

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS**

held at Tamworth Cruising Club Saturday 18th November 2023 at 1100h

PRESENT: Mike Rodd (chair), Helen Hutt (treasurer), David Fletcher, Peter Braybrook (minutes), Anne Husar, Phil Goulding, CJ Green, John Sadler and Sharon Wells, Ken Hylins (Zoom), Val Fletcher, Robert Neff, Nick Roberts (Trentlink), Paul Monahan (Zoom), Sam Warrall (Zoom)

1. **APOLOGIES** were received from Alan Douglas who will attempt to join on Zoom and Andy Soper,
2. **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING** held on 12 November 2022 were **agreed** as a true record.
3. **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** The chair gave his report which he said he would circulate in full. (See Appendix 1). He commented that he feels that he has been chairman too long and this would be his last report. He will continue on Council to cover the EA re-organisation. He thanked Anne for taking her share of the load. He described the way that the funding crisis for waterways has arisen. He highlighted difficulties with coping with the increases in license and mooring fees. NABO is aware of the shortcomings of CRT and the problem of having to accept that they were there to stay. This led to connection with IWA, AWCC, British Marine and RYA. *Fund Britain's Waterways* has now over 100 member organisations. The events in Birmingham, Gloucester and on the Thames to Parliament have received much publicity. It has been a good year with an encouraging increase in membership numbers. He highlighted that we are one of the few organisations to challenge CRT. He described the structural changes in EA. He said he believed that our pressure has resulted in some heritage buildings remaining in the care of CRT. He also described NABO's involvement in the Boat Safety Scheme and issues that require watching carefully such as the period of inspections. He thanked Anne Husar as Vice Chair and David Fletcher for the spectacular work he did as chair of the BSS Technical Committee from which he has retired. Mike informed the meeting of work that has been done on electrical systems on boats by the IET. He also thanked Peter Fellows for his work in NABO News and to John Sadler for continuing and improving this publication. He thanked CJ Green for work she has put out into social media. He also thanked Helen for the work she does in the treasury and as a boater's rep on the CRT Council. He thanked Phil for work on the Winter Works Committee. He also thanked Ken Hylins for the work he does as Welfare Officer. Mike described some of his work.
4. **TREASURER'S REPORT** The accounts had been put on the website (see Appendix 2) Helen Hutt reported income and membership is stable. She thanked RCR for advertising on the back page of NABO News and this will continue. She described the investment strategy which takes advantage of better interest rates with Redwood Bank. We have a small excess of income over expenditure. Helen invited questions.

Acceptance of the accounts were proposed by Ken Hylins and seconded by Peter Braybrook.

The chair commended Helen's work and clarity in the finance.

5. **APPOINTMENT OF THE AUDITOR FOR 2023-24** The auditor, Colin Walker was thanked for his work and re-appointed for the coming year. Proposed by Helen and seconded by Mike. All Agreed
6. **ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS** The current Council all put themselves forward for election with the exception of Phil Goulding. Nomination had been received for Robert Neff, proposed by Mike Rodd and seconded by Anne Husar. This brings the Council to eleven members. The full complement is twelve.

Mike Rodd, Anne Husar, Helen Hutt, Peter Braybrook, Alan Douglas, David Fletcher, C J Green, Ken Hylins, Robert Neff, John Sadler and Sharon Wells were **Elected** en bloc.

7. **APPOINTMENT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY.** Peter Braybrook, who has been caretaker will continue. Mike Rodd proposed him and Anne Husar seconded
8. **CONSTITUTION** Amendments have been circulated to the membership and Council by Helen Hutt and David Fletcher and he proposed acceptance of the amendments as tabled. Seconded from the Chair
ACCEPTED.
9. **CLOSING DISCUSSION.**

Mike started the discussion by commenting on the poor performance of CRT with reference to dredging problems.

How do we get our voice heard? It was suggested that in fact we have been getting our voice heard via social media. Paul Monahan commented on the number of stoppages that appear on the system.

We do have a problem with many people who do not want to support CRT. It was noted that celebrities are also turning away from criticism of the government. It is also a real issue that boaters are ignoring the issues that are evident. It is true that we have contacted every MP but only a very few have actually taken an real interest. It was noted that FBW is not getting a very high profile. CRT have gone their own way with "Keep Canals Alive". It was noted that they have used FBW press release under their own banner in the Boaters Update.

Ken Hylins felt that we need to publicise the degradation of canals and the demise of charity boats etc.

Nick Roberts brought to the table an analysis of CRT's figures with respect to the North East of England. There has been a decrease of lock movements between 2017 and 2023 has highlighted that boats are not cruising. There has been an increase in licensed boats but less use of them. What stops them, based on local to the River Trent, are mainly navigation restrictions which have increased nationally. The state of the Leeds and Liverpool that he described gave rise to evidence that the state of the canal is declining. Particularly the summer closures have increased from 24 days to 104days. This is not anecdotal evidence now. Anne suggested formalising evidence and publicising it. Paul Monahan offered data from the Rochdale Flight. The Huddersfield was only open end to end for 24 days last year. Other problem canals were referred to such as the Oxford and Rochdale Canals. Whether the Rochdale was owned by CRT was queried. Paul indicated that CRT hold a long lease on the canal. Hire Companies are reluctant to provide information, perhaps because they need CRT to operate. Phil Goulding described CRT's system for stoppage planning. This has been hindered by changes in chair. He described it as a nightmare. He described the current situation as chaos because added in are stoppages caused by HS2 who are unpredictable. Added to this are weather events that affect river levels. 80% of boaters are in a position to be able to pay and use their boats very little. Sam Warrall commented that these statistics could be publicised on local facebook groups.

Mike Rodd commented that hire boat companies have never had so low numbers.

Phil Goulding commented that live-aboard boaters now constitute a community of approximately 12000.

It is evident that we need to get the message to all sections of the boating community and increase our membership and reach.

The chair thanked all for their attendance and contributions.

The meeting closed at 1230 pm

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Chair's Report,

After too many years as your Chair, and with an excellent Council team in place, I felt this was the time not to stand for re-election as your chair, although – if approved – I am happy to continue as a Council member, especially given the situation with EA and my role on the Boat Safety Scheme's Technical Committee. The latter is especially relevant, given its work on the rapidly changing situation regarding the rapid increase in the introduction of AC on boats, as well as all the dangers related to the introduction of lithium batteries.

Without any shadow of doubt, it has been a great privilege to be NABO's chair, not only because of the challenging issues that we have had to face, but also because of the wonderful folk who have been, and still are, members of the Council – who really do all the work, especially my Vice Chair, Anne Husar! We've never yet had to deal an issue where no-one has offered to take responsibility.

But what a situation faces all us boaters right now, given the horrendous issues resulting from the government's (reduced) funding of CRT, and of all the other waterways operators, especially the EA. The current crisis for CRT goes right back to Prime Minister David Cameron's decision in the Noughties, to get rid of the so-called "Quangos"^[1], and the vision that British Waterways could become the "National Trust for the Waterways". It's important to note that NABO – along with most boater representative bodies – said from the start that this would never be financially viable. The fundamental problem is that (unlike National Trust properties, for example, where every visitor pays) most of those who benefit from the waterways never contribute in any meaningful way to their upkeep and maintenance costs.

NABO recognised right from the start that this strategy would simply never work, and thus opposed it loudly – but to no avail. Now we are once again having to say – very loudly – that CRT and the other waterway operators simply cannot (and indeed, should not have to) operate without any government support, given that they are largely unique national treasures of historical importance that benefit a high proportion of the population, most of whom contribute nothing to their upkeep, except (currently, but not for long, unless something changes) via their taxes!

Nevertheless, the outcome of this policy was for British Waterways to become the Canal and River Trust (CRT) and now, after the planned 15-year transition period, the minister responsible is applying the long term aim of reducing CRT's government funding so that it will soon be down to zero.

A separate – but related – issue is that we also believe that CRT could make better use of the money that they do have. We have continually had to raise concerns about the way CRT is failing to maintain the canals – instead, spending vast sums on silly blue signs, supporting non-waterways-related projects, employing poorly-managed contractors, etc.

There is, however, no "Plan B" that doesn't include CRT. We, as your Council, have had to recognise that there is no way that the government would consider undoing the establishment of CRT. CRT is here to stay, so we need to find the best way of helping it to focus more on the fundamental reason for its establishment – that is, keeping our amazing and unique canals and waterways in an acceptable condition. Thus the best thing for us to do is to hope that by supporting moves to get the reduction in funding reversed, we might be seen by CRT as a "critical friend" – with the emphasis on "friend" – whose voice should carry more weight in making operational decisions!

Because of this we saw a need to establish a national movement to work for better funding of our waterways, and were delighted to find that the IWA (Inland Waterways Association) was similarly motivated. So the “Fund Britain’s Waterways” campaign was established.

With over 100 organisations now on board, this initiative is being led by a small steering group with membership from NABO, IWA, AWCC, British Marine and the RYA, under the chairmanship of the well-known and highly-respected Les Etheridge, lately the National Chair of the IWA. With an initial campaign cruise in Birmingham with nearly 50 boats filling the canal, there was extensive press and media coverage, especially via the BBC and ITV, also by local radio stations, and then by several national newspapers, particularly the *Guardian*. This all helped to swell numbers signing the nation-wide petition (please do sign it if you haven’t yet – see <https://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways>) and also brought the issue to the attention of MPs, etc. A follow-up event was held at Gloucester docks by an offshoot of FBW, “Fund Gloucester Docks”. The next event was another campaign cruise in November, this time to the Palace of Westminster, similar to the one in January 2007, which also sought to effect changes in Government policies. Thirty-one boats then played a crucial role in that venture, and many of them agreed to be involved this time around too.

At the same time as all this has been going on, NABO has been flabbergasted to see that CRT has chosen to plunder one of its few identifiable revenue streams, namely us boaters, by imposing horrendous increases in licensing charges, mooring costs, etc., over the next five years. This specifically includes – despite our earlier, legally supported objections – escalating the licence fees for continuous cruisers, using a very questionably-structured so-called “survey of boaters” to prove that this move is favoured by the majority of its licence holders! We have, of course, taken legal advice regarding the situation, but it does seem that without expensive additional legal action, we will be unable to prevent CRT from going down their chosen route.

We boaters are clearly seen as soft targets, but my fear is that these moves will drive many to leave the waterways, and may also cause others to simply disobey the requirements unless there is substantially increased monitoring and enforcement. It seems a perfect recipe for killing the golden goose!

We also continue to try to be active in the management of EA’s waterways, especially the Thames, although unfortunately we don’t presently have many members who are based there. The funding of waterways activities within the EA has also been extensively cut back and a completely new structure of volunteer engagement has been introduced, many experienced staff have been disposed of and relatively inexperienced new staff introduced into key roles. On the Thames especially, we have continued to work with other boater representative organisations and recently we have at last seen some improvement in the EA’s willingness to engage with us – a very welcome change to earlier attitudes, whereby it had seemed to many of us that they simply saw no benefit in working with us! So we can only hope that a similar transformation could occur at CRT!

NABO has continued to be an active player in the Boat Safety Scheme; until recently, David Fletcher was chair of its Technical Committee. There, he did an amazing job of ensuring that the Scheme continued to be of real value to our boating community, often struggling with under-staffing issues. At the same time, the scheme has had to deal with many necessary changes in the on-board requirements, as well as the continual need to ensure that all requirements keep pace with the changing nature of boats, especially in relationship to new technologies. In my own role as a boater representative on the Technical Committee and a Chartered Electrical Engineer, I had been particularly anxious about all aspects of the BSS’s electrical requirements, largely resulting from the increasingly widespread use of 240volt AC-based systems. Having always been concerned about the lack of guidance to installers, boat designers and, indeed, amateurs making changes to their own boats, I was delighted that my recent employers, the Institution for Engineering and Technology (IET, formerly the IEE) decided to

produce such a guideline text. After a year's work involving advisers from all the relevant bodies, this has finally been published.

In terms of your Council's activities, I would like to pay special tribute to our retiring NABO News editor, Peter Fellows, who for many years has been continually improving and expanding its contents - always making it of relevance to our members and the thousands of others who read it. It is also apparently compulsory reading for CRT and EA staff – given their frequent screams after publication, when they haven't liked what they were reading!! I was saddened when Peter finally decided that, in selling his boat and going farming in Wales, he should step down, but I am delighted that John Sadler has quickly picked up the reins and is doing a great job!!

It is also very good to see that, through the work of my vice-chair Anne Husar and also CJ (Carolyn Green), we are now having a major presence in many areas of social media – I just wish that a few more of the thousands involved would add more muscle to our work by deciding to become paid-up NABO members!

In thanking others, especial thanks go to Helen Hutt, not only for her highly professional management of all aspects of our financial affairs, but also for her work on the CRT Council as an elected boater's representative. Thanks too to Phil Goulding for his work on the CRT's winter works group, and again to David Fletcher on CRT's NAG (Navigation Advisory Group).

Finally, I have to conclude my thanks by paying tribute to Ken Hylins, our Welfare Officer. Having had his own problems, but with extensive experience as a live-aboard boater and a deep knowledge of fundamental rights and entitlements (especially of those with problems), he has done a wonderful job in helping so many folk battling the bureaucracy of CRT or local authorities. I think some of the CRT staff cringe when they get a request to call Ken – they are aware that he knows more about a boater's legal rights than they ever will! His unstinting and selfless service of others is proving a fertile recruiting ground for NABO – people really see the value of having us alongside them!!!

And so, thank you all so much for many wonderful years and I am sure my successor will find the role as interesting and fulfilling as I have.

[1] “Quasi-government organisations” – which, he felt, would be better run by non- government bodies, and which would then not require to be funded (or indeed run by) a government department.

APPENDIX 2

NABO AGM 18 November 2023 – Treasurer's Report

The ship is steady at the moment. Membership is holding up reasonably well, thanks to an influx of new members to compensate for those lost, and this continues into the current year.

Income was boosted by advertising revenue from River Canal Rescue and this, again, appears to be holding up for the foreseeable future.

Interest rates recovered during the year to more than double the 2022 figure and this trend is continuing too. After year end we transferred a further £4,000 from Barclays to Redwood Bank to take advantage of higher interest rates.

We lodged yet another complaint with Barclays, regarding the difficulty of adding a new signatory, resulting in a £75 compensation payment.

Expenditure remained roughly the same. More was spent on representing NABO, especially at meetings with CRT. We contributed £85 towards the printing of the Skippers Guide and Mark Tizard was given a gift of wine as a thank you for his many years of service to NABO.

Looking ahead, we have already recruited a good number of new members this year, boosting income, but expenditure is also likely to be higher due to our contribution to the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign (£1,000) and legal advice taken regarding CRT's license fee increases (£1,200).

However, with our reserves standing at a healthy £25,082 I see no reason to increase membership fees or cut expenditure at present.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

AUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED

31st MARCH 2023

NABO, 20 Oak Grove, Hertford SG13 8AT

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

	Note	<u>31-Mar-23</u>		<u>31-Mar-22</u>	
		£	£	£	£
INCOME					
Membership Fees	1	8,880		8,990	
Less Paypal Transaction Charges		<u>-68</u>		<u>-52</u>	
		8,812		8,938	
Donations		380		470	
Advertising Revenue	2	1,500		250	
Interest Receivable	3	336		159	
Other Income	4	<u>75</u>		<u>0</u>	
TOTAL INCOME			11,103		9,817
LESS EXPENDITURES					
Council Meetings	5	-310		-166	
AGM		-71		-73	
Membership		-101		-81	
Representing NABO	6	-436		-53	
NABO News	7	-7,407		-7,413	
Website / Internet		-292		-161	
Subscriptions		-10		-4	
Accounts / Audit		-219		-186	
Legal Fees		0		-45	
Insurance		-851		-823	
Administration		0		-85	
Donations	8	-85		-200	
Gift	9	<u>-120</u>		<u>0</u>	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE			-9,902		-9,290
EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE			<u><u>1,201</u></u>		<u><u>527</u></u>

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2023

	<u>31-Mar-23</u>	<u>31-Mar-22</u>
	£	£
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Barclays Bank Deposit Account	4,634	4,623
Barclays Bank Current Account	3,475	3,013
Redwood Deposit Account	16,162	15,836
Paypal Account	379	109
Debtors and Prepayments	507	590
Total Current Assets	<u>25,157</u>	<u>24,171</u>
Current Liabilities		
Deferred Income	0	-40
Creditors and Accruals	-75	-250
Total Current Liabilities	<u>-75</u>	<u>-290</u>
Total Net Assets	<u><u>25,082</u></u>	<u><u>23,881</u></u>
RESERVES		
Opening Reserves	23,881	23,354
Excess of Income Over Expenditure	1,201	527
Total Reserves	<u><u>25,082</u></u>	<u><u>23,881</u></u>

REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

TREASURER

Enclosed are the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ending 31st March 2023, Balance Sheet as at the same date and Notes to the Accounts.

Helen Hutt

August 2023

AUDITOR

I have examined the books and records of the Association and am satisfied from the information provided to me that the Financial Statements give a true and fair view both of the Association's Balance Sheet at 31st March 2023 and the excess of Income over Expenditure for the year ended on that date.

Colin Walker, FCCA

August 2023

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

1 Membership fees

During the year membership fell by 10. Although 45 new members were recruited, 55 members resigned or did not renew.

There were three free memberships for supplying photos for the NABO news.

The total at 31st March 2023 was 339 excluding additional family members, compared with 349 at 31st March 2022.

2 Advertising revenue represents a full back cover advertisement in six issues of the NABO news for River Canal Rescue.

3 Deposit interest rates recovered during the year.

	£
Redwood Bank	326
Barclays Bank	10
	<u>336</u>

4 Other income represents compensation from Barclays Bank in respect of delays to processing a change of signatories.

5 Council meetings were split roughly 50/50 between virtual and real.

6 Representation by NABO Councillors, especially at meetings with CRT personnel, increased during the year to a level which it is hoped, will be sustained.

7 NABO News expenditure covers the cost of artwork, printing and mailing 600 copies. It is published six times each year.

8 Donations represent a contribution to the Historic Narrow Boat Club towards the printing of a skippers guide.

9 The gift was for the departing Vice-President, Mark Tizard.