



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOAT OWNERS

## NEWSLETTER

March 1994

### Editor's comment

Thank you to everyone who wrote to me after my plea for letters in the last issue of the Boater. Unfortunately, only a very small amount of space is available in this issue for printing letters, so I have chosen the one with the shortest 'shelf life'! We promise to print a more extensive selection in the next Boater, so please keep writing.

A member also sent minutes of a User Group meeting. NABO Council members cannot get to all these meetings, so if you attend any such gathering, please do let us have a report.

Whilst every care is taken to ensure that the contents of the Boater are factually correct, we accept no liability for any direct or consequential loss arising from any action taken by anyone as a result of reading anything contained in this publication. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

Newsletter.....	1
Editor's comment.....	1
News.....	3 - 4
Council meeting.....	2
Members welcome.....	3
Houseboat code.....	4
Reports.....	6 - 11
Waterway standards.....	6
Stephen Goode User Gp..	8
River Nene.....	9
Insurance survey.....	10
River Soar User Group...	10
Letters.....	11
NABO representatives.....	12

Published by

**National Association of  
Boat Owners**

# NEWS

## View from the Council meeting held on 26th February, 1994

Your intrepid reporter, code-named Moley, having successfully infiltrated the last Council meeting, reports:

Loos are safe! BW have confirmed that those threatened at Market Harborough and Coventry will be replaced. Coventry will even have the first coin operated pumpout.

NABO Policy was further advanced by considering a paper from Stephen Peters on the major issues facing boaters. This ranges from the BW General Powers Bill and its implications, via stoppages and maintenance monitoring to proposals for a National Navigation Authority. The initial tasks were allocated and more will be revealed soon. Watch this space! The meeting also agreed how policy should be formulated and approved by the members. The final version will be approved next time.

To help and guide future members of Council Job descriptions are being agreed to avoid duplication and will be published eventually in a Council Members' Booklet.

A load of Bollards! A lot of

time was spent on the new BW mooring matrix, which seeks to improve the objectivity of assessing mooring charges. Unfortunately they don't succeed. However like the Curate's egg it is good and bad in parts. The first part is all right (although you may not agree the scoring system), as they award facilities available a score which is then turned into "Bollards". Where they go wrong is by trying to multiply the Bollards by Location factors. The reasons why someone chooses a particular site have not been surveyed and accordingly it is up to the local Managers to decide themselves. This subjective judgement is bound to cause problems. You should not forget BW has a statutory duty to maximise their income. Council applauded the improvement with the Bollards but could not accept the subjectivity of the Location factor. It was also suggested that Managers should be prepared to justify their reasons and there ought to be some arbitration procedure available to settle disputes. It was also felt that Location factors affecting Residential moorers were different.

## NEWS

### Council meeting (cont)

Lack of progress on the availability of Waterway Standards means that Jon Darlington will be taking things up with BW's Chairman before invoking the appeals procedure.

Area Representatives variously reported general unhelpfulness from Government & BW. Notably, the Dept. of Transport is failing to provide adequately for waterways affected by road proposals and is causing enormous expense through unnecessary appeal procedures; at Derby this is threatening the restoration project. And BW called a meeting to discuss dredging depths where they refused to make available details of canal widths and depths!

More next time.

### Members welcome at Council meetings

The February meeting of the NABO Council was attended by two of our members from the River Wey who had advised us that they would like to address

Council on a number of matters of concern and interest.

They were given an opportunity to sit in and listen to the proceedings of Council (often quite heated and sometimes quite humorous!), and they were then invited to air their views and inform us of developments on the Surrey river.

The overall impression was that the Wey has improved in recent years although much still needs to be done to give the 500 or so boat users the facilities which their licence fees warrant.

NABO is keeping a close eye on developments on the River Wey and sends a representative to all user group meetings. We have again raised the question of relaxation of the 20 H.P. maximum outboard engine size regulation which prevents many boat owners from cruising on the Wey.

If you have used this waterway in recent years please let us know if you think there have been any noticeable improvements, or should the National Trust be doing more as guardian of the river?

# NEWS

## Houseboat Code of Practice

NABO and RBOA are currently working together to produce a draft houseboat code of practice which will be presented to BW for discussion at a series of meetings currently being arranged.

It is felt that a code of practice would be desirable partly in preparation for when the BW Bill becomes an Act and partly in recognition of the difficulties that will arise when the Houseboat Moratorium expires.

The document is being produced by a small group of people from both organisations. We are not involved in a large scale conference as reported in the March edition of Canal & Riverboat. The idea of a conference was put to us in December but we concluded it would be beyond our resources, particularly in terms of time and energy. It was also felt that more could be achieved by a small group analysing problems and thrashing out answers than could be achieved by a large scale conference.

We will of course report developments as they occur.

## Cowroast moorings update

Following the howls of protest from moorers at Cowroast, as reported in the last Boater, BW have agreed not to apply for more residential moorings on the site at Cowroast, but instead to try and find an alternative site in the area.

Another instance where BW are thinking of upgrading moorings in the hope of getting planning permission for residential boats has come to our attention, this time on the Staffs & Worcester canal. If you know of any other cases, we would like to hear from you.

Would anyone like to talk to the BBC about living afloat?

The BBC programme "Countryfile" would like to hear from anyone living on a boat in the country - ideally a family with children, but this is not essential - with a view to making a feature for the programme. Anyone willing to discuss the advantages and difficulties of this way of life should contact Gyn Freeman, Countryfile, BBC, Pebble Mill Road, Birmingham B5 7QQ, direct line 021 414 8452.

# NEWS

## Avon Weirs Trust

Members may be interested to know that the Avon Weirs Trust was established in 1991 to raise funds for the maintenance and repair of weirs on the Warwickshire Avon.

Apparently, a number of weirs have no known owner and there is the ever-present risk that these old structures might fail, resulting in loss of navigation and threatening both pleasure boating and the local economy.

To date three weirs have been restored completely at a cost of £177,000, but a further six require work to be undertaken urgently and £700,000 must be raised for this work.

Donations have been made by local councils, the two Avon navigation trusts, the National Rivers Authority and by private donors. When work is completed the NRA will accept responsibility for all future maintenance works on the structures, but many members will be surprised (and worried) to learn that the continued existence of navigation on the Avon cannot be funded by the navigation trusts themselves.

If you would like to give your support to the Avon Weirs Trust

donations can be sent to them at Riversmeet House, Newtown Industrial Estate, Northway Lane, Tewkesbury, Glos.GL20 7JG.

### Buy now and avoid VAT on fuel

Members are reminded that the price of diesel fuel, solid fuel and bottled gas will increase on 1st April 1994 as a result of the imposition of V.A.T. on domestic fuel.

You may not have known but hitherto these fuels were zero rated because they were classed as for "domestic use", which excluded them from the tax.

All this is about to change and your boating budget will increase accordingly. The only way to mitigate the effects is to top up your tanks before the April deadline and cruise slowly thereafter!

Anyone wishing to contact Penny Barber (Treasurer) can use her new 'Voicemail' answering service (no. on back page). Expect the electronic voice to give you step by step instructions!

## REPORTS

### The latest on Waterway Standards: Jon Darlington reports

If you have been following the BW Customer Charter saga you will remember how virtually all specific standards and commitments of direct relevance to Boaters had been removed when the final version was produced. We were assured by BW that most of these commitments would be found in "waterways standards" described in the Charter under the heading of "Documents containing our commitments" as being "produced to meet the needs of users". We were also told that we would be allowed copies of these standards for all waterways.

We were very surprised therefore when we learned that the standards had been copyrighted and were not going to be freely available to the public, but that users might only be allowed to have a copy of them if they first had them explained by a waterways manager.

We had a meeting with BW last October at which we asked for a copy of the waterway standards but were told that the standards were waterway specific and would first have to be

explained to us by a waterways manager, and until that was done we could not have a copy. This also applied to a "blank" set without any waterway specific details filled in.

At the same meeting we were told that the availability of the standards would be reviewed by the end of January 1994, and that as there was a good chance of the standards being made more available after that date, would we wait till then before launching into a campaign to make the standards more available. We reluctantly agreed to do this.

In our last letter from BW on the subject we were told that the question of availability has been reviewed and when the content of the standards is reviewed around September this year, the review group will consider "how they can be made more generally available". As we have already explained how – by just giving copies on request at a price which meets the cost of printing – we conclude there is little intention to do so.

BW have given us two reasons in writing for not allowing copies of waterway standards to

# REPORTS

## Waterways Standards (continued)

be freely available to the public. The official reason is that some waterways managers felt that given the complex make up of the document it would be "advantageous for users" to have the application of the standards explained in their proper context at a local level. If this is so, then the standards should either be redrafted so that they can be understood or explanations be included with the current draft. Our suggestions to this effect were ignored.

The other reason we have had was from a waterways manager who innocently wrote "there was concern at the centre about the potential number of copies that would be in circulation and which may get into inappropriate hands. For example it would not be appropriate for every boat owner to have a set, so that they could then each act as independent auditors and make complaints...."

Which reason do you consider to be more credible?

In May 1993 British Waterways produced a statement of intent on consultation which contains the following:

"Enquiries will be dealt with expeditiously and upon the principle of full disclosure of relevant information which in the opinion of BW is not commercially confidential....BW recognises that the views of users need to be heard and taken into account at all levels within its organisation.... Reasonable provision will be made for ad hoc meetings to be held at the request of user representatives."

1. The commercially confidential argument has not been used.

2. There has never been consultation with user groups at a national level on the content, implementation and availability of waterways standards, and our requests for such consultation have either been refused or ignored.

We believe these are serious breaches of both the statement of intent, and the spirit of the Customer Charter. As communication has effectively ceased on this subject we believe the complaints mechanism is the only avenue left to us, and is the one we are taking.



## REPORTS

### User Group meeting with Stephen Goode – Colin Pailin

This meeting, held at Fradley junction on 15th February, started at 7.30pm and continued through to 10.45pm. Everyone was made to feel very welcome. The meeting was quite casual with no set agenda.

Coventry basin: there are plans for a new toilet block as well as water, refuse and sewage services. Quite an innovation for this area is a self-operated coin or disc pump-out. Mr Goode asked the group about their thoughts on shower blocks on the canals. Most people felt that most boats now have shower facilities, and that perhaps the money would be better spent on the canals. BW are in the process of looking for a suitable site for a new toilet block at the bottom end of the Ashby canal.

Stephen Goode went through a summary of planned works for the year 94/95 and discussed at length some of the items that were of specific interest. Planned stoppages include the replacement of Stenson top gates; replacement and repair of the wall at Swarkestone narrows; rebuild of wall and replacement of top and bottom gates at Airewas;

installation of new bottom gate at Wood End; new paddles and frame on locks 4, 5, 6, 8 & 9 at Atherstone; installation of new head heels and sill to locks 1, 4, 5 & 8 at Atherstone; rebuild of no. 6 wall at Atherstone. Other planned work includes dredging bridgeholes and backfilling piling from Atherstone 11 to Fradley and from Colwick (T & M) to Derwent Mouth; and the Ashby canal is to have 3km of new piling.

On the first Saturday in August, there is to be a fishing match between Rugeley and Shardlow!! This is a large charity event and members of the Trent & Mersey Canal Society will be at locks to help and advise boaters. Mooring sites will not be pegged.

Stephen Goode spoke about the waterway standards. These documents are not allowed out of the office, but are available for inspection on request. He feels that the standards to be achieved over the next 5 years are a good and helpful guide. I shall be spending some time with him going through these, and will report back.



## REPORTS

### Consultation on the River Nene – Nikki Timbrell

The Anglian Region of the NRA have produced a Management Plan for the Upper Nene, and have started a process of consultation. I attended the briefing meeting which launched the plan on 23rd February, and was impressed by their commitment to consultation, with their stated aims of broadening their horizons, finding the real issues, listening to genuine concerns and thus creating realistic plans.

Much of the NRA's duty involves conservation and environmental issues, management of water resources, flood defence and fisheries. Navigation is bottom of the list, but this does not mean that they are not taking it seriously on the River Nene. They admit that they have a lack of information about how the river is used, the type of customers who use it, and whether more boats could be accommodated. There are currently 1300 boats and 90 canoes registered on the river.

When I enquired about plans for improving the navigation, the Area Manager, Ron Linfield, replied that they had already

spent nearly £1/2 million over the last two years on improving safety on the river, which they had considered to be a priority – thus now almost every lock has a suitable landing stage both ends, and some additional locks have been electrified. The next step will be to survey users and potential users to find out their needs. I felt that they were committed to improving facilities on the river (more moorings and sanitary stations) with a view to encouraging more boats, but that they were also sensitive to the possibility that more use could change the character of the river, which they do not want to do. User Groups will also be set up.

For those of you with an interest in wildlife, you will be interested to know that the NRA hope to be able to reintroduce otters into some of the Nene tributaries.

If you have any comments about the River Nene, or would like more details about the Management Plan, you can write to Ron Linfield, Area Manager (Northern), NRA Anglian Region, Kingfisher House, Goldhay Way, Peterborough PE2 5ZR.

## REPORTS

### First results from Neil Hutchinson's latest insurance survey

In response to some urgent requests from members regarding the availability of third party insurance for their boats, we are able to provide the following advance information. Twelve insurance companies or brokers were invited to answer this question:

Q2: Are you able to provide third party insurance for a boat on the inland waterways?

The following positive responses were received:

#### **Collidge and Partners**

Q2: *Yes*

#### **St Margarets Insurances Ltd.**

Q2: *Yes – minimum premium £68 excluding removal/salvage charges.*

#### **Newton Crum Insurance Agents Ltd.**

Q2: *Yes.*

#### **Housemans Insurance Consultants Ltd.**

Q2: *Yes (subject to minimum premium of £100).*

#### **Haven Knox Johnson**

Q2: *"Liability only" available to "dry" survey. Includes removal.*

#### **Toughs (Insurance) Ltd.**

Q2: *Yes.*

#### **Michael Stimpson & Associates**

Q2: *Special policy. High own damage excess, nil third party excess.*

#### **Eagle Star (Navigators and General Ins. Co. Ltd.)**

Q2: *Yes, but not recommended (not good value).*

We are awaiting replies from four more companies. When these are received, the responses to all seven questions which we asked in the survey will be collated and published - hopefully in the next Boater.

### Soar User Group meeting

A NABO member, Terry Goodlud, attends meetings of the River Soar User Group, and has sent us minutes of the last meeting held on 3rd November, 1993. Here are a few extracts which may interest you.

Kegworth Deep lock is having new ground paddles - it was reported at the meeting that materials were in place to start work, and that the project should

## REPORTS

### River Soar User Group meeting (continued)

be complete by the spring. Most of the work can be carried out without a stoppage.

Last year's stoppages on the Leicester section have resulted in an improvement in water levels, and more stoppages are planned to improve the situation further.

For those with VHF radios: the sand and gravel boats which operate on the River Soar

operate on channel 77; new radios have been installed at Cranfleet Lock and Trent Lock (known as "Trent Base"), both operating on channel 74.

Sanitary stations: renovation of the one at Kilby Bridge is now complete, Sawley should be completed by April, and work is due to start at Bishop Meadow during February/March.

## LETTERS

### Toilets at Market Harborough and Coventry

In issue 9 you report that BW intend to remove the toilets at Market Harborough and Coventry as part of the redevelopment proposals. I don't know the present situation at Coventry, but at Market Harborough the toilets were not provided by BW. They were provided – and paid for – by Harborough Marine and available free of charge to all visitors. If the development plans don't allow for there to be toilets provided, then NABO should approach the local Planning Authority or BW and press for the plans to be altered. Then whoever does the development will have to supply

them. This shouldn't be a big deal, as in the past BW have frequently made it a condition of their leases to boatyards that toilets and Elsan disposal should be provided. What's sauce for the boatyard goose should be sauce for the developer gander!

Finally could I gently point out to Jon Darlington that I did and do not 'automatically take the view of the Board or D.O.E'. My concern is what is best for the waterways, whoever's view that might be.

Giles Baker  
Sometime MD, Harborough  
Marine & Chairman IWAAC

# **NABO REPRESENTATIVES**

## **Council members contact addresses**

Penny Barber  
(Treasurer)

Christopher Barnacle  
(Assistant Editor)

Phil Bland

Jon Darlington  
(Chairman)

Melanie Darlington  
(Production/Distribution)

Roger Hancock  
(Secretary),

Neil Hutchinson  
(Navigation Officer/NW Rep)

Peter Lea  
(Vice Chairman/SE Rep)

Colin Paillin  
(Midlands Rep)

Stephen Peters  
(River Users Co-ordinator)

Christine Potter  
(Membership Secretary)

Peter Sterry  
(NERep/Publicity)

Nikki Timbrell  
(Boater/N'letter Editor)

Harry Winter  
(Engineering Officer)