

# IWA POLICY ON RESIDENTIAL BOATING

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*Updated May 2023*

This policy document sets out The Inland Waterways Association's views on various aspects of living afloat.

## 1. Background

The inland waterways have been home to people living on boats for as long as there have been boats navigating those waterways. The principle of using a boat primarily as a dwelling rather than for transporting cargoes is well established, and several founder and early members of IWA lived afloat, notably Tom Rolt who wrote about his experiences in his book, *Narrow Boat*.

While it was leisure boating that provided a new purpose for the inland waterways following the demise of regular commercial carrying traffic in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century residential boating is also now a primary use of many boats on the navigable inland waterways of England, Scotland and Wales.

The high cost of housing, particularly in some parts of the country, has contributed to the increase in the numbers of boats being bought and built specifically with residential use in mind.

## 2. The Different ways of Living on the Inland Waterways

IWA supports a variety of ways of achieving the aspiration of a life afloat such as;

2.1 Home mooring either in a marina, boatyard or online, either towpath or offside, designated for residential use. IWA would like to see every marina or other significant mooring location having a proportion of berths designated for residential use. As well as meeting the need this provides other benefits such as addition security and early warning of navigation problems.

2.2 Small sites of home moorings self-managed under a form of community charity or company. IWA supports the gradual increase in these sites, often utilising redundant wharves and arms regenerated by the boaters moored there and conserving their heritage and environment. IWA would like to see navigation authorities and local authorities providing more support and advice to enable such moorings to be set up.

2.3 Continuous cruising (see 3.2 below). This is the generally recognised term for this form of residential boaters although legally referred to on CRT navigations as 'boats without a home mooring'.

2.4 Houseboats- there are various definitions of houseboat including "a boat fitting out for use as a dwelling" which could include all boats used for residential purposes. In this

context IWA takes the definition of a craft which is normally unable to navigate either due its dimensions or lack of propulsion. IWA supports the use of houseboats in specific locations where they are not impeding navigation, for instance on wider river, estuary and coastal locations. Houseboats may be subject to full planning approval and various other regulations not applicable to navigating craft.

2.5 Some residential boaters will utilise a combination of these and IWA welcome the diversity which this brings; for instance continuous cruising throughout part of the year combined with a winter mooring, either living onboard or returning to a land based residence.

### 3. Licensing Issues

3.1 Licensing and permission requirements for the residential use of boats varies widely across different navigation authorities, and these are usually covered in the licence conditions and associated guidance notes set out by each navigation authority.

3.2 For boats licensed on Canal & River Trust's waterways a specific designation was introduced by the British Waterways Act 1995, which allows boaters to declare that they do not have a home mooring. This requires them to move at least every 14 days and the boat must be used "bona fide for navigation". Many boaters choose to do this, travelling widely across the network in a progressive journey, while others would prefer to stay in the same location but find it difficult to obtain a residential mooring. IWA supports:

- the right of boaters to cruise CRT's waterways without being required to have a home mooring.
- A single licence fee for boats with or without a home mooring. Moorings enforcement is a separate issue which should be tackled separately.

### 4. Short-term Moorings

4.1 Conflict can occur when large numbers of boaters wish, for whatever reason, to stay within a small area, reducing the availability of visitor moorings for boats which are passing through. In the London area this is known to be deterring boaters from elsewhere in the country from visiting the capital's canals.

4.2 IWA will help to facilitate, in appropriate locations agreed with the relevant navigation authority, the installation of additional mooring rings to increase visitor mooring capacity. A number of IWA branches have worked with navigation authorities to install new mooring rings, and case studies and technical advice are available.

4.3 In areas where demand for visitor moorings is an issue IWA will ask navigation authorities to designate more 24 and 48 hour moorings, possibly including some bookable moorings. 72 hours or 7 days may be appropriate in some locations, and stretches of unrestricted (ie 14 day moorings) should also continue to be available.

4.4 In areas where overstaying on 24 hour and 48 hour visitor moorings has become an issue, navigation authorities should designate some moorings as overnight only, eg mooring only allowed between 4pm and 11am, and ensure that these timings are enforced.

4.5 IWA considers that stronger enforcement action is needed by navigation authorities. Difficulties in some areas have been exacerbated by a lack of enforcement by the authorities and those who have enjoyed this way of life without interference need to be treated sensibly and considerately in any tightening and enforcement of the rules.

4.6 In addition to stronger enforcement, IWA supports the provision of more moorings suitable for residential boats as set out in section 4, as part of the solution.

## 5. Residential moorings

5.1 IWA supports the principle of people living afloat and will promote and campaign for the provision of more affordable moorings for residential use on all waterways.

5.2 IWA will encourage a proactive approach by navigation authorities, planning authorities and mooring providers to encourage the provision of a range of affordable moorings, including residential moorings, from large marinas with lots of facilities to smaller community-run sites accommodating a few boats with basic facilities.

5.3 Where new marinas or mooring sites are being developed, IWA will encourage the inclusion of residential berths.

5.4 IWA will encourage and support waterway restoration groups to incorporate residential moorings into their plans. Income from such moorings will be beneficial in ensuring the future viability of restoration schemes.

5.5 IWA will identify opportunities for utilising redundant arms and wharves for residential moorings, across the waterways system. Where investment in infrastructure is needed, IWA will encourage private companies to get involved, or Community Interest Companies or other social enterprise groups to be set up.

5.6 New on-line residential moorings should, wherever possible, be located on the non-towpath side of the waterway.

## 6. Planning

6.1 IWA will press for local authorities to take a more positive and supportive approach to residential moorings. Planning permission is required but there is no specific national planning policy or procedural guidance related to residential moorings and local planning authorities take differing approaches.

6.2 IWA will remind local authorities that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 includes a duty for local housing authorities in England to “consider the needs of people residing in

or resorting to their district with respect to the provision of ... places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored.”

6.3 Despite significant differences between residential moorings and built development, in terms of permanence, sustainability and environmental impact, residential moorings are treated as residential development and subject to the relevant national and local planning policies. IWA will encourage local authorities to approve applications for residential moorings where such proposals meet the sustainability and environmental criteria in the Local Development Plan.

6.4 IWA branches and regions should respond positively to consultations on planning applications where there is the potential for residential moorings. Specifically:

- Where IWA branches are responding to consultations on Local Plans and it is appropriate to include the provision of new moorings, it would be beneficial to include a statement on the desirability of a proportion of residential moorings as detailed above.
- If planning applications are submitted for new marinas or other moorings in their area and provided this is considered desirable, branches should refer to the benefits of including residential moorings in their submissions.
- Developers of residential housing sites alongside waterways will be encouraged to incorporate moorings – both residential and leisure, and ideally offline, into their designs.

## 7. Lifestyle challenges facing residential boaters

7.1 IWA recognises that residential boaters are not well considered in much lifestyle administration and legal process. Those without a recognised home address may have particular difficulties in these areas. Whilst these matters are outside the primary objectives of IWA, we recognise their significance in enabling the diversity of waterways lifestyles to be maintained and will support any action to facilitate access to them.

Examples are-

- Purchase of boats or other major items
- Financial matters including loans and investments
- Obtaining supplementary payments such as Energy Bill Support Payments
- Voting rights
- Employment security
- Access to health and social care

## 8. Conclusion

IWA’s aspiration is for a vibrant inland waterway system and recognises that those who choose to live afloat can play a valuable part in this. Whether they choose to have a home mooring or cruise progressively in accordance with their licence requirements, suitable permanent or visitor moorings should be available to them.

## 9. Version History

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This version:

- Edited May 2023
- Approved by Navigation Committee 24 May 2023
- Approved by Trustees at Board meeting on 15 July 2023