

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

Minutes of the Council Meeting held at Northfield on 19th July 1997

1. Apologies

Christine Denton, Peter Foster, Andrew Sherrey, Denis Smith, Nikki Timbrel.

2. Accuracy of the Minutes of Council Meeting 7th June

Agreed a true record and signed accordingly.

3. Matters Arising

Chairman's items

3b An article in the Daily Telegraph had indicated that the present Government might impose stiffer standards in Citizens Charters. It was agreed that the Public Service Minister be written to with copies of NABO correspondence on the BW Charter.

3d This questionnaire had now been circulated

3e. MP's had been sent letters

5d. This list had been circulated

5g. Audrey Smith had accepted an invitation to draw the raffle at Henley.

7e. It was agreed a letter should be sent regarding the Waterway Code for Anglers.

13d. A letter had been written but no reply received.

P. Barber

13. Reported no response on the Consultation process

R. Davis

11. A format for the new Membership form had now been agreed.

4. Report from the Chairman on Matters of Current Interest

The Chairman described a version of events leading up to the current advertising of the post of Waterways Ombudsman. There had been, it was understood, 300 applicants for the post, which had now been shortlisted. The Minister concerned (Angela Eagle) would decide on the successful applicant. *from a Sh. list of three.*

It was noted with concern that the new Ombudsman's required qualifications *may have been* had been altered, excluding a requirement for legal expertise. Matters requiring legal interpretation would, it was understood, in future be referred to BW's legal department.

It was pointed out that at least three recent decisions of the Ombudsman turned on legal interpretations and would therefore have been excluded under the new terms of reference. *If this was the case*

This *dilution* of the stature and influence of the Ombudsman's post was considered totally unsatisfactory, though consistent with BW's current management attitude.

The Minister had been asked for an early meeting with NABO at which the following matters would be raised.

The apparent change in scope and stature of the Ombudsman

BW's change of approach to consultation with the users

BW's charging policy and its effect on less well off users

The watering down of commitment to users in the revised version of their Customers Charter

Proposed changes to BW's legal structure and to the Transport Acts

The lack of any effective supervision of BW and its activities

P. Barber then reported on the RBOA's submission to John Prescott regarding the independence of the Ombudsman. The RBOA considered there should be one Ombudsman for all major navigation authorities.

It was agreed that a letter of appreciation be sent to Lady Ponsonby.

The Chairman then reported on matters concerning the Pocklington Canal. It was considered that the draft plan, obtained with some difficulty, was biased towards English Nature, restricting further restoration and limiting boating. He had written commenting on the draft plan accordingly.

It was noted that Paul Wagstaffe (Ex NIMF) was replacing Jim Kelly. David Fletcher's letter after his meeting with Council was also noted.

The Council meeting was then addressed by Michael Handford, a representative of a self-appointed working group who were concerned as to the future of the waterways in the United Kingdom.

After stressing the need for a new effective and politically aware entity to replace an allegedly now ineffective IWA he went on to list likely key issues which will need to be resolved. These included the future of British Waterways and likely legislation including a new Transport Act. British Waterways were drafting possible new legislation; de-nationalisation was on the cards. This represented an opportunity that should not be missed.

Mr. Handford then went on to cover matters such as water resources, identification of new sources of income and the formation of a Waterways Heritage Trust. He also described a possible new conservancy structure for all waterways authorities and listed further objectives for achievement in the next five to ten years.

Finally, the proposed structure of a new organisation could consist of layers of supervisory, advisory and task forces, with all Canal Societies and Associations taking part. Reformation of the present situation was not possible. A new approach was needed.

General discussion then followed, after which Mr. Handford was thanked for his presentation and left the meeting at 1210.

On this subject Council agreed that a NABO representative could attend the inaugural meeting of the Consultancy Group, otherwise we would continue to watch developments closely.

Mr. Handford would be thanked by letter for his presentation.

Council then discussed a presentation that had been given by David Fletcher on the conversion of British Waterways to a Charitable Trust. The Vice-Chairman would draft a response to BW's ideas. The response would cover such matters as the composition of the Trust, funding, marketing, relationships with other bodies and pricing policies. Other items may be included in the final response. The Chairman commented that he believed BW were flying a kite but it would be in our interest to state our views as soon as practicable.

5. Current Status of NABO complaints to the Ombudsman

It was reported that the Ombudsman had found against NABO on three outstanding complaints and was likely to do so over a fourth. These concerned BW not following procedures, not giving sufficient time for consultation and not continuing with the £20 discount for C of C holders. The other complaint not yet considered concerned BW not answering letters correctly.

6. Boat Safety Scheme Update

R. Davis reported on the results of the questionnaire circulated regarding the scheme. So far, 139 members had responded indicating substantial costs incurred, the highest being £3085.39. As a result of this interim report, Council agreed that these alarming findings should be communicated to the Minister at our proposed meeting. BW should also be informed. Consequently, the Vice-Chairman would draft a letter to BW quoting the survey findings and those of AWCC. The letter would suggest that increases in licence fees over the next year or two should be reduced to compensate for these increased costs.

BSS Advisory Group meeting was reported on by the Vice-Chairman. Matters raised included the likely compulsion to include RSD's in AC circuits, and the lack of liaison between BW and other bodies, such as the Manchester Ship Canal Co., over safety requirements. The Broads Authority had produced a scheme that would need examining. The Complaints and Appeals procedure had now been published.

10a. IWA Bulletin (taken early)

The Chairman invited discussion on the IWA Bulletin concerning the actions of English Nature and the Environment Agency a copy of which he tabled. It would appear that these bodies were restricting rights of navigation on some waterways, or showing laxity in defending them against environmentalist pressures. It was agreed that P.Barber would draft a position paper on the problem in the prospect of NABO and the RBOA forming a joint view.

10. Not taken, Christine Denton not being present

8. BW Draft Code for Cyclists

Council confirmed the Chairman's response. R.Davis reported on a mass protest held by cyclists on the Kennet and Avon as reported in the press.

9. P.Ogdens Notes and draft reply to BW

These were discussed and agreed. Council members emphasised the need for BW to do better regarding patchy and inconsistent notices advertising stoppages on the system. Dredging policy should also be altered in order that some summit pounds could be deepened to provide extra reservoir capacity.

Angling: a disturbing case of harassment experienced by a member moored at the lower end of the Erewash was discussed. Council confirmed that the local rep. had their full authority to take whatever action was necessary in complaining to the local Waterways Management.

11. ^{AGM}Rallies and Marketing.

Council considered further the possibilities of rotating AGM venues. It was decided that unless Northfield had already been booked this year's AGM would be held at Hockley Port. P.Barber would check the availability of the site. Council would consider invitations to visitors and a possible invitation to B.Henderson at their next meeting on the 30th August. At this meeting the Secretary would also advise Council of the timetable for publishing nominations etc. prior to the AGM.

13. Press Matters

N.Timbrell would be retiring as Newsletter Editor at the next AGM. The Chairman reported that two possible replacements had come forward. Council empowered the Chairman to interview and select a suitable candidate from those available.

Council also confirmed that one of the aforementioned, M.Wooding should be asked to take up the post of Website Editor in place of J.Dennison.

P.Bland informed Council that he had as yet been unable to publish details of Waterway amenities, as J.Dennison had not yet returned the lists of these to him.

It was agreed that the latter be asked again for the return of the papers and also of some NABO display signs, which were needed for other venues.

14. Membership

R.Davis amplified his written report.

15. Reports on Meetings attended and important local issues

The Chairman reported that BW were now "statutory consultees" for planning application purposes. He was concerned that some planning applications may be unknown to BW who now must be consulted in appropriate cases.

He also reported on a meeting held in Peterborough with the local EA over proposals to encourage boating on the Nene.

16 AOB

The Chairman.

(a) Donation of £142.41 received from Staniland Boating Club was welcomed

(b) The results of the BW surveys on Boaters, Anglers and towpath Visitors were now available

(c) NABO lapel badges were now available. Delivery from the manufacturer was being arranged.

(d) Council meeting 30th August. He may not be present, if not N Parkinson would chair the meeting. He was also not available 20-27 October, which would include the EA user meeting and the PWG. The Vice-Chairman would substitute at the PWG.

(e) He requested that Dominic Grieve MP for Beaconsfield be added to the free N/L circulation list

R.Davis Enquiring who would be attending the National.

P.Barber: Detailed events at Coventry Coal Basin, which underlined BW's amateurish approach to problem solving.

She also reported that the PLA had increased some mooring fees by very large amounts. This matter would be brought up at the next PLA user meeting

The meeting closed at 1550 hours.

Agreed a true record
Parkinson