

## **SURVEY RESULTS, IWA IDENTIFIES DETERIORATING STATE OF WATERWAYS NETWORK AND THE NEED FOR MORE FUNDING**

In support of the multi-organisational Fund Britain's Waterways campaign (FBW), IWA asked boaters for their views on the state of the inland waterways network and how it impacted on their cruising in 2023. As with FBW, the survey covered all navigations in Great Britain and gathered crucial insight into various aspects such as condition of locks, depth of water, ease of mooring and provision of services.

726 boaters responded anonymously during March and a summary of the results is attached. Boaters were able to record specific problems, but the main purpose of the survey was to obtain a snapshot of the current overall state of the infrastructure. Boaters painted a picture of declining condition since their previous cruises and in the long term over the total period that they had been boating with 79% recording the latter.

A particular interest of the survey was how this had impacted on the enjoyment of their cruising in 2023 and their ability to complete planned routes within the allocated time. Nearly half of boaters responding reported that unplanned stoppages and major problems with waterways condition necessitated replanning. The survey results include a long list of recorded problems. Other responses identified problems with moorings, the need for more dredging and vegetation management and poor provision of service.

A key question was whether boaters' experiences in 2023 would influence their future cruising plans. The good news is that 59% said that it would not have an impact proving the considerable resilience of boaters. However, others would not return to certain canals/rivers or not cruise far from their home mooring and sadly 12% said that they were considering giving up boating,

There was also a useful question regarding how navigation authorities should prioritise maintenance if future funding is reduced, with a variety of responses from boaters.

"These results totally prove the need for this survey as a snapshot of current condition and as a benchmark to enable us to identify future deterioration should funding reduce," said Peter Marlow, IWA Trustee involved with the survey. He continued, "they add further strength to the multi-organisational campaign Fund Britain's Waterways to secure adequate funding for all waterways across Great Britain. Without this we see a progressive decline in their condition with resulting lack of use as enthusiasts give up boating and we are in danger of some canals closing."

**ENDS**

### **Notes for Editors**

For further information, please contact the IWA Press Office.  
Email: [pressoffice@waterways.org.uk](mailto:pressoffice@waterways.org.uk) or call: 01494 783 453.

Canal & River Trust was approached for comments on this Press Release.

Richard Parry, Chief Executive of the Canal & River Trust, comments: "I'd like to thank boaters for participating in the survey. The Trust is committed to listening and responding to

your feedback. It is essential that we deliver the long-term care that our historic canal network demands and continue to raise (and spend) record levels of money on maintenance and repairs, alongside the contribution of our growing number of volunteers.

“Both this IWA survey, and our own annual survey of boater satisfaction which we’ll be publishing shortly, confirm the importance of a focus on the basic upkeep and maintenance that directly impacts on boaters. So, whilst we’re seeing record statutory spend on reservoirs, vital for navigation and accounting for a significant proportion of our major works expenditure, we must ensure that all aspects of the direct boating experience continue to be prioritised.

“With government funding declining in real terms, and the challenges of climate change increasing, we have published our Election Statement setting out how, with the right partnership with the next government, we can ensure that a navigable and well-cared for canal network can continue to deliver so much for society.”

Environment Agency was approached for comments but is unable to do so publicly in the pre-election period.

### **About The Inland Waterways Association**

The Inland Waterways Association is the only independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and regenerating Britain’s navigable rivers and canals as places for leisure, living and business. IWA has a network of volunteers and branches who deploy their expertise and knowledge to work constructively with navigation authorities, national and local government and a wide range of voluntary, private and public sector organisations for the benefit of the waterways and their users.

The Association provides practical and technical support to restoration projects through its Restoration Hub. IWA's Waterway Recovery Group offers practical and technical support to waterways restoration projects across the country as well as providing skills training for volunteers.

The waterways of today would not exist without IWA, which ensured over many years that they were saved and enhanced. Subsequently, the Association has led successful campaigns to preserve heritage, promote greener boating, and encourage more funding for the waterways. IWA is now deeply concerned about the threat to our waterways posed by funding cuts, with for example the financial situations of the Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency waterways and Scottish Canals being especially critical. IWA will not let the network fall into disrepair again and for this reason joined with partner organisations in May 2023 to launch the Fund Britain’s Waterways action group, with the single purpose of “campaigning collectively for an increase in government funding of Britain’s inland waterways to avert their decline, and to promote awareness of the huge economic, environmental and social well-being value they provide”. To date, more than 130 waterway and non-waterway organisations representing hundreds of thousands of waterway users and supporters have joined Fund Britain’s Waterways and IWA continues to play a leading role on the steering group. Canals and rivers are valuable assets which contribute to the country’s economic recovery, as highlighted by our Waterways for Today report, so it is vital that we act now to protect them for future generations.