

PRESS RELEASE

31 July 2025

NATIONAL BOAT COUNT 2025

The Canal & River Trust's National Boat Count, conducted across the charity's waterways each year, has seen a 1.5% increase in boat numbers together with an increase in unlicensed boats, with evasion standing at 9.9%*.

Nationally, 33,080 boats were recorded on the Trust's enforceable waters. The most populous regions, London & South East and the West Midlands, saw increases of 3.5% and 3.6% respectively.

Numbers of boats without home moorings increased by 11.9% (to 8,519 boats), while boats with home moorings declined by 1.8% (to 23,889 boats)**. Approximately 92% of boats with home moorings are licensed compared to 84% of boats without home moorings.

As a charity, the Trust uses the income from licensing to help fund lock repairs, provide boater facilities, and maintain canals for navigation and, following the creation of a new national licence, compliance and enforcement team last September, the Trust has pledged to address unlicensed boats faster.

The team has been restructured to streamline case management and is improving customer communication, for example reminding boaters about shortly lapsing Boat Safety Certificates, with lapses commonly causing boats to become unlicensed and fall into the enforcement process.

With the difficult economic climate felt to be an increasing contributor to boats becoming unlicensed, the Trust's welfare support has been strengthened, with boaters in need signposted to financial assistance for support with licence payments, such as Universal Credit.

The effectiveness of this new approach has been born out in London, which saw a reduction in licence evasion, from 17.9% to 15.5%, for the first time since 2018.

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Alex Hennessey, national boating manager at Canal & River Trust, said: “We’re seeing the harsh realities of the cost-of-living crisis play out on the waterways. More people have turned to life afloat or taking to continuously cruising but, for some, the financial and practical challenges of boating are proving difficult to manage.

“We’re doing everything we can to support boaters who are struggling, and we urge people to talk to us early. Our welfare and customer support teams are helping people navigate complex situations, whether that’s applying for benefits, getting boats safety certified, or simply staying compliant.

“As a charity we rely on income from boat licences to help fund the essential work needed to keep the canal network open and safe. While we help those who need assistance, where someone simply chooses not to license their boat, we’ll be doubling down and taking enforcement action.”

Despite the licence, compliance and enforcement team’s best efforts to resolve matters, on occasion, when all other avenues have been exhausted, the Trust takes action to remove boats. In the last financial year, 101 boats were removed from the network that were abandoned and/or unlicensed.

The National Boat Count is a physical sighting of boats carried out by the Trust’s towpath teams.

* Licence evasion is 9.9% (2024: 8.2%).

** Since the last count, the Trust has introduced a requirement for boaters to provide proof of moorings they’ve paid for, which may be in part behind the rise. Not all boats have licences with or without home moorings, for example boats with licences from other navigation authorities.

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Notes to Editors

Area	Compliance 2025	2024 boat numbers where CRT licences are required	2025 boat numbers where CRT licences are required	Year-on-year % change in boat numbers	2025 all boat numbers (inc private marinas etc)
East Midlands	92.5%	5321	5295	0.5%	6123
London & South East	84.5%	6727	6962	3.5%	7035
North West	91.4%	5979	5976	-0.1%	6053
Wales & South West	92.1%	3680	3694	0.4%	4240

West Midlands	93.9%	7531	7801	3.6%	8428
Yorkshire & NE	89.2%	3364	3352	-0.4%	3368
	90.9%	32602	33080	1.5%	35247