

MEDIA RELEASE



FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

For immediate release

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Fund Britain's Waterways responds to the Autumn Budget 2024

Despite much talk by Government about rebuilding Britain through increased public investment, the Budget made no mention of public investment to safeguard Britain's inland waterways.

This is despite the strong representations made by the coalition group Fund Britain's Waterways to the Treasury, which highlighted the widely acknowledged benefits that Britain's rivers and canals provide, including the many economic activities generated, and the urgent need to review and improve funding for the waterways.

The increasing fragility of the 250 year old infrastructure which supports Britain's 5000 miles of inland waterways, combined with ever more frequent episodes of extreme weather, means there is now an urgent need to invest to save the network. Indeed it was in response to growing concern about the deterioration of Britain's well-loved network of canals and navigable rivers that national organisations joined together in 2023 to establish the FBW campaign.

Whilst the underinvestment in the network is allowed to continue, we are getting ever closer to the tipping point when waterways will be forced to close, directly hitting jobs and wider tourism, and wasting the millions of hours of volunteer time and millions of pounds of public money that has been dedicated to regenerating this great national asset.

There is ample evidence of the need to increase funding, with all the main navigation authorities openly admitting they have insufficient funding to deal with all the growing infrastructure challenges. Today there are long periods of time where sections of the network are closed for extensive repairs and other sections become unreliable due to more frequent and unpredictable closures caused by failing infrastructure. All this is having a heavy impact on the holiday hire boat trade, which in turn impacts local jobs and wider associated tourism.

The level of funding required to restore and retain Britain's inland waterways is tiny in the overall terms of government spending and yet it is critical to avoid a more rapid deterioration of the network which would only further burden the public purse and jeopardise the many businesses and communities which rely on having safe and navigable waterways.

Moreover, further investment in Britain's inland waterways aligns with the Government growth mission as it would return billions of pounds in health, economic and environmental benefits.

This is why, as part of its next phase of the Spending Review, FBW urges the Government to commit to a comprehensive review of future funding plans for Britain's inland waterways.

Les Etheridge, Chair of FBW said

"The Government must intervene to help reverse the current deterioration of Britain's inland waterways which is increasingly impacting businesses up and down the country. Unless funding arrangements are reviewed and improved we fear that Britain's inland waterways and the many benefits they provide will be in serious jeopardy."

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Notes to the Editor

About Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW)

FBW brings together a wide range of organisations with the sole 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. Established in June 2023, it already has more than 140 member organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways, and has secured over 50,000 signatures on its public petition.

Founding members of the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign include:

- The Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs
- British Marine
- The Inland Waterways Association
- The National Association of Boat Owners
- The Royal Yachting Association.

For further information about Fund Britain's Waterways, contact Joanna Richardson, Senior Public Affairs & Policy Executive at British Marine jrichardson@britishmarine.co.uk

References

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

1. The latest [British Marine Economic Benefits report \(April 2024\)](#) which includes:

The combined economic contribution of the inland boating sector and its wider associated tourism generated the UK was £7.6bn in total for the year 2022/23 (the figure includes £1.6bn from the inland marine industry plus £6bn from wider tourism generated by expenditure of those participating in inland boating and other inland watersports on non-boating goods and services such as food and hospitality)

Employment - the inland marine industry provides 41,166 total jobs. In addition, wider tourism associated with inland boating provides 295,886 jobs, so not only does inland boating directly employ over 41,000 people but it also supports almost a further 300,000 jobs through its associated wider tourism.

2. ['Waterways for Today' report](#) published by the Inland Waterways Association (November 2022)
3. ['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)