

ASSOCIATION of WATERWAYS CRUISING CLUBS



From David Pearce – National Chairman

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
Committee Office
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13 March 2007

Supplementary Memorandum to the Select Committee

BRITISH WATERWAYS

SUMMARY

The Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs (AWCC) submitted a Memorandum to the Committee in January 2007. We appreciate the invitation to speak at an open meeting at Gloucester and summarise the comments we would make to you as follows:

- Future development, and enhancement by Government, of the BW property portfolio is essential to maintain adequate third party funding;
- More third party funding could be obtained by seeking co-operative arrangements with other public bodies, such as English Partnerships and their successor;
- The necessary re-organisation of the navigation and leisure function of the Environment Agency (EA) will have consequences upon the long-term funding arrangements for BW and should not be ignored;
- Our concern that many boaters may be forced off the waterways because of ever rising prices and that it is somewhat related to the current funding crisis.

We refer you to our original Memorandum for a full discussion on these matters.

DISCUSSION

Grant or Property Income? We emphasise the point that public money is appropriate for the public services provided by BW. The short-term solution that we proposed is that the DEFRA grant is replaced by a cross department service contract to maintain assets that have use by a wider public. In the longer term, the financial freedoms given to BW within the public corporation structure should be reviewed and loosened. However, GIA has to be supplemented by other sources of income.

Other Income. BW should be enabled with a greater borrowing ability and given a more flexible approach to the management of their property portfolio, with powers for greater co-operation with others in the investment in property and raising of third party income. The search for innovative ways of achieving extra income must be continued. We recommend that the portfolio of appropriate property needs to be increased to a value of at least £1 billion and that this should be done where possible from government sources. We also suggest that a partnership with 'English Partnerships', could be used to further develop the BW portfolio. We welcome the formation of 'Communities England', as the Government's new principal regeneration agency, (to eventually encompass English Partnerships), with its £4 billion of public assets and a mandate to create more homes from brown field sites. We anticipate that this will encourage more partnering deals with regional development

agencies, local authorities and other public and private bodies and we suggest that BW should be involved.

The EA Connection. We have said that it is difficult to consider the proper funding needs of the inland waterways without also looking at the EA. In summary, the solution that we have put to the EA is to seek the full powers available under the Trading Fund Act for “Next Steps” Agencies. This should be done as fully functional trading fund in a separate agency, or compartment of the existing agency, to cover navigation and leisure. The alternative is to transfer the responsibility to BW, but this will require enhanced funding for BW.

Ever Increasing Prices. We do not wish to present ourselves as a group of moaning boaters having to pay more for their pastime. However, many of our members, who are life-long waterways enthusiasts, are now retired and on fixed income, having put in much voluntary effort in their working lives to bring the canal system up to its present better state. As we said before, the history of the restoration has been forged by the commitments of volunteers both physical and financial. Many of AWCC’s older members helped create and develop club moorings and facilities on derelict land. Volunteers will feel betrayed if funds for ongoing maintenance are not to be made available and prices of moorings and licences continue to rise disproportionately, thus denying them the fruits of their labour and their boating retirement. BW has a duty to promote full social inclusion and we ask the Committee to consider the aspect that we have raised and how fairness may be extended to all.

Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) Costs. We offer one example that has arisen since our original Memorandum. The BSS has recently declared that the scheme is in financial trouble as both BW and the EA wish to withdraw direct funding (no doubt brought about by the current wider financial problems). The AWCC has contributed much to the scheme – maybe more than other groups - in the many years since its inception. Members of our National Executive have freely given technical advice and contributed many hundreds of hours in attending meetings in order to make it a technically sound scheme. We currently have representatives on all the BSS Committees and our President has recently completed a period as chairman of the Advisory Committee. This has all been done on a voluntary basis. The BSS certificate itself is now to cost £28 and that is on top of the technical examination, which takes several hours work by the examiner. It is our belief that the Scheme will become unsustainable at reasonable cost without the direct financial support of BW and the EA.

We will be represented at the open meeting by Tony Mason, AWCC Vice President and for many years National Chairman of the Association. Tony is also the IWAAC appointed user representative on the BSS Management Committee.

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