

IWA Policy on the Unauthorised Renting of Boats

This policy statement sets out The Inland Waterways Association's views on boats that are available to rent but have not been authorised for such use.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of privately owned boats available for rent across the waterways, particularly in the London area. Boats for holidays or accommodation for short stays now appear on popular auction or bed and breakfast websites as well as there being an increase in boats being rented out for residential use.

IWA seeks proper regulation of this new market by the responsible navigation (and other) authorities to ensure:

- the safety of visitors to our cities and their waterways
- the safety of those already living on and navigating our waterways
- the continued sharing of overstretched boat-support facilities, such as fresh water, sewage disposal, gas and coal supply, and mooring space.

The types of rented boat available, and associated issues, are numerous, including:

- single rooms on boats being advertised for bed and breakfast type accommodation for one or a few nights at a time (usually via websites). This can be aimed at tourists or people travelling on business
- boats being let out by private owners for holiday hire, for a profit, without the relevant hire boat licence
- boats that are owned by one person (who may own several boats) with the whole boat let out long term to someone else for residential purposes, sometimes without the hirer being made aware of licensing requirements, eg to move every 14 days
- larger boats with multiple rooms being let out for residential accommodation, eg on the Thames, where there are several examples of unregistered barges that have become notorious for unsafe cramped rooms.

IWA is concerned about the problems that may occur when unauthorised boats are rented out and asks navigation authorities to do more to regularise the situation. Such problems include:

- boat owners being in breach of the terms and conditions of their licence, and possibly mooring terms and conditions too if on a long term mooring
- Long term hirers being unaware that boats are not subject to any Landlord and Tenant regulation and legislation. Boat hirers may find themselves in danger from badly maintained craft and unscrupulous landlords
- boats being hired out (either whole boats or part of a boat) with only the standard private Boat Safety Scheme certificate in place rather than the more rigorous requirements which hire boats have to comply with. They may therefore be unsafe

for people who are not as familiar with the craft in question, or with boats/boating generally

- boat tenants not understanding the specific needs of boat heating and ventilation systems, which are significantly different from those commonly encountered in a hotel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Boat fires and carbon monoxide poisoning are potential outcomes of a solid fuel stove not being used properly
- adding to the problem of mooring in popular locations such as London as there is an incentive to take boats there purely to let out for profit and these boats are unlikely to move regularly.

IWA recognises that the operation and maintenance of boats is more complex than that of houses, making them potentially more hazardous for those using them. IWA recommends that both those letting out and those renting boats should consider this before progressing.

IWA considers that no boats licensed as private pleasure boats should be let out for monetary return in any situation. Anyone wishing to let out their boat, or a room on their boat, should have a business licence/registration and approval from the relevant navigation authority, with the hire-boat level of boat safety examination and appropriate insurance.

IWA further considers that any boat licensed for the purpose of being let out, for either holiday or residential use, should not be able to be declared as “continuously cruising” but should have a permanent mooring as part of their business licence agreement. The mooring agreement needs to allow for subletting of the mooring, and both boat owner and landowner need to take responsibility for safety of visitors and neighbouring boats.

January 2017. Updated April 2019 and June 2021.