



# IWA MEMBER SURVEY

*27 November to 12 December 2023*

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12-Jan-24 v1.1



## OBJECTIVES

IWA Members & Corporate Members were invited to give their opinions on:

- What is important to you.
- The unique position that IWA holds.
- How to get our message across.
- What we need to do more of.
- What we could do less of.
- Our future priorities.
- How members engage with IWA and vice-versa.
- How to recruit more members.
- The enhanced roles that volunteers could play in the future.

The survey was anonymous. The data collected was not personally identifiable data.

## RESPONSE

- **6086** members received the survey - 5187 by email (260 failures) and 1159 by post - and were given links to the *Member Survey* and the *Corporate Member Survey*.
- There were **1228** responses to the *Member Survey* giving a response rate of **20%** (although some joint members may have made individual responses which could have inflated this figure). The 2021 survey response was 13%.
- There were **18** responses to the *Corporate Member Survey* out of the **321** Corporate Members. These responses contained some helpful comments but it was felt that there were insufficient responses to make any meaningful conclusions. We will be following up with another consultation.
- There were a tiny number of issues for respondents using iPads – paper copies of the survey were supplied where requested.

## HEADLINES

Of IWA activities, the highest importance were:

- Campaigning to preserve navigation and funding for navigation authorities (93%)
- Support for waterway restoration groups and projects (86%)
- Waterway Recovery Group activities (80%)

Of survey respondents:

- 85% were very concerned about inadequate funding
- 89% of survey respondents were 60+
- 80% expected to still be members in 5 years' time
- 62% did not volunteer for a waterway charity
- 70% did not want an on-line group discussion

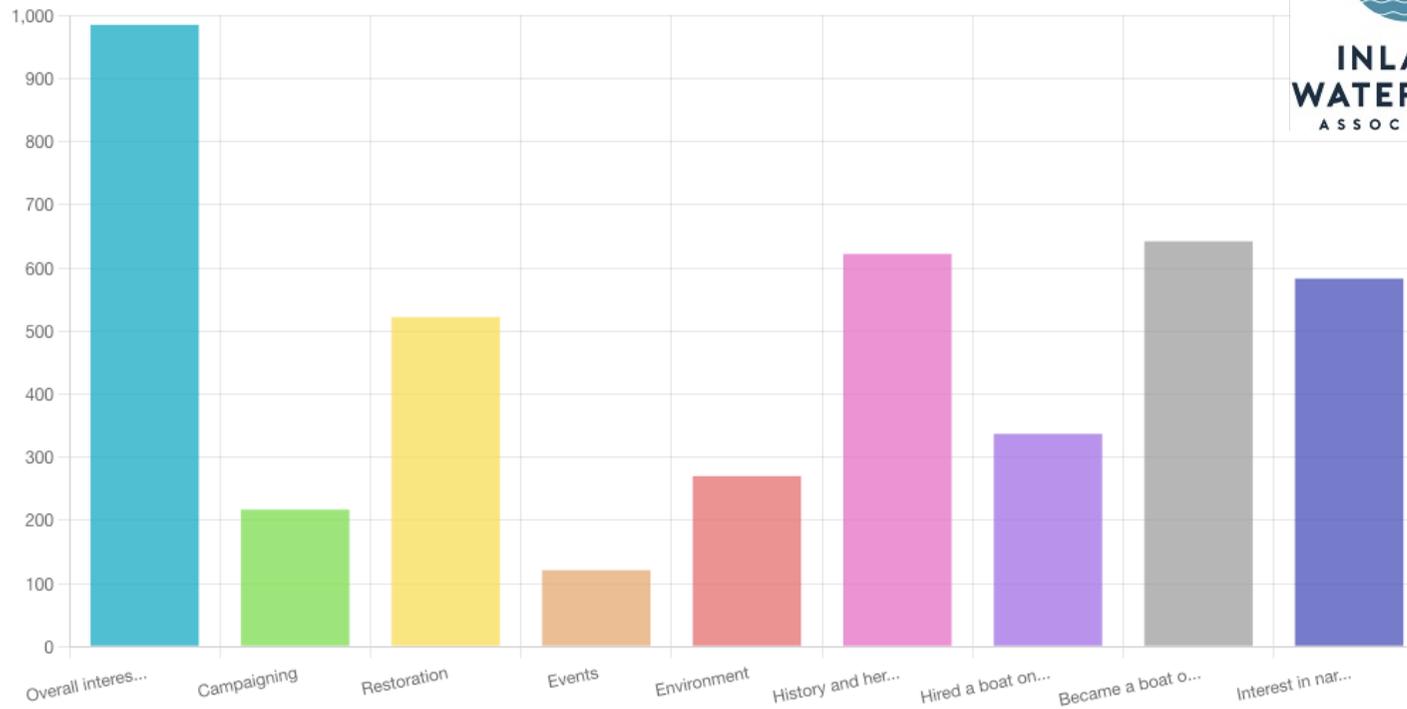


INLAND  
WATERWAYS  
ASSOCIATION

# *Member Survey Results*

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## What were your reasons for joining the IWA?



**81%** (985)

Overall interest in waterways

**18%** (217)

Campaigning

**43%** (522)

Restoration

**10%** (121)

Events

**22%** (270)

Environment

**51%** (622)

History and heritage

**28%** (337)

Hired a boat on the inland waterways

**53%** (642)

Became a boat owner

**48%** (583)

Interest in narrow boating

## 2

## Were there any other reasons for joining?

Reasons in approximate descending order of frequency:

- Support for IWA's aims, including recognition of the historical reputation of the Association, and as a way to make a financial contribution
- General interest in the waterways, the importance of their preservation and the shared responsibility for maintaining them for future generations, 'giving something back'
- The need for advocacy and campaigning, to counter government, EA and C&RT, and IWA's role as an independent and collective voice
- Opportunities to network and meet people with similar interests
- Restoration and work of WRG
- Interest in waterways heritage
- Being a boat owner
- Recreational use of the waterways beyond boating (walking, fishing, kayaking), and interest in the environmental benefits of waterways
- Learning more and keeping up to date about the waterways
- Family connection to the waterways, or being given membership as an offer or gift
- Specific local interests or connection to another waterways organisation, mostly canal restoration trusts





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## Are there any other ways we should attract new members?

Suggestions for attracting new members include:

- **Widening who we engage with**
  - Collaborations with other waterways-related organisations, particularly hire firms
  - Stronger outreach with all waterways users through a greater presence on the towpath
  - More focused involvement in local communities
  - Educational activities in schools and youth groups
- **Adopting new ways for how we engage**
  - Stronger social media presence to resonate with a younger audience
  - Get in on what is already there e.g., TV programmes and You Tubers
  - Encourage existing members to spread the word
  - Discounted memberships and make joining easy e.g., use of QR codes
- **Strengthening the message of why membership matters**
  - A united, assertive message that makes clear how IWA differs from C&RT
  - Target the message at specific user groups, beyond boat owners
  - Be forward looking about the value of the waterways, as well as celebrating past achievements
- **IWA needs to collect evidence of what works** and adapt



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## What is IWA's main purpose and how could we better achieve it?

The purposes of IWA revolve around the following:

- **Preservation and Restoration** of the inland waterways as a national asset. Clean and navigable waterways for all.
- **Lobbying and Advocacy** to secure funding and support to future proof the waterways. Holding C&RT to account.
- **Public Awareness and Engagement** to be more visible and engage with the wider public, beyond boat owners.
- **Educational Initiatives** providing materials and resources to educate the public about the benefits of waterways.
- **Media Presence and Communication** to highlight IWA's successes via social media and engaging with boaters.
- **Collaboration and Independence.** IWA can achieve more by collaborating but it must retain its independence.
- **Collaboration with Restoration Trusts** by providing support, technical advice and resources, and promotion.
- **Differentiation from C&RT.** Focus on areas where IWA can bring unique value, such as political campaigning and independent scrutiny.
- **Supporting all Waterway Users,** representing the interests of walkers, cyclists, wildlife enthusiasts, and other groups, ensuring inclusive access and enjoyment.
- **Strategic Focus,** the need for a clear direction for IWA.

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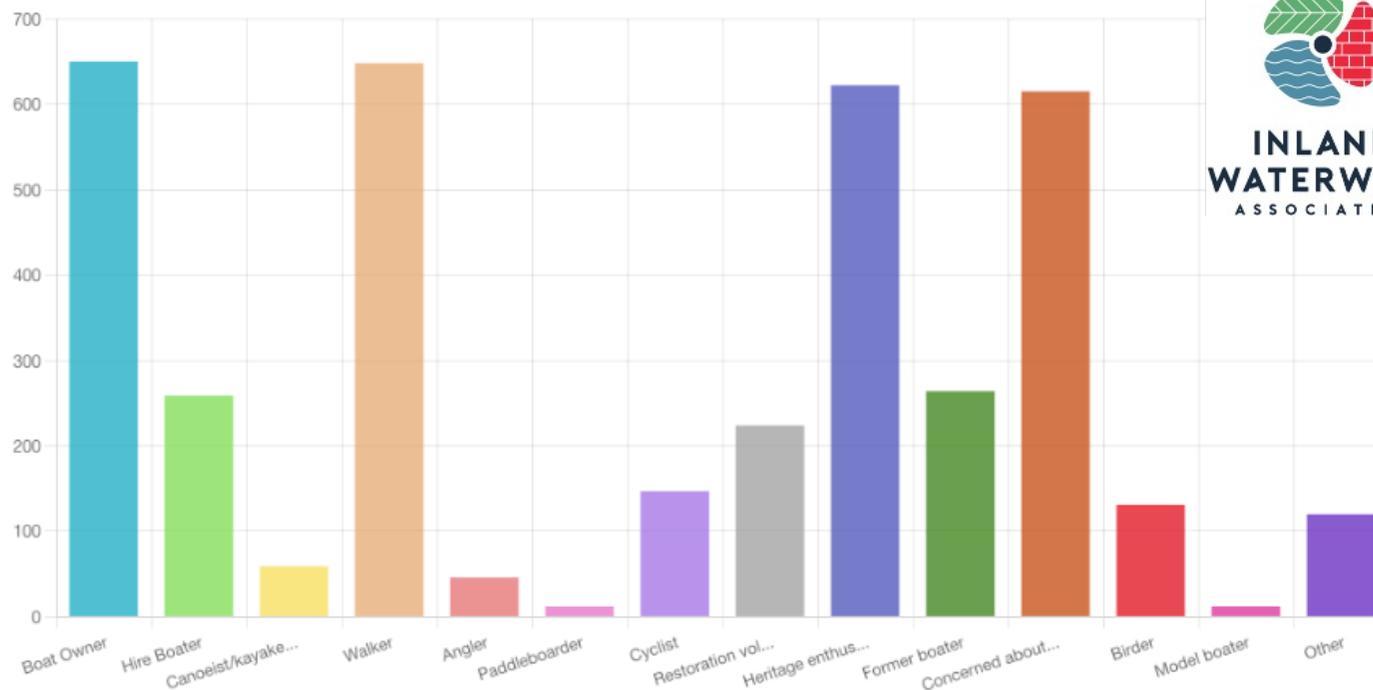
How concerned are you about these current issues with Britain's inland waterways?

	Not concerned	Neutral	Concerned	Very concerned	Responses	Weighted Average
 Inadequate funding	6 (0%)	18 (1%)	153 (13%)	<b>1031</b> <b>(85%)</b>	1208	3.83 / 4
 Pollution	21 (2%)	175 (15%)	<b>529</b> <b>(44%)</b>	481 (40%)	1206	3.22 / 4
 Drought and lack of water	10 (1%)	125 (10%)	<b>607</b> <b>(50%)</b>	462 (38%)	1204	3.26 / 4
 Climate change	68 (6%)	236 (20%)	<b>493</b> <b>(42%)</b>	380 (32%)	1177	3.01 / 4
 Loss of heritage	10 (1%)	101 (9%)	437 (38%)	<b>607</b> <b>(53%)</b>	1155	3.42 / 4
 Inappropriate development	10 (1%)	151 (13%)	437 (39%)	<b>536</b> <b>(47%)</b>	1134	3.32 / 4
 Poor maintenance of waterway infrastructure	5 (0%)	26 (2%)	233 (21%)	<b>859</b> <b>(76%)</b>	1123	3.73 / 4
 Lack of Dredging	5 (0%)	105 (9%)	404 (36%)	<b>596</b> <b>(54%)</b>	1110	3.43 / 4
 Poor vegetation control on off-side, as well as towpath side	16 (1%)	135 (12%)	442 (40%)	<b>508</b> <b>(46%)</b>	1101	3.31 / 4
 General mismanagement of funds on vanity projects	60 (5%)	283 (26%)	338 (31%)	<b>410</b> <b>(38%)</b>	1091	3.01 / 4
 Overstaying and or inconsiderate boaters	34 (3%)	232 (21%)	<b>450</b> <b>(41%)</b>	379 (35%)	1095	3.07 / 4
 Loss of access	38 (3%)	196 (18%)	396 (36%)	<b>457</b> <b>(42%)</b>	1087	3.17 / 4

3.32 / 4

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## What are your interests in waterways?



**56%** (650)  
Boat Owner

**22%** (259)  
Hire Boater

**5%** (59)  
Canoeist/kayaker

**56%** (648)  
Walker

**4%** (46)  
Angler

**1%** (12)  
Paddleboarder

**13%** (147)  
Cyclist

**19%** (224)  
Restoration volunteer

**53%** (622)  
Heritage enthusiast

**23%** (264)  
Former boater

**53%** (615)  
Concerned about the environment

**11%** (131)  
Birder

**1%** (12)  
Model boater

**10%** (120)  
Other

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Where do you live?



9% (112)  
Eastern

10% (121)  
North West

6% (71)  
Yorkshire

12% (148)  
East Midlands

1% (17)  
Scotland

2% (27)  
Wales

7% (85)  
London

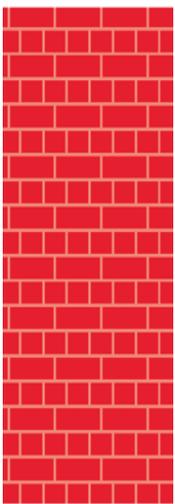
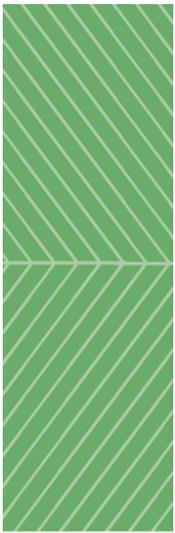
20% (241)  
South East

15% (188)  
West Midlands

2% (19)  
North East

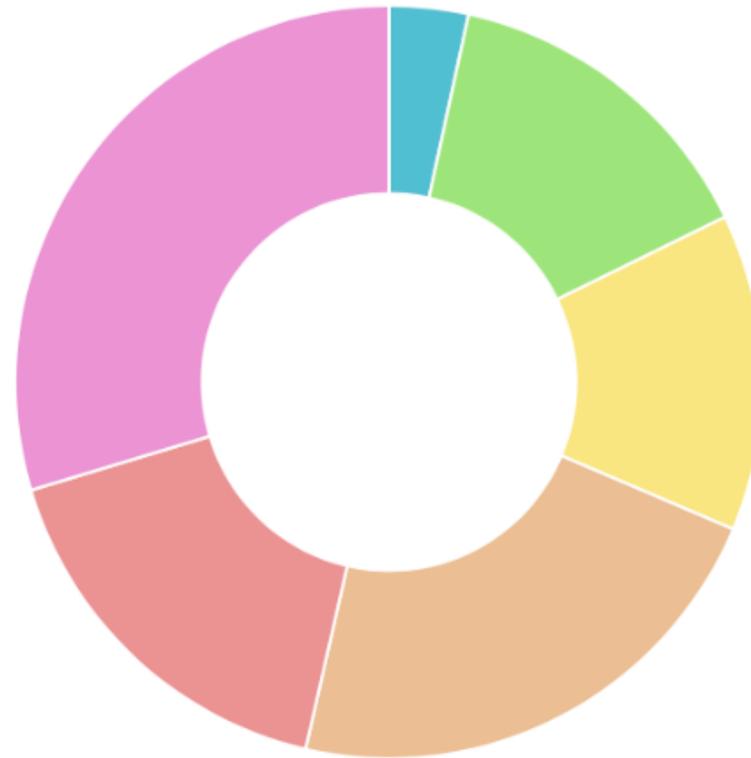
12% (146)  
South West

3% (40)  
Other



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How long have you been a member of IWA?



3% (41)  
Less than 1 year

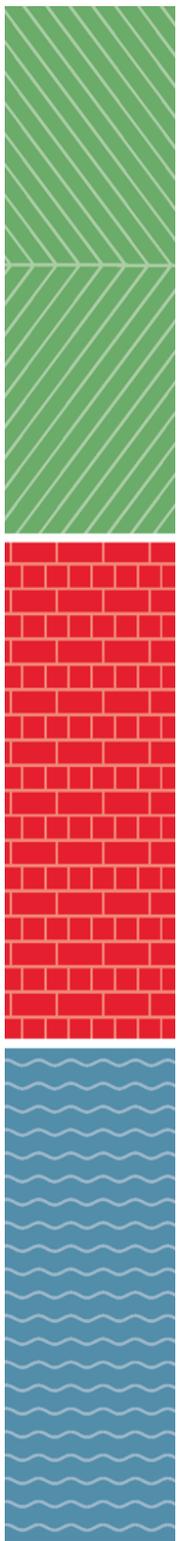
14% (172)  
1-5 years

14% (163)  
6-10 years

22% (266)  
11-20 years

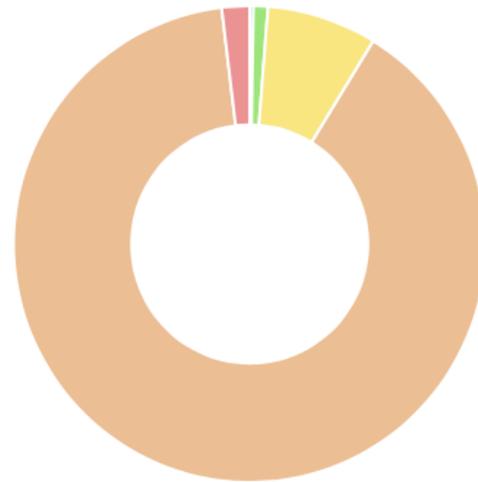
17% (201)  
21-30 years

30% (355)  
30+ years



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What is your age group?



0% (3)  
Under 30

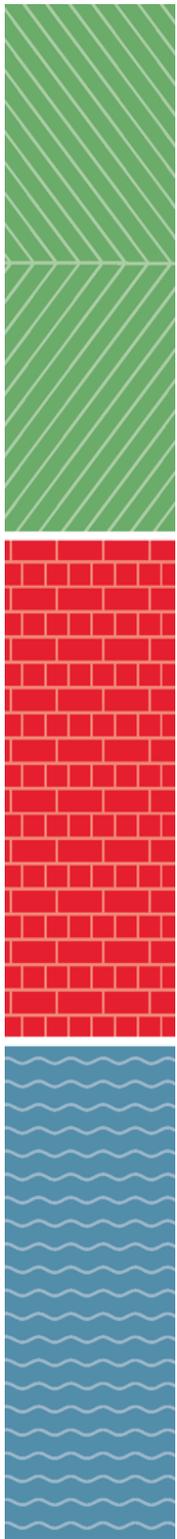
8% (91)  
46-60

2% (23)  
Prefer not to say

(1209)  
Responses

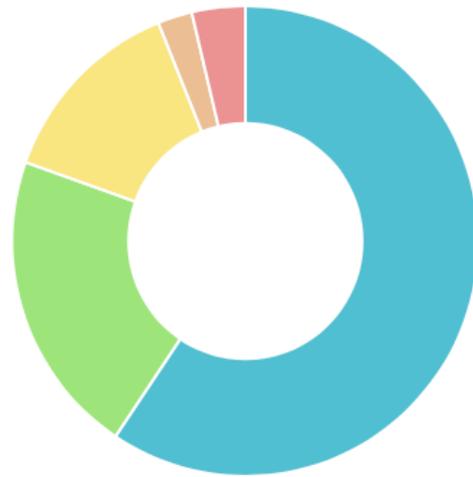
1% (12)  
31-45

89% (1080)  
60+



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I expect to still be a member of the IWA in five years' time



59% (723)  
Strongly agree

13% (164)  
Neutral

4% (45)  
Strongly disagree

(1217)  
Responses

21% (256)  
Mildly agree

2% (29)  
Mildly disagree

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Do you volunteer for the IWA or other waterway charity?



38% (458)  
Yes

62% (750)  
No

(1208)  
Responses

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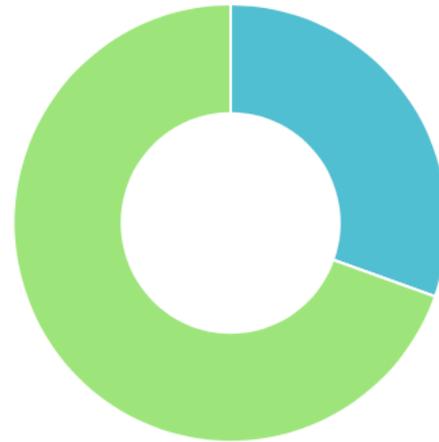
If you do volunteer, or would like to volunteer, what is the main thing you can offer?

Respondents collectively offer a wealth of skills, experiences, and passion for waterways. While some face physical limitations, there is a shared desire to contribute in various capacities, emphasizing the importance of diverse skills and perspectives in the continued preservation and promotion of waterways. Key themes include:

- **Professional and Technical Expertise** – including fundraising, senior management, government relations, engineering, software development, archiving, project management, policy, communications, media, digital and communication and administration. Sector specific skills range from expertise in education, planning, and historic preservation to practical skills like bricklaying, excavation, and boat handling.
- **Interest in Specific Activities** – including canal restoration, clean-ups, vegetation control, and water safety are highlighted. Support for specific projects, events, or initiatives, like waterway festivals, heritage preservation, and local clean-up efforts, is evident.
- **Knowledge and Advocacy** - providing talks, educational partnerships, and raising awareness in their local communities reflecting a deep understanding of waterway systems, historical knowledge, and a passion for advocating the importance of waterways.
- **Utilising Past Experience** in C&RT, restoration societies, as well as WRG and IWA, in roles such as lock keepers, committee members, and newsletter editors, showcasing their longstanding commitment.

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If members wish, we will organise an on-line group discussion to discuss the issues raised by this consultation early in the New Year. Would you like to take part?



30% (366)  
Yes

70% (836)  
No

(1202)  
Responses

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Would you be interested if IWA ran a series of discussions, via Zoom, for members to share their views? If so, please list up to 5 key topics that would interest you.

Here's a summary of topics requested:

- **Funding:** how it works, other funding sources, what does a reduction mean?
- **Restoration:** the work of WRG, the future, how far should it go?
- **Heritage:** historic features and buildings, the evolving use of canals
- **Waterways management:** how it works, role of navigation authorities, role of IWA
- **Monitoring:** how we scrutinize C&RT, how we influence them, how this develops in future
- **Boater issues:** support, training, safety, sustainability
- **Environment:** climate change, wildlife protection, nature trails, pollution, water supply
- **Campaigning & lobbying:** how can IWA secure greater political influence?
- **Volunteering:** recruitment and engagement
- **Membership:** cost, retention, engagement
- **Management & leadership:** governance in IWA and how it could be improved
- **Branch structure & value:** including relationship with local restoration groups
- **Inclusivity:** engaging new audiences, disabled boating
- **Other:** water transfer, promotion of waterway tourism, waterway photography

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## Anything else you would like to add?

There were several key themes outlined by respondents to the final question. This includes the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the IWA, concerns about the organisation's leadership and mission, the state of waterway maintenance, the need for increased engagement with younger members, and questions about the organisation's relevance and structure. It underscores the importance of effective leadership, communication, member engagement, and strategic focus.

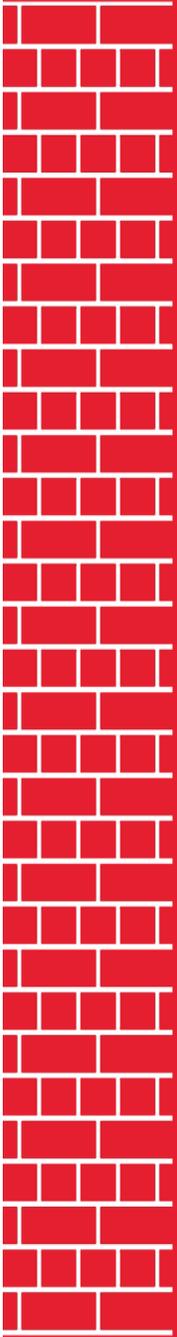
**Positive feedback** – the role of IWA in preserving and extending inland waterway navigation, engagement of volunteers

*Concerns and criticisms:*

- **Relationship with C&RT** – the role of IWA in holding C&RT accountable
- **Communication and transparency** – dissatisfaction with IT infrastructure and the website, calls for more transparency in communication
- **Membership and engagement** – discussion on the tiered structure of regions and branches, the need to engage more members and the importance in involving younger generations
- **Leadership and organisational structure** – questions about internal issues, leadership changes and the need for transparency and communication about the organisation's issues, including financial stability
- **Public perception and advocacy.** The need to improve perception and actively dispel the notion that “everything is wonderful in the world of waterways”.



# *Next Steps*



## NEXT STEPS

The Trustees are meeting in mid-January to consider the Member Survey results and map a way forward. Our initial follow-ups are to:

- To refresh our campaigning strategies
- To more widely promote our restoration work
- Aim to attract younger members.
- Conduct a wider survey of non-members/members in Autumn 2024
- Consult with Corporate Members
- Further improve the website
- Widen our volunteer database
- Encourage members to let us have their email addresses that we don't have!