

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

Minutes of the seventh Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Boat Owners held on the 22nd November 1997 at Hockley Port, Birmingham.

37 members attended. Apologies for absence were received from various members. The Chairman welcomed Bob Clarke news editor of Canal and Riverboat, also David Daines and Jon Darlington.

1. Minutes were agreed an accurate record.

### 2. Chairman's report.

Peter Lea reported on the work carried out by the Association in furthering its member's interests over the last year. This included obtaining good results through negotiations, pursuing complaints through the Ombudsman and the obtaining of worthwhile publicity. The Association now had a higher public profile. Attempts had been made to achieve better working relations with BW.

The Association had responded to BW's latest re-organisation proposals as would be detailed by the V. Chairman later in the meeting.

The Chairman went on to detail other work done by Council members over the last year, and ended by emphasizing the continuing importance of NABO in the future bearing in mind the proposed changes and increases in regulation.

### 3. Treasurers Report.

The Treasurer spoke to his written report, which had already been tabled. Amongst other points he reported that income and donations were up on last year. Expenses had increased with Newsletter costs up. This was mainly due to the Newsletter being heavier and better and had to be distributed to more members. Rallies and Marketing costs were up in the aim of raising the public profile of NABO and recruiting more members. Prospects were good with assets up and the reserves running at about 14000 pounds.

The Treasure then answered questions from the floor.

The meeting then adopted the Accounts

### 4. Resolutions.

The meeting then debated the Resolution: -

"Owners of broad beam river cruisers and sea going boats are under -represented within the Association. We urge Council to establish a 'river craft section within the Association for members who are not interested in canals and narrowboats."

The Proposer Stephen Peters then spoke to the resolution and was seconded by Peter Foster.

The resolution was then debated from the floor. Amongst points made were concerns that adopting the resolution would create a division within the Association between owners of different craft. There was strength in unity and simplicity. Various approaches were proposed. The last part of the resolution was generally considered to be too divisive. It was felt that Council could be relied upon to ensure that owners of boats other than narrowboats interests were catered for. However there was still

concern that to recruit more members from the sea going and broad beam owners some action was necessary.

An amended resolution was put to the meeting that: -

"we urge council to expand the representation of River users within the organisation, and to consider the merits of the establishment of a River Craft section within the Association."

This was passed 36 for, 1 against.

5. Subscriptions.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that there would be no increase in the Annual Subscription this year.

6. Election of Council Members.

The following members were standing for Council this year.

Penny Barber, Geoff Barnett, Roger Davis, Peter Foster, Peter Lea, Philip Ogden, Nigel Parkinson, Stephen Peters, Geoffrey Rogerson, Andrew Sherrey, Denis Smith, Nikki Timbrell. These were accepted no election being necessary

7. Appointment of Auditors.

Ann Tilman of Tilman and Co. was re-elected as Auditor

This item concluded formal business of the meeting. There followed a presentation and general discussion on the BW proposals for the setting up of a Trust to administer the Waterways, new standards of maintenance and a membership scheme.

The meeting ended at 1340 hrs.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - NOVEMBER 1997

We have had a very busy year since last November, and been involved in the major issues affecting the waterways. It has been a successful year as well; we have achieved some good results through negotiations, and have obtained worthwhile publicity for ourselves and our views.

We started the year off with three complaints to the Ombudsman, ably prepared by our retiring chairman, Jon Darlington. We were successful with the first: Lady Ponsonby found BW guilty of maladministration in not consulting users over their massive three year hike in licence fees. She cleared BW on the other two, which were over the introduction of the Boat Safety Scheme and a senior BW executive's handling of complaints. However she found BW broke its promise to continue the £20 licence discount to boat owners holding a Certificate of Compliance or BSS Certificate for a further year, and she slapped the Board's wrist for the way in which our letters had been answered.

During the summer, Lady Ponsonby decided not to seek reappointment as Ombudsman, because of the way she was treated by BW's Chief Executive. I had built up a good relationship with her, and a personal friendship. We gave her what support we could, and were very sorry to see her go.

On the political front, we had very useful meetings with Lady Knollys, Chairman of IWAAC, Bill O'Brien, Chairman of the Parliamentary Waterways Group, and most recently Angela Eagle, the Minister in charge of British Waterways. Issues discussed included BW's handling of the Ombudsman and the need for him or her to be fully independent; BW's approach to consultation with users (as shown by the changes to its Customer Charter and the surprise licence fee increases); pricing existing boat owners off the waterways and discouraging new ones, and proposals to change BW. I am pleased to say these meetings, and others, have borne some fruit. In particular, I doubt that BW will ever again handle relationships with its Ombudsman and its users in the way it did between May 1996 and June 1997 - though I may be wrong!

Our higher political profile has been matched by better press and public relations. We have established good working relationships with the waterway monthlies, and rarely does a month

go by without a mention of NABO and our views in one or more of their publications. We have also been quoted in the national press<sup>AND RADIO.</sup> Our book of press cuttings is here today for you to look at.

At the same time, we have tried to achieve better working relations with the Board. Nigel Parkinson and I had a long meeting with BW's Chairman and Chief Executive in Watford in March. David Fletcher came to a Council Meeting in June, and has visited me twice over the last few months to discuss current matters.

As a result of these initiatives, it is fair to say we are now universally regarded as a key player on the waterways scene.

Your Council has been actively involved in major issues affecting boaters and the waterways. In March and April, we drew attention to the likely impact of the drought on water levels during the summer. Partly in response to this, BW spent nearly £1 million in a back-pumping scheme extending over the Midlands and south. We have responded in detail and obtained major changes to BW's Licence and Mooring Permit Conditions and the Waterways Code for Anglers. These are now much better than they were a year ago. We worked hard to get a reduction in the next two years' licence increases. We have been involved in fights for boaters' rights on waterways as far flung as the River Wye, the Pocklington Canal, and the Cam. We campaigned for more funds for the waterways, supported BW over licences for cyclists, and opposed their high-handed and inappropriate plans at Stourport and their proposal to abolish most short-term licences. We continue to criticise many aspects of the Boat Safety Scheme, and of course we are responding to BW's latest proposals to change waterway standards and create a trust.

Nigel will be making a presentation of BW's proposals on maintenance standards and a waterway trust later this morning. However, for anybody who is interested, we have prepared a first draft of our response. While we applaud the thinking that has gone into them (when was the last time BW did any creative thinking?) we do not believe their proposed maintenance standards are acceptable. And while the concept of a trust is very interesting, before we will support it we will need to be quite sure that all our concerns are met, and the new organisation is fully accountable.

During the past year, Philip Ogden carried out a detailed investigation into possible savings of

water supplies and discussed his findings with BW Operations Director Stewart Sim. Philip has also done a lot of work on channel dimensions for our response to BW on new waterway standards, and on the Code for Anglers. Denis Smith has doggedly fought one of the waterway managers over plans to re-develop the site of the third basin at Stourport and the introduction of pontoon moorings which will seriously affect the appearance of the Basin, as well as facilities for visiting boats. He has just won an important victory in a battle over mooring agreements on the Staffs and Worcester.

Nigel Parkinson has attended the meetings of the BSS Technical Committee and analysed the results of our survey of members' BSS compliance costs. He has also prepared several strategic papers for us (especially on the trust proposals), and for the National Inland Navigation Forum. Jon Darlington, although no longer on Council, drafted our complaints to the Ombudsman, attended BSS Advisory Committee meetings, and given me much helpful advice. Thank you, Jon.

Stephen Peters and Pete Foster have ably represented us on BW's river navigations, and kept us abreast of operational problems on the Severn and Trent. Neil Walker drew up our response to the Environment Agency's proposed River Wye Order, while holding down the jobs of Secretary and Southern Region rep.

On the non-political side, Roger Davis carried out the Herculean task of going through all our membership records since NABO was founded, and correcting and updating our membership database. He also writes excellent letters, and chases every non-renewing member with letters and phone calls. He has put in hundreds of hours; without his efforts, I do not know how we would have carried on.

Christine Denton has completely revamped our marketing and recruitment effort. Anyone visiting our stand at Henley from the Saturday on, or at the other major events we attended, knows how much we have improved. She also organised a highly successful raffle. Christine's name doesn't appear on the list of candidates for next year's Council, but she isn't getting out that easily - I expect she will be co-opted on to the new Council in short order.

Nikki Timbrell (who is away on holiday) has stepped down after four years as editor of NABO News, during which time it has gone from strength to strength. She put a lot of time, energy and talent into producing eight interesting issues a year. Our newsletter is our showpiece; it

goes to M P's and civil servants, IWAAC and the Ombudsman, senior personnel in BW and the Environment Agency, and the heads of the major user organisations. We are enormously grateful to her.

This would be a good moment to introduce Wendy Hook, who is taking over as editor.

(STAND) Thank you, Wendy, for taking on this vital job. I would also like to congratulate Robert Coles for his lively photographs, and Mike Wooding for creating NABO's website and keeping it up to date. He's made a great job of it. Check the next newsletter for the website address.

Andrew Sherrey has worked hard at keeping our books up to date. It's not easy to be Treasurer with two other accountants on the Council! The volume of paperwork seems to increase as we grow, but Andrew manages to keep on top of it all.

During the year, we were very sad to lose John Griffiths, who tragically died of cancer in September. Our condolences go to his family. We say good-bye to Neil Walker and Phil Bland, who are leaving Council after many years. We wish them all the best in future.

At this point, I must stop and tell you that Neil's departure means we have a very important vacancy to fill on Council. As of next meeting, we have no Secretary. A lot of the routine secretarial work is ably carried out by helpers, but we need someone who is prepared to come to Council meetings, take minutes, and write them up promptly. The time commitment is one Saturday every six or seven weeks, plus a two or three hours to type up the minutes afterwards. Can I ask if any member here today is willing to volunteer to do this? (PAUSE) Is anyone prepared to be press-ganged? It really is important. (PAUSE) If anyone is prepared to even consider it, could they please see me during the break.

What of the future? I see NABO's role continuing in importance. British Waterways will change, perhaps quite dramatically. Responsibility for running individual waterways may shift from the Environment Agency. The Boat Safety Scheme is certain to change. Regulation will increase; so will pressure from other users, and particularly from environmentalists. NABO must respond to these, on behalf of the boater, as we have always done.

Finally, I would like to say that it has been a great privilege to be NABO's Chairman for the past year. It has been hard work, but luckily I have had a lot of support. I am convinced that

without the efforts of everyone on Council, NABO members and boaters generally would be worse off than we are today.

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