

## **THE MAGAZINE OF THE**



President: Bill O'Brien J.P. M.P.

# **ISSUE 2/04 - March 2004**

**Council Tax / Website Waterway Reports / Policy Upgrade**

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### 2004 CALENDAR

<b>Council meeting</b>	<b>Copy date</b>
April 24th	May 1st
June 5th	June 12th
July 17th	July 24th
Sept 18th	Sept 25th
<b>Nov 13th A.G.M.</b>	
Nov 27th	Dec 4th



# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

## BW to downsize

I was just putting this magazine 'to bed' when I had a phone call from Eugene Baston. He rang to prepare me for the news that British Waterways intends to reduce its 2000+ staff posts by 140 in an effort to reduce 'fixed costs'. This is blamed on cuts in funds from the EU, DEFRA and the Lottery. BW will now be in a 90-day consultation period with the trade unions.

A significant number of losses are in the northern units where posts concerned with recent restoration work are no longer needed. Robin Evans said, *"I realise these changes will affect people's lives and I did not take the decision lightly. However, BW is a dynamic organisation, capable of much more growth, and the future for the vast majority of our people and the business as a whole is very bright."*

I am sure NABO members will join me in sympathising with those who stand to lose their jobs, and the many who have suffered uncertainty leading up to this announcement. It is small wonder BW's ranking in the Sunday Times 'Top companies to work for' has dropped from the top 100 to below the top 250. We wish them a speedy recovery.

However NABO is there to help its boating members, and where that

means helping BW to help NABO members, we must do what we can.

## An unprecedented outbreak of common sense at Watford!

Sometimes our efforts are rather like doses of medicine – you don't know whether they do any good or whether the illness would have gone away on its own. However the good news is that, whichever is true, BW Head Office has recently taken big steps to appear more boater friendly and those 'sillies' have gone from the licence conditions. Without any future pangs of guilt, you will now be able to charge batteries without being under way, use canal water for your flowers, and put gangplanks against the bank.

NABO's investment in proper legal advice has born fruit

One big 'silly' in many people's eyes was the Moorings Code. That has now gone too. NABO's investment in proper legal advice has born fruit here, as we were able to show BW how the Code might fail in a Court of Law. BW's replacement guidelines will be published separately and are just aimed at 'Continuous Cruisers'. They will be spelling out in simple terms what is expected under the law as it stands, rather than adding prescriptive requirements with no legal justification.

The rest of us should now be able to sleep easy on public moorings irrespective of how many lock/miles we have moved over the past fortnight – provided, of course, that figure is not zero. If you look at your Licence Terms and Conditions (section 2.1), it says:- *'The licence does not allow you to moor the boat in any Waterway*

except for short periods *ancillary* to *cruising*'. The message is that, whoever you are, BW does not consider its licence gives you the right to use any one spot as a long-term mooring unless you have a permit.

NABO does not condone over-staying either, but it does support the basic right of boaters not to have to pay for permanent moorings that they would never be in a position to make use of. Unfortunately all these people tend to be dubbed '*Continuous Cruisers*' and so condemned to roam the waterways forever like lost souls. However this group also contains boaters who weekend their boats around the system, we have one on our Council, and folks who find legitimate medium-term moorings in a different part of the country each year. Neither group wants a **permanent** base mooring, yet they don't really cruise continuously.

Another suspect term is '*live-aboard*', because some people use it in a derogatory way. NABO Council has officially resolved to avoid using it. Neither do we encourage the use of '*gypsy*' as this can offend genuine Romany people.

We can't avoid the fact that boaters who boat a lot, and so have the highest 'exposure' to the waterway authorities, have a lot to say. That doesn't mean they dominate Council. In fact we are lucky to have almost all cruising styles represented, and we are not all narrowboat owners either, despite popular myth - see later.

### **More Serious Issues**

Boaters on all waterways are facing two serious threats that are even bigger than anything BW or EA can offer at present, namely fuel duty and council tax.

Thanks to all those who filled in the forms in the last issue regarding diesel. More contributions will be welcome.

We received a worrying letter from a boater near Manchester saying that the council where his boat is moored is looking to charge Council Tax on moorings used by pleasure boaters on the basis that they are holiday homes. We have approached BW about this, as BW is the landowner, technically speaking, for most inland boat moorings according to the definition used by local council guidelines, viz the land/canal bed **over** which a boat is moored. We are also receiving very useful advice from the RBOA, who have been into this in great detail.

### **Something positive**

You will see in this magazine that Adrian Stott's Waterway Dossier initiative now has a sibling in cyberspace. Here anyone can leave messages on our website about navigation problems, and check out warnings that other boaters have posted before they cruise. We hope waterway management will be across it too and deal with matters before our local and regional reps have to act.

In fact, the boards had been in operation barely a week before BW's Customer Relations Manager posted a notice about a minor breach on the Shropshire Union - thank you, Eugene.

This is not just for members, it is a service for all on-line boaters. This includes anyone who takes the trouble to use a computer in the local library. You don't need any sort of internet account, nor do you need to register or give passwords etc. Have a look at the article in this magazine which tells you how to use the facility.

Don't let anyone say that everything NABO does is negative!

*Stuart Sampson*

# COUNCIL TAX ON NON-RESIDENTIAL MOORINGS

This issue stems from a letter NABO received which included the following:-

*I am writing to you now because something serious is happening and is likely to be actually worse than it appears. I feel sure that you will have heard this from other quarters; that Thameside Council have decided to target narrowboats for council tax purposes. . . In general it seems that all the moorings (not the boats) can be classed as second homes, so pay 50% of band A.*

Ivor Caplan, Chairman of the RBOA, has been involved in this for a long time, and has kindly pointed us to guidelines for council tax valuation, from which we quote the summary of the relevant section:-

## **Practice Note 7: Application of Council Tax to Caravan Pitches and Moorings. . .**

### **6. Summary of Policy**

**6.1** The policy that the legislation is intended to achieve can be summarised as follows. Although this specifically refers to boats and moorings the same principles apply to caravans and their pitches.

- a) If a boat which is someone's sole or main residence is moored "permanently" at a mooring, then the mooring is domestic property, and both the mooring and the boat are subject to Council Tax.
- b) If a boat which is someone's sole or main residence stops at a mooring and moves away for a sufficiently long period (see 6.2), and it seems that when next in use that mooring will be used by that same boat or another boat which is someone's sole or main residence, then the mooring is domestic but the mooring only is subject to Council Tax.
- c) If a boat which is someone's sole or main residence is moored at a mooring and moves away, and it seems that when next in use the mooring will be used by a non-sole or main residence boat, then the mooring is non-domestic and subject to non-domestic rates.
- d) If there is a mooring with no way of telling what sort of craft will be moored at it, then it is non-domestic and subject to non-domestic rates.

**6.2** Whether occupation by a boat or caravan, used as a sole or main residence, of a mooring or pitch can be treated as sufficiently permanent is a question of fact and degree. As a general rule, where a dwelling boat or caravan occupies a mooring or pitch for a substantial period of time - such duration would usually be for 12 months or more - it should be entered in valuation list, even if it moves away for brief periods of say 2 to 4 weeks, provided it then returns to its original mooring or pitch. The question to be asked is whether the occupation can be characterised as that of a 'settler' or a 'wayfarer'. If the latter, then only the mooring or pitch should be valued.

**6.3** Even if the sole or main resident of a caravan or boat does not have exclusive rights to a particular pitch or mooring if, in practice, the caravan or boat occupies the land with sufficient permanence it will be classed as domestic property, and the value included in the Council Tax banding.



Taken from the body of the document, the following clauses may also be poignant:

**4.5** In the case of a mooring the hereditament will comprise the precise area of land (whether covered with water or not) occupied by the boat and to which the root of the mooring is actually attached together with the “mooring gear” itself (ie piles, weights, chains, pontoons etc) if this fulfils the requirements of rateability. (See Rating Manual 5:670:4). The pitch or mooring will include any garage yard, outhouse or other appurtenance belonging to or enjoyed with them as domestic property.

**4.6** There must be actual beneficial exclusive and non-transitory occupation of the caravan pitch or mooring but in some cases where there is prima facie evidence of rateable occupation it may not be easy to discern who is the occupier for council tax purposes, and accordingly what the correct unit(s) of assessment should be. Investigation will be necessary to determine whose occupation is paramount.

For those who wish to look up the full version, it is on:-

<http://www.voa.gov.uk/instructions/chapters/council%5Ftax/council%5Ftax%5Fman%5Fpn/frame.htm>

From this it certainly looks as though the guidelines only allow councils to rate as ‘domestic’ those moorings that are used by boats which are the sole residence of their occupiers. There is no mention of pleasure boaters till you get to :-

‘**8.2** If there are a number of adjacent moorings, some of which are used by boats which are sole or main residences and some of which are used by **pleasure** boats, but no boat owners have exclusive possession of any particular mooring, there would appear to be a composite hereditament occupied by the owner of the moorings.’

Although this clause is about mixed purpose moorings, it does make the distinction between residential and pleasure craft moorings. The guidelines also recognise that the actual vessel is legally a chattel and so can only affect the amount of the valuation for the mooring, it cannot be taxed itself.

Should reason prevail, a council would be morally justified to charge tax on anyone resident within its boundaries for a significant time and so making use of its services. If, therefore, someone used their boat on its mooring as a place to stay for a holiday, or as a temporary residence, then it could be justified in charging, but only pro rata. However to tax someone who arrives at their boat, loads up and casts off for a holiday, maybe not spending a single night within the parish, is totally unjustified.

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## Geoff Rogerson on USER GROUP MEETINGS

For those not aware, a few lines about User Group meetings. These are meetings held by BW usually twice a year when local and national organisations can attend to be briefed by BW on the latest developments and question BW about all sorts of things that they think are important.

**A local user group.** In my case the Kennet and Avon.

Members attending: 22, representing among others angling, local cruising club, Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs (national), IWA (national), K&A Trust, ramblers, local hire fleets.

### Matters discussed:-

BW re-organisation, waterway development - BW plan to double the number of visitors to the whole network by 2012; new marina planning application; new hire fleet - too many already?; stoppages; dredging; new pump-out and toilet facilities; trial moorings code; new permanent on-line moorings; congestion at locks; disabled access.

NABO attend getting on for fifty User Group meetings a year and accordingly, through the collection and collation of all the notes taken, acquire an overall view of the waterways. Sometimes BW may pilot a new scheme or idea on one waterway to see how it goes. It is important that we are able to pick this up and consider any national implications.

### **National User Group Meeting**

In addition to the above, BW also hold a National User Group meeting once a year, chaired by the BW chairman George Greener, together with Robin Evans, Chief Executive, and some directors and BW board members. Those attending represent only national bodies and in addition to those previously mentioned include : Association of Pleasure Craft Operators, British Marine Federation, Residential Boat Owners Association, the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and others.

Matters discussed: BW's progress, BW plan for the future, national mooring strategy to deal with the growth in number of boats over the next ten years, implication of 'Waterscape' and 'Waterway Holidays U.K.' and their relation to BW, government funding (grant in aid), the restoration programme. A big item was BW's new "*Openness and Accountability*" report augmenting the role of the ombudsman and their own complaints procedures. The question of an independent regulator was also raised. A new formula for annual licence increases was announced and finally future water supply.

All the national and local organisations value the opportunity of attending these user group meetings and our council members and Regional Secretaries travel many hundreds of miles to get to them. They give of their own time willingly.

Whilst NABO is always ready to challenge BW we do also work together. For instance one item at the meeting was the trial moorings code. I was invited to Watford in February to discuss a modified code and hopefully, with others from national groups who have also been invited, we will help modify the code in the light of a years trial experience and bring about a sensible, legal, and enforceable solution to a problem that really extends at the moment to the Kennet and Avon, Grand Union South, and the South Oxford.

User group meetings may vary following BW's reorganisation, however BW are committed to the principle of consultation and they will continue albeit in a changed venue. The Customer Relations Manager is compiling guidelines for local consultation which should incorporate points that NABO has made.

Attendance is not just limited to Council members or Regional Secretaries and should any NABO member like to attend his/her own local user group on our behalf and report back, we would be very pleased to hear from him or her.

*Geoffrey Rogerson.*

# NABO POLICY REVIEW

**In response for more ‘openness and accountability’ from NABO towards its members, Council has been fleshing out the ‘sound bites’ in its policy document and is offering the draft results for member’s comments.**

The clauses are being taken in turn and in this magazine we deal with general issues. Navigational policies will be in a future edition.

## 1. Waterways Regulator

### Summary policy

*There needs to be a Waterways Regulator who is truly independent of all navigation authorities or other bodies with a waterways interest (as in OFCOM for the communications industry)*

### Supporting Detail

NABO strongly advocates the appointment of an Independent Regulator to safeguard the interests of boat owners and customers of navigation authorities who have been faced with swingeing increases in fees and charges over recent years.

NABO acknowledges that the Waterways Ombudsman fulfils a role in holding British Waterways to account for maladministration arising from customer complaints but his powers are limited and do not extend to monitoring proposals and actions of BW with regard to its charging policy.

Likewise, IWAAC is able to give advice to the Minister, but has no remit to oversee the charges that BW imposes on its customers.

As a major nationalised industry, controlling the majority of the canal network, and many major river navigations, BW holds a dominant market position, which it can, and does, abuse, and which is not controlled by market forces. The Office of Fair Trading has declined to intervene or investigate the activities of BW.

BW has imposed unfair increases in mooring charges in the past, and abandoned the agreed mooring charge policy without prior consultation with users. It has also implemented a complex pricing formula for licences against the wishes of users.

The introduction of a new structure of Advisory Panel and revised complaints mechanism does not fully address the need for independent supervision of BW to safeguard consumers.

NABO would wish an Independent Regulator to have a remit covering all inland navigation authorities to provide a uniform approach applicable to all waterways not presently included in the various Ombudsman schemes. This should also encompass the navigation functions of the Environment Agency.

## 2. Consultation

### Summary policy

*We want meaningful consultation and the interpretation of the rules to be consistent in all regions*



## Supporting Detail

In the Statements of Intent which accompanied the British Waterways 1995 Act, BW committed itself to “*effective consultation*”, and to “*take fully into account the views expressed through the consultation procedure*”. In the nine-year period since then, there has virtually been a complete staff turn-over, and a full reorganisation, so that now, many BW staff have not even heard of the 1995 Act let alone know what it contains.

NABO is committed to meaningful consultation, but would like to feel more confident that the views of users are being taken seriously.

Local User Group meetings especially have deteriorated into a social evening out together for the BW staff, and an attitude of what-shall-we- do-with-them-this-time? The ‘audience’ is more often subjected to a presentation, which involves the screening of a series of headings which are then read out to the assembled company. The question and answer session, which is what most people have attended for, is left until the end, and often curtailed due to lack of time.

NABO thinks that this is not good enough. Those who have freely given their time and travelling costs to attend should be considered as a valuable resource, from whom BW or EA can learn vital information about the state of the navigation, and also where to prioritise expenditure. Presentations should be totally abandoned, unless they pictorially illustrate the topic under discussion, as should questions about individual moorings, lock paddles etc. NABO would like to see users consulted about issues such as winter works and stoppages, + priority of work, dredging, sites for the future provision of moorings / facilities etc..

NABO accepts that all final decisions relating to financial expenditure must rest with the navigation authority, but demands that users be given input.

There should be no opportunity for individual Waterway Business Units to interpret the navigation by-laws. The application of the rules should be consistent across the system. NABO would support consistency between all navigation authorities.

### **3. ‘Pan-waterway Licences’**

#### Summary:-

*‘There should be one licence covering all navigations and unified standards for all waterways.’*

#### Detail

NABO believes that navigation authorities should work towards an overall licence that would give any boater the right to use any waterway irrespective of which body manages it. This should be at a cost no greater than what they would pay for using the waterway(s) where their boat is normally based, and with standard terms and conditions. This would require a reciprocal agreement between all authorities and common requirements for:-

- Registration information
- Vessel identification
- Construction and condition safety criteria
- Obligatory equipment
- Other bylaws

It would also require standardisation of criteria for fee calculation and VAT status. As this ‘System Rover Ticket’ is not a goal achievable in the short term, NABO would look favorably on any measure that would make the transition from the waters of one authority to another easier and/or less costly. for example.:-

- Fee Harmonisation within EA for the Thames, Anglian Waterways and the Medway
- Building on the BW/EA Gold Licence concept
- More reciprocal agreements like the one between the M.S.C and BW for the use of the Bridgewater and neighbouring waterways
- The development of ‘One Stop Shops’ for obtaining licences/permits, e.g. on Waterscape.com.
- Less notice needed and less reliance on the postal system, problems that make application for the Basingstoke particularly difficult for itinerant boaters.

## **4. Riparian Rights**

### Summary policy

*There should be no erosion of existing riparian rights*

### Supporting Detail

NABO attaches great importance to the preservation and exercise of ancient historic rights relating to land adjoining navigable waterways (rivers and canals). Original legislation (Acts of Parliament, Letters Patent, etc) often bestowed rights and privileges on land owners with riparian interests and these must not be eroded by illegal actions of navigation authorities or any other person. NABO is aware of instances where British Waterways, for example, has denied or attempted to deny, the existence of certain riparian or navigation rights applicable to landowners enshrined in enabling Acts. Records of these may exist in the House of Lords library or other establishments and NABO will encourage affected landowners to refer to such sources in the event of disputes involving land ownership or other rights pertaining to navigations.

## **5. Licensing, Regulations and the law.**

### Summary policy

*All regulations must be applied equally to all boaters and have national legality*

### Supporting Detail

British Waterways, being established by statute and being a Public Authority. Rules made by the said authority must be in accordance with the powers granted to them by Act of Parliament, and they must not exceed these powers.

## **6. Licence Evasion.**

*We do not support license evasion and will do all we can to help BW in eliminating it.*

## **7. Mooring Abuse**

*Continuous mooring is a problem by boats however licensed. We agree in principle with BW's moorings guidelines and will support them whenever appropriate in any prosecution. Enforcement must be seen to be even handed and not discriminatory.*

We are against “Bridge Hopping” and consider that shuttling between two points is not Bona Fide Navigating.

## **8. Visitor Mooring Charges**

### Summary policy

*We are opposed to charges being applied to Visitor Moorings.*

### Supporting Detail

In the British Waterways licence conditions, as enabled by the Transport Act 1962. Section 43, it is stated that: a pleasure boat licence entitles the holder to navigate, and to moor ancillary to cruising against land owned by BW. The Statements of Intent which accompany the 1995 Act state that “*to provide so far as is practicable to do so and where there is a demand a mix of moorings of different durations.*”

NABO believes that if such mooring is included within the licence fee, then there should be no further charge. At designated Visitor Moorings, there should always be an initial period where mooring is free. This should be between ONE and FOURTEEN days, depending upon the number of, and demand for, the available moorings.

Where a vessel outstays the advertised mooring period, then NABO will support the application and enforcement of punitive overstay charges.

## **NEW CLAUSES**

Review of these policy clauses have shown up some omissions. The following new clauses will be put before Council for adoption when the policy statements above are amended and ratified.

## **9. Boating Cost Increases**

### Summary policy

*Justification should be sought and, wherever possible challenged, for any increase in licence, permit, mooring or other boating fees that exceeds the rate of increase to which pensions are linked.*

### Background

There are many boaters who are retired and on low incomes who have in the past contributed greatly to the waterways purely voluntarily, and stand to be denied enjoyment of the fruits of their labours through boating becoming beyond their means.

## **10. Scope of Licence and Moorings Terms and Conditions**

### Summary policy

*Licence/permit Terms and Conditions should be restricted to those essential to the successful administration of the system.*

### Details

‘Good Citizenship Guidance’ should not be included in the contract a boater makes with the navigation authority, however NABO would welcome and contribute towards such guidance and its promotion by more effective means than small print in an official document.

## 11. Mooring Fee Justification

### Summary policy

*A justification and breakdown of Mooring Fees should be available to all*

### Details

Since the imposition of the 'end of garden' mooring charge and the abandonment of BW's Mooring Matrix there has been need of a clear itemised statement of what a boat owner is paying for in a long-term mooring fee. NABO would like to see exactly what is being charged for, so it would be in a position to challenge any unfairness, for instance the inclusion of a charge for the use of the 'real estate' over which a boat floats, a right for which the boat owner is also paying in the Licence fee. Much of the envy shown towards 'continuous cruisers' and abuse of that status arises from the lack of transparency towards charges made for permanent moorings.

### **THE LOW COST ALTERNATIVE TO BW!**

Dave and Margo of nb Alice-Louise answered my plea in the last issue for the above by sending the following prices for inland boating outside Britain.

( 1Euro is about 70p)

#### **Ireland:**

Winter mooring (Shannon): one month 12.70 Euro , five months 63.40 Euro

Mooring (canals): one month 12.70 Euro

Annual licence (canals): 126.00 Euro

Dry dock: three days 126 Euro, extra day 13.90 Euro

#### **France**

from 12 to 25 square meters 109.2 Euro a year

from 25 to 40 square metres 219.4 Euro a year

(that makes a 55ft narrowboat about £151)

A winter mooring, for a 55ft narrowboat, controlled by the town in the south of France cost us £450 for 6 months INCLUDING electricity (1999/2000)

#### **Belgium/Flanders**

Boats longer than 12 metres 100 Euro per year (£70)

Wollonia: was about 35 pence per trip (could take as long as you liked)

Quote from a a Belgian canal official who had guided us to a nice mooring in the centre of a large town when asked how long we could stay there he replied "for the rest of your life if you wish."(as long as we had a licence.)

#### **The Netherlands**

No licence fee but charges to pass bridges and locks and to moor overnight in some towns but there are usually free moorings outside the town limits.

DIY electric coin op pump out 30 p for 3 mins

# WORRIED WOMAN of the WATERWAYS

Hurrah **Spring** is here, the usual 'harbinger of spring' for me is a cup of coffee in my lap as some inconsiderate b..b..boater **speeds** past creating such a jerk on the mooring ropes that I leap up, poke my head out and solicit 'I say, could you please **slow down** a little?' Well it goes something like that.

The greatest joy of being on the canals is the **slow** pace of the life. Boaters who chase about, always wanting to see the next bit, are missing out on so much of what is around them. You are where you want to be! Seek no further, just enjoy the **surroundings** and the **scenery** as you glide along.

Now is the time for my **seasonal** worries, Yes Spring is here, but will all the closures be off? (and the repairs done?) Will the water on the river have **subsided sufficiently** to enable navigation?

Will the coming of **Summer** herald overcrowding on the canals, queues for locks and facilities and, despite the heavy rainfall of the winter, water **shortages**?

Will they have **sheared, shaped or snipped** back the overhanging vegetation, or will it **scrape** along your cabin side as you cruise or pass another boat? not an unusual occurrence, but oh how maddening when you look at the **scratches** along your paint work.

Another worry for me is **silly signs**, or possibly 'sings' if you are on the river Nene, where the signs show that they can't decide whether you are in danger from a 'weir' or a 'wier'.

I have mentioned before (N for notices) the **substantial cost** of erecting signs to tell us how much was **spent** on a particular project. In some areas there are so many signs that they lose their **significance** by overkill. We can't spend all day reading them so tend to ignore the lot.

On the Staffs & Worcs, between Wolverhampton and Great Hayward, every balance beam on every lock has a **sign saying** 'Caution gate paddles.....' not one of these locks HAS gate paddles and there aren't any on bottom gates. No wonder we tend to ignore signs.

No one should have to worry about **safety**, it should be lack of safety that might trouble us but, while 'Health and Safety' tyranny rules and the Nanny State expands, we will be so cocooned by rules and **statutes** there will be no freedom to choose, right to roam, excitement or adventure allowed.

'We don't encourage single-handed boating', I was told by a BW official. 'I don't need encouraging' I replied, 'I enjoy doing it!' I worry that soon it will be against the rules, on safety grounds of course.

I asked one who was there at the time 'How on earth did a boatmen cope safely single

handed with a loaded pair or even, in the later days of carrying, a loaded motor and two loaded butties\*?' and he replied 'We just done it, there weren't no Health and Safety then, folk knew how to do things and got on with it.'

People don't go out of their way to put themselves in danger. Single handed boaters these days love the **solitude** of the canals, and believe me, there is nothing more enjoyable than working up a flight of locks, totally alone, very early in the morning. The closeness of the wildlife and the feeling of solitude **secluded** from the world is **superb**.

I also worry about **selfish** boaters; those who **speed**; those who **spurn** your offers to **share** locks; those who moor in the centre of a large **space** on moorings thus reducing the number of mooring spaces available; those who create **sound pollution** and ruin otherwise **serene surroundings**.

The pleasure and **satisfaction** far outweigh the worries so while I continue to escape from 'The Safety Police' I will carry on enjoying my boating.

Do the same, why worry when I am here to do it for you?

your friend Dot.

\* They **stemmed** one butty (pushed it) and towed the other on cross straps.

*Advertisements*

# NABO Website Waterway Reports Board

[www.nabo.org.uk/ww\\_reports/](http://www.nabo.org.uk/ww_reports/)

A collection of comments pages has been set up on the NABO website. one per length of waterway, where anyone can leave reports about broken paddles, overhanging trees, hostile locals, seemingly abandoned boats etc.

These serve three purposes:-

- 1) to alert future users of that stretch to possible problems, or curing of same,
- 2) to update NABO representatives about concerns which they can take up with the authorities or bring up at local consultation meetings,
- 3) to bring matters directly to the attention of the navigation authority should they take the trouble to monitor it themselves.

## Finding it

Visit the address above, or click on the button on the title page of the NABO website. There are also other links to it in various places on the site.

You will find a list of options on the left, which stay with you while you work the board. On the right is a list of areas roughly split according to who looks after the navigations. Clicking on one of these will bring up a list of lengths in that area.



In some cases, e.g. in the West Midlands, you will find these are further subdivided.

Alternatively use either the System or West Midlands map. These can take a while to appear, but have patience.

To select a length just click on the square containing the stretch you want.

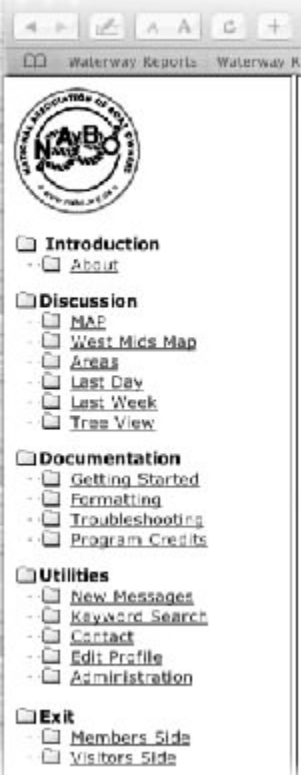
## Feeding it

Follow the screen instructions. Use the **'Create New Conversation'** button unless you are responding to something already posted. You don't need a 'user account', you can post anonymously, but we would prefer it if you gave your name.

If you are on a slow mobile connection and would like someone post it for you, email: **reports@nabo.org.uk**

We would also like some volunteers to receive reports as **text messages** and post them on the boards - any offers?

To help you send shorter text or emails, we have labelled the map squares on the maps that follow to identify waterways, e.g. Put **J9** instead of 'the Erewash'



## Reading it

Select the waterways you intend to cruise (or if you are from the navigation authority, those you look after), and see what has been written.

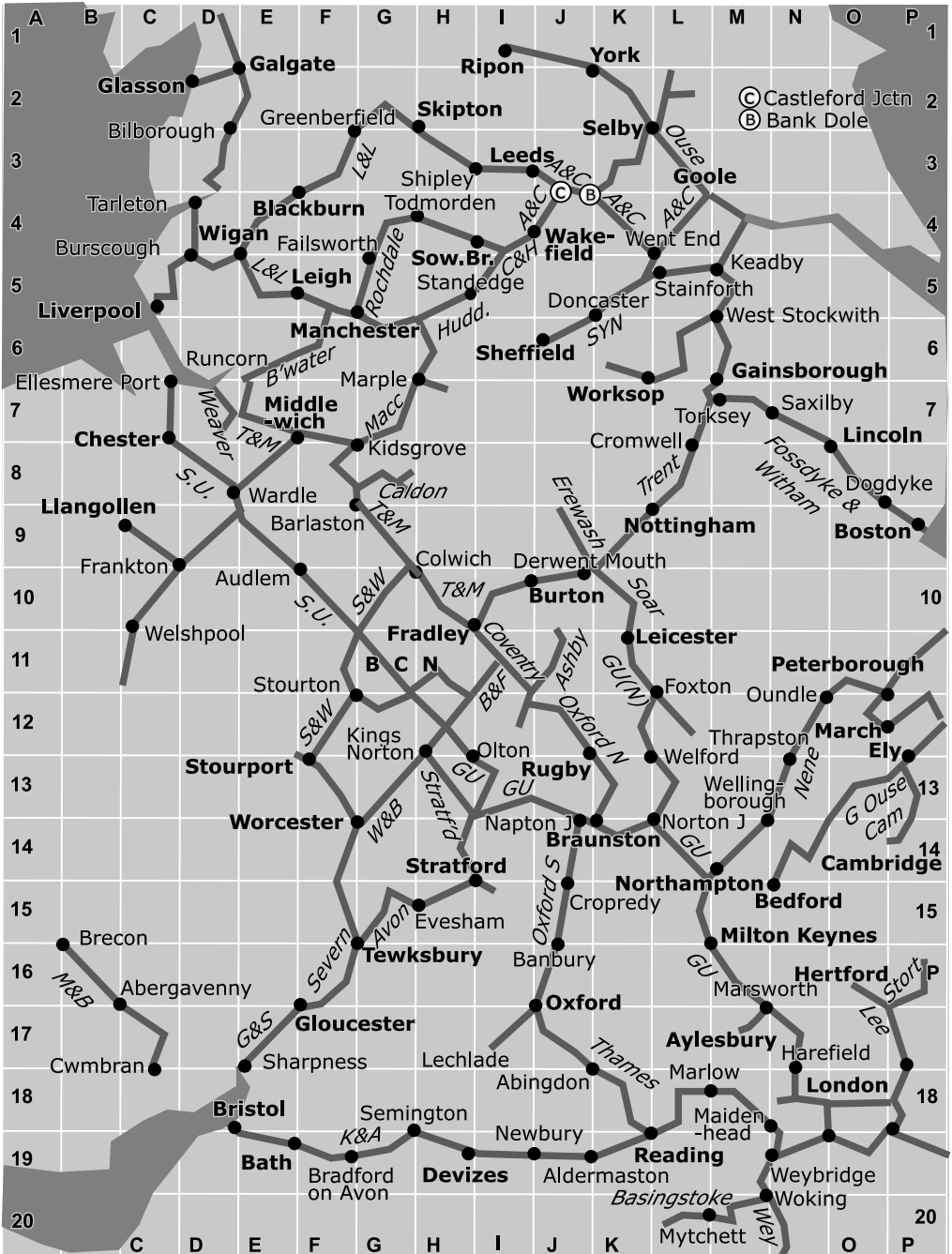
Alternatively you can view all messages posted after a certain date. You can select **'Last Day'** or **'Last Week'** from **'Discussion'** in the list on the left. **'New Messages'** under **'Utilities'** allows you to set the time span according to when you last looked.

Another option is to search for words within the messages using **'Keyword Search'** under **'Utilities'**. For instance if you want to know if a problem on the lock gates at Birchills has been fixed, a search for *'Birchills'* should find the page you want.

## Please use it.

**I have put in many hours setting it up, now its success depends on you, but please – only put up facts, keep opinions to yourself.**





**WATERWAY REPORTS SYSTEM MAP**

## Notes on the maps and how the system is divided

The waterways are divided into nineteen reporting areas, roughly according to which authority or unit manages them. This should help your comments reach the right waterway office. These areas are divided into reasonably identifiable chunks which generally contain only one waterway or part of one. Around the West Midlands, the chunks have had to be subdivided to make this possible, see below.

### The Maps

Note that on the maps the waterways have been stretched, squashed and contorted to fit a grid system which makes clicking on them easier. Some chunks have more waterway in them than others, and some are spread over two squares, either of which will select that chunk. Needless to say the original canal builders were not considering websites when they planned their waterways!

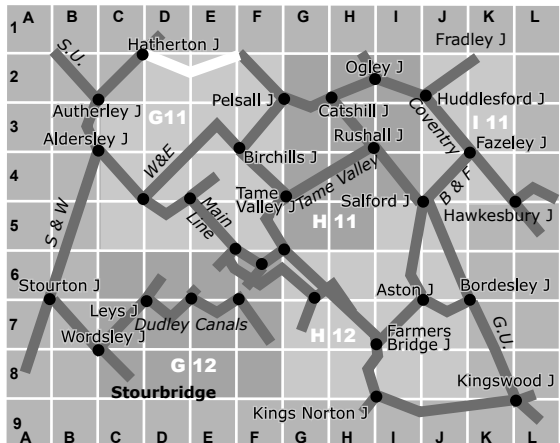
There are about 150 squares selectable, each leading to a report posting board.

### Stoppages

The fact that very few squares contain a junction makes this layout also a good basis for a route planner during the stoppage season. Work is in hand to create a web page where you can step through the weeks and see which routes should be open to you.

#### List of Areas

- BW Scotland
- BW Northwest
- BW Yorkshire
- ABP Tidal Trent
- BW Border Counties & Wales
- BW West Midlands
- BW Central Shires
- BW East Midlands
- EA Anglian
- EA/PLA Thames
- BW Southwest
- BW Southeast
- BW London
- MSC Ship Canal & Bridgewater
- Middle Level
- Norfolk Broads
- Warwickshire Avon
- Basingstoke Canal
- NT River Wey Navigation



#### West Midlands Map

Waterways in grid squares G11, H11, I11, G12 and H12 on the System Map are subdivided further and given their own selection map. If you are quoting a grid square to identify a length it is important to say which map it came from.

# NOTICES

## POST FOR NABO NEWS

For issue 3/04 please send contributions to  
48 Old Lane, Bramhope,  
Leeds LS16 9AZ

E-mail -  
news.editor@nabo.org.uk



## Fuel Tax

A big **THANK YOU** to all who filled in the questionnaires in the last issue, keep them coming in!

## FEELING UNWELL?

If you are suffering flu like symptoms, and have exposed any cuts, grazes, or your face, to canal water within the last 10 days, tell your doctor you may have Leptosporosis. If you are jaundiced too you may have Weil's disease.

## WANTED

Person with text-capable phone, internet access, time, and a bit of enthusiasm, to:-

Receive waterway reports as text messages and put them on the reports board.

## SUPPORT THE WARWICKSHIRE AVON - GU LINK Warwickshire CC is consulting!

Go to [www.warwickshire.gov.uk](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk), there there is a link to the 'Avon Navigation consultation' from the home page. Also see NABO website or IWA website for info.

>>>> DEADLINE - 12 April <<<<

## PASSWORDS

Any guidance papers tables still protected will open with password 'Branch' (Capital B)

The members-only website section has a password, which has been sent out to on-line members via the members' bulletin list.

The User ID for the members section is the word 'member'.

If you have not been given the new word please e-mail:  
[webmaster@nabo.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@nabo.org.uk) with your name and membership number to be given the password, and, if you want, to be put onto the bulletin list.



# RIVERS



Editor's Note - This article is under Rivers because:

- a) it was written by your River Users Co-ordinator;
- b) most of the structures are on, or accessed from, rivers;
- c) the rivers heading is too pretty to leave out; and
- d) no-one has written anything else about rivers this issue and we mustn't let our rivers users feel ignored!

## **ADDITIONAL CHARGES FOR USE OF BW INFRASTRUCTURE**

When British Waterways introduced changes to the craft licensing system and charges in 2003 a number of user-friendly changes were brought in following requests from NABO and other user organisations.

With the new "High Season" (BW's terminology) quickly approaching we thought it would be worthwhile to set out comprehensively the full extent of additional charges levied by BW for use of certain structures.

Access charges for use of Safe Havens no longer apply but craft may have to pay overnight mooring charges where applicable. Craft with river-only registration certificates (note - they are not "licences" despite what BW call them!) may enter West Stockwith, Keadby Lock and Gloucester Docks and may stay for up to 14 days in these havens. There is also no longer any transit charge for up to 72 hours use of the canal links between Selby and Keadby for river craft.

The circumstances where BW do make ad hoc charges are: a) where there is a clearly identifiable marginal cost to BW at specific boat/customer level and/or b) where pricing is needed as a means of managing a scarce resource e.g. overstaying at particularly popular visitor moorings.

There are no longer any charges for access through the Anderton Boat Lift, Standedge Tunnel and the Ribble Link by craft with long term licences.

Generally there is no charge for long term or short term BW licence holders making passage through locks and access to docks/havens/rivers etc where BW waterways connect to other navigations or coastal waters. Charges for Dee Locks in Chester and Marsh Locks on the river Weaver have not applied since last year. However, there are a number of specific exceptions that prove the rule.

### **Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and River Severn**

Use of river locks and canal bridges is subject to out of hours charges levied at £20 per hour + VAT.

Charges of £20 per craft single passage and £40 return passage apply at Sharpness Sea Lock only for craft with short-term licences or river certificates. Holders of 3, 6 or 12-month licences or certificates do not have to pay extra. Please note - it does not matter what type of licence you have.

## **Standedge Tunnel**

Charges apply only to short-term licence holders (i.e. 1 day, 1 week or 1 month). These are £35 per boat for single passage (including up to 4 passengers) and £60 return passage.

## **London Waterways**

Use of West India Dock Entrance lock is free up to one hour either side of high water during working hours. Mooring charges of £20 per night then apply.

There are no additional charges for use of the locks at Limehouse, Bow or Brentford.

## **River Weaver**

Charges are only applicable for out of hours lock and bridge passage which is £50 per man + VAT for up to 4 hours and £12.50 per man + VAT for every hour thereafter.

## **Dee Branch locks, Chester**

Charges only apply for out of hours passage at the rate of £18.50 single passage. Opening times are Monday - Friday 8.30 am to 5.00 pm.

## **Anderton Lift**

Short-term licence holders pay £20 for a single passage and £30 return.

## **Ribble Link**

Holders of long-term licences pay nothing extra and the link is manned during operating hours. BW staff operate the staircase flight locks (1-3) and sea lock 9. Other locks 4 - 8 are operated by customers.

## **Scotland**

Scottish waterways are subject to a separate licensing regime and craft using the Falkirk Wheel are allowed 2 free return passages per annum if they have a Lowlands Canal licence. Otherwise the charge is £20 return.

There are no extra separate charges for lock use on the Caledonian or Crinan canals for craft holding the relevant licences.

Let us know if you encounter any problems with unauthorised charges being levied. Or if you get away scot-free! We promise to publish details of the former but we might keep mum if we receive any of the latter!!

*Stephen Peters*

**CRICK SHOW 29th to 31st of May**

**If you can help in any way please contact Aileen  
on 0207 723 2424 or e-mail [events@nabo.org.uk](mailto:events@nabo.org.uk)**

# KEEPING AFLOAT

Must you leave the waterways when owning is too expensive?

Alan and Sheila Gilby's answer:

Our first boating experience on inland waterways was in 1954 on a small hired craft on the River Thames. There followed annual excursions on the Thames, Broads and eventually on canals up and down the country, and also in Scotland and France.

At different times we thought of purchasing our own boat, even living aboard, but other commitments ruled this out with the feeling that ownership at that time would almost certainly lead to a boat languishing in some far off mooring for most of its time.

As retirement approached, however, we felt the time was at last ripe to venture into buying our own narrowboat, with the thought of halcyon days ahead. A 50 foot eighteen month old semi-trad was our first venture in the early nineties, followed five years later in the commissioning of a 55 foot trad with full sized bath (for end of day wallowing after extensive lock work), washing machine, bow thruster, etc.

Whilst able to spend a few weeks at a time on the boat travelling in most directions from our mooring at Crick, we never had time to live aboard. Even in retirement, other commitments always seemed to intervene.

In time, we became aware of ever increasing costs - licence fees particularly, mooring fees, maintenance and servicing (limited mechanical know-how didn't help), and always some extra needed. We suddenly realised how much of our annual retirement budget was being directed into keeping the boat afloat and legal.

Much as we wanted to continue boating as long as physically able, we

recognised that we could no longer continue in the present way. Very, very reluctantly (and owners who have faced this situation will know how we felt) some two and a half years ago, we decided to sell our pride and joy. By then, however, we had realised there was a possible compromise in moving into shared ownership. Not the ideal, of course, but realistic, and with the sale of our boat, came the opportunity to take a twelfth share, not only in a narrowboat, but also in a Broads cruiser, and leave a healthy sum to spare.

Each share-holding gives us four weeks boating annually - weeks being drawn at an A.G.M. of our particular syndicate - giving a week in each season with the opportunity to negotiate changes amongst co-owners.

A service charge (payable half-yearly) covers repairs, maintenance and running costs (moorings, licence fees, insurance, etc), and any changes (improvements) mutually agreed by the share-holders.

There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages to shared ownership.

On the plus side there really does remain the pleasure of ownership, albeit shared with others of like mind. A quality craft (in our case a Challenger Syndicate 62 foot semi-trad - six berth, two toilets, hydraulic bow-thruster, etc.) of a build value probably much greater than the average boater would feel able to afford.

The downside is not being able to use the boat as the mood takes. We have no regrets, though occasionally we do

Many of our boating colleagues see co-ownership as a stepping stone to owning their own boat, if not before, in retirement. We have journeyed in the opposite direction, seeing shared

ownership as a way of continuing to enjoy our love of the waterways at a cost we can afford as we celebrate fifty years of boating in 2004.

*Alan and Sheila*

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

As you may have read in NABO News, the Association has started a major new initiative -- **the waterway dossiers**. The basic idea is for NABO to keep track of current concerns about local waterways, as background for our discussions with the navigation authorities (locally and nationally) and for forming our national policy.

The way this is planned to work is to assign each stretch of waterway to an individual NABO member -- the length monitor. The monitor should travel his length (by boat or on the towpath) at least once every three months, and report on new problems observed, and on what progress has been made on resolving previously-identified problems.

Each whole waterway will be assigned to a dossier manager, who will maintain a current status report for that waterway, using information from the length monitors, and from individual cruising members via the Internet. The dossier managers will support the NABO secretary for the region.

## WILL YOU HELP PLEASE?

To make sure everything works properly, we are starting the scheme as a pilot in the London region, covering the Stort, Lee, Grand Union south of Stockers Lock (including the Slough and Paddington arms, the Regent's, and the Hertford Union), and the Thames from Molesey Lock to the barrier. We will later use what we learn from this to amend the approach as required before we roll it out nationwide.

We will give the monitors an explanation about what to look for and how to report it, and simple forms for making the reports.

So, we are now looking for volunteers to be length monitors on the London waterways.

If you are interested, pick a length of waterway (as long or short as you like), and email your choice to me ( [london.sec@nabo.org.uk](mailto:london.sec@nabo.org.uk)). I'll take it from there.

Obviously, without the monitors, the scheme isn't going to work at all, so please volunteer if you can. After all, isn't this the sort of thing you joined NABO for?

This is **not** an onerous task! You probably travel along your local length every now and then anyway, if not by boat perhaps when you're walking the dog. Here's your chance to help NABO do its job, while you're enjoying the waterways.

And you won't be able to say any more, "*I can't understand why they don't **do** something about that,*" the next time you come across the same old broken paddle or collapsing towpath.

I'll hope to hear from you.

Adrian

[adrian-nabo@enable.telinco.com](mailto:adrian-nabo@enable.telinco.com) Telephone 07956-299966



Yes please!

## **FROM BRITISH WATERWAYS Re DATA PROTECTION**

In the February issue of NABO News, your correspondent 'A Boater', in a letter headed 'Council Tax', indicated that it was all-too-easy for British Waterways and local Government to share information on boaters.

I want to make it absolutely clear that BW is bound by, and complies with both the letter and the spirit, of the Data Protection Act, which sets out very clearly what records may be kept on individuals and how those records should be protected and can be used. We never share information about customers without their consent, except when required by law to do so. We are for example, expected to disclose information in certain circumstances, such as to help in the detection of a crime.

We have records because we need to know who uses the waterways: to manage licensing and moorings in respect of boaters, but also to help us understand how people use our canals and rivers, and for what purposes, and where. This information helps us to make the right decisions to achieve best value from our income on behalf of all those who help to fund the network, and to improve the waterways to provide what users want.

Finally, BW is very aware that there is a shortage of moorings with planning permission for residential use, and we are working widely to influence local planning authorities in order to improve on this situation for the benefit of boaters and other waterway users.

*Nigel Johnson - Director, Legal Department BW*

*Advertisement*



# FLY ON THE WALL



## at Council

I'm back on the wall watching a full council meeting, except for Gordon...not so much sympathy this time as he's apparently sunning himself under the eye of a continental fly. Let's hope he's well enough for the next meeting.

Many of you may have heard that BW has suddenly abandoned the Moorings Code. It did seem to be unenforceable! BUT you don't get off completely...in comes the Continuous Cruising Guidelines! These are guidance on what is expected of continuous cruisers. User groups will submit their comments. It's not perfect but your Council welcomes it in principle subject of course to reconsideration after implementation. But beware, those taking advantage of the respite may be in for a shock after the winter stoppages when BW could well carry out a purge using the powers of the 1995 Act.

You may like to know that the latest definition of 'place' is a locality with an identity, which seems to make more sense. And BW will now be sorting those residential moorings which need planning permission. And EA is considering standardising its charging

schemes so that there is just the one common to all its waterways.

Did you know that BW charge VAT on canal licences? They also charge it on river licences, which should really be called registrations. But you may not know that the Environmental Agency don't charge VAT on these 'licences', actually certificates, as there is a common law right of navigation on rivers. The VAT office thinks BW is right. EA doesn't! Watch this space.

If you've bought a licence recently you should have received the new licensing conditions. Council will scrutinize them in the light of previous Acts. 'Terms and Conditions' should contain only things that are enforceable under law and not guidelines and good boating behaviour. Council thinks the new formula for licence increases should be extended to other kinds of charging.

They think NABO should join RYA and IWA to help fund the research on red diesel so that boat owners will also have a voice. For the purposes of pricing, red diesel is being regarded solely as a propulsion fuel, but as many of you know, boat owners use it for many things that are not propulsion; central heating, cooking, heating stoves and of course engine running to top up batteries. Many replies to the questionnaire have been received. If you haven't yet done so please complete and return the questionnaire from the last magazine about how you use diesel.

Have any of you more comments about hirers being able to become associate members of NABO? See the letter page for two opposing views. Council decided that those who share ownership of a boat should be regarded as proper boat owners, and should be able to be members in their own right. Indeed some members find share- ownership a good way to 'downsize' and stay boating without so much responsibility and expense as owning their own boat.

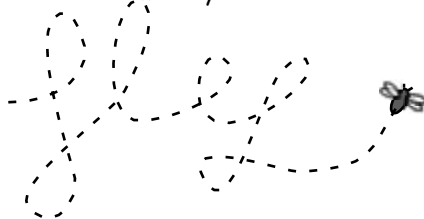
The NABO website has started to get your canal reports and you are using the facility too. If you can't get onto the website you can still send your report to

a new e-mail facility with contact to the website. Use email address **reports@nabo.org.uk**.

There was a feeling that NABO's Policy needed review and that you could help in this. More on that in the future.

Your Council were in decisive mood weren't they?! They are also looking forward to hearing from you one way or another and to seeing you at this year's rallies.

Till next time - Byeeeeeeeee



## COUNCIL MEMBER'S BOATING LIFESTYLES

The **Chairman** leaves a narrow beam Dutch style barge on a BW offside mooring from autumn to spring and cruises continuously during the 'season'.

The **Vice Chairman** lives aboard a narrowboat which he cruises as much as he can on BW waters between the junctions with Thames at Reading and the tidal Avon at Bristol.

The **Gen. Secretary** does it with the Chairman – BOATING of course!!

The **Treasurer** has a narrowboat on moorings on the Bridgewater, in which he cruises for several weeks at a time.

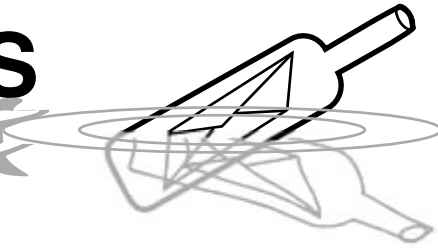
The **River Users Co-ordinator** co-ordinates his use of the River Severn mainly at weekends aboard a 30 foot Seamaster motor cruiser.

Nobody seems to know what the **Anglian Secretary** does, but we find him elusive between meetings in the summer so we assume he is off boating.

The **Midlands Secretary** has a partner and up to four offspring inhabiting her boat much of the time, and so enjoys the freedom to moor outside her marina as much as possible.

The **Events Co-ordinator** has no home mooring, weekending her boat most of the year when she is working, and living aboard during the summer. She points out that you don't have to live on board to abide by the rules.

# LETTERS



## Owners only

In the latest NABO News, you ask views on granting associate membership to hirers and those in shared ownership schemes. I venture to offer our views, which are based on over twenty years boating - hiring, borrowing boats, six years in shared ownership before having our own boat built in 2001.

I would oppose such a move, for various reasons. I do not think that many hirers would consider themselves eligible for membership [we didn't], and generally, hirers simply want to enjoy a great holiday, with none of the responsibilities which go with ownership.

Shared ownership is a little less clear cut, but again, I believe that they should not be included. Although boaters in shared schemes like to think that they 'own' a boat [or part thereof], they do not have the responsibilities of ownership. Any issues are raised via their managing agents, who will negotiate on their behalf, often with considerable success due to the large 'fleets' they represent. Those who choose the shared path do so for a number of reasons, lack of time particularly if they are working, lack of capital, or the desire to tie up such a large proportion of disposable cash in a boat, or simply the lack of commitment to boating. When we took

delivery of our new boat in 2001, we found ourselves like 'new boys' despite over twenty years boating under our belts. And now more than two years down the line, we are still learning, and will no doubt continue to learn the pitfalls of ownership.

Please don't think that we are anti-share; on the contrary, we recommend this route to anyone lacking the time and/or cash to invest in their own boat. We had six years of happy boating, covering many different waterways, but it isn't the same, believe me.

If these people want to show their concern for navigation issues and the like, there are other avenues open to them, such as the IWA, local canal societies, amenity groups etc.

Please remember our name, the National Association of Boat OWNERS. Surely that says it all.

Erica Martin  
nb Yeomans at Endon

## In contrast...

First a comment on the pronouncing of NABO, We use NABBOW but have heard one group of young children use NABOOO, (Which they seemed to feel was scary!)

**Note** – Views expressed in readers' letters are not to be taken as those of NABO as a whole

Now to non-boat owners as members of NABO, It has already happened! Many years ago I was (possibly) the first one. In those days, spending all our 6 weeks holidays hiring while not expecting to own a boat I had tons of experience (having spent over a year of nights sleeping on boats), And, having had 20 years of the foibles of BW I felt that no-one really represented my boaters point of view. Enter NABO - whose aims seemed to match mine - so I wrote to the then chairman explaining that I lacked a boat or the likelihood of getting one but shared the NABO point of view so could I join. He was happy to have me,

Later, on retirement, we had the money for a boat of our own on which we displayed our NABO stickers. But we also displayed our NABO stickers when hiring. (A tip here - attach stickers, not to your windows but to a bit of transparent plastic. This allows you to keep your stickers and your windows clean with the plastic propped in the window frame. It also works for licence holders and, at home, for Neighbourhood Watch stickers - which should never look old lest the criminals think your 'watch' is past it!)

Anyway, showing NABO stickers when hiring normally went down well and elicited many enquiries about joining NABO by (true) boat owners, but there was always the odd exception. I well remember one gent who, we understood, had recently found canals, bought a boat and joined the (exclusive) NABO club.

(no riff raff allowed!) He had apoplexy when he saw our hire boat with NABO stickers and realised that he had just spent some time being instructed in how to work a lock (his first) by a mere hirer!

Stories apart you might guess I am for letting non-boaters into NABO but,.. Any such scheme must be a little limited in its scope. Over the years we have seen the IWA slowly move from a 'pro-boats moving on canals' group to the 'dilute lot of BW yes-men and waffle artists' which seems to be their modern roll. It was this change of attitude that spawned NABO in the first place, With this in mind we must be careful with how we allow non-boaters in, We don't want an eco takeover for example - god forbid given the direction that BW/IWA seem to be heading,

David Cragg

### **And another. .**

I say 'yes' to associate membership for those who hire or share boats. My brother-in-law was just as keen a boater when he used to hire as after he had to be skipper and engineer for Nancy Bell. And certainly a lot of hirers out-boat many boat owners. (Me included now, unfortunately).

Nancy

### **Emigrate - the only answer!**

My partner has been boating for 30 years and eight for me, six of which we were residential. Wonderful times we

had but it was changing constantly for the worse and like a lot of the British population we have also decided to flee the country.

We have exchanged our beautiful ex working boat for an equally beautiful barn which we are converting here in France. It has also to be said that it is cheaper to live here in a huge house than on BW waters, which rather says it all.

All but two lots of long term boating friends have left the cut, all citing the same reasons but this will of course suit the new regime that is BW, they do not want people to remember what freedom we had and the days when one could cruise equally in the winter as in the summer. The w/e floating cottage sitting in the marinas all but for a few days of the year suits their purpose so well, while they sit back and collect the considerable revenue which comes from this source.

We never envisaged leaving the cut, intending to end our days on the boat. However life has led us in a new direction and we intend to carry on growing old disgracefully, but in a different and exciting way. Who knows we may even get a boat over here one day.

I could go on but will bore you no longer.

We do wish to keep in touch with what is going on and we hope that NABO will continue to be a thorn in the side of BW and keep on fighting for the boaters who have no chance of escape should they wish and who have no real voice other than through yourselves.

Keep up the good work.

An ex-British-boater

### **One good turn..**

A small thought for the new year. Ever wondered about the origin of the word for 'winding holes'?

Over Christmas I had a book on the origins of the English language. One of the words rang a chord. 'Wennd' is Old English (pre Norman) for 'turn'. So whenever we wind or wend our boats in a winning or wending hole we have a connection with our Saxon forbears. Wend must have been used in the folk tradition at least to the start of the Canal age, and is maybe still in use in some dialects. We also wind up our clocks which is an operation involving turning, but I never made the connection to the canal usage.

Chris Boxall

### **3 - 2 - 1 - THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!**

Have you seen BW's new plans for their maintenance fleet? They will be making Pods, which can be floated to the site by barge or craned off a truck, but not, as far as we know, raised up into some hopelessly un-aerodynamic green thing which launches off a ramp, but maybe.... It would have to be blue!

There will be welfare pods, workshop pods, maybe pee pods?

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