

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
of
BOAT OWNERS

NEWS from the Committee Meeting...

...held on the 16th January 1993 at Hockley Port on the Birmingham Canal Navigations.

It was decided to look deeper into the advantages of NABO becoming a Company limited by guarantee. Dave Green, Jon Darlington and Peter Lea are to investigate this as a means of protecting Council members from being personally responsible for any libel actions arising out of anything contentious printed by NABO in any of its publications.

The Bank balance is still quite healthy, although this was an expensive period due to the organisation buying a Computer (£586) essentially for the membership records.

Due to commissioning of the computer, membership numbers were not available at this meeting.

Tamworth Cruising Club will be the next recipients of one of Pete Sterry's talks on 29th January 1993.

NABO will be attending:-

Nottingham Festival on 20th-23rd May

Rickmansworth Festival on 21st-23rd May

Peter Sterry has booked space for the Nottingham Festival, and Peter Lea is organising a presence at Rickmansworth. An invitation has been accepted to attend a rally at Preston Brook for the weekend of 27th May. We are hoping to persuade Rally organisers to include NABO information in their rally packs. Members are asked to remind their Clubs that NABO information can be made available for rally packs, magazines, meetings etc.

Concern was expressed at the proposal from the NRA to cease the reciprocal licensing arrangement between the Nene and BW waters. This follows pressure from the Association of Nene River Clubs, who feel that they are at a disadvantage as most have boats over 7' wide. NABO has written to the NRA to support the continuation of the present arrangements, which will in any case remain in force until 1994.

There is continued action in opposition to the BW Bill. The official reply from Lord Strathclyde at the DoE to MPs seems to take little account of our main objections (it might well have been written at Willow Grange!). Lord Strathclyde is not prepared to meet NABO but puts his name to the unhelpful correspondence in support of British Waterways and their Bill (see below).

There is a recently reconvened All Parties Waterways Group who we hope to persuade to 'listen' to the NABO line. There will be an opportunity for NABO and other waterway users to put forward their views to the Group probably on the 9th February.

Boat Standards were discussed. It was noted that draft 5 of these is now available in Grey 'folder' form. A meeting was held between BW and User Groups at the London Boat Show on 13th January to discuss the details of Draft 5, although, as mentioned above, it had already been printed! If you are fitting out a new boat, this is the version you should be consulting.

We are looking at ways to get the NABO message across to a wider potential membership and to this end we are considering the production of a marketing leaflet, letterheads with the new NABO logo, and a more organised distribution system of information.

Stephen Peters has been appointed as NABO's River User Coordinator.

BW Bill: Ministerial Letters

NABO has been receiving copies of replies sent by the Department of the Environment to MPs in response to letters from our members. We are very concerned at the misleading contents of these replies (all of which have the same standard paragraphs regardless of who is writing the letter) and have written to the Ministers concerned expressing our concern.

The Ministers state that by tradition the Government remains neutral on the specific provisions of a Private Bill, but it is quite clear that they support BW and their Bill. They set out the Government Policy on the financing of BW, which has nothing at all to do with the Bill, nor our (or our members') objections to which the Ministers are replying. What they say is, in any case, very misleading. There is a direct attack on boat owners, comparing the proportion we pay to BW (approx 12%) with the proportion of income gained by the National Trust from membership and entry fees (approx 33%). This comparison is invalid for the following reasons:

1. The National Trust has 2,186,000 members. BW has no membership base from which to draw income.

2. A large number of National Trust properties attract an entrance fee from the public. BW do not charge entrance fees for public access to the canals.

3. A high proportion of National Trust property consists of land which does not attract high maintenance costs whereas practically 100% of BW property consists of 200 year old man made waterways and associated waterway structures all of which have a high maintenance cost.

Furthermore, the statement that boaters contribute less than 12% towards BW's operating and maintenance costs is again misleading for the following reasons:

1. In excess of 25% of BW's "operating and maintenance costs" are priority arrears of repair and renovation of waterway structures as a result of decades of neglect and should not be matched with current year income.

2. The operating and maintenance costs include costs incurred for activities other than leisure, such as land drainage and water supply functions which are not charged for or recorded in the Board's accounts but were estimated in the 1989 Environment Committee Report to represent approximately 50% of the Government Grant.

Contrary to the Ministerial letters, NABO does not object to necessary powers that BW needs in order to improve safety or efficiency. We do however object to the very broad powers the Board is seeking to control boaters, which could be applied fairly or unfairly, sparingly or broadly, and without redress.

One paragraph (which does not occur in every letter) implies that we hold certain views and beliefs which we do not hold. For example, nowhere have we suggested that the statute should "promote the interests of boaters over other more numerous users". Neither do we "believe that non boating taxpayers should pay more and take second place in enjoying the benefits whilst boaters should be more heavily subsidised"; but we do believe that the Government should properly fund the Waterways which are a national asset freely accessed by the public. Again we do not "want (BW) to maintain expensive methods of maintenance". Indeed we are particularly concerned that they should not!

Surely it is inappropriate for a Government Ministers in reply to MPs to wrongly ascribe beliefs to people, which in any case have nothing to with the questions at hand.

We have sent Ministers an outline of our main concerns about the Bill, with specific clause numbers, and request that proper consideration be given to these specific concerns, particularly the creation of new criminal offenses for activities which cannot be considered as criminal in nature. We are circulating our replies to all MPs who have shown an interest in inland waterways.

Stoppage on the Ashby canal

NABO has been concerned about the length of stoppage on the Ashby canal following the discovery of the dangerous condition of Bridge 57. The first stoppage notice was issued by BW about this bridge in November 1991, and the canal beyond Shackerstone (the last winding hole) has effectively been closed ever since.

Roger Herrington, the BW Manager of the Ashby canal, reports that the canal is expected to be reopened in time for the next 'cruising season', i.e. April 1993.

The delay has been caused by the fact that BW could not justify repairing a bridge which they felt had no use, but were refused a demolition order as the bridge lies within a Conservation area. BW then set about persuading the DoE, Leicestershire CC and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council that they should contribute to the cost of repairing the bridge to a structurally sound condition.

BW have succeeded. The DoE are contributing £6,400, and the two Councils £2,000 each towards the repair costs of £21,900. Hinckley & Bosworth Council met only last week to decide the issue, thus clearing the way to issuing a contract for the work to be done. Roger Herrington regards this as a victory - but at what cost to those of us who have wanted to reach the end of the Ashby canal in the last year?

Thorne Lock Lengthening

British Waterways is considering lengthening Thorne Lock on the Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation. The lock, which is about 61' long, is the only obstacle preventing full length narrowboats from visiting North Eastern waterways via the SSYN; such boats making the trip now have to go round Trent Falls. A stoppage is planned for Thorne lock this winter, and BW say they may lengthen it - if the demand is there. If your boat is over 61' long, and you would like to take it to the North East this way, write to Ian White, North East Regional Manager, British Waterways, 1 Dock Street, Leeds, LS1 1HH.

Canal Haul

The Times (18/1/93) reports that "Workers dredging a canal in Coventry have recovered a Ford Escort, a motorcycle, a sofa and two armchairs, two shotguns, a video recorder and dozens of shopping trolleys". Rumours that this haul was found outside Roger Herrington's office windows at Hartshill are totally unfounded.