



## Q1 report for the non-tidal River Thames 2011 / 12

Keeping customers informed about our performance in April,  
May and June

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment and make **a better place** for people and wildlife.

We operate at the place where environmental change has its greatest impact on people's lives. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

Acting to reduce climate change and helping people and wildlife adapt to its consequences are at the heart of all that we do.

We cannot do this alone. We work closely with a wide range of partners including government, business, local authorities, other agencies, civil society groups and the communities we serve.

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# Foreword

I am pleased to present our first quarterly report of the year, which describes our performance on the non-tidal River Thames for April, May and June 2011.

It covers how we have carried out our duties as harbourmaster for the non-tidal River Thames and managed it as a waterway, measured against the standards we have set in the Customer Charter 2011. We hope it helps our boating customers understand the range of work we do to support their interests.

I'd like to thank our waterway teams for their commitment to delivering a great service and hope our customers enjoyed everything the river has to offer in the first few months of the year.

Innes Jones  
West Area Thames Manager  
Environment Agency South East

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## **1. Managing water levels**

We manage water levels to balance the many uses of the river, including boating, retaining enough water for water companies to extract, managing flood risk and ensuring conservation sites and water quality are protected.

We measure water levels at lock sites and monitor them 24/7.

We operate the weirs to provide the best conditions possible for all uses of the river, based on our knowledge and experience.

Our ability to control water levels may change in flood or drought conditions.

One incident at Romney Lock in June, when a member of the public left the sluice gates open overnight, caused water levels to drop quite substantially.

Telemetry systems are in place throughout the river. Some of these are designed to raise an alarm with our control room in Reading if water levels drop unexpectedly upstream of weirs, so that the issue can be addressed quickly. This system is normally very reliable, and only on rare occasions failures occur. Any failure is quickly investigated and systems are repaired.

## **2. Raising awareness of river conditions**

River flows can sometimes be hazardous for boating, for example after heavy rain. To help our boating customers, we provide information and advice in various ways about river conditions.

We use visual warnings at lock sites by displaying red and yellow stream warning boards. During Q1, no red or yellow boards were displayed.

Our river conditions web pages continued to be popular and during Q1 we recorded:

- 4,617 unique web page users
- 1,649 subscribers for email updates

We also provided recorded advice on Floodline 0845 988 1188 throughout the period.

## **3. Maintaining the River Thames for boating**

During Q1 we kept all our locks in safe, working condition for boating.

Following the news of our much reduced capital budget in May, we have begun to focus our engineering work on maintaining our existing assets, rather than building anything new.

Work carried out during Q1 includes:

- Replacement beams at St Johns and Radcot locks.
- Construction work at Staines Gasworks and Shepperton Lock Island where the river bank is collapsing.
- Bank protection works in the Boveney Reach and Shiplake Lock service Island.

We arranged 15 critical breakdown repairs as soon as we could, as follows:

- Mapledurham - broken rubbing strake cap (<4 hours)
- Caversham - oil leak (<4 hours)
- Hambleden - oil leak (<4 hours)
- Temple - operating system reset (<4 hours)
- Boveney - replace tailgate button (<4 hours)
- Boulters - tail sluices sticking (<4 hours)
- Boulters - sluices repaired (<4 hours)
- Bray - hydraulic leak (<4 hours)
- Temple - tailgate stuck open (<4 hours)
- Temple - hydraulic leak (<4 hours)
- Molesey - push bike stuck under gates (<4 hours)
- Romney - local power failure (<4 hours)
- Bray - lock power cut (<4 hours)
- Temple - burst oil pump (>4 hours)
- Teddington - launch lock ram broken - barge lock used (>4 hours)

(For interest and comparison, during Q1 2010/11, the previous year, we arranged three critical breakdown repairs as soon as we could, as follows:

- Marlow Lock - head gate seizure (<4 hours)
- Boulters Lock - hydraulic leak (<4 hours)
- Sandford Lock - tail gate structural weakness (lock closed 3 days)

During Q1, all fairways were clear apart from fallen trees partially blocking the navigation at Osney and Boulters and another tree blocking the navigation at Northmoor. All known underwater obstructions were buoyed apart from a shoal at the tail of Benson due to a missing buoy, which was later found and replaced. All channels and danger areas were marked by signage.

#### 4. 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 to use our locks.

We aim to staff our locks with a duty lock keeper to minimum river-wide targets. The table below shows our performance measured against our targets for Q1. The levels of service relating to the targets are explained in our Customer Charter 2011.

	April	May	June
Target %	94	96	96
Actual %	91.8	99.3	99.2

As an organisation we are having one of our most difficult years. Our budgets are under pressure and have been delayed; coupled with a freeze on recruitment, this has made it very challenging to recruit and deploy staff as we have done in previous years.

During April we failed to meet our target due to delays with temporary staff starting at Cleeve, Chertsey or Sunbury locks and staff sickness at Northmoor Lock.

We also aim to offer at least 97% coverage river-wide during peak times outside June, July and August. During Q1, these periods were the Easter school holiday, early May Bank Holiday weekend and late May Bank Holiday weekend. We met the target of providing 97% coverage apart from during the Easter school holiday due to staff sickness.

With the confirmation of budgets being delayed and an ongoing public sector freeze on recruitment, subject to special approval from the SoS, we were unable to employ summer assistants at the time normally needed. To help address this, at very short notice, in March we opted to recruit volunteers to help cover the service.

Budgets were eventually confirmed at the end of April. A decision was made soon after, at the May 2011 WWG meeting, to employ summer assistants if needed, providing a supplement to volunteering. The process of employing summer assistants however was delayed for a further two weeks after this meeting, which in hindsight was a mistake. This was because volunteer numbers appeared to be sufficient to cover the service, but soon transpired not to be the case when put to the test and factored into the manning rota.

This meant many of those locks expecting additional manning (to cover lunch and tea breaks) - Caversham Lock to Molesey Lock - did not have it. As our volunteers developed their competence so they became able to cover lunch breaks and provide the additional cover, but this was generally in July, i.e. into Q2.

Although our performance in manning all locks was generally good we were disappointed not to be able to provide the additional cover at all of those locks set out in the Customer Charter.

## 5. Protecting your interests on the river

We support a safe and enjoyable environment for our customers. We protect the river and our income by carrying out enforcement activity. We plan and monitor this activity in Area Enforcement Plans. The table below gives the summary for Q1 and the same period in previous years where available.

Activity	Q1 total 2011/12	Q1 total 2010/11
River patrols by boat	75	75
River patrols on foot	5	2
Boats reported without licence	750	98
Speed and wash checks	0	2
Boats formally moved on from EA short-stay moorings	11	1
Boats charged mooring fees at EA short-stay moorings	807	37
Written warnings issued	180	76
Formal cautions issued	0	0
Successful prosecutions	0	2
River events attended	31	24
Media coverage to promote enforcement activity	8	0

Our officers have continued to work with the police, local authorities and other enforcement agencies as well as other Environment Agency enforcement teams to

improve safety, prevent crime and reduce anti-social behaviour. Specific work includes:

- Two people arrested for stolen boats.
- Joint patrol with Environment Agency fisheries bailiffs.
- Eight joint police patrols.
- Joint police patrol on foot to check boat registration and gather local intelligence.
- Operation Brook - a high profile joint enforcement campaign with the Metropolitan police to target unregistered boats in the Kingston area.
- Operation Shield - a joint enforcement campaign with British Waterways and the local police to target unregistered boats in Oxford.

## **6. Incident response**

We support the emergency services in dealing with emergency river incidents and respond to non-emergency river-related incidents.

A waterways incident includes any incident that occurs on a waterway where we are the competent authority for navigation and has the potential to, or is impacting on people, property or the environment.

During Q1 we responded to a total of 30 incidents.

## **7. Boat registration**

All boats used on the non-tidal River Thames must be registered with us. During Q1 we processed 4,358 applications.

During Q1, the boat registration team took over the administration of boat registrations for our Anglian waterways, the River Medway and Rye Harbour. The volume of work resulting from this, plus the additional telephone enquiries arising from introducing the Inland Waterways Order, created a temporary backlog. The backlog meant that in some cases we were unable to meet our charter standard of dealing with all applications within 10 days of receipt.

During the backlog we took no enforcement action against customers with boats kept or used on the river, who were awaiting the arrival of their registration plate.

Following the backlog we have begun a review so we can improve our service in the future.

## **8. Licensing structures in the river**

All structures in the river 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'.

During Q1, we issued new licences for 12 privately used and 2 commercial accommodations. We approved each application within our target of two months.



## 9. Lock and weir fishing

We offer fishing at a number of lock and weir sites. Anglers must have permission from us and we provide a permit allowing access.

In Q1 we issued 208 permits within 10 days of receiving the application.

## 10. Lock site maintenance and facilities

We aim to provide and maintain safe access to our lock sites and facilities for visitors where we can, such as toilets, information points, camping and picnic areas.

During Q1, safe access was available to all our sites and facilities.

We arranged six facilities breakdown repairs as soon as we could:

- Rushey - pump out unit (<24 hours)
- Abingdon - pump out unit (<24 hours)
- Mapledurham - pump out unit (<24 hours)
- Eynsham - pump out unit (up to 1 week)
- Boveney - pump out unit (over 1 week)
- Teddington - blocked public toilet (over 1 week)

## 11. 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. Our teams also deal with a large number of written general enquiries.

The table below shows the number of complaints, commendations and enquiries we received in Q1. We responded to all complaints and enquiries within the target time of 10 days or agreed timescales with customers if their issue required further investigation.

	Total
Written complaints	37
Commendations	3
Enquiries	854

Examples of areas prompting customer complaints in Q1 were:

- Delays with boat registration applications
- Lock manning
- Speeding boats

## 12. Partnership working

We work in partnership with many 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 RTA mainly delivers its work through its working groups, and Q1 performance is summarised below.

## **12.1 River Thames Alliance Marketing Partnership (RTAMP)**

We promote the use of the river through our work with the River Thames Alliance Marketing Partnership. By offering regularly updated news and information through the RTAMP website ([www.visitthames.co.uk](http://www.visitthames.co.uk)) and liaising with the media, we hope to raise awareness of the leisure opportunities along the river and increase visitor numbers.

In Q1 we received a full page spread in the Mail on Sunday's day's out supplement in May, promoting several RTAMP partners and the visitthames.co.uk website.

All of the promotional work we do signposts people towards [www.visitthames.co.uk](http://www.visitthames.co.uk). We measure our success through visitors to the website and in Q1 85,636 unique users visited the site. Over 3,000 publications were downloaded from visitthames and we answered 113 email enquiries that came in via the website.

Our work to transfer the management of the partnership and the website to Tourism South East continues.

## **12.2 River Thames Alliance Moorings Group**

This quarter, it has been encouraging to see a greater number of hot-spot mooring sites being well-managed by sharing best practice through this group. This includes Reading Borough Council continuing to enforce its new mooring policy, serving several Possession Orders; Oxford City Council, British Waterways and the Environment Agency working together in Oxford; the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead working with the Environment Agency to tackle illegally moored boats in Maidenhead; and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames working to bring in new byelaws. The group has also started to look at the design of standard RTA mooring signage, with the Vale of the White Horse District Council, Henley Town Council and Pangbourne Parish Council enthusiastic to work together.

## **12.3 River Thames Alliance Learning Partnership**

Following the spring launch of the 'Click on Thames' map – a joint initiative between the RTA Learning Partnership and Thames Estuary Partnership Education Group. The partnerships have continued to work together as the Thames Learning Group to promote this valuable resource that provides teachers and the public with a one stop shop for details of educational sites and visits along the entire River Thames.

## **13. River User Groups**

We support a partnership network of River User Groups (RUGs) along the non-tidal River Thames, which bring together different types of river users to promote understanding, safety and goodwill.

During Q1 our staff attended all of the seven scheduled RUG meetings.

## **14. Media coverage**

Making the headlines in the local press this quarter was news of our campaign to target unregistered boats following the new registration laws.

Coverage also included news of our volunteer scheme to help out at locks and warnings about the dangers of swimming in the river.





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