

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release

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Fund Britain's Waterways calls on Government to stop inland waterways falling into disrepair

Britain's unique and well-loved network of canals and navigable rivers is deteriorating because of inadequate funding. At a time of unprecedented challenges caused by the climate emergency and high inflation, government is failing to respond. Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW), a coalition of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways, is campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

Management of Britain's 5,000 miles of navigable inland waterways is fragmented. The Canal & River Trust (CRT) has the greatest responsibility covering 2,000 miles. It is already in a difficult financial situation with a fixed government grant of £52.6m per year until 2027. Defra was expected to confirm funding for 2028 onwards in July 2022 but has not yet made an announcement. Other waterways face similar problems: the Environment Agency is operating with £22m per year, one third of its identified requirement, and Scottish Canals has over £70m of maintenance work outstanding.

The consequences of failing to maintain waterway infrastructure were clearly shown by the evacuation of 1,500 local residents in case the dam at Toddbrook Reservoir collapsed in 2019. This event has shown the need for increased spend on CRT reservoirs of up to £25m per year, but it is as if the lessons have not yet been learnt.

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of Britain's inland waterways as people sought blue and green spaces to help recover. This was acknowledged in Defra's own Environmental Improvement Plan, providing levelling up, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing benefits for us all.

The combined annual economic and social value of CRT waterways alone has been quantified as £6.1bn, including cost savings of £1.1bn for the NHS from active use of the waterways and towpaths.

Despite this greater understanding of their value, and the deteriorating state of the infrastructure today, the Government appears intent on significantly reducing its funding for the waterways, says Les Etheridge, Chair of the FBW steering group and National Chair of the Inland Waterways Association.

He said: "Government needs to recognise that saying they value the inland waterways is not enough to prevent their decline. Whilst we in FBW understand the financial pressures that everyone faces, the financial cuts are too deep, and adequate public funding needs to be allocated to maintain these national assets. FBW will be taking action starting with a campaign cruise in Birmingham over the weekend of 12-13 August 2023."

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For further information, please contact the IWA Chief Executive Officer, Sarah Niblock.
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For more information about Fund Britain's Waterways, or to join the group, please visit www.fundbritainwaterways.org.uk or email info@fundbritainwaterways.org.uk.

NOTES TO EDITOR

The initial member organisations of Fund Britain's Waterways include:

- **Accessible Waterways Association**, set up to inform, represent, and assist people who live with disabilities, impairments or accessibility issues, and who want to enjoy the Inland Waterways and their surrounding environments
- **Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs**, an affiliated group of boat clubs offering their members mutual facilities relating to boating on the inland waterways of England and Wales
- **Basingstoke Canal Society**, working to secure an environmentally sustainable long-term future of the Basingstoke Canal for the benefit of its users and the community
- **Braunston Marina**, a major centre for leisure craft and narrowboats at the crossroads of the Grand Union and Oxford Canals
- **British Canoeing**, the national governing body for paddlesports in the UK
- **British Marine**, trade body for the UK leisure, superyacht and small commercial marine industry, representing 1400+ member businesses, through regional and group specific member associations which include:
 - **British Marine's Inland Boating Association** with over 100 independent companies offering river and canal holidays on hire boats, hotel boats, plus passenger trip boats and business services
 - **British Marine's Passenger Boat Association** representing all sectors of the passenger boat industry, including scheduled transport services, pleasure trips, private & business hire
 - **The Broads Hire Boat Federation** including operators of holiday hire cruisers and day-hire craft on the Norfolk Broads

- **British Marine's London and Thames Valley Regional Association** which has over 250 members, of which over 80 operate their business alongside the non-tidal and tidal River Thames
- **Chesterfield Canal Trust**, working to promote the full restoration and appropriate development of the Chesterfield Canal, and to campaign for the construction of the Rother Valley Link, a navigable waterway to join the Chesterfield Canal to the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation
- **Commercial Boat Operators Association**, the prime trade organisation involved in the effort to sustain and increase freight carriage on our waterways for economic and environmental reasons
- **DBA – The Barge Association**, the club for people interested in leisure barging on the inland waterways of Europe
- **Electric Boat Association**, championing the interests of electric boat owners
- **Fox Narrowboats**, a long-established family business operating a marina in March in Cambridgeshire, providing narrowboat and day boat hire, and curating a comprehensive blog about Fenland waterways
- **Great Ouse Boating Association**, representing boaters on the rivers Great Ouse, Cam, Lark, Little Ouse, Wissey and associated East Anglian waterways of England
- **Historic Narrow Boat Club**, a not-for-profit national club dedicated to preserving the working heritage of UK canals, from the boats themselves to details of the waterways on which they travel
- **Inland Waterways Association**, the only independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and regenerating Britain's navigable rivers and canals as places for leisure, living and business
- **Kennet & Avon Canal Trust**, the charity that restored the Kennet & Avon Canal which runs from Bristol to Reading and now operates 9 trip boats, including 4 for disabled passengers, and the world famous and fully operational Crofton Pumping Station
- **Kennet & Avon Trade Association**, a local trade association for businesses operating on the Kennet & Avon Canal
- **Lowland Canals Association**, aiming to promote the interests and well-being of boaters and other users of the lowland canals
- **National Association of Boat Owners**, listening to boat owners, speaking out for boat owners, representing boat owners
- **National Inland Navigation Forum**, a forum bringing together organisations with inland navigational interests
- **Newbury Boat Company**, a family-run marina within a Site of Special Scientific Interest on the Kennet & Avon Canal in Newbury
- **Residential Boat Owners' Association**, the only national organisation which exclusively represents and promotes the interests of people living on boats in the British Isles
- **Roving Canal Traders Association**, a non-profit making organisation run to help support and promote the diverse array of existing and potential Canal & River Trust registered Roving Traders on our waterways
- **Royal Yachting Association**, the national governing body for dinghy, motor and sail cruising, all forms of sail racing, RIBs and sportsboats, windsurfing and personal watercraft, and a leading representative body for inland waterways cruising in the UK
- **Thames MotorBoaters Association**, representing owners of powered craft registered on the non-tidal Thames

- **Torksey Yacht Club**, a small club based at the junction of the Fossdyke Navigation and the River Trent at the ancient village of Torksey

with the stated intention of significantly widening membership to any organisation or individual with an interest in using or supporting inland waterways whether canal, river, tidal river or estuary (excluding navigation authorities).

The benefits of Britain's inland waterways are documented in:

- 'Waterways for Today' report published by the Inland Waterways Association (November 2022) <https://waterways.org.uk/campaigns/waterways-for-today>
- 'Valuing Our Waterways' report published by the Canal & River Trust with social-value experts Simetrica-Jacobs, with all methodology aligning with 2022 HM Treasury Green Book valuation techniques (November 2022) <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/valuing-our-waterways>