

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS

NABO



NEWS

- **BW Admits Duty to Boat Owners**
- **Diesel Latest** • **Grid Refs Explained**
- **Visitor Moorings Policy in making**



Issue 3

May 2008

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Editor's Notes

'You Say' in this issue is **still** taking comments from the rich pickings from the CSS survey. Thank you again.

Articles

It is good to see an increasing variety of contributors, though still mainly Council members – saves me having to create content to fill the pages. More articles welcome, especially from non-political folk. Humour, practical tips - need more.

Photos

Colour isn't needed so you can send it as a greyscale image if it saves you time or hassle .

The subject part of a picture doesn't need to be any bigger than 1500 pixels wide so you might want to crop or reduce the definition of a shot before you send it.

2008 CALENDAR

Council meeting	NN Copy date
7th June	14th June
12th July	19th July
6th Sept	13th Sept
22nd Nov	AGM
29th Nov	6th Dec

BW ADMITS DUTY TO BOAT OWNERS

'... I was thinking very recently that there are 30,000 boats on the network and if each one of those is worth £30,000, that is almost £1 billion worth of investment that people have in the existing network in all those boats. We cannot allow the network to fall away and to become unfunctionable because it is a huge investment by people and so that has to be the priority...'

This nugget from Robin Evans was unearthed from the 'uncorrected' oral evidence to the EFRA Select Committee when they 'revisited' the relationship between BW and the Government.

To appreciate its significance one must understand that the Select Committee system is an essential behind-the-scenes moderator in the core of British Parliamentary democracy. The committees, which have members from government and opposition parties, have the right to investigate and pass judgement on any issue of their choosing relating to the departments they oversee, and both the evidence they collect and the conclusions they draw are made available for public scrutiny.

The committee that concerns itself with the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs became aware of the problems between BW and DEFRA at the time of the 'Cuts' and their investigation found both parties wanting. This April they called BW to account again to hear how relations were improving and learnt that the new Waterways Minister and his team had given BW what they called a 'Strategic Steer'.

This, in effect, called for BW to re-focus its attention on looking after the network, which should be good news for those sceptics who believe waterways are secondary to BW's property ventures. It is also good news to see that the investment by boat owners '*in the existing network*' is one of the reasons quoted for the 'steer' by BW's Chief Executive when he was called before this panel of MPs with no specific interest in boaters.

NABO's Chairman is delighted to hear BW quoting the NABO message of its own volition: ***'The surest way to know someone has accepted your idea is to hear them claiming it as their own!'***

DIESEL LATEST

Simon Robbins represented NABO at HMRC meeting on 30/4/08

Arrangements are far from finalised but the direction of travel looks to be:

Anyone buying red diesel at less than full rate will always have to make simple declaration at the point of purchase. Revenue and Customs are working on a suitable form of words but they are anxious that this be kept very simple and may simply be a signature from the purchaser. There will probably also be an option where you can do an annual declaration with a given boatyard/marina supplier and all diesel bought from that source for the following year will be covered without signing each time you purchase.

The consensus at the meeting was that most boaters will then buy at a single rate at the pump which assumes the diesel bought is used in a fixed ratio of use between navigational use and 'Domestic' use. Where the assumed ratio will be set is still under discussion but there seemed to be a strong acceptance from HMRC that there will be one! User Groups have been asked to offer formal submissions to HMRC about where the split should lie.

The meeting recognised that this will still leave a few people substantially worse off, those who use a much higher proportion of diesel for domestic purposes rather than navigation compared to the fixed percentage split. The difficulty is there is no common pattern of use in such cases and HMRC do not want to create a complicated individual rebate system. More thought is however being given to this subject and the Residential Boat Owners Association and the Barge Association in particular will be working with Customs and Revenues to see if there can be a proportionate rebate system for users who have already bought at the pump price but have a substantial case to claim additional rebate over and above the flat percentage.

BW NATIONAL USER GROUP MEETING

Howard Anguish reports from the Spring 'WUSIG' meeting

Formerly known as 'Boating Issues' and 'Corridor Issues' but now combined, the first of two WUSIG meetings this year was held at the British Waterways Offices at Hatton on Wednesday 16 April and I attended to keep a watching brief on behalf of NABO. For those who are unfamiliar with WUSIG, this stands for "Waterway User & Special Interest Groups", a new name for a well established forum for the exchange of view between most of the user groups who use British Waterways facilities and the central management of British Waterways. As such it concentrates mainly on national issues, whereas the local and regional user group meetings tend to deal mainly with more local issues.

The meeting, chaired by BW's Consultation Co-ordinator, Jonathan Bryant, was well attended by representatives from over 35 user groups with many interests represented, ranging from angling, cycling, rambling, horse boating, commercial boat operators, IWA, RBOA, historic boats, and of course NABO. Representing BW were two Directors, Vince Moran and Simon Salem, plus Sally Ash.

There was a large and detailed agenda so I will try to give a flavour of what was discussed, although if anyone wishes to have more details, the meeting notes will shortly be published on the BW web site under the “accountability” section.

An interesting first topic was that of lock gearing and the determination of a reasonable force which a user should expect to have to shift moveable structures such as paddles, gates, lock beams etc. A suggestion that 50% of the strength of the ‘average woman’ should be used was dismissed in favour of setting a numerical value of 40 Newton (the force needed to lift about 9 pounds weight) but this will be further researched by BW before implementation.

Items such as a growing concern regarding the lack of dredging, not knowing the location of dimensional pinch points on the system, and the gauging of boats on the various waterways, was again discussed at length with strong points being made from many around the table. A study is at last underway regarding pinch points and the details will be published in the near future.

A long debate concerned the recently introduced Customer Service Standards (CSS) which were now being implemented throughout the system. Because these were largely put in place before sufficient consultation had taken place with users, many at the meeting considered some of the standards to be ill-conceived and that there was a great need to monitor and control this policy to avoid waste and to manage the changes. Simon Salem announced that BW will be setting up a Review Panel consisting of people from consumer boating groups, the trade and BW, to oversee monitoring, review progress and recommend additions and/or modifications. This panel will be formed very shortly and NABO hope to have a representative on it to look after members’ interests. (See pages 10 and 14)

On-going items such as the mooring tender trial, BW’s role in regeneration and restoration in the light of their withdrawal of funding for the Cotswold Canal Project and a number of items described as towpath matters: access, vegetation control, and so on, were also on the agenda, as was the implementation of better consultation between BW and its customers.

A recent request by NABO to look at the problem of overstaying at moorings and the need for the setting of consistent standards and rules to control this overstaying was acknowledged at the meeting by the introduction of a draft direction paper for BW staff in order to set up nationwide guidelines, using signing and setting up monitoring procedures. This initiative was cautiously approved by the meeting but there is still work to be done on some of the detail and BW will be reworking this guidance note in the near future with a copy also being made available for customers. (More on page 6)

Finally, BW also outlined their proposals on the introduction of the late payment charge, first announced as a result of the licence fee consultation process held recently. Again the meeting cautiously welcomed most of the proposals but asked for some details to be “tweaked” before implementation.

All in all this was a generally positive meeting and with distinct signs that BW seem to be listening at last to its customers. Let’s hope that this continues. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 12 November

VISITOR MOORINGS - GETTING BW'S PRIORITIES RIGHT?

Simon Robbins reports on BW's latest draft policy

In the last NABO News I reported that River Thames Alliance members, led by the Environment Agency, are undertaking a review of the management and availability of visitor moorings and facilities on the EA Thames navigation. We seem to have managed to initiate a similar review from BW!

Carole, with active support from the rest of Council, has put many hours over several years into persuading BW to undertake a similar exercise on their navigations. Despite knockbacks and procrastination from BW, our requests have finally been more fully acknowledged.

The paper we and other user groups have just received, entitled '**Time limits at moorings which are not designated long term moorings**', represents BW's first draft proposals to consider and review the overall rationale and management of visitors moorings. Although the paper only arrived a couple of days before the most recent national user group meeting, and also given that there are related issues raised in other papers, (classic BW consultation overload - nothing for ages then loads in the weeks leading up to the national user group meeting!), on the whole we are encouraged. The central themes which NABO have for some time been arguing need urgent attention, are two-fold.

- BW to adopt a more consistent approach where there is a case for imposing shorter than 14 day limits on visitors moorings, and
- that enforcement action against overstayers needs much greater consistency of approach and outcomes, (whatever the time limit at a given site).

The sub-headings here are mine rather than BW's, but I hope give a clear sense of what is proposed?

1. Monitoring and enforcement - 'Obstruction' of 'service points'

By service points I mean access to rubbish, water and elsan points and landings for locks and bridges. These are essential services for all boaters while cruising. Most boaters seem to respect these areas – they use the facilities and then shuffle along to allow the next boater to use them. Where people are less considerate this effects many other boaters using that navigation.

BW have proposed they should take much more prompt and active action against the small minority of boaters who overstay on these shared facilities. We cautiously welcome the proposal that BW patrol staff should be empowered to move craft at short notice without the permission of the owner if they overstay at these key locations. BW are still working through the details of this but are investigating the idea that they should apply their general powers (under Section 8 (5) of the BW Act 1984) to physically move the craft to another nearby location, where it is no longer obstructing other boaters from getting to the service point. (Note the distinction with other Section 8 powers - in this instance the boat is moved somewhere more appropriate but not seized). On the occasions where this happens BW will look to recover a charge for their time and trouble.

What minimum notice BW can or should give when proposing to move people's

boats in this way, and what charge should be sought from the 'offending' boater, is still under discussion as far as Council is concerned. 'In the first 24 hours' is under serious consideration, if the lawyers can be persuaded to give it the nod! What level of charges should apply is also something we want to think about some more and talk to BW about further, but we agree with the principle that BW should be enabled to act more quickly in the worst cases and seek to recover a reasonable cost.

BW have also suggested that such action, i.e. physically moving 'obstructing' boats, might be extended to overstaying on visitor moorings generally. We are a bit more cautious about that one and I for one am poring over the legislation closely!

2. Access to 'Attractions',

I am here talking particularly about access to very useful but non essential facilities, i.e. true 'Visitor' moorings adjacent or close to shopping facilities, town centres and the most popular pubs etc. We think that at these facilities there is a good case for having variously: 24 hour; 48 hour; or 7 day limits on the moorings nearest to these attractions. We don't think the initial paper goes into this rationale enough (yet). The detail will need careful examination in each case, but our suggestion is that there effectively be concentric mooring zones at different distances from the attraction. The nearer you moor to the attraction, the shorter the time limit so that there is clear zoning of a few visitor berths for 'passing trade', but still opportunities to stay longer nearby, if not right on top of, your favourite hostelry/restaurants/town centre.

3. Most popular visitor moorings

Sheer numbers of boats cruising in the most popular areas in high season means we and BW agree it is time to look closely at this. There is a case for suggesting that in particularly busy stretches there should be more 7 day limits on general visitor moorings (as opposed to the default 14 day limits). Ideally there should be a mix of durations of different periods in a locality, if this can be achieved in a way that is clear and manageable both for boaters and BW patrol staff.

BW are also suggesting that in very popular areas there should exceptionally be mandatory overnight charges - we are extremely cautious about this one and think this should be a last resort when all other options (including providing more visitor moorings in the area first!) have been exhausted. To be fair we have not been made aware of immediate plans to develop this, and it is something maybe to look at in a year or two's time, I say, only if and when other options have been exhausted.

4. "Genuine" overstayers

BW have accepted suggestions for a visible and accountable system of "Special Arrangements" where BW can temporarily manage and monitor those few cases where there are exceptional delays which result in overstaying, (e.g. a major health emergency or major mechanical breakdown). We support the idea that Patrol Staff should enjoy a better accountability system where they have reason to use their discretion. The draft paper proposes a clear 'window sticker' style permit so that the public and other patrol staff can quickly sort the sheep from the goats. We broadly support this as long as it is closely monitored and public data provided on how often and why these exceptions occur.

5. Seasonal/Winter Moorings

NABO has long advocated that the system already used in some regions of providing temporary towpath winter moorings in some locations off season should be further developed. The paper recognises this and we hope that this can be developed further over the summer by regional offices and trialled in more locations next winter. If sensibly priced, this is a facility that many continuous cruisers (and extended cruisers with home berths elsewhere) might welcome and which will also generate BW a small but significant sum in short term fees. (I will be arguing strongly that such fees should be recycled into repairing and improving other local boating facilities and dredging!)

6. Overstaying charges

There is also some useful clarification in the paper over the basis on which BW justifies the £25 a day overstay charge. The emphasis (rightly we think) is that this must be regarded as reflecting actual patrol and enforcement costs. Some more esoteric details on all this are still being mused over though.

What next?

Some initial suggestions about areas that may need further work from BW to develop this idea in a fair and transparent way include:

- a) Gathering and publishing better and more consistent data on bottlenecks (which in turn implies the need for lots of short term 'transit' moorings for craft waiting to pass through) and evidence-based data identifying other areas where there is high demand for visitors moorings.
- b) Collating national data on numbers and locations of overstay patrol notices issued, both to help build a case both to show where the problems are and to monitor and more effectively target the outcomes of patrol staff's work.
- c) Differentiating clearly between overstaying (licensed) boats and unlicensed boats. There are two separate problems that can look like the same thing here.

(I would also like to see clear differentiation in such statistics between how many overstayers are continuous cruisers and how many not. On the last numbers I saw, even if every patrol notice BW issues is to an overstayer and every overstayer is a continuous cruiser, the maths suggest that 90% of continuous cruisers are fully complying with the rules and guidelines at any one time. Lets finally have some hard facts to look at, please!)

Please let us have your thoughts on these suggestions and any others you think of.

The plan on BW's side, which we broadly approve of, is to use this season to monitor and collect data and that regional moorings managers should in effect be working towards first draft local moorings plans by Christmas 2008. We will let you know more about how things develop - but we would very much like members to bear all this in mind over the coming months when you are out and about boating. We and other user groups will doubtless be asking you for feedback in the Autumn on where you encountered problems relating to any of the above this year. As ever you can also, if you like, give this to BW direct in the usual ways!

Summary

Old cynics like me are tempted to say we have heard a lot of this before and are still waiting to see how much BW can deliver and how quickly and consistently. One can also ask whether BW are only looking to ration existing facilities as opposed to addressing the underlying problem - more boats on the system requires more facilities.

What I think is new, (the previous absence of which we have berated BW about for some time) is that BW seem to accept in principal the need to adopt and maintain clearer national standards around these issues. As I say, all this is hot off the press and the next thing that needs to be done is for the BW national moorings team to have fuller discussions with user group reps and BW patrol staff, to work out what of the things proposed is most practical and quickest and easiest achieved.

But the latest aspirations to try to manage what we've got already more thoughtfully are welcome, even though it has taken longer than we would have liked to approach this subject properly. Many of the practical things we have berated BW about from the boater's point of view over the last couple of years at least seem to finally be creeping into higher positions on the BW agenda.

*Simon
Moorings Matters*

LIVERPOOL NEXT YEAR?

Richard Carpenter seeks help to produce new guide

We are working locally with the West Lancs. and Merseyside branch of the IWA to put together a bang-up-to-date guide to the area from Wigan down to Liverpool in time for next years opening and cruising season down into the Albert Dock.

The aim is to provide new and up to date information for cruising, mooring, safety and vital facilities.



The locks down to the docks

At the same time we hope to bring boating visitors to the region, prompted by being able to cruise all the way into the Albert Dock, lots of local information on the history and infrastructure of the region.

The best bit is that we are seeking local cruising members of NABO to help with the research! Someone will have to test all the inns in the area for example (don't all shout at once!). We want to look at all the moorings, check for depth, check for ease of towpath access etc. not only in the obvious places but out in the country.

Let Richard Carpenter know if you would like to help?

The NABO News issue in the New Year will tell you how and where you can pick up this guide free of charge – so get planning for a trip next year to the Albert Dock and the Ribble Link over to the Lancaster – areas that have benefited from massive investment and the energy of many User groups and Organisations.

A POINT TO PONDER

Caution - opinions expressed here will remain anonymous, are independent of NABO official policy, and statements herein have not been verified as true fact.

BW is currently wheeling out its Customer Service Standards (CSS) and on the face of it they have to be congratulated in their aims to improve customer service. Nobody can argue, I hope, against the wish to improve standards and to provide a better service to all those users who enjoy the superb waterway network which we have inherited is one to which everyone should aspire to, and we should applaud them that they seem to be taking this initiative.

However, in my opinion it is not all good news, and I am concerned that some of the standards which are currently being acted upon are not only flawed but are costing a fortune at a time when BW is suffering large budget deficits as a direct legacy of the Defra cutbacks over the last year or so.

I would also say in passing that some of the standards which are spelt out in the "People Standards" section of the CSS list should go without saying and should have been in place many years ago. The need for the inclusion of such items as item 6, for example "*BW people have an overall understanding of the waterways network and destinations around it*" beggars belief!

The one single standard, however, which seems to be causing universal adverse comment is in the Safety Standards section. I refer to item 2d – *2 Locks. Narrow locks have three holding points on the same side as the ladder. Wide locks have three holding points on both sides.* Firstly, are three bollards absolutely necessary? Some means of holding a boat temporarily especially for those boating single

handed is useful, two is more than satisfactory but three..... - especially in locks where the lock ladder(s) obstruct the use of ropes!



The picture is of one of the locks at Audlem where all locks have been fitted with bollards in line with the standard. However, a recent photograph in *Narrowboatworld* shows a boater ignoring all these bollards in favour of using one of the ladders to secure his boat – I suspect because the bollards are both badly sited and difficult to use. It seems to be that no thought is being given to local conditions and the use of a little common sense, and when the cost of this is multiplied throughout the system it could be regarded as a great waste of money.

Another item which seems to be incurring waste is in the numbering of bridges and locks where each structure is currently being fitted with a number plate, even where there is already a perfectly good number plate in place (I have seen for example, a lock balance beam which has three separate markings!)

Please don't misunderstand me in my criticism, however. Like many others I am pleased to see this initiative but I only wish that they had involved the users more before drawing up the list. It is gratifying to hear that BW will shortly be setting up a review panel to monitor and control the standards and that this panel will include users.

Maybe we will also be able to persuade BW to start using decent rope to secure their working craft rather than the usual bits of rotten blue rope, and I am sure we can all talk of examples where staff safety standards could be improved. I'll leave you with just one example seen recently.



Chairman's Note - The results of the survey on CSS which some of you helped us with has been received by BW with polite thanks and forwarded to the Market Research Department. No further direct communication has been forthcoming. See page 14

MOORINGS WARDENS

Be-Ware

If any NABO members are, like me, BW moorings wardens, please be aware that BW are reviewing terms and conditions.

NABO and I only learnt of this through enquiries from two wardens who have been approached direct by BW. Moorings wardens generally and user groups have not been consulted in advance about the proposed changes, in my case even though I personally highlighted that this item needed clarification during an Ombudsman Complaint a few year ago.

Please let me know if this effects you because there are some major concerns about what seems to be being proposed and if others feel as concerned as I do, we may need to act collectively.

Simon, Moorings Matters

YOU SAY



"customer usage may well drop off if vegetation is not maintained appropriately. We have seen many places this year where mooring and walking on the towpath is very difficult due to overgrown vegetation, discouraging use."

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Just a Minute...

I have been chastised, with and without 'tongue in cheek', for my opposition to publishing the minutes of Council meetings in NABO News and I have been wondering where best to respond. Perhaps the answer is obvious – here in NABO News!

In fact NABO has been accused of asking BW to be accountable whereas NABO is not, so I'll let you be the judge of that.

The following is a boating related extract from the most recent (January 2008) BW Board minutes as published on the 'Accountability' section of BW's website:-

'BOAT LICENCE PRICES AND ENFORCEMENT, 2008-2011

08/15: The Marketing and Customer Service Director introduced BWB 3309. Additionally he showed a slide summarising the licence contribution options.

The memorandum reported on the outcomes of the 3 month public consultation on the level of boat licence fees to be set for the 3 years 2008/09 to 2010/11 and recommended significant changes to the original proposals in the light of these.

The Board considered and agreed the recommendations.

The Chief Executive confirmed that all the significant issues and ideas put forward in the consultation would be explored.'

First of all, it is four months out of date, as, quite rightly, minutes have to be approved by the Board before being published.

Secondly, what does it tell you?

Certainly not much about the contents of 'BWB 3309', nor what was shown on the 'slide'. Anyway, what were the 'recommendations'? Not a clue in those minutes about relenting on the Headline Percentage.

I am not trying to criticise BW here, I am pointing out that minutes of BW Board meetings are not written to inform the public, nor are NABO's. They are a record of proceedings, the skeleton that needs fleshing out with all the accompanying papers and presentations. I am sure we were all well aware of much of the substance of 'BWB 3309' through more direct channels before these official minutes were permitted to be published.

Likewise NABO News publishes articles on matters usually written straight after the meeting where they were discussed, and you get to read them well in advance of the official minutes being approved. Also the articles are written to inform you fully about the issues without you having to do an anatomical reconstruction.

So which do you prefer?

What does irk me is that in the same article our accuser expressed an extreme dislike of constitutions, yet is advocating boring you with the very records required by said constitutions.

"Ah, but NABO Council minutes are not skeletal like BWB's".

No, but they would be if required to be published, if for no other reason than availability of space. I might also add that the reason they are fuller is due to the diligence of our esteemed but publicly berated General Secretary.

And now to something even more controversial...

Does membership size matter?

When it comes to campaigning organisations, one could say that it's not the strength of numbers that matter, it is the strength of the arguments.

Taking that to its logical conclusion, NABO could survive up until the last person falls, provided that last person retains the respect of the authorities and can attend meetings and communicate effectively. Even now the authorities are happy to invite a 'one-man-band' (thankfully without banjo) to meetings reserved for groups because he has persuasive arguments, so why does NABO need members - plural?

There are a host of circumstantial arguments. We have a constitution that sets a minimum quorum for Council meetings, so maybe the Association would have to be wound up if there were fewer than that.

There is the money side, a certain number of subscriptions would be needed to sustain what we do, but how much money is really needed to keep the arguments flowing? Not much, and we have plenty of reserves.

What does give us strength is the pyramid of support and the opportunity for issues to be debated internally. Our members are in NABO to ensure that boat owners have a say and that what is said is in their interests. A few may have been seduced by offers but they won't stay on that basis alone. There aren't many other reasons to be a member, except perhaps this magazine.

Other organisations may boast more members, but the actual number that are truly behind their campaigns, rather than there to enjoy peripheral benefits, is probably no bigger. Take the Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs. By combining all its constituent

clubs, it can command huge numbers, but with all due respects, does this make its influence on the meeting floor significantly greater than that of the Horseboating Society?

"*Blasphemy!*", I hear you cry – how can the chairman of a national membership organisation possibly be allowed to imply that said organisation has no need to recruit members?

Well, of course he can, because he is also editor of the magazine in which said blasphemy can appear. The only cure to this state of affairs is to recruit more members in the hope of finding amongst them a new and willing editor who can put a stop to it!

A ray of hope?

This could happen. A possible new editor has provisionally put herself forward and, had family circumstances had allowed, she might have been applying the strike-through at this moment. Watch this space.

A definite

Saying we don't need to recruit members may have just been an excuse for the lack of someone with the enthusiasm to do it – but now:
WELCOME RICHARD!

We have a new member of Council to tackle Promotion and Recruitment, bringing with him skills honed in the football business. We might have to share him with SOW but that in itself might not be a bad thing.

Perhaps his first slogan should read:
'NABO - UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT'

And finally...

Happy cruising. You may see us on the cut later in the month. Please don't shun us as unapproachable, we are just boaters trying to put something back into boating.

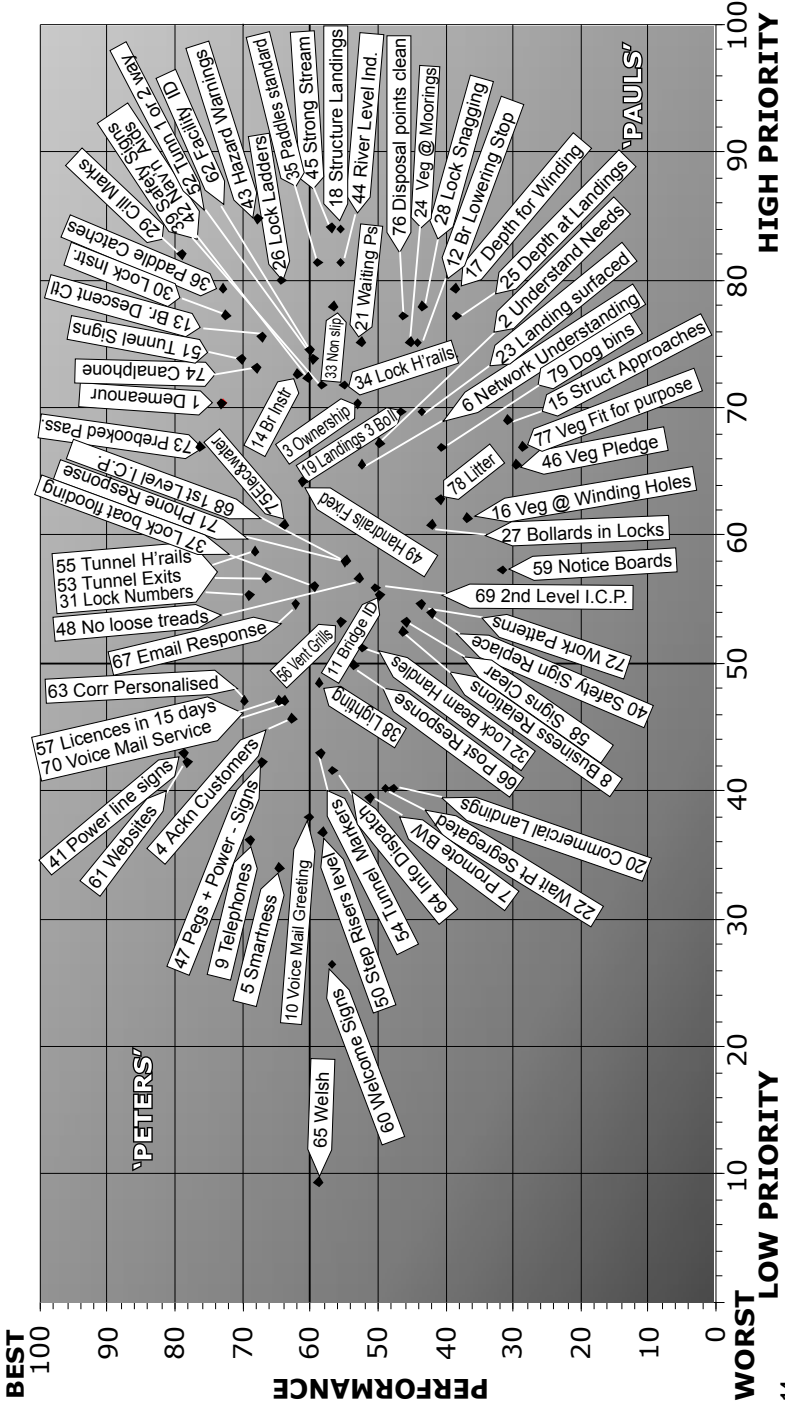
Stuart

Customer Service Standards Survey

In the December 2007 issue we introduced a survey where you could rate the priority and current achievement of each of BW's newly publicised Customer Service Standards. In the April 2008 issue we summarised the results and mentioned a 'Scatter Graph' to highlight areas where BW might be able to 'Rob Peter to pay Paul'. We couldn't let it languish in the pending tray of BW Marketing Division without a wider audience, so you get to see it before visitors to the Tate Modern:-

Obviously the tags are just an aide memoire and if you still have it, you should go back to Issue 7-07, or a BW copy of the standards, to tally the numbers with the full wording.

Failing that, the form with the full wording is still available on www.nabo.org.uk/css-survey/html



Note- Pages 14/15 were a double page spread which does not fit the format of this version. Hence reduced version on previous page

Concerns over sale of Thames Lock Houses

The Environment Agency (EA) has proposed the sale of a selected number of lock cottages and the renting out of a further number. Currently the final number and is still hopefully open for discussion but rests in the low 20s.

Originally the lock cottages in question were to be disposed of as and when the resident lock keeper retired. Sadly for reasons currently known only to the EA, they imposed at the last moment a timescale of 5 years without prior warning to the users with whom consultation had taken place.

The user consultees were originally not too concerned about the policy as there was time to study the proposals. The principal of lock-side cottage disposal was opposed. We were assured nothing would be happening before 2011 at the earliest. Now it would seem likely that the first lock cottage could be on the market this year.

What was to be a gradual move of the management structure to a more relevant system for the 21st century has been turned into a fiasco with significant disruption to working relations between EA management and lock staff. The lock staff, their union and most existing staff were amazed and horrified when the targeted lock staff were interviewed during the week beginning the 14th April with these new timescales. Suffice to say that mayhem was unleashed.

It seems unclear how the EA propose to break the tied cottage agreements with resident lock keepers. The existing terms of contract include a "requirement" for lock keepers to live in their houses. The real concern here has now become apparent in that any effort to remove the lock keepers that entails early retirement with compensation or payment to defray the costs of lost a lock-keepers dispossession will ultimately come from funds that one way or another would or should have been spent on the river navigation. The fact that the lock cottage sale income is promised for reinvestment into the Thames will most likely be met with a reduction in government Grant-in-Aid of the same amount. This entire debacle need not have happened if handled without a shotgun and timescale.

Both NABO and the undersigned will be closely involved with the developing events and will keep you appraised of the outcome.

The lock cottages, along with the lock staff responsibilities and all working practices, were under review but now the lock staff have withdrawn cooperation.



It is to be hoped that the EA will deliver a plan of how they see the River Thames Navigation operating in 20 years time and how they will absorb technology in an effort to improve service and hold costs. It might even be possible for someone to actually offer serious and supported figures for this that not simply suggest that it costs "about" £10,000 pa to fund a lock cottage. We do not even suspect the used envelope on which this figure was scribbled even exists!

Louis Jankel

NABO welcomes a new Mid-Thames Representative

Graham Paterson has agreed to cover NABO interests in the River User Group (RUG) 3 region from Sandford to Cleve. He has cruised the river in a Dawncraft 22 since 1973 so knows it pretty well, having kept his boat on EA 'annual' moorings at Iffley, Abingdon and now Days.

He believes in a policy of "live and let live" between fishermen, narrowboaters and plastic boaters, and says, "One never stops learning - water is, and the things that glide upon it are, dangerous, unpredictable. One is foolhardy in EVER thinking, even after 35 years, that one is master of every single navigational situation one encounters on the Thames."

BW RIVERS

BW Consults on River Severn and G&S Canal Winter Operations

British Waterways announced a drastic cost-saving reorganisation of operations on the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and River Severn in August 2006 and this was followed by a public meeting attended by no fewer than 360 people. They were mainly boat owners from the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal, with a smaller number owning boats elsewhere along the river Severn.

As a result of the strength of feeling expressed at the meeting, BW modified its proposals regarding winter manning of locks and bridges and undertook to consult further once a complete season had expired.

They are now seeking feedback from customers who have experienced the reduced winter manning regime, in the light of changed circumstances on the canal. It had been BW's original intention to convert 4 canal bridges to user operation, thus enabling boats to pass along almost half the length of the canal even when the bridges were unmanned. The existing high-level bridges are already passable to low air draft vessels and the automation of Fretherne, Sandfield, Junction and Parkend bridges would have enabled users to control passage through these low bridges as well. However, due to a number of factors including lack of funding and opposition from local authorities, the planned changes never took place.

It is anticipated that canal users will have most to contribute to this round of consultation, which was initiated at a meeting of the G&S and River Severn Users Forum in early April 2008. Comments should be directed to BW at the Gloucester office.

Stephen Peters

RIVERS, TIDAL

Does the Ribble scare you off the Lancaster? NABO can help



During the past couple of years whilst talking to visitors to the Rufford Branch on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal its has become apparent that some owners are a bit nervous about making the crossing over the Ribble.

Often this will be because one member of the crew is unhappy about wider and deeper water for example.

As a result a group of local boat owners have got together, as well as a couple of people on the Lancaster side who know the Link well, who are prepared to take the place of members of crew who are a bit nervous and see the vessel across.

They have all been across on a number of occasions and so know it well (those of you who have been over will know is a quite rewarding experience) and can be really helpful in terms of advice for skippers.

At the same time, for a small donation towards petrol (its only about ten miles by road) these same local boaters will arrange transport of the nervous crew to be ready at the other end.

They can also lend NABO members planning the trip the required anchor, and even the flares required by BW as part of the terms of crossing.

Just let Richard Carpenter know. He will make the necessary arrangements and introductions.



Asland Lamp - If you miss it on your return, Ireland awaits!



Some of the reward - peace and tranquility at Garstang (Photos Stuart Sampson 2003)

OTHER ISSUES

Broads

NABO was approached by disgruntled boaters on the Broads looking for an alternative, less 'brass-buttoned blazer', representation route to challenge aspects of the Broads Bill. Unfortunately this request came with a requirement for NABO to launch a recruitment campaign on the Broads which it hasn't the resources to undertake at present. NABO has offered to lend its name, experience and infrastructure to any otherwise self-sustaining group of Broads boaters that conforms with NABO's remit and is prepared to come under the association's wing.

BW Licence Conditions

NABO is keeping a watchful eye on a new draft of the BW pleasure craft conditions particularly with respect to re-wording the 'Continuous Cruising' clauses. The re-drafting is mainly to introduce the new late payment surcharge.

BW Details Requests

Some of you may have received letters headed 'UPDATING YOUR DETAILS' with enforcement threats from the 'Boat Licensing Team, Shared Services Centre'. NABO has registered dissatisfaction with the tone of these letters plus the lack of a precise date, a signatory and a contact number, and questions their necessity in the first place.

If you receive one of these please don't complain to the Yorkshire Unit General Manager. He just has the misfortune to share an address with the Licensing Team!

Emergency Services Problems

There have been a number of reports of Emergency Services personnel refusing to go on board a boat to perform their duties.

NABO intends to raise this at the highest level in the interests of all waterway users. Instances include ambulance staff unwilling to assist patients and police to investigate crimes. Your experiences welcome.



YOU SAY



"Call centres tend to be ignorant - need training in waterway geography"

"New facilities are excellent. Old ones are often hidden and sited in silly places."

NEW MEMBERS AND RECRUITMENT

...and a welcome to RICHARD CARPENTER. He explains:

From saying a year ago I would help out as North West representative which according to our NABO Secretary “just means popping along to a couple of BW User Group Meetings twice a year” I seem to have talked my way on to Council!



I have been a member of NABO for the past five years, indeed I joined at the same time I was able (after 30 years of hiring) to afford my pride and joy - Elysium 60ft of dreams come true!



I joined NABO, I imagine like most members, because I knew as a boater I needed to be sure that someone more knowledgeable than I was looking after my interests with the “authorities”.

I didn't know anyone on Council but I read with interest (even if not with full understanding) NABO News and subsequent bulletins. I felt, as I am sure the majority of members feel, that people, with a good knowledge of our Waterways, and a passion and patience to ensure our rights and needs were being met, were taking care of me.

I didn't really think much more than that if I am honest, I'd done my bit, paid my fees, got a couple of discounts on things and knew that keen types were representing me – job done! In fact I did the same as most people that belong to many specialist groups and organisations do – feel I have contributed and that's that! Probably applies to everything from The National Trust and other heritage groups to the local hospices and any other voluntary organisation.

And then came the DEFRA Cuts and the grass roots Save Our Waterways Campaign in late 2006 and the follow-up rallies in March 2007. These brought home to me and many others just how bad a financial state our Waterways were in, particularly for the future. I realised that this long dreamed for investment of mine might not be able to be used in the future unless something was done.

So, off I went and organised one of the gatherings on the Rufford Arm on the Leeds and Liverpool, and helped start off a similar one held at Garstang handled by the Lancaster Canal Cruising Club. This brought home to me just how much investment had been made, and which may now be at risk, in providing all of us with the opportunity to now visit and cruise the previously isolated Lancaster Canal. I also realised that so few boaters really understood the threat of a breakdown in our Waterways and the dire implications if maintenance levels are not kept up.

As a result I became involved with the Save our Waterways campaign where an real attempt will be made to reach the millions of yearly visitors to our Waterways to explain to them the threats to their enjoyment and how they can help.

During all this activity I got to know the people behind the pictures we all look at on the back pages of NABO News, I came to realise just how dedicated they are and just how much time they give campaigning on our behalf. Fighting all the issues on things like mooring fees and allocations, provision of proper and contractual facilities by BW and following up members questions and problems.

They also work with BW and other user groups on advisory and consultation forums. Some of the officers, and in particular our Chairman and people like Simon Robbins will often attend three meetings a week on these issues.

And now here I am, on Council and taking responsibility for recruitment to our Association!

We at NABO are already strong but surprisingly we only make up a small proportion of all boat owners on our Waterways. I have seen first hand how important the work is and how vital it is that it continues but we need to help our Council by spreading the word amongst the boaters you meet throughout the year.

My aim will be to provide not only a bigger and better range of benefits of membership but hopefully persuade many of you to become more involved in our campaigns. Perhaps we can try and get some localised gatherings under way where we get a chance to meet and discuss issues whilst enjoying our heritage. Lets work with other canal user groups to be sure the future is bright and better funded.

The one thing we found with Save our Waterways was that one of the main reasons people visit our waterways, quite apart from the great environment and amenities, was to look at boats,! That's us folks, we are the attraction so lets put on a show?

We do need our members help in this, and we are not asking for loads of your time or effort, just spread the word, talk to boaters you meet on your travels and at your moorings and marinas. There are good incentives open to all for introductions so it is worth it. The main thing though is by doing this we can provide our specialist council members the back-up and clout they need working on our behalf.

The following quotation appears in a User Manual produced by a well-known German manufacturer of marine battery chargers to highlight the dangers of electrolyte in lead acid batteries:

'IT IS IMPERATIVE TO SEEK MEDICAL TREATMENT FROM A DOCTOR WITH INJURIES CAUSED BY ACID.'

It seems that the translation into English has been less than perfect. Does anyone know such a doctor?

GRIDLOCKED?

Grid References unravelled

Boaters may have stared in disbelief at the new OS Grid reference numbers appearing on BW signs around the network. *'Whatever happened to the letters?'*, they ask, *"and the ambulance wants six figures and I am faced with two lots of six figures. Which one do I use, or do I take the first three digits of each, or the last?"*

Unfortunately none of those options work – you have to take the 2nd, 3rd and 4th digits of the first number, then the 2nd, 3rd and 4th digits of the second number. Straight forward? Well, it is a BW sign after all!

BW's numbers are in fact genuine 'XY' style Ordnance Survey Grid references. Like money and metrication, this newer system is very logical when you get used to it. It tells you where you are within a metre in relation to an imaginary point somewhere near where the Torrey Canyon met its end – but that is no reassurance when you have just dialled 999!

The clue to the origins of the more familiar old system is 'in the question', as they say. Ordnance Survey was set up for the Army, surprise, surprise, and it suited them to believe the world was flat, so they discounted all the longitude and latitude angles used by the Senior Service and adopted a square grid system. They wanted it to cover all the lands they might want to conquer, as well as the lands they didn't have to conquer and the sea in between, but they were mortal like the rest of us and found letters and numbers easier than just numbers. However for some unpatriotic reason they were also prepared to bow to the wishes of their foes across the Channel and based it all on metric measurements.

They decided to divide their bit of world up into 100 kilometre squares and label each one using letters. By dispensing with 'I' in the alphabet, they could use one of remaining 25 letters to select any square in a 5 x 5 grid. Add another letter and you can manage a 5 x 5 grid of 5 x 5 grids, so just two letters can identify any one out of a choice of 625 squares. Using numbers they could only have had 100 squares - maybe there is a hope for military intelligence yet!

A	B	C	D	E
F	G	H	J	K
L	M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T	U
V	W	X	Y	Z

However, if we restrict ourselves to Great Britain, 100 squares are enough. We are also talking computers, which would have to convert letters to numbers anyway, so a new system was devised which took the southwest corner of Square SV, somewhere west of the Scillies, as '000000 000000' and this allowed two 6 digit numbers to locate any point in the whole of Great Britain to within one metre. This is sometimes known as the 'XY' system as opposed to the older system, sometimes called 'Landranger' because that is where it survives.

BW has chosen to use the XY system, probably because it fits in with the GIS (Geographical Information System) standard on which all its 'assets' are plotted. However the XY system's 100 Km squares are aligned with the old system's, so measurement within squares is the same, but the Eastings and Northings are

shown separately and each given another digit at the front to identify the square instead of using separate letters.

Anyone looking for you using a map or street atlas with the unaided eye can only cope with three digits for Eastings and three for Northings to get them within 100 metres (near enough - yards) of you. Theoretically, the last two numbers of each group can pin you down to the nearest metre, but waving your arms can do that, and saying you are beside the canal helps too.

The only reason they should need the letters is to help them choose the right map, but if they can't do that from knowledge of their own patch they shouldn't be in the job. However if you are faced with a complete novice, beware – the lettered squares are sometimes called 'Sheets' in the Landranger system but they bear absolutely no relation to what you buy over the counter in a bookshop.

If you have to quote your position from a map, just remember the old adage - ***'In the door and up the stairs'***, for the Eastings and Northings. To find the relevant letters on a Landranger series map, they are shown in big blue outline style typeface in the top left corner of the map itself, not in the border. If the map overlaps squares, the letters for the next square are in the top left hand corner of the square in question. Philips Navigator atlases also use blue letters within the maps, but in their Street Atlas series you need to turn to the 'Administrative and Postcode Boundaries' page, usually the last of the full coverage maps, to find the letters for the squares. Below is a very rough map of the waterways and the squares that cover them, but double check if you are near a boundary.

If you have the luxury of the Web, the site www.streetmap.co.uk is good for locations, and there is a very inconspicuous link on the word **'here'** in the text at the bottom of the mapping page which takes you to a very comprehensive conversion chart, giving both styles of OS Grid Reference, the Postcode, Longitude and Latitude and more, for the spot on their map where you clicked last.

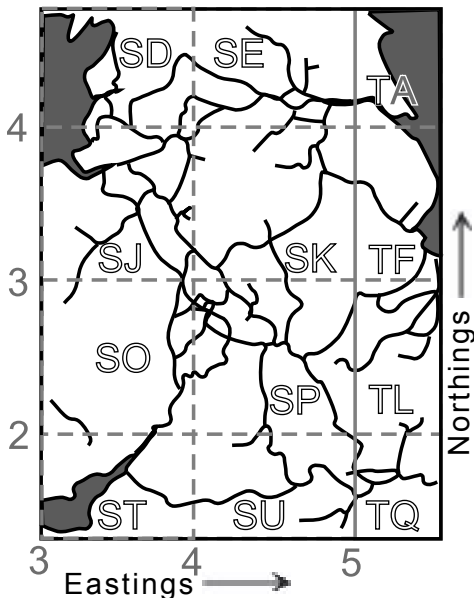
Going back to BW signs, if you are faced with an 'XY' reference and you want the reference in 'old money', take digits 2,3, and 4 from the first group (Eastings or X) and digits 2,3 and 4 from the second group (Northings or Y).

So, if a BW sign shows:-

399035, 289610

Landranger = **SO 990896**

*[Actually there shouldn't be a BW sign here!
These, for your info, are the co-ordinates for
where Council meets at the Waggon and
Horses, B69 3AD. Do come.]*



RCR Advert

Boating's finished?

I've been intending to write for several months, in fact ever since I learned through NABO News that you are giving up the Chairmanship and departing soon for foreign waterways.

I wish you every bit of good fortune possible in your new venture. You will, as I am sure you know, be sorely missed by NABO Council and, perhaps most of all, by NABO members. I wonder how many realize just how much work you have done for boaters over so many years? A case, I predict, of "you don't know what you've lost 'til it's gone."

Personally, I fear greatly for the future of boating in the UK. I recall some years ago now - at least ten, when I had my previous boat, and the vagaries of the BSC were in full swing - mooring up at Sutton Stop and chatting with a boater of many years' experience, who was fishing off the end of his much loved and somewhat elderly boat. He advised me then to make the best of the time left for boaters. "Boating's finished for people like us," he said, and nothing that has happened since has shown me that he was otherwise than right in his views. BW's deplorable mooring auctions, the above-inflation rise in the licence fee year on year, the loss of the red diesel concession later this year, not to mention the fact that the BSC saw off many perfectly adequate but more down-market boats, are all symptomatic of what has happened to a pastime that traditionally was enjoyed by ordinary people of modest means. I lost my first boat to the unattainable requirements of the BSC; now, having acquired a better-built and

fully compliant boat, it looks as if financial pressures may result in my having to leave the boating world altogether. I shan't, though, be the only person forced so to do in the coming months and years.

Anyway Stuart, many, many thanks for all you have done over the years. What will become of NABO after your departure is, I believe, problematic. I cannot personally become involved again with NABO, other than as a paid-up member; I live too far away from the centre of the boating world and I have interests other than boating that take up a good deal of my time.

All the very best,

Ann (Berry)

In reply:

Many thanks to Ann for the kind words, particularly as Ann has herself been on NABO Council so is no stranger to the work that needs to be done. However I think members should have no fear about the future of NABO, if the support I am getting from other Council members is anything to go by. A quick scan down the by-lines in recent editions of NABO News is a good indicator – once upon a time I could only rely on one major contributor. All we need now is someone to take the plunge on the proverbial ducking stool a.k.a. the NABO Chair.

Unfortunately we seem to have chosen the very worst time to be selling up in the UK and paying for something big in Euros, so the dream is on hold for now, but it is early days.

Stuart

PS - Nice house in Bramhope - see [RightMove.co.uk!](http://RightMove.co.uk/)

YOU SAY



"The whole ambiance of the waterways is being destroyed by by signs. you cannot even take a photo of a timeless view or structure because there is a great big sign destroying it. Everybody I know says this, no wonder the number of hire boats is falling, it just shows how out of touch with its customers BW is.

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