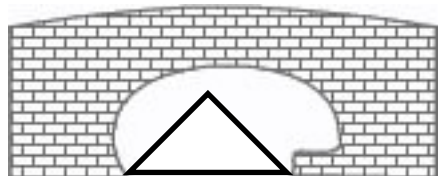
If things above it come into view, then we will go through.



This principle works for all flat span bridges and all boats except those with a structure too tall to see over, but it is not so easy for arches, and is more difficult to do the greater the distance. A trick that works for us, but may help others, is to envisage shapes in the bridge hole. For narrow canals no bridge hole is likely to be narrower than our height, so if I can 'place' a square in the aperture as high as the channel is wide and see clearance above it, then we can go through with the wheelhouse up.



Likewise I imagine a right-angled triangle like a roof truss in a broad beam bridge-hole whose apex will show the height of our boat. If all else fails, and it is raining, we approach very carefully and back up if our mobile phone aerial scrapes the underside of the bridge.



Ordinary bridges are not the only hazard. Walkways on lock gates can also overhang the entrance, as can the slope of the arch of quite generous bridges at the tail of locks. If I can, I take the wheelhouse down and enjoy the fresh air, but with the weather we have recently had, somewhere to shelter while under way has been a godsend.

## FED UP WITH WAITING? – YOU CAN HELP

Do you feel you are forever stuck in queues waiting for other boats, or doesn't this bother you?

British Waterways is wanting some measure of the effects of 'congestion', mainly to plan the siting of new marinas, and is asking if NABO members can help.

As the main question is 'where' it would seem the Waterway Reports Forum is a good way to collect your feedback. So, if a hold-up spoils your enjoyment of the waterways, please note it down and enter it as a report when convenient to you.

Please head the report '**CONGESTION**' and say:-

- Where you were held up (presumably at a lock or facility point)
- When it happened
- How long you were kept waiting
- How long you would have been prepared to wait
- Any specific distress you were caused, such as failing to make an appointment or rendezvous.

What constitutes a distressing delay to some is just an excuse to chill out or chat for others, hence our need to ask how long you would be happy to wait.

Comments like "If you are in a hurry, go by car" may be fine for some, but time is not limitless for everyone.

Your feedback would benefit us all. Use: [www.nabo.org.uk/ww\\_reports](http://www.nabo.org.uk/ww_reports)

## YOU SAY



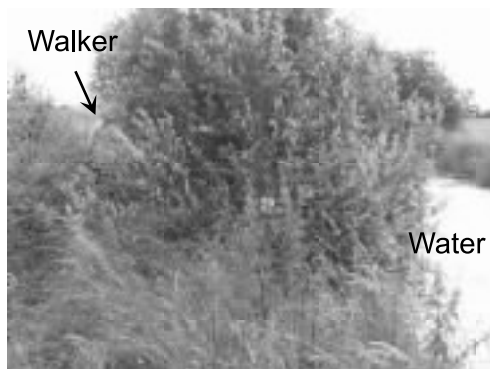
"I find generators annoying, especially on 24-hour moorings when there should be no need for them. Quite often they are just dumped on the bank and left."

"Hire boats only have one battery, so the engine is left running so that they can watch telly with all the lights on."

## WHAT VEG PLEDGE?

Charles Moore, without his new NABO website hat on, wrote the following to NABO and sent photos:-

*I have just travelled over the summit pound on the south Oxford canal between Claydon and Marston Doles. Navigation is not helped by the completely overgrown state of the towpath which is almost impassable on foot. There are many ash trees growing from the waterside of the path. These are so large now that they block the view when navigating the many bends.*



*The towpath is designated as a walkway to Oxford. It is certainly not safe as walkers may be in danger of falling due to the uneven surface which is covered in vegetation.*

NABO forwarded the comments directly to Robin Evans, instigator of the Veg Pledge, and he received a reply having passed it down to Jeff Whyatt, General Manager of the Southeast Unit

It appears the Unit has been aware of problems with their new contractor (Countrywide Grounds Maintenance) on the Oxford for a while, having engaged them for one year on the basis of a very good record with a variety of water companies and local authorities

However, the local team that had been assigned to the Oxford have 'needed a lot of management' and are only now getting on top of the requirements.

Of particular concern are the '5 weekly cycle' areas, which are on 'Mowing regime 3 (as specified in the Directive)' for rural areas. In particular, the area between Marston Doles and Claydon all came within this mowing regime and was behind. Jeff had visited several locations and confirmed that they would be cut the following week.

'Fender growth' (inc saplings etc) was programmed to be dealt with by Land & Water in the Autumn - 'It is clear that in many locations, this is contributing to the visual nature of problems.'

They are concerned about performance overall though and have contacted the Countrywide MD to assist with reviewing the local management of the contract

Jeff stressed that the ten key locations/destinations along the Oxford that require mowing regime number 1 (with a 3 weekly frequency) seem to have been cut to a higher standard.

Roger Morgan also wrote to NABO: *'I seem to recall that last year you*

*extracted a promise from BW to improve its performance on the towpath maintenance, especially relating to vegetation growing on the towpath edges.*

*I have just spent 2 weeks cruising from Napton to Tixall (and back) and the lack of maintenance is frankly appalling.*

*I would estimate that at least 95% of the towpath on the northern Oxford has not been looked at this year. It would be impossible to get to the side in the case of an emergency on most of this section of the cut.*

*I know BW have issues re funding, but this should be an HSE priority, in my view.*

*Can NABO bring any pressure to bear on this matter?*

We were able to reassure him the matter was in hand and complaints had been lodged. Obviously now the flooding and water levels will be their major concern, but it appears that again rural towpath management has been at the bottom of the priority list. Clearly some towpaths have growth that is well over a year old causing a hazard to navigation, which is not what Robin Evans promised.

One member rightly suggested that it should be done from the water. If BW can dream up fancy devices like the West Midlands weed gulper and the ‘Taranchewer’ for clearing rubbish around London, then a workflat with a cutter and conveyer belt to bring the cuttings aboard can surely be added to their agricultural inventiveness, and save all those access problems. Failing that why not make it a project for *Scrapheap Challenge!*

We don’t expect mown edges, just that they are cut so you can see where you are going and where to put your feet if jumping ashore.

Every year plants grow – Every year this seems to be a novelty to BW!

## BOATING TIP

I’m probably the last person afloat to have heard of a ZapperClick, but.....

If the insect population looks upon you as the best square meal it’s ever seen, and gleefully rub its back legs together at the sight of you, then this little device is what you need. You place the end with the contacts against the bite, press the button between five and ten times, or as many times as you need to stop the itching, and that’s it. Repeat if required. It does not hurt, the itching stops so that you don’t scratch, and the bite heals in double quick time! Marvellous!

This is available from chemists - I bought ours from Superdrug - and the device lasts for ages.

I’m told it has been on the market for two years, but I’ve only just heard of it. Thanks to Yorkshire Tyke!

*Carole Sampson*



# EFRA SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT OUT

The long awaited findings of the Sub-Committee on British Waterways were published on July 31st, and contained few surprises to those who have been following the evidence sessions. The 57 page document is available on the website:

[www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/  
environment\\_\\_food\\_and\\_rural\\_affairs/efra\\_british\\_waterways.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/environment__food_and_rural_affairs/efra_british_waterways.cfm)

In essence the committee concluded that:-

- BW's relationship with DEFRA had left a lot to be desired. The new Waterways Minister, Jonathan Shaw, under a new Environment Minister, Hilary Benn, and new civil servants acting as liaison, should make a fresh start to improve communications and work out a longer term funding structure.
- Privatisation of BW should not be seen as a workable option.
- Government should recognise that if the Grant-in-Aid was to fall by 5%-RPI as feared then BW should be given additional capital funding to maintain the network infrastructure.
- Other Government departments e.g. Culture, Transport and Local Government, should contribute to BW 'to reflect the contribution BW makes to the agendas of those departments'.
- Government should carry out a study to determine the full social benefit of the waterways network as a basis upon which to make future funding and strategic decisions.
- BW should benefit from income gained from planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act—or from planning gain supplement, if introduced by Government—in respect of the increase in property prices realisable from waterside developments.
- If BW is to keep its ambition to become "largely self-sufficient", both Government and BW need to provide much more detail about what exactly this means in practice.
- Within its limited remit in this case, the National Audit Office should comment on the conflicting accounts given by the DEFRA and BW about BW's finances between 2002 and 2012
- The permanent introduction of a tendering system for mooring allocation could make boating too exclusive. The committee expressed disappointment that BW did not inform them in evidence about its trials, and noted the concerns of the boating community that the new system may further increase the cost of boating.
- Licence and mooring fees should be kept at a level that maintains a high level of individual participation on the network.



- BW needs to do more to develop an effective direct relationship with the users of its network, particularly those who are significant ‘customers’ such as boat residents, operators and licence holders.
- Given the potential carbon savings to be derived from an increase in freight transportation on the waterways, DEFRA should form a joint industry/ Government body fully to evaluate the opportunities that exist for freight.
- BW should develop an environmental heritage strategy for the waterways, in tandem with the Waterways Trust. This should involve all interested parties, and could be orchestrated through the British Waterways Advisory Forum.
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should look favourably on introducing methods by which the Waterways Trust could adopt a free-entry policy to the National Waterways Museum

NABO must express its gratitude for this excellent report and the months of work that went into it by the Sub Committee and all those who prepared evidence, and hope its recommendations are carried out as soon as possible.

Perhaps members should write to their MPs to find out from Hilary Benn or Jonathan Shaw what DEFRA plans to implement in the report, and when.

## LPG PRICES UP

World market oil prices are back near their record highs, so Flogas (the supplier to the DBA UK bottled propane national buying scheme) has had to raise the scheme prices again.

The new prices are (previous price in brackets):

19 kg £17.21 (£16.64)

11 kg £10.81 (10.48)

As ever, these prices are for exchange (empty bottle for full) and include delivery. VAT at 5% will be added to the invoice. The minimum order is two bottles.

The scheme is free to join for DBA, RBOA, and NABO members. Please contact me (Tel 07956 299966) if you are interested in joining it.

*Adrian Stott*

## YOU SAY



"At the Saul rally, when it was permitted to run your engine twice a day between certain times, it was the weekend of the World Cup! Everyone was watching and running their engine or generator after 7pm."

"People walk off with them from the bank. I thought ours was quiet one night: it had been taken."

# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



## Floods

"Have you done floods before?" asked a passing lady – in a long dress and bare feet!

"No, not really", I replied.

"You need to tie that rope higher up the tree so it won't drag the side of your boat down when the river rises", she advised.

It was a humbling thought – that someone in seemingly impractical boating attire should be advising someone who has been boating for over forty years and recently returned from what was essentially a sea passage!

It seems she came from the raft of boats and barges tied up just downstream of us between the 'Tesco' moorings and Kennet Mouth on the Thames. I have 'done floods' before on the Trent, but not without the luxury of floating pontoons or rising rings. This community weathers the river all the year round on anything but an official

mooring, and knows how to survive all that nature, and presumably the authorities, can throw at them. We are just amateurs by comparison and it made me feel like an ignorant visiting tourist!

We were really very lucky to have found the spot we did, with a tree for each end and one for the all important 'spring' which acted like the string of a kite and helped the current keep the boat away from the bank. I feel all boats should have some attachment point strong enough for a mooring rope just forward of where you disembark at the stern, so a tight line can be rigged to stop the boat moving back, without causing a trip hazard, and fore and aft lines left looser to allow for rise and fall.

There were many not so fortunate. Just downstream below Kennet Mouth the roof of a narrowboat is slowly disappearing, as I write this, under the



Some not so fortunate

rising flood waters, still tied by its grab rail to a bollard on the bank. Whether this is a casualty of the growing habit of using top ropes as mooring lines I know not, but it seems if floods during the summer are to become more frequent then narrowboat design and mooring practices need to adapt.

## **Humbling**

Going back to feeling humbled, I also felt both humbled, and reassured, by the expressions of faith in me after my comments about leaving the Chair, (see Letters). I still feel NABO needs to be thinking about a future successor, and certainly someone who can relieve me of some of the meetings, now that Tony is too immobile to help.

It made me wonder how I got to sit in said chair in the first place. I have never regarded myself as a 'political animal' and always considered myself a 'doer' rather than a 'talker' – more interested in working with things rather than people – as well as having a healthy disrespect for paperwork and bureaucracy.

My working life started with a degree in electronics and I joined the BBC at a time when it took that knowledge to persuade the old 'Quad' videotape recorders to begin a new recording onto the end of a previous recording without the playback derailing on the join, i.e. to perform a *videotape edit*.

However the exposure to journalism and programme-making that that 'skill' imbued led to more interest in words, and when computers allowed me to manipulate writing in the same way as the other materials of my trades, I felt qualified to do battle with the 'talkers'.

I suppose my endeavours for you are fuelled by my lingering mistrust of anything trussed up in a suit and tie,

and I am not deceived when they 'dress down' for my benefit either. For many of them, management is just a day job and just because they wear a grey uniform and a haircut, and can use terms like 'going forward', it doesn't mean they are any good at it. You should hear them on trains talking to their Blackberries!

I don't know who are worse, those who were doers and have been 'promoted' to talkers, or those who have been talkers all along. In my experiences at the BBC, the former can make dreadful managers, but I do have a respect for the diminishing number of those in waterway management whose career experience has taught them to know a lock paddle from a canoe paddle.

When I started to attend 'high level' meetings, I did find the lingo, and the procedures, irritating, particularly with the EA. There was so much 'scoping' to be done before 'going forward', and reluctance to bite the bullet, that I just had to fidget in my chair waiting to contribute to something that, as a boater, I could relate to.

In a way top level managers are like the damsel flies you see at this time of year. They flit around in their finery above the surface, in a world of their own, having meetings [mating] and then dip their tails below the surface to drop an egg that soon turns into a voracious predator!

Sorry! If I go on like this I can only blame myself for putting you all off. With help – see nomination forms in this magazine – we can create an even stronger team to show them which way 'forward' is.

## **EFRACOM**

There are exceptions to all generalisations, and, although they wear suits, I

was very impressed by the work of those MP's who fought through so much 'male bovine excrement' (created by other suits?) to find out what was really going on with BW and DEFRA. I would also like to thank all those who added to their understanding and hope their findings bear fruit.

### **The IWA**

The recent item in the *Aquarius* column of *Canals and Rivers* magazine would appear to accuse NABO of trying to poach members from the IWA. I would like to point out, again, that there are many people who are members of both, myself and the IWA's Chief Executive included, who presumably feel there is a role for both. I certainly do.

It cannot be denied that there are areas of overlap in the two organisations' remits, and occasionally differences of approach. I could also say there has been some 're-inventing of wheels', such as the IWA's online reporting system, and in these areas it is a shame that valuable volunteer effort may have been saved by better liaison.

However there are many times when we speak in unison, and the very fact that seemingly rival organisations are making the same points does add weight to them.

### **Stuck again?**

Looking back over my June offering I see that then, like now, I had time to write my column while waiting for suitable navigation conditions. I wonder what it will be next time?

*Stuart*



The result of the Chairman's 'doings' moored at Allington Lock on the Medway

*RCR Advert*

# THIRD NABO CRUISE - TO THE MEDWAY

## *An Organiser's Report*

Third time lucky! As organiser, I am delighted to report that there is nothing significant to report! We went, we saw, we conquered, and we returned. Everything within my control went according to plan, the trip down the Thames estuary - pass Southend-*on-Sea* and turn right - was spectacular: the memory of the seven-mile-wide waterway with the big ships using the North Sea in sight, will remain with me for ever.



Sheerness

Prior to the cruise, all boats had been registered with the CG66 scheme, which gives the Coastguards details and a photo of each boat so it can be identified if it gets into difficulties. We were also monitored all the way, as we cruised, by London Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) then Medway VTS, whom we kept aware of our position by marine VHS radio, so we felt safe and secure in the knowledge that help would immediately be to hand should any of our number have a problem. Not that we did. The worst event was a lunatic speedboat, which created such a wash that one of our convoy shipped some water, which entered the cabin via the air vents. The huge container ships and ro-ro ferries which we had encountered on the Thames were benign compared to that!

The Medway itself is much like any other river, with high banks, and mainly wooded throughout its non-tidal, navigable length. But we were made very welcome, firstly by Tim, the number one lock-keeper, then by all the people who swarmed out of The Malta Inn to line the locksidings as we arrived, then by the anglers, who could be relied upon to direct any expected guests in the right direction - they knew where each boat was! - and finally by all men and women of Kent who took pleasure in seeing our colourful boats on the river. There are narrowboats on the Medway, but they are mainly to live on, and only cruise to use facilities. There are plenty of kingfishers and the oast houses are magnificent. Some of our group were able to see one at close hand, being invited to tea (!), and then to attend a production of Sheridan's *School for Scandal* which was staged in the garden of Parsonage Oasts - it had four!



Parsonage Oasts

The return trip was delayed by a fortnight due to the wrong weather conditions, although we were perhaps lucky to be there at that time, when severe rainfall caused most of BW's navigable rivers to be in spate, and extensive flooding causing problems in the midlands and north. But at the first opportunity, we set off for the return trip to London, which again caused no problems.

So, would we go again? Yes.

Would we go by ourselves? Having done it with others before, yes.

Was it difficult? No. There are no sandbanks to avoid, as on the Severn, and the Thames has marker buoys to follow.

Would I do anything differently? I would contact some of the cruising clubs to try to arrange permission for us to use their rural moorings during the week.

Is there a downside? The distance. At about 70 miles, it took 12 1/2 hours, which is a long time.

Would I recommend the trip? Yes. As long as boaters are sensible, prepared to wait for the right weather conditions suitable for inland craft, and have the correct equipment, then there should be no problems.

*Carole Sampson*



The Medway Estuary

## ROUNDBABOUT AHEAD!

NABO is on the list for some bizarre consultations, one being the Marine Aggregate Regional Assessment Scoping Report issued by the Thames Estuary Dredging Association. However in it there was warning that might have concerned the Medway Convoy had they ventured further east:-

‘The Sunk TSS (Big Ship Gyrotory System) is due to become operational from July 1st. The system consists of two 1.9 Mile wide traffic lanes running north-south, two one mile wide lanes running east ...

In the centre of this arrangement is a one mile diameter avoidance zone around a turning mark. This Sunk Centre is the SLV Racon (C) located at 51° 50'.10N 01°46'.02E. Ships over 300gt or 20m will need to comply with this roundabout style system turning around the marker in an anticlockwise direction.’

Straying working boats must obey!

## TENDERING TRIALS

**From Simon Greer**

*Please add my name to those who are outraged at the prospect of seeing BW moorings up for tender/auction.*

*I suggest we add a page to the NABO website that invites tenders for the top jobs at BW. The sealed bids can contain the salary that any of us would accept to do Robin Evan's job or any of the other we see fit to list. I suspect there are plenty of heavy hitters who would do Mr Evans's job a lot better for a lot less than his £250k and £40k annual bonus. I am one of them. In this way we can argue on the basis of market forces that to run a bankrupt, overblown, subsidised monopoly they are all overpaid. My sealed envelope would contain a figure of £100k tops.*

*Boaters please wake up. One day we will be told BW has been sold to French Water or similar. As more houses are built, all using more water than ever before, FRESH WATER is the ultimate BW asset. Reservoirs full of fresh water all haemorrhaging out to sea. So BW will first sell-off/milk their property portfolio and maximise the revenue from boaters and float off a new Leisure Company. Then will come the coup de gras. A sell off of our reservoirs to a Water Utility Company for a massive many billions £ figure.*

*The result the Government gets pots of cash (which we will pay for in higher water bills) and at the same time gets rid of whinging BW and those tiresome boaters - all in one hit. QED.*

*I ask only that we boaters consider the likelihood of what I see as inevitable and come up with our own contingency plan. ie demand we are at the negotiating table to protect our interests. If we don't well just be told, after the event, its happened and where will we be then?*

*I offer 150% support for Stuart. His understanding of a duplicitous BW is spot on. We need someone of his talent, application, dedication and vigilance at the top of NABO. Keep up the excellent work Stuart, you are well regarded, respected and valued. Its not time yet for you to throw in the towel.*

**From Sir Adrian Stott**

*I think auctioning moorings is a very good idea. I believe that NABO's opposition to it is the result of poor analysis, vested interests, and entrenched and outdated political beliefs, and is very unfortunate for many members and the for the waterways as a whole. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity for members to consider the pros and cons of the proposal before the Council rushed to combat it in a way that only confirms the increasing criticism of NABO as a negative organisation.*

*However, there is not room here to discuss the idea in full, so I will limit myself to the Council's accusation that its introduction is unfair. It isn't.*



*What do you get when you join a queue? Only one thing, which is an understanding that, while the queue you are in continues to operate, you will be dealt with by that queue's server before anyone behind you is.*

*That's all. You don't get a guarantee that you will eventually be served. You don't get a guarantee that the queue will continue to exist. You don't even get a guarantee that another checkout won't open so that other people will be able to pay for their shopping before you do.*

*Imagine you are queueing for tickets for an event. If, before you reach the wicket, the show sells out or a tickets phone hot-line or web site opens, the show's promoter doesn't compensate you. He simply closes the wicket, and the queue disperses. If that happens you don't get a ticket (or anything else), even if you've been waiting all night. That isn't unfair; it's just the way queues work, and everyone knows it before he joins one.*

*The moorings waiting lists are no different. If BW decides to dispose of moorings by another method, it owes nothing to those on the lists. Joining one of the lists didn't give you any special "rights". That has to be how it is, as otherwise how could BW ever change to a different (better) approach?*

*In this case, moving to auctions would be much better. It would give \*everyone\* a chance at each mooring, not just the person at the head of the list. This would mean that someone with an urgent need would be able to*

*get a mooring ahead of (e.g.) someone who maybe just decided a while ago that he would like to get a spot nearer the pub but happens now to be at the front of the queue.*

*And some people do indeed have urgent need, such as a person buying his first boat. If he isn't near the head of a list, he may not be able to get a mooring for years. So he probably won't buy. It isn't just boat builders who are worried about the loss of business this is causing -- selling your existing boat is becoming more difficult too, because BW (rightly) won't let you pass your mooring on to a buyer.*

*It is the waiting list approach, not its abandonment, that is unfair, because it unreasonably gives priority to people who have time to wait and thus by definition do \*not\* have an urgent need.*

*The Council should stop insisting on its inappropriate "council housing" approach to moorings. It should allow members a proper debate on this very important issue and then review its position. And in particular it should stop all formal complaints about BW related to this, which just make NABO look bad.*

### **From Roger Brown**

NB "Don't Panic", Crick Marina

*I'm so outraged by what BW has done in this case that I simply had to mail you.*

*Let me make clear that I'm not "anti-BW" in any general way and I had hoped that NABO/BW relations were*

*improving as a result of positive attitudes in both organisations helped by more reasonable and consultative trends in BW's behaviour.*

*Then this!*

*I am fortunate in not being personally affected by the suspension of waiting lists (having a marina mooring) but I can imagine the position of boaters who are. The auction policy is not only grossly unfair to these individuals but it represents a significant cultural and political statement by BW which must be vigorously opposed as it is potentially so damaging to the entire concept of inland waterway boating and to future relationships with BW. It sends a message that BW's sole interest in boaters is as a source of revenue; revenue to be maximised in any way possible. Scarcity of either moorings or revenue doesn't provide an excuse.*

*Suspending a waiting list originally made in good faith breaches trust, offends common decency and is essentially deceitful. There is a waiting list at my marina. There is therefore an excess of demand over supply. Yet the private commercial operator (a hard-headed businessman) has been content to operate a first-come, first-served waiting list for moorings, rather than hold a sealed-bid auction, because he is an essentially decent operator.*

*In my view, BW has placed itself "beyond the pail" of commonly decent business practice by this step.*

*I am surprised this can't be legally challenged though I imagine BW did*

*consult its lawyers. However, whether or not the action is illegal, it is most definitely immoral.*

*NABO MUST win on this one. I will write directly to BW of course, but please can we get some collective protest action going - everyone should oppose this whether or not they are directly affected. What is the stance of the IWA on the issue? Sorry but I must have missed news of the petition.*

## **AND OTHER MATTERS**

### **From John Cheeseborough**

*Thank you for your explanation of "Green Blue". (NN. Issue 4, page 19.) I was so sure it was the latest environment-friendly product from Thetford!*

### **To Chairman and Gen Sec From Jo Mackness**

*Whoever is accusing you of being control freaks must desperately want to step into your shoes. I only hope they can display the commitment and dedication you have shown.*

*I look forward to NABO News as I feel I am getting somewhere near the truth, especially with your accounts of various meetings you attend on our behalf.*

*I, for one, would really miss you both at the helm. It needs someone not afraid to stand up and say what others haven't the courage for.*

*If you do leave us, have lots more hours of boating. from me. Thank you*

[Much appreciated - Stuart & Carole]

## WHY I'M FED UP TO THE BACK TEETH WITH BW

Email from Jim Hutchinson

*My patience with BW has finally snapped and I'm perfectly happy for the attached article to be published in NABO News. It may be too combative because I know you've been accused - quite unfairly in my opinion - of BW bashing.*

*I've sent a copy of this to Eugene for his comments.*

*Keep up the good work, and don't let BW off the hook. At the moment everyone is feeling nice and sympathetic for BW because of the DEFRA fiasco. And how did they repay the poor saps who signed petitions etc? Why they shoved up the mooring fees when our guard was down.*

*Sorry about the rant. I'm really a mild mannered chap deep down!*

The 'attached' saga ran to over 3500 words so we will have to shorten and serialise it. Unfortunately Eugene was on holiday when we went to press so his comments must wait till the next episode, but even without them there is good news as well as bad and it makes a good tale. Read on [Ed.]:-

*There can be fewer stress-inducing, obstructionist and at times plain bloody-minded institutions than BW. Despite its up to date management-speak assertions that it puts the interests of its customers first, I maintain that deep down it still has all the worst features of one of the old nationalised industries: top-heavy bureaucracy and utter inflexibility.*

*Here is an account of some of the difficulties I've encountered over the years.*

*Our family has for the last 17 years been restoring a pair of ex-working boats. The first set of problems concerned the moorings.*

### **The Elastic Waiting List**

*We had been on the waiting list for the much sought after online moorings at Cowroast, on the Tring summit. We were prepared to wait for a vacancy to appear and spent many years in the neighbouring marina until a mooring came up. We were told by the BW employee in charge of moorings on the GU South at the time that we could have the first Cowroast mooring that fell vacant for mooring our breasted up pair of boats, provided the channel was not obstructed. At the time there was only one such space and it was occupied by an ancient wide beam lighter that was used as a liveboard.*

*Eventually, after a nine year wait, the wide beam boat sank and was removed, leaving, so I assumed, a place for our pair. I repeatedly rang BW and tried to find out if it was OK to have the mooring. I was then told that there were at least 3 separate waiting lists: one for wide beam boats, one for small boats and another one for all the rest. Because we weren't a small boat and, in the impenetrable minds of BW, a pair of ex-working boats somehow occupies a different space from a 14' wide beam boat, we were, in fact still only 14th on the list. After protestations, because other boaters who joined the waiting list later than us were higher up, our position was revised to 9th. In the meantime the space formerly occupied by the wide beam remained empty. After a couple*

of weeks' phoning to find out what was happening and receiving no satisfactory answer, I took matters into my own hands and moved the boats out of the marina onto the empty mooring. That did the trick; at last BW responded and phoned me immediately. I was able to remind them of my verbal agreement that we could have the next wide beam mooring and, having made my protest, I moved the boats back into the marina. A couple of days later, lo and behold, we had moved up the waiting list from 9th to 1st and at last we had our mooring. Matthew Routledge was then the SE Waterways manager and he was happy for us to moor at Cowroast with a 50% reduction for the butty which was to be breasted up. He knew the pair of boats well and because of their historic significance, had often asked us to go to the Bulbourne Workshops open day as part of the attractions.

### **Different rules for different people**

The mooring had the luxury of an electricity supply. Indeed, as I told BW, this was one of the chief reasons for hanging on to the waiting list so long. However, when I asked an electrical engineer to check the installation, it was found to be dangerous and parts of it needed replacing. At this point BW got wind of what I intended to do and said that it was not their policy to allow electricity on their moorings. This was patent nonsense, since the rest of the boaters at Cowroast had installed electricity at their own expense with BW's blessing and there already was a supply on our mooring. If I'd kept quiet and used the old installation, BW presumably would have been quite happy. Because I chose to have the

job done properly, at a cost to me of over £1000, BW somehow felt I was trying to pull a fast one. More arguments ensued until at last we were given permission for upgrading the electricity supply. At this point, I'm sure BW marked me out as an awkward customer and decided to punish me for my persistence. They didn't have to wait long to strike.

### **The Saga of the Shed**

On our mooring there was a shed, erected by a previous mooring tenant with BW's permission. I asked the electrician to put the supply box in the shed to protect it from the weather. BW saw where I'd put it and they then told me that I would have to move the electrical supply from the shed because I didn't have their permission to have a shed. I didn't know I needed permission for a shed that was already there! At any rate, I had the power supply moved at further cost to myself.

Two weeks later we came up to the boats only to find that the shed had been demolished and was heaped up into a pile of firewood. There was no room for negotiation – just a swift hatchet job. Again I protested and was told, "Sheds are only allowed on residential moorings. Yours is not a residential mooring and the shed was therefore illegal." I pointed out that other non-residents had sheds on their moorings at Cowroast and, in any case, BW now no longer made a distinction between residential and non-residential moorers. I got the distinct feeling that they were making up the rules as they went along.

In the meantime a neighbour had been given permission to put up his shed, so they reluctantly allowed me

*to do likewise. Thus I had to pay £350 to replace a perfectly good shed and another £500 to move a socket that could have remained where it was now that it was BW had declared the illegal shed to be perfectly legal.*

### **BW's revenge**

*At this point in 1998 my son decided to take the restored butty down to London to live on board. He found a mooring at Battlebridge Basin which had been leased to a property company by BW. The moorings were expensive, but reasonable by London standards. Each year there was a small increase in line with inflation and all was well. In 2002 BW took back the lease and immediately doubled the mooring fees to an impossibly high £7000 per year. Despite vigorous protestations on the part of my son, BW's argument was, as always, "take it or leave it."*

*We then wrote to Matthew Routledge and asked if the butty could return to Cowroast on the same 50% discount basis as before. I emphasised the enhancement to the local waterways a much admired historic pair would bring and he was happy for the boats to be re-united and gave his consent.*

### **The incredible expanding boat**

*We then had an eighteen-month hassle over the length of the motor. When BW converted feet into metres they*

*made a mistake. This only came to light five years later when I idly typed the length of our motor in metres into a little conversion program on the computer. I calculated that BW owed me £170 in past mooring fees for charging me for a boat that was longer than it really was. After interminable delays, and the bizarre excuse that their computer system could not issue refunds or even deduct the over-charged amount from the next bill, Eugene Baston, BW's customer liaison executive finally sorted this out for us and sent us a cheque.*

### **The Annual Hassle**

*Each year there has been a hassle when I came to renew the licences and mooring fees for the two boats. There were four lots of correspondence and four separate payments for the two boats. So I thought I would try to simplify matters. I basically wanted to pay for both licences in July and both moorings in August. I had no difficulty in making a similar arrangement with the insurance company. I receive two invoices for the two boats and make a single online payment each August. What could be simpler?*

*Will this question be answered in the next episode?*

## **YOU SAY**



*We left our generator out and we were watching tv. Suddenly, it went off, and we thought someone had tripped over the wire. When we went out, it had gone, with just a wire left hanging. It was only 7 days old: before that we'd had a rough old thing for years."*

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