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Annual report for the non-tidal River Thames 2009/10

Keeping boating customers informed about our performance and financial position

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Foreword

I am delighted to present our first annual report which describes our performance and financial position on the non-tidal River Thames for 2009/10. It covers how we have carried out our duties as harbourmaster for the non-tidal River Thames and managed it as a waterway. We hope it will help our boating customers understand the range of work we do to support their interests.

This has been a good year for boating on the River Thames. We registered nearly 10 per cent more boats than last year, there was an increase of more than 20 per cent in boat traffic through our locks, and we staffed lock sites 97.5 per cent of the time from April to September.

We spent £5.1million continuing our program to tackle the backlog of work on our locks. We finished the year with 94 per cent of our waterway assets in target condition, an increase of 18 per cent since 2004.

We improved information for customers by adding details of boating services and facilities to www.visitthames.co.uk and our river conditions website has nearly 1,400 subscribers. We worked with customer representatives to produce a new Customer Charter for 2010.

Income from customers increased and significant support through our grant from the government provided us with a relatively healthy financial position.

The challenges we face in 2010/11

2010/11 will be a challenging year for us as our government grant is likely to be affected by the national budget deficit. If the weather is good, we expect the increased use of the river to continue, which will mean we need to balance increased demand with fewer resources. We will need to take action to reduce our reliance on government grant to make our services on the river more sustainable.

However, we are in a good position to manage the situation as our recent work to modernise staff terms and conditions means we can be more flexible in meeting customer demand. We have explained our service in the Customer Charter 2010. We will monitor our performance against it throughout the year and this will be a basis for our planning in future.

We will prioritise investment in our assets as they need to be in safe working order for the River Thames to function as a navigation. After discussion with customer representatives, we will start implementing the powers we have through the new Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010. We also hope to use the River Thames as a catalyst to work with volunteers across a wide range of activities.

We're already working with others to help make the Olympic events at Eton Dorney a success. We expect this area of work to increase as 2012 gets nearer.

I would like to thank our staff for their commitment to being the best we can and look forward to working with them and our customer representatives this year.



Howard Davidson
Thames Regional Director

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1. Performance against our priorities

The following sections explain our performance in our priority areas of work. This information provides a complete picture of our performance and the external factors that influence it. We use some terms throughout the report which are explained in Appendix 1. We work with customer representatives, groups and committees throughout the year which is explained in Appendix 2.

1.1 Customer service

1.1.1 Lock and weir keeping service

A significant role we provide on the river is the lock and weir keeping service. This means operating the weirs to manage water levels, maintaining the lock sites and helping customers use our locks.

As well as resident lockkeepers, we have non-resident staff to provide cover. We also employ extra seasonal staff to cope with customer demand in the main season.

We monitor and record how each lock is staffed each day. The table below shows how many days our locks were staffed out of the total number of 'lock days' available. We did not have targets for this in 2009/10 before the launch of our new Customer Charter.

Table 1: Staffed lock days per quarter

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Total days	3,952.5	4,084	3,800.5	3,464	15,286
Total %	96.5	98.6	91.8	85.5	93

We completed our programme to install public power at our mechanised locks (Godstow to Teddington). This means customers do not need to hand-wind these locks when staff are unavailable. We introduced a new 'self service' sign and made sure instructions are displayed at each lock.

1.1.2 Protecting your interests on the river

We support a safe and enjoyable environment for our customers. We protect the river and our licensing income by carrying out enforcement activity. We plan and monitor this activity in Area Enforcement Plans. Table 2 gives the 2009/10 summary.

Table 2: Enforcement activity

Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
River patrols by boat	93	81	70	66	310
Boats reported in use without licences	161	56	10	52	279
Speed and wash campaigns carried out	0	4	0	0	4
Speed and wash reports investigated	16	2	5	2	25
Written warnings issued	30	7	22	13	72
Successful prosecutions	4	4	1	6	15
Boats moved on from short-stay moorings or charged fees	14	29	24	15	82
Media releases to promote enforcement	0	2	1	4	7

We do not have enforcement targets and will be developing some in 2010/11 to report next year.

1.1.3 Responding to incidents

1.1.3.1 Incidents on the river

Last year, we responded to 129 incidents on the river as summarised in the table below.

Table 3: Incidents we responded to in 2009/10

Type of incident	Number	%
Wrecks, sinking boats, boats adrift, other hazards to navigation	26	20
Criminal activity on or about the River Thames	8	6
Public self-service lock operation issues	11	8
Speed and wash	23	18
Water level problems	12	9
Pollution incidents	6	5
Fires	5	4
Unregistered vessels	2	2
Other incidents	36	28
Total	129	100

1.1.3.2 Operation Neptune

We worked with the Passenger Boat Association (PBA) and the emergency services to establish a river length directory of Emergency Rendezvous Points. We then lead an emergency exercise called 'Operation Neptune' to test the directory and the integrated response to a major incident on the river. This was a multi-agency exercise held on the river near Wokingham Riverside Centre. We were involved on site and in our Regional and Area Incident Rooms. The scenario was that a passenger boat with passengers on board was stranded following an explosion. The exercise was a great success and provided learning points for everyone involved.

1.1.3.3 Public safety

We record details of customer incidents and accidents at our sites. We use the information to raise awareness of the most common accidents and near misses. Last year, there were 10 serious accidents which led to medical treatment. We recommend customers take their time using the river and follow the safety guidance in our *User Guide to the River Thames*.

Table 4: Customer incidents recorded

Incident	Level 4 Near miss	Level 3 Minor (no treatment)	Level 2 Serious (medical treatment)
Finger caught in rope	0	2	2
Falling into the lock	7	9	5
Fending off with hands/feet	0	0	1
Jumping from boat	0	2	1
Boat fire	0	0	1
Hire boats in wrong channel	5	0	0
Poor boat handling, e.g. collisions	15	0	0
Total	27	13	10

1.1.4 Registering your boat

All customers using boats on the River Thames must register their boat with us. We use the income from boat registrations to invest in the service we provide as explained in our Customer Charter.

1.1.4.1 Boat use on the river

The number of boats registered increased in 2009/10. We believe this is mainly due to the renewed interest in holidaying at home or 'stay-cationing' which increased the number of visitors, unpowered boats and boats available to hire for a holiday.

Table 5: Number and type of boats registered

Boat type	2008/09	2009/10	Difference %
Private powered	8,615	8,933	+3.69
Private unpowered	4,391	4,778	+8.81
Commercial powered	365	493	+35.06
Visiting powered	3,737	4,415	+18.14
Visiting unpowered	766	964	+25.84
Gold	790	750	-5.07
Other (exemptions/events/houseboats)	5,172	5,878	+13.65
Total	23,836	26,211	+9.96

We introduced a 50 per cent reduction in the charge for a tender when licensed with another boat. Early indications show this is proving popular.

1.1.4.2 Boat traffic totals at each site by type and 2008/9 comparison

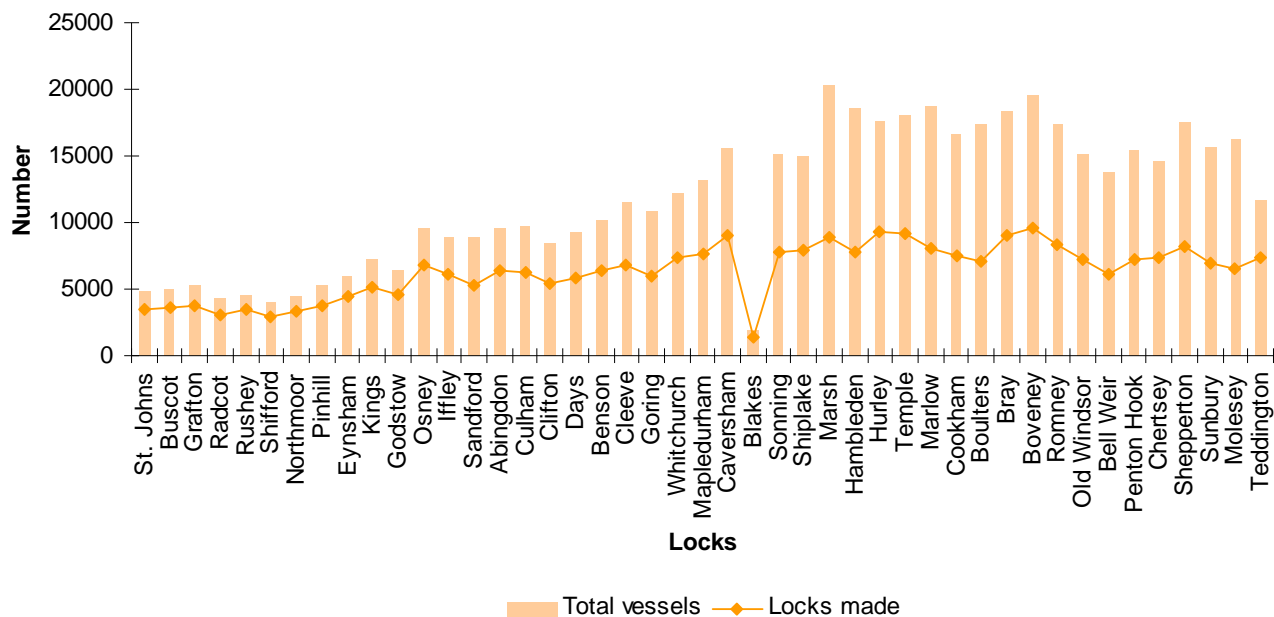
When there are staff at our sites, they record the number and type of boats going through the lock, and how many times the lock is operated. This year, we saw a significant increase in the number of boat movements.

Table 6: Boat traffic totals by type

Boat type	2008/09	2009/10	Difference %
Private, powered	287,567	340,970	18.6
Hire, powered	45,399	61,442	35.34
Visitor, powered	55,177	68,445	24.05
Passenger	14,984	15,397	2.76
Unpowered	30,135	40,389	34.03
Number of tugs	2,571	2,197	-14.55
Loaded barges	1,712	1,498	-12.50
Total vessels	437,545	530,338	21.21
Locks made	247,119	285,611	15.58

The graph below shows the total traffic per site and how many times the lock was operated to service that traffic (locks made). It helps us to understand the level of activity and demand at sites to assist with our planning.

Graph 1: Total lock traffic and locks made 2009/10



1.1.4.3 Licensing structures in the river

All structures in the River Thames must have permission from us and display the licence plate we provide. This includes landing stages and mooring posts which we refer to as ‘accommodations’.

Our charging scheme differentiates between privately used and commercial (income generating) accommodations. During this year, we have caught up with the backlog of more complex accommodation applications, which has meant an increase in the number licensed and in our income.

Table 7: Number of accommodation licences

Accommodation type	2008/9	2009/10	Difference %
Private	608	648	+6.57
Commercial	284	296	+4.22

Table 8: Number of new licences issued

Accommodation type	2008/9	2009/10	Difference %
Private	68	79	+16.17
Commercial	55	40	-27.28

1.1.4.4 Enquiries, complaints and commendations

We want to hear from our customers if we're doing something well or if we need to investigate or change something. We treat complaints very seriously.

The main areas prompting complaints were boat licence fees (increase in fees for customers, and the high cost of transit from the River Wey to the tidal Thames), the number of unregistered boats on the river and lock staffing.

The main commendations were for providing good customer service, the new river conditions web information, and the improved appearance of our lock sites.

The table below shows the number of complaints and commendations received in 2009/10. We responded to all complaints within the target time of 10 days or agreed timescales with customers if their issue required further investigation.

Table 9: Complaints and commendations received

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Written complaints	14	35	9	13	71
Commendations	9	21	6	4	40

1.2 Raising awareness of river conditions

Following feedback from customers who experienced the 2007 summer floods, we have improved the quality, availability and accessibility of information about river conditions.

We launched our river conditions web page and email update subscription service in November 2008. In 2009/10, nearly 1,400 customers signed up to receive email updates and there were 32,500 unique web page users.

We have worked with our National Floodline team to improve the service we deliver to boating customers. We provided a training package for call handlers on the information boating customers might need during flood or strong stream. We also improved the script for recorded messages.

We have included new advice and guidance for boating customers on how to prepare for and deal with changing river conditions and navigate safely in *A user's guide to the River Thames*.

We continue to use visual warnings at lock sites by displaying red and yellow stream warning boards. This year has been relatively average in terms of days with boards displayed, as summarised below.

Table 10: Number of lock days stream warning boards were displayed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total days	Total %*
Red	0	0	606	2,730	3,336	40.1
Yellow	0	0	400	2,479	2,879	35

*Q3 and Q4 only as we do not have accurate data for Q1 and Q2 due to issues now rectified.

As changes in river conditions are influenced by the natural impact of rainfall, we have provided this summary for information only.

1.3 Maintaining the River Thames for boating

1.3.1 Improving our assets

We continued our programme to improve the condition of our assets and ended the year ahead of our target because of ongoing investment and efficient working practices. This means 94 per cent of our assets are in target condition - an improvement of 18 per cent since 2004.

Our main projects were:

- Hurley Lock - new and improved revenue and overnight moorings.
- Shifford Lock - replacing the rubbing timbers on the lock walls.
- Culham Lock - widening the tail layby walkway.
- Clifton Lock and Days Lock - new lock ram trench anchors.
- Blakes Lock - refurbishing the head lock gate.
- Shiplake Lock - replacing lock gates and lock chamber repairs.
- Marlow Lock - re-sheeting the lock gates.
- Bray Lock - replacing lock gates and lock chamber repairs.
- Iffley Lock, Marlow Lock and Whitchurch Lock - installing new out of hours power.

We constructed the first phase of new toilet and shower facilities at Buscot Lock, Grafton Lock, Rushey Lock, Northmoor Lock and Eynsham Lock. These facilities are for staff working at locks who don't live on site and will be shared with the public.

We also prepared projects for construction in 2010/11 for several lengths of river bank that we own which need work to protect the bank and improve mooring points.

1.3.2 River closures

We rarely close the river but it is sometimes necessary for events, management activities and in emergencies. The table below shows the number and type of closures on the river.

Table 11: Number of river closures

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Emergency closures	1	0	3	0	4
Planned event closures	2	0	4	0	6
Planned management closures	0	0	4	1	5

1.3.3 Lock breakdowns

Despite our programme of planned preventative maintenance, our locks occasionally break down. We arrange repairs as soon as we can to minimise the length of the disruption to customers.

Table 12: Number and duration of lock breakdowns

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Less than 4 hours	0	1	5	0	6
Between 4 and 24 hours	4	0	3	0	7
More than 24 hours	0	0	2	0	2
Total	4	1	10	0	15

1.4 Promotional work

The River Thames Alliance Marketing Partnership promotes the river using a range of marketing, media and online tools. By offering regularly updated news and information through our website (www.visitthames.co.uk), advertising, taking part in riverside events and liaising with the media, we hope to raise awareness of the leisure opportunities along the river and increase visitor numbers.

1.4.1 www.visitthames.co.uk

All of the promotional work we do signposts people towards www.visitthames.co.uk. We measure our success through visitors to the website. Last year saw nearly 210,800 unique users, which was a 26 per cent increase compared to the previous year. There was also a 35 per cent increase in page impressions (the number of different pages viewed) from 681,150 to 918,500.

1.4.2 Media

We issued 10 press releases which generated 30 pieces of coverage in publications including The Guardian, The Sunday Telegraph, The Mail on Sunday, The Evening Standard, Britain Magazine and other regional titles and websites. This coverage has an estimated Advertising Value Equivalent (what it would cost to buy the space for advertising) of over £921,000.

1.4.3 Publications

We provide a range of leaflets to help our boating customers make the most of the river and to inspire new customers to discover the river. We distributed 23,000 via our lock sites and 9,000 through Tourist Information Centres, events and through our partners. All our publications are printed on recycled paper. We improved our distribution plans and used our in-house design system to reduce costs. We encourage people to download publications from our website and 3,700 of the most popular were downloaded last year.

1.4.4 Marketing campaigns

We delivered 12 targeted marketing campaigns. We worked with Tourism South East on campaigns aimed at families and couples. We worked with boating business groups on two campaigns to promote boating on the Thames including passenger boat trips. We also supported a business-led inland waterway feature at the London Boat Show which focussed on promoting the Thames. Nearly 10,000 people visited the stand and viewed the cruiser and narrowboat on display.

2. Partnership working

We work in partnership with lots of organisations and groups. The River Thames Alliance (RTA) is our main partnership body which brings together over 80 organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, the non-tidal River Thames and includes local authorities and user groups. The work of the RTA is mainly delivered through its working groups. For more information see www.visitthames.co.uk and click on 'About us'.

2.1 River Thames Alliance Marketing Partnership

We have had a successful year promoting the River Thames through the RTA Marketing Partnership. Our aim is to raise the profile of the River Thames for leisure and to encourage more people to make the most of what the river has to offer.

We worked with 39 different partners, from both the private and public sector including the Thames Path National Trails, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, the Runnymede-on-Thames Hotel, The Passenger Boat Association and British Marine Federation Thames Valley. The membership fees generated a marketing budget of around £40,000, which we spent directly on promoting the river. See section 1.4 for more information.

2.2 River Thames Alliance Moorings Group

This group brings together landowners who are committed to providing adequate, fit-for-purpose and well managed short-stay mooring sites. We want boaters to be confident they will find a safe, attractive mooring to enjoy the waterside environment and use local amenities. During 2009/10, the group delivered its agreed actions, with particular partnership successes in Reading and Oxford.

2.3 River Thames Alliance Learning Partnership

We support the Learning Partnership which is led by the Henley River and Rowing Museum. It promotes the River Thames for learning and brings together all the organisations that provide education and learning facilities on and near the river. The main activity this year was improving links with the Education Network on the tidal Thames. This included getting the resources in place to be able to add to and promote all the tidal education facilities on the visitthames website in the coming year. See www.visitthames.co.uk/learning.

2.4 Policing the river

We work closely with Surrey and Thames Valley Police. In October, we provided three training sessions for more than 60 staff from Surrey and the Metropolitan Police (Police Constables, Police Community Support Officers and Specials). There were three sessions, firstly training on Environment Agency powers, legislation and aims, then two sessions outdoors, one at a lock and one afloat with us to go through key health and safety issues. This means we can work more closely with them, either at locks or on the river. Our enforcement work will benefit from their varied intelligence, both because they are land based and because of the number of staff involved.

3. Staffing

As part of a review of how we manage the River Thames, we re-organised from 1 April 2009 from a Regional department to a structure that mirrors our standard regional management arrangements.

We deliver waterways work through a central strategic team and two geographically based operational teams. We reduced the number of management posts and made progress towards rebalancing the number of permanent and temporary staff to cope with demand during the main boating season.

Another significant area of work was revising the terms and conditions for our lockkeepers. Through close working with staff and union representatives, we reached agreement on a single set of conditions which came into force on 1 April 2010. We also introduced a Service Occupancy Agreement to establish employer and employee rights and responsibilities regarding our lock houses.

Table 13: Waterways staff data 2009/10

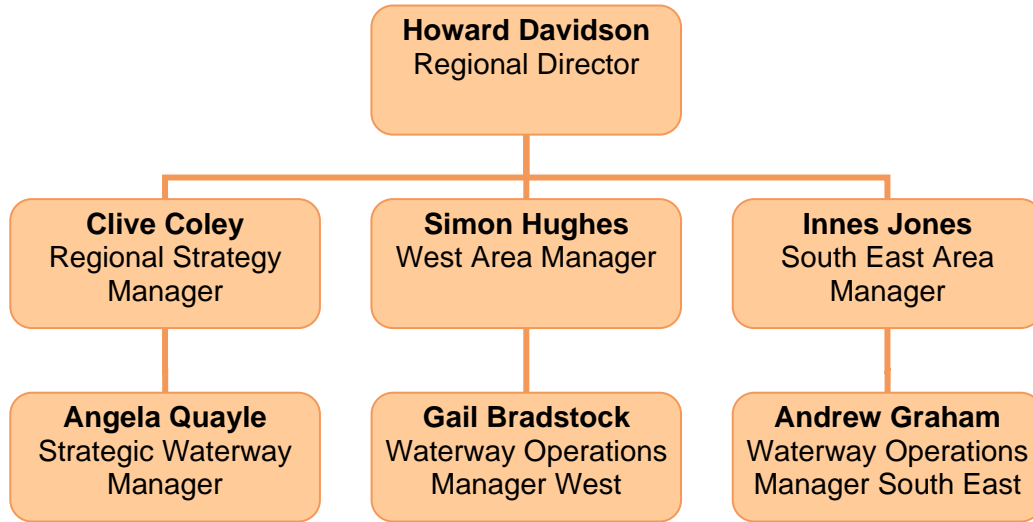
Team	Occupied posts (FTE)	Vacant posts (FTE)	Total FTE	Seasonal staff (six month posts)	Summer assistants
Regional Strategic Team	19	1	20	0	0
West Area Waterway Team	60	0	60	9	45
South East Area Waterway Team	40	1	41	6	21
Total	119	2	121	15	66

We restructured the teams during 2008/09 and ended the year with 121 FTE.

4. Governance

Our restructure means that three regional managers have responsibility for, and interest in, Waterways. To provide strategic direction and monitor our performance, we created a new Waterways Management Board. The diagram below shows the regional governance structure for Waterways. Membership of the Waterways Management Board includes the people set out below, plus the Regional Finance Manager.

Diagram 1: Regional Waterway Management Team



5. Financial summary

The money we need to maintain, operate and promote the non-tidal River Thames comes from income from people using the river and a grant from the government. In recent years, we have been under pressure to increase the income from customers and reduce our reliance on government grant to make the River Thames a more sustainable waterway. Over the last few years, we have increased charges for customers registering their boats, and this, combined with a recent increase in the number of boats registered, has resulted in more income. We have researched opportunities for commercial development to find new sources of income but have not found anything which will provide enough to bridge the gap between existing income and any further reduction in government grant.

Income from customers and businesses is from charges for registering boats, use of facilities such as moorings and pump-outs, charges for licensing private and commercial landing stages, and for access, rental and licensing agreements relating to our estate.

The national grant from government is divided by the Environment Agency Board according to our various functions. We manage Waterways in an integrated way so the grant we get comes from all the functions we support in our work. Our government grant appears to have decreased significantly but we were allocated an extra £600 thousand in 2008/09 within the year for capital works which inflated the 2008/09 figure. In the past we have benefited from limited support from Water Quality. However, due to continued pressure in funding core water quality activity, this was withdrawn in 2009/10.

Our workforce and operating costs reduced as a result of our re-organisation.

Table 14: Waterways income and expenditure 2009/10 (£million)

Income	2008/09	2009/10
Craft registration and charges	3.2	3.4
Moorings and landing rent	0.5	0.5
Other income	0.5	0.7
Government grant	8.1	6.8
Total	12.3	11.4
Expenditure	2008/09	2009/10
Workforce cost	4.5	4.4
Operating cost	2.1	1.9
Capital financing	5.7	5.1
Total	12.3	11.4
Government Grant in Aid	2008/09	2009/10
Navigation	4.2	3.5
Flood and coastal risk management	2.8	2.5
Water resources	0.8	0.8
Water quality	0.3	0.0
Total	8.1	6.8

Appendix 1: Definitions of terms and abbreviations

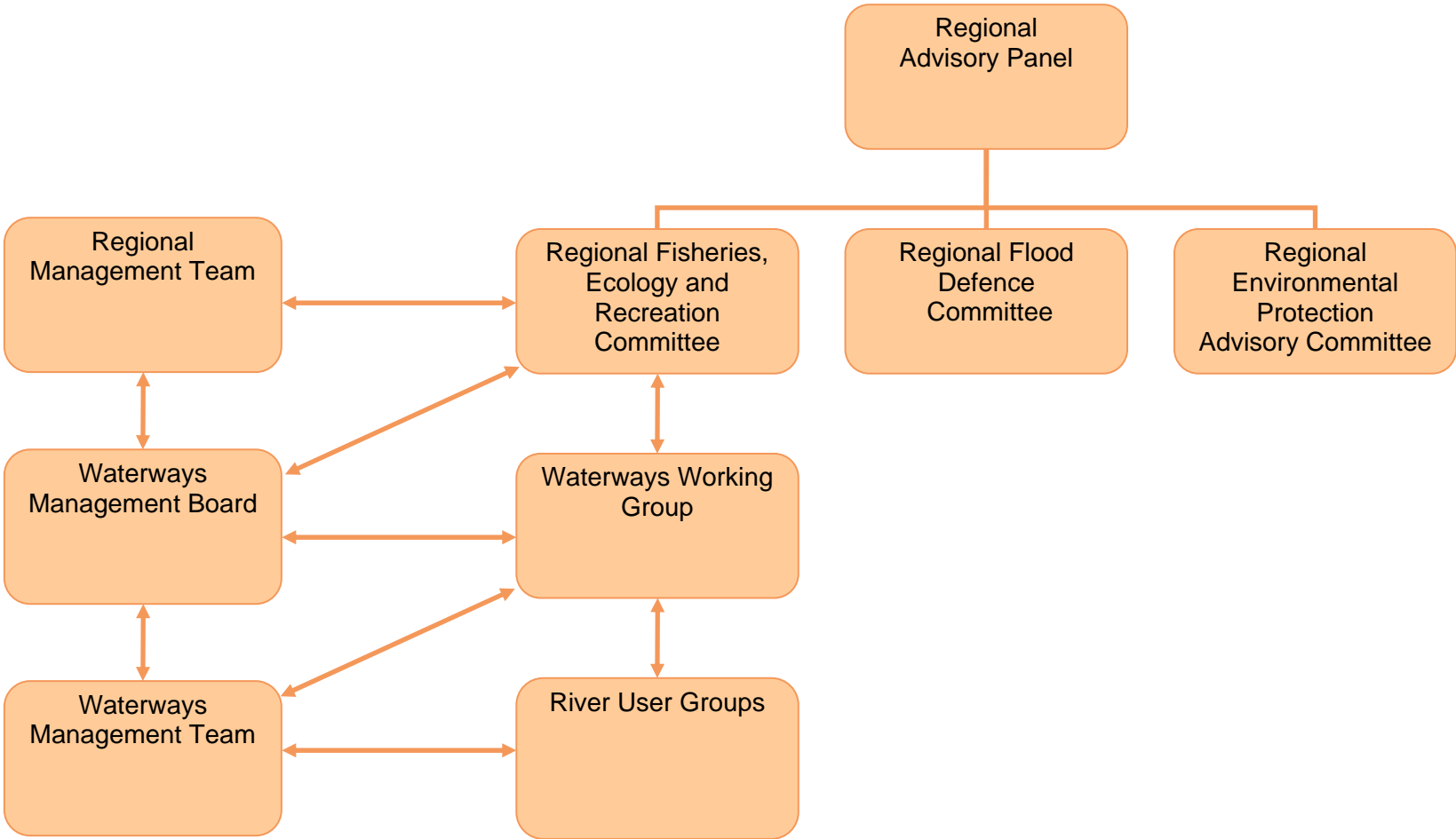
Table 15: Definitions of terms and abbreviations

Term	Explanation
West Area	St Johns Lock to Hurley Lock
South East Area	Temple Lock to Teddington Lock
Q1	April to June
Q2	July to September
Q3	October to December
Q4	January to March
Lock days	365 days a year x 45 locks = 16,425 lock days a year
Lock made	The lock going through one full cycle
FTE	Full time equivalent

Appendix 2: Waterway meetings and customer engagement

Internal management

External liaison



Summary of meeting groups

Regional Management Team (RMT) covers all regional items. Meets weekly and is chaired by Howard Davidson.

Waterways Management Board (WMB) meets quarterly before Waterway Working Group. The Board is chaired by Howard Davidson and includes both Area Managers, the Regional Strategy Manager, the national Head of Navigation, the Regional Finance Manager and the Waterways Strategic and Operational managers. Chris Poupard, as chair of RFERAC, is also invited to observe the meetings.

Waterways Management Team (WMT) meets twice a month and is chaired by Simon Hughes. The Waterways Strategic and Operational managers attend.

Waterways Working Group meets quarterly, two weeks after WMB and two weeks before RFERAC. Simon Hughes is the chair. The terms of reference and membership is below. We send a summary report of WWG to RFERAC members to ensure WWG opinions on issues are shared and to help focus debates at RFERAC.

River User Groups (RUGs) meet quarterly and are chaired by local volunteers. They are a communication forum for river users and promote understanding between all the different interests. They also safeguard the interests of all river users and promote safety and goodwill. RUG chairs attend WWG, and Waterways Operations staff attend the RUG meetings.

Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee (RFERAC) is one of the three statutory committees for the Region. It is an advisory committee to help inform Environment Agency decision making. Chris Poupard is the chair.

Regional Flood Defence Committee (RFDC) is another statutory committee for the Region but this one is an executive rather than advisory committee, this means it makes decisions as well as providing advice. Amanda Nobbs is the chair.

Regional Environmental Protection Advisory Committee (REPAC) meets quarterly and a statutory committee for the region. It is also advisory and is chaired by Valerie Owen.

Regional Advisory Panel (RAP) brings together the Chairs of the regional committees quarterly to discuss strategic issues for the committees. It is chaired by Lady Suzanne Warner, the Board member for the Thames Region.

Thames Waterway Working Group: Terms of reference

Aims and objectives

To act as a River Thames (non-tidal) users/customer consultative forum to advise the Waterway Department in relation to:

1. The management, development and promotion of navigation on the non-tidal river
2. The development and promotion of the River as a visitor/tourist destination
3. The overall promotion and development of navigation on, about and alongside the Thames.

It is expected that members will represent the views of their organisations at meetings and will subsequently feed back information to their organisation. Papers to be circulated at least one week in advance to members and the minutes to be circulated within two weeks of the meetings.

Meetings

The group to meet a minimum of three times per year under the chairmanship of either the Regional Director or Waterway Manager.

External membership

One number representative from each of the following organisations:

- Association of Thames Yacht Clubs (ATYC)
- British Canoe Union (BCU, local region)
- British Marine Federation (BMF)*
- British Rowing
- DBA – The Barge Association
- Inland Waterways Association (IWA, local region)
- National Association of Boat Owners (NABO)
- Passenger Boat Association (PBA)
- River Thames Society (Chair)
- River User Groups (Chair)
- Thames Boating Trades Association (TBTA)*
- Thames Hire Cruiser Association (THCA)*
- Thames Valley Region of the Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

* These organisations came together in 2010 to form the British Marine Federation (Thames Valley).

Local statutory organisations and individuals with particular knowledge and skills may be invited to attend on an ad hoc basis as necessary, to discuss relevant topics:

- Thames Path National Trails Officer
- South East Region of Natural England
- Southern Region of Sport England
- Tourism South East
- Riparian Local Authority staff

Thames RFERAC members with an interest in navigation will be invited to attend.

Environment Agency membership

- Regional Director
- Area Managers
- Strategic Waterway Manager
- Waterway Operations Managers (two)
- Other Environment Agency staff as necessary to discuss specific topics.

Term of office

Each organisation will be asked to nominate a representative for a three year term. At the end of every term the organisation will be asked to extend or replace the nomination.

Table 16: 2009/10 membership

Organisation	Representative/s
Regional Fisheries Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee (RFERAC)	Chris Poupard, Chair Mike Chambers David Sowter Paul Wagstaffe Mark Pearce Amanda Nobbs (RFDC)
Association of Thames Yacht Clubs Chair RUG 7	Chris Turner
British Canoe Union (local region)	David Moss
British Marine Federation	Brian Clark
DBA – The Barge Association and RFERAC	Andy Soper
Inland Waterways Association (local region)	Tony Davis
National Association of Boatowners (South Region) and RFERAC	Louis Jankel
Passenger Boat Association	Roger Flitter
River Thames Society Chair	Peter Finch
RUG 1 / 2 Chair	Richard Mayon-White
RUG 3 Chair	John Dalton
RUG 4/5 Chair	Peter Moore
RUG 6 Chair	Bob King
Thames Boating Trades Association	Mark Pearce
Thames Hire Cruiser Association	Russell Chase
British Rowing	Richard West
Thames Valley Region of the Royal Yachting Association and Chair RUG 8 and TUGn	Michael Shefras

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