

RBOA Open Meeting

Report: The RBOA Review of the Report of the Commission
on Licensing on 31st January

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1. Introduction

This is not a transcript; most comments are not attributed. It is however an accurate distillation of the themes and fears expressed. Inevitably in a debate such as this there is some repetition and comments are made on a subject after the debate has moved on.

In this document I have captured every unique point that was made but not repeated comments that were voicing points already made, albeit in slightly different words.

When reading this report please remember that our assumption is that the majority if not all of the contributors are residential boaters, that is, their boat is their home.

A very strong theme throughout the whole three hours, starting with Penny's run through of the recommendations is the importance of consultation. An often-repeated fear that CRT will either draft consultation documents designed to give them their chosen outcome and/or ignore the results. *Decide, implement, defend.*

It was agreed it is the job of the organisations represented in the meeting to fight to ensure every recommendation to consult is honoured. The organisations represented were the RBOA, NBT, IWA, NABO and AWA. Delegates were from a wider group of organisations and none, but the vast majority, to the best of our knowledge, were active liveaboard boaters.

It became very clear that once the recommendations are looked at and discussed in detail many need considerable refinement, some are just impracticable, others completely unacceptable. Crucially, as the Commissioners said:

"It is essential that new powers are accompanied by appropriate, proportionate safeguards, allowing Trust decisions to be challenged."

On that theme an often-repeated suggestion that had strong support in the chat was the need for an appeals process for example, but not limited to, when a boater is accused of abusive behaviour.

1.2. Structure of This Document

To understand this document the format is as follows:

- **Section 1** is a virtually verbatim record of what was said by the Chair, Hannah Halliday, and Penny Barber. This covers Penny's brief description of the Commissioners' rationale in framing the recommendations and, on occasion, her personal view and, arguably most importantly, the points that boaters and their representative organisations need to focus on in the forthcoming rounds of consultation.
- **The remainder of the document** is a narrative summary of comments made verbally and in the chat section used by those online.
Where actual quotes are used, they are presented in *italics*.

2. Opening Remarks

Chair: Hannah Halliday

"The RBOA's objective in holding this event is to give boaters, especially those whose "Home is where their boat is" an opportunity to hear at first hand, and then to discuss, what the Commission recommends, and what the impact of the recommendations is likely to be. Which recommendations are broadly acceptable or not, how those recommendations might or should be implemented and which recommendations are totally unacceptable.

What we are NOT doing is debating the legality or otherwise of the Commission, or the adequacy or otherwise of the Terms of Reference.

It is the RBOA's intention to produce a summary of the debate. We will share this with CRT in the hope it will help them in the creation of the consultations that they will inevitably launch to guide their decision-making process."

It will also guide the RBOA response to those consultations.

[Halliday introduced Penny Barber, narrowboat owner since 1989, long-time liveaboard and one of the four elected boater representatives on CRT's Council.]

2.2 Commissioner's Introduction: Penny Barber

Penny was one of the three commissioners and provided context and guidance before taking participants through all 36 recommendations.

Her full introductory comments are included here exactly as provided (structured for readability, but not edited):

"As Hannah has said, I'm going to make a few opening remarks on context and choices and then whiz through all 36 recommendations...

My work writing the report with the two other commissioners is done...

Please read the recommendations carefully. Every word was weighed..."

My work writing the report with the two other commissioners is done.

We handed it in at the end of October. However, I remain in post as one of your four elected boaters representatives. It's my job to put your views to CRT.

Please be assured that I am quite capable of having an argument with myself, and anyway, more information may have emerged, as well as there being more time for contemplation.

As you read the recommendations, when you experience a knee-jerk reaction, I ask if you could just pause a moment, push that knee slowly back down. Until you've read the underlying paragraphs.

My second suggestion for your use of the report is remember that CRT like it. They liked it immediately, and wholeheartedly. Use that. Trawl the report for actions and phrases that work for you and hold them to it.

There are some bright ideas that we didn't think were sufficiently vital to be expressed as recommendations, or maybe we were even less confident than usual that there wasn't quite enough information to support them. And examples of those you can find on page 34, paragraph 3, there's thoughts there. And also, page 64, paragraph 163, there's another one, and I'm sure there are others that I haven't noted there.

There are recommendations that you may be concerned about. You may think that if you'd been in the room, you'd have vetoed it.

As many of you know, prior to the Commission being set up, CRT had some plans involving a Transport and Works Act order. I decided in the end that, on balance, it was better for all ideas to be out there. To be on the table. Left off, there's a risk that they'd be smuggled in later.

Please read the recommendations carefully. Every word was weighed.

Several recommendations are for consultation on a matter. Our Terms of Reference 4.15 asked us to consider the appropriate vehicle for reform. We declined that invitation. I know some of you think we're stupid because we've suggested actions that are problematic legally.

That's not your best evidence of our stupidity.

We didn't know how the report would be received. We didn't want to waste hours, and probably money, exploring the legal issues of something that might be dropped. More importantly, we try to take a rigorous problem-solving approach. So, define the problem, identify all possible solutions, select some. How the solutions are implemented is implementation. That's the next step.

We may have blocked ideas too early if we'd involved the lawyers saying it couldn't be done, or it's too difficult. So, that's why we did that.

Okay, so, now for your whiz through the recommendations”.

3. Recommendations 1–36 With Penny Barber's Commentary

3.1 Recommendation 1

The requirement for boaters without home moorings and other boaters when cruising to change their moorings at least every 14 days, or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances (for example to allow for unplanned navigation stoppages), should be retained (paragraph 44).

It's generally agreed that boats should move, every fortnight, or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances and do remember that last bit.

3.2 Recommendation 2

The Trust should interpret 14 days as inclusive (paragraph 45).

That's a suggestion that we received from, I believe, somebody who is with us online today.

You move on the same you can move on the same day of the week, you don't have to move that day. And we don't care if it means CRT sighting officers' rotas have to change

3.3 Recommendation 3

After careful consultation with licence holders and others about the different options, the Trust should define a new, clearer movement requirement to replace the concept of bona fide navigation. The new requirement should be directed at finding an appropriate balance between the efficient and effective management of the waterways, including fair access, boater needs and the impact on others whose interests might be affected, and on encouraging the use of all the waterways (paragraph 52). Annex 5 illustrates one possible way of doing this.

I'll say more about Annex 5 at the end, because I think that's a sort of a bit of a longer comment than I'm trying to approach the recommendations with.

Beware the loose wording of this. We didn't think we should be too prescriptive here, because consultation is needed, but of course the risk is that there might be a bit more leeway than some of us would like left in there

3.4 Recommendation 4

The Trust should cease to use the term "continuous cruiser" to describe leisure licence holders without home moorings and substitute a more accurate description (paragraph 54).

I spent quite a bit of time saying there's no such thing as a continuous cruising license. The phrase doesn't describe how many people do use their boats and want to use their boats.

I think most people talk about going boating or navigating. I don't think many people talk about going cruising. And, yeah, you do get some, unpleasant homophobic jokes about going cruising, so we thought perhaps something better should be there.

3.5 Recommendation 5

The Trust should begin an open discussion about the meaning and measurement of the term "congestion" and about the desirability and practicality of introducing price differentials and/or rationing the issue of licences or other ways of addressing capacity issues in congested areas (paragraph 71).

Lovely. Oh, this is great.

The terms of reference talk about congestion. We discovered there's absolutely no definition of congestion. I think I made one up for a footnote which says something about how many spare meters of mooring at sunset each day, or something, but for all the talk of congestion and all the people that say they're concerned about it, there isn't a definition, that's, the starting point in defining the problem. Please also note that we say the Trust should begin an open discussion here, and if we look at also 6,

3.6 Recommendation 6

The Trust should seek to include the power to introduce price differentiation and/or rationing on a contingent basis in any legislation which is put to Parliament to implement our recommendations (paragraph 72).

And 7

3.7 Recommendation 7

If the Trust decides to introduce differentiated licence fees and/or rationing in congested areas, it should do so as part of a considered package, possibly including ring-fencing the additional revenue in whole or in part to improve services in those areas (paragraph 73).

Those are some thoughts about what people might want to do, but of course, supply is another part of that.

3.8 Recommendation 8

The Rivers Only discount should be ended on all Trust rivers. The change should be phased over a period of three years to ease the financial impact on those affected (paragraph 77).

and what I'm going to say next ties in with the other the previous three slides. To my mind,

your navigation licence should be the same business model as gym membership. Namely, you pay your money, and how much use you make of those facilities is entirely up to you.

So, with the rivers-only discount, we just thought, well, why should there be any sort of discount for this in particular? And our understanding of it was that it seemed to be some sort of introductory offer to rivers being licensed.

I appreciate there's a whole other yes, I realize there are some legal implications around this, but just be assured, where we were coming from was there should be one navigation license.

And it should be the same price. We are not trying to have a go at the River Lee here. That absolutely wasn't where we started from, although I know there's some suspicion around that.

3.9 Recommendation 9

Any waterways where the Trust is the responsible navigation authority, but where it currently has no power to issue licences should be brought within the scope of the licensing provisions (paragraph 78).

That, I think, is fair enough. Everyone should have a navigation licence

3.10 Recommendation 10

The Trust should consult on appropriate safeguards to prevent any new or existing enforcement powers in relation to the licensing system being used capriciously (paragraph 83).

There's a lot of we have there's a lot of concern that the trust complaint system and the ombudsman system doesn't seem to be used very much, and if you contrast it, perhaps, with schemes like the Housing Ombudsman, it's quite a different scheme, and certainly underused, so generally, yes, we're talking about there should be appropriate safeguards, but if you look into the paragraphs behind that, we're also talking about looking into what the complaint system should be in the Ombudsman system.

3.12 Recommendation 12

The statutory notice periods before the Trust can remove non-residential sunk, sinking or abandoned boats from its waterways should be removed, subject to payment of appropriate compensation if the Trust is mistaken in its belief that the boat has been abandoned (paragraph 105).

There seems to be a lot of concern about boats that are abandoned, and then, of course, they progress to sinking, and then, of course, they progressed to being sunk.

And there's a delay between the boat being abandoned and when the trust can actually move the abandoned boat. So, we think that that time period should be removed. Obviously, we would want them to be absolutely certain it was genuinely an abandoned boat but moving it before it sinks and is difficult to move and dangerous to move, and is possibly causing an environmental hazard seems to make sense to us.

3.13 Recommendation 13

The Trust should consult widely on the case for granting it the power to use reasonable force as a last resort when removing a boat subject to a Court order and (ii) the safeguards which would have to be in place if the power were granted. Boat removal should only happen after all reasonable steps have been taken to avoid it becoming necessary (paragraph 113).

Yes. The trust Should consult widely.

The Trust claim that having such a power would make the experience of, a boater on the other end of a Section 8, so their home has been taken away from them, less stressful for the boater.

all reasonable steps sometimes haven't been taken, and there's sometimes been misinformation in there, and we'll say more about that in a bit

3.14 Recommendation 14

The Trust should have the civil power to levy fines on licence holders in response to breaches of its licence terms and conditions and on towpath users in response to behaviours detrimental to others, like fly tipping. In cases involving boaters, if a fine remains unpaid for over 21 days, the Trust should have the power to tow a boat away until both the initial debt and the cost of towing and storage are paid (paragraph 117).

Now, this one this is the idea is that to solve the problem, that there's nothing between saying, please could you move, please could you move nicely, and taking your boat off you. I think the CRT also have some jealousy around the sort of powers that council has to levy parking fines and fine people for fly tipping. So, the idea is that there's some sort of new civil power that is much less severe than the current Section 8.

I know they've got bylaws, there seem to be problems with them using the bylaws. They talk about not wanting to criminalise people, but I think there's also an issue around how you take that sort of case through court. But something to be considered, and I'm just explaining where the intention of that comes from.

3.15 Recommendation 15

The Trust should review its initial approach to licence holders it believes may have breached their licence conditions in minor ways without causing a nuisance to make it more customer-friendly and positive (paragraph 124).

Yeah, that's one of the I think there's about 3 clauses that are basically stop being horrid, We've said in in different ways, and certainly something a number of us have suggested as boaters, reps, where the approach we could just be treated more like customers. If you're more than 14 days in a particular spot, instead of being told off.

Why isn't the first communication? We notice you've been there for more than 14 days? Are you okay? Is everything alright? Because quite often, the reason someone hasn't moved is because something dreadful has happened, or there's still ice in the canal, or whatever. So, hopefully people are happy with that one.

3.16 Recommendation 16

The Trust should review and regularly check the robustness of its arrangements for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information it uses before issuing overstay or other notices (paragraph 127).

Oh, goodness me, yes. Again, any of us that have been involved in supporting boaters know there are some absolutely appalling examples where the information hasn't been complete, and I know of a case that we did have the client's permission to speak about where someone had actually got a license for. I think they got 8 or 9 months remaining on it, and they got a Section 8, because finance and licensing haven't spoken to each other, and kind of ticked a box somewhere.

3.17 Recommendation 17

Subject to appropriate safeguards, the Trust should have the ability to refuse to issue or renew licences where (i) there is clear evidence of abusive or threatening behaviour posing a significant, or serious fear of risk to other boaters or users of the waterways or to Trust employees, volunteers or contractors; (ii) there are unpaid debts; or (iii) there is lack of suitable identification of boat ownership (paragraph 97).

Subject to appropriate safeguards, so you'll have thoughts on what those should or shouldn't be. Where the trust's coming from with, this one is how the power works, how the licensing works, as I dare say many of you know. If someone's got their BSS, they've got the insurance, they've got the mooring, or they're meeting the, continuous cruising requirements, then the trust absolutely has to issue a license. They have no reason to refuse. They feel that there are, possibly some behaviours that shouldn't be tolerated. Amongst the boating community. So, that's where that's coming from.

3.18 Recommendation 18

The Trust should consider the addition of lack of fitness for navigation of the vessel concerned to the statutory grounds for refusal of a licence (paragraph 98).

Yes, I mean, that the idea behind that is to address the issue of Oh, things that are clearly unsuitable that can't navigate, something far too enormous to get through the bridge that's just down the way, something I don't know, a pallet with plywood on it, maybe, you might not think is a suitable, vessel for its use, whatever.

So and they're concerned that there are things that just that people want to license that are really not suitable for navigation for a variety of reasons. they say we asked about, the sort of static businesses. I think there's a large there are one or two large restaurants or something in London. Apparently, they're not a problem, you can do something with them and a business license

3.19 Recommendation 19

The Trust should develop the existing boat registration system into a publicly available ownership register, with owners being required to provide the information necessary to complete the register at the time they apply for a new licence or for licence renewal. The cost of the register should be met by fees paid by the applicant (paragraph 133).

Apologies to anyone that we've alarmed with this proposal. This is not designed to be some sort of public register, so your violent ex can find you and continue to harass you.

The idea behind this is to deal with the situation where A buys a boat. Goes away for a little bit. B breaks in. says the boat is his, sells it to C. C buys the boat.

B buggers off with the money. A returns. A and C genuinely both think they own the boat. So some sort of registration scheme that would give some sort of protection against ownership we think would be desirable. This was another one that was a suggestion from a boater who has experience of horses, who says that once upon a time, people said you couldn't possibly register horses, and loads of people wouldn't stand for it, but actually they did. So, the suggestion is some sort of registration scheme to give a little bit of proof of ownership, if that's possible.

3.20 Recommendation 20

Any party operating a crane, slipway or other facility subject to a contract with the Trust should be required as part of that contract to confirm the existence of a current licence before allowing their facility to be used for launching a vessel on to a Trust waterway (paragraph 135).

Again, that's hopefully a sensible barrier to entry. You might as well check that a boat coming onto the waterways has got a license.

3.21 Recommendation 21

To incentivise boats being kept in good condition and to inhibit them from being abandoned if they sink or otherwise fall into acute disrepair, the Trust should discuss with the insurance industry and consult with boaters on the practicality of insisting on recovery of wreck insurance cover or some form of deposit scheme as a condition of issuing a licence (paragraph 145).

Recovery of wreck. That might be useful to just, again. Stop the idea, cover against boats sinking, or make sure the cash is in place to fish them out if they do, if you do forget to tighten your stern gland, or put your, put your weed hatch cover back on at walls or locks, or something like that.

3.22 Recommendation 22

The Trust should consider whether the blocked account arrangements are working effectively and are fit for purpose, particularly in the way they affect more vulnerable boaters (paragraph 129).

We know we haven't got the wording quite right on this, and pretty much a couple of days after we published the report, we found out more information about finance and licensing, but we do know that there's quite a lot wrong with how the finance and licensing systems, operate, and how things aren't checked, and all the rest of that. So

Sorry we haven't we didn't manage to find out, perhaps as much as we might have wanted to on that, but take that as a cipher for, for goodness sake, sort out your finance and licensing systems, and make them work and accurate, and don't overcharge people, and all of that, and something I discovered only this week is if your license has expired, you can't tell and you're trying to sort it out, you can't notify CRT of an overstay. They won't let you, because you haven't got a license. At the very time you're trying to be compliant and put everything in place to be compliant, that stops. So Yeah do add your own examples in when you're responding to this, and let's work on getting the finance and licensing systems better. The boaters reps. boating interest meeting, we did have someone from finance to that meeting in November, so we're pursuing it as boaters' reps, but anything you can do individually is also useful

3.23 Recommendation 23

The Trust should have the right to fit a tracking device to any vessel where there is clear evidence of a failure to comply with movement requirements, particularly in congested areas. Boaters should also be given the right, but not the obligation, to install a Trust-approved tracking device on their boat to provide evidence of compliance (paragraph 131).

Oh, yes. Okay. This one has a long history. I'm told by someone who is a petitioner to the 1995 Act that a select committee site visit was informed that British Waterways wanted to put barcodes on the roof of all boats and, have a tracker on the underside of all bridges.

What we're suggesting here is that if somebody really isn't where there's clear evidence that somebody isn't complying with the movement requirements, that a tracker could be fitted. But also, that where a boater thinks they're not being fairly assessed, they can go, can I have a tracker, please? And, hopefully that would work. So that's the suggestion that it's used in very limited cases. I appreciate there are all number of technical problems with that one.

5.24 Recommendation 24

The Trust should investigate the desirability, practicality and cost-effectiveness of different methods of providing proof of insurance as part of licence applications and renewals, rather than continuing to rely on self-certification. Failure to demonstrate up-to-date insurance when an existing policy expires during the period of a licence should be flagged in the licensing system and followed up. Persistent failure to produce evidence of up-to-date insurance after a warning should initially result in a fine and ultimately the invalidation of a licence (paragraph 139).

Oh, yes, now.

There's a couple of things going on here. Secondly, it's another point that could be a touchpoint, for boaters. You know, you have some sort of contact at your time of license renewal with the trust.

Currently, my boat license renews at the end of August, my insurance renews in December. There's absolutely no check that I've renewed that I've got any insurance from December to August. It's only when I come to renew my license next August that I that there's any check on insurance.

And the checks well, we talk about the current system being self-certification, which it is, really. There's not much checking goes on, and there used to be, apparently, some sort of certification system, so we think that should be looked at again, and we do think that there should be a check at the renewal date, like, you know, like with car I'm wary of using car analogies, but it seems entirely reasonable to make sure everyone has insurance all the time.

3.25 Recommendation 25

The Trust should amend the Boat Safety Scheme to include proportionate checks which would reduce the risk of sinking (paragraph 148).

Again, people are concerned about sinking and abandoned boats.

we just thought we'd ask the boat safety scheme if there was anything that could be improved. We spent a lot of time talking about holes and deciding, apart from the fact it just wasn't practical to include any sort of, hull check, because of course you need an out-of-water survey for that, and that'd be an absolute nightmare.

And you need a surveyor but anyway, boats tend to sink because water comes in from above, or you haven't tightened your stern gland, et cetera, et cetera, more than a hull having holes. So the sort of thing I was thinking of, but, you know, I'd like the experts on the scheme to have a think

about it, the sort of thing I would be thinking of is maybe we're all required to carry a bilge pump. Not have one fitted, but just that we carry one, because it's quite a good idea. But we'll see what they come up with on that. There might be other ideas, and you may well have some bright ideas that would help avoid sinking boats.

3.26 Recommendation 26

A new boat safety certificate should be required within three months of a boat being transferred to a new owner, unless a new certificate has been obtained within a defined period (we suggest three months) leading up to the sale (paragraph 150).

This is to cover, I think, a situation that might be more of a thing in London, where there's quite a fast churn in boats, people might only be on a boat for a couple of years.

A lot can happen in 4 years. We're resistant to the idea that there should be a boat, safety scheme check every, every year. But we thought, at least a check on transfer of ownership would at least make sure your gas was safe. Again, you know, people lots of people coming onto boats don't really know, don't have much experience, and at least making sure their gas is safe would be a good idea. And we said, it doesn't matter whether it's the seller or the buyer. Somebody, just please make sure this boat is okay on, on transfer.

3.27 Recommendation 27

The Trust should consider the case for a scrappage scheme to encourage the removal from the waterways of derelict or unsafe boats (paragraph 152).

this was another bright idea from someone. Yes, if there are craft that have been abandoned, or that people don't want to maintain anymore, why not do what we did with cars that we didn't want anymore? Why not have a scrappage scheme

3.28 Recommendation 28

Houseboat Certificates should be abolished and replaced by standard licences (paragraph 158).

There's only 43 of us, and I'm one.

I've been persuaded that some of the protections I thought I'd got under this, I haven't and anyway could be provided through a mooring agreement. So, the 43 of us that are affected by this will be looking more closely at it, but I can't argue with the logic of getting rid of something that's not much used, and just having a leisure license like everybody else does.

3.29 Recommendation 29

The Trust should initiate a discussion with stakeholders about the historic boat assessment criteria and process with a view to ensuring the associated licence fee discount is serving its intended purpose and, if it does, consider whether a larger discount would be appropriate (paragraph 159)

Hopefully that's not too contentious. I think there's a bit of a mystery about how some of the assessments were made that we thought should be tidied up.

3.30 Recommendation 30

All fee discounts and surcharges applied by the Trust should be determined by general principles related to its corporate objectives and charitable objects, should be capable of clear and transparent explanation, and should be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain appropriate (paragraph 160).

The person who proofread and formatted the final report did say, well, isn't that a bit, sort of, apple pie and motherhood? You really need to say that? Surely that's what people do anyway. Well, I don't think they do. I don't think we've been told the real reasons publicly for the continuous cruiser surcharge. Use that for the continuous cruiser surcharge, and anything else that you think, isn't quite right. I mean, I also wonder if the if the electric boat discount is a bit too generous, given the level of infrastructure, or as fine-tuned as it might be, given the level of infrastructure that you need to charge up an electric boat, but used that one, they've signed up to that one, so, there we are.

3.31 Recommendation 31

The Trust should produce a clearer exposition of the uses to which licence fee income is put and from which licence holders benefit in terms which make sense to licence holders, building on the existing analysis in its Boater Report. It should make that analysis widely available (paragraph 162).

I hope that would be a useful and sensible thing, and again, something else, something that should be happening already, and ideas on what you would like to see would also be useful

3.32 Recommendation 32

The Trust should review at least triennially the data it collects so that it is able to provide assurance to its Board, boaters and others about the condition and use of its waterways, including in relation to licences (paragraph 18).

We got a bit frustrated by the lack of evidence and data, so we thought we'd put this one in.

I mean, obviously, they do have quite a lot of information about all sorts of things, but you know, and I'll give you I've already given you a congestion as an example of something that's perceived to be a problem, but there doesn't seem to be any data, so we thought that was a useful reminder of what all good businesses should do.

3.33 Recommendation 33

The Trust should reassess the way it communicates and works with boaters and attempt to improve its relationships with them, particularly with liveaboard boaters (paragraph 170).

*Yes, this is another Stop Being Horrid one.
Which I'm told they're working on. Well, so yeah.*

Indeed.

My first boaters rep meeting in March 2024, the very first- I and others, in response to the presentation of the Boater Satisfaction Survey, I said, well, you could change your attitude, and sent them some examples, and I'm not sure much has happened since then, but we live in hope, don't we? And certainly, I get the impression that the new CEO is keen on making this change, so we'll see what happens

3.34 Recommendation 34

The Trust should support and provide start-up funding for an independent charity that offers advice and advocacy to liveaboard and other boaters, including assistance with benefit claims (paragraph 174).

Please do, on this one, read through paragraphs 172 to 174, which set out our thinking on this quite well, I think.

I know there are many people who do great work. In preparation for my role on council, I trained as an NBTa caseworker and took 11 cases for them. Their training and case management is excellent.

The waterways chaplain are often well-trained and, able to assist, but I'm told they have a policy of not raising complaints.

CRT's welfare team can be excellent, but they can only signposts, they can't actually advise an advocate. And as they're part of the organization causing the problem, I think there's probably a barrier to get approaching them early. So, there's I think there's long been a desperate need for an organization that can offer correct advice and appropriate, and not just signposts correct advice and appropriate support, and can advocate for the clients and challenge and criticise CRT so that they improve. But that obviously could be done under an umbrella of another organization. You might not need a separate charity setting up

3.35 Recommendation 35

The Trust should review the tone and content of all its communications and other contacts with boaters and other waterways users to ensure they are in plain English, use consistent terminology and are as customer friendly as possible (paragraph 177).

Yeah, stop being horrid, another. I said there were several of those. If we say it in enough ways, perhaps this'll happen. One of the user groups did do some very good examples of how things weren't in plain English, and how they could be in plain English.

3.36 Recommendation 36

The Trust should make the case to DEFRA for consolidation of the legislation under which the Trust operates (paragraph 178).

The legislation, as anybody who's delved into it will know, is strewn amongst several Acts of Parliament, and in bylaws, and goodness knows what else. So There may be some if legislative change is needed under this, then it might be a good idea to take the opportunity to have it all in one document, rather than you needing that many,

Plus the undertakings, etc. So, that's the 36 recommendations. I will now just do a bit on Annex 5, the movement requirement.

Share Space

Please planners

Clear

Prioritise some movement

Queens not Pawns

4. Annex 5 Discussion: Movement Requirements

Annex 5, I apologize to the rest of the country, and please be assured that in many meetings, I pinned a wall-sized map of the country up, and would go, that little bit in the bottom right-hand corner, that's London, this is all the rest of it, please don't put a solution that you think works is needed in London onto the rest of us, but also but also, you know, let's be fair and not be I don't want to be horrible to London either, but it was certainly the London situation, where there are quite a lot of boats moved, and quite a lot of moored, and quite a lot of boats lived on, that we were thinking of when we came up with this movement requirement. So, apologies if you think it's a bit too much for that situation the idea that why do you need to move at all? And again, you'll notice in the report, we spend a bit of time going, why do you need to move at all?

And there's two reasons you need to move. One, it's only reasonable to share out the towpath space. It's not fair to somebody to hog the best spot at Tixxall Wide all summer. You should swap over every day, really, or maybe every couple of days. I don't know what the mooring rules are there exactly, but, you know, don't share it. Play nicely.

And the second one is don't annoy the planners. don't annoy the planning authorities, because if you stop in one place for absolutely ages, they'll start getting terribly excited about the change, especially if you're living on your boat, they'll start getting terribly excited about the change of use and it being residential use rather than ancillary to the use of the waterways. And again, we've gone into the planning a bit, in the text.

People do seem to want something that's clear, and certainly the current the current guidance that CRT say is based on the very best legal advice. The current guidance is still very vague. People think they've complied, and then they're told they haven't. All this nonsense about cruising patterns and continuous movement, and goodness knows what else, isn't clear. So, we sought to come up with something that is

Very clear that people will understand.

What we've really done is prioritise moving at all. So we're saying.

Shuffling's fine. Of course, you can go backwards and forwards to the sanitary station, of course you can do that. Of course, you might get so far and not be able to do something, and anyway, you want to live your life in a relatively most of your life in a relatively small area. As long as you're sharing the space out.

Who cares? You're using the waterway, you're paying your license, just move around a little bit. So we've come up with this idea that at the end of every fortnight, you need to be at least two complete flocs, a floc being a kilometre length away from where you were the previous fortnight. But two of you can swap over every couple of weeks, that's absolutely fine, that's not a problem. Since, since we did this, we've just somebody said, in London. they're allowing they're already allowing one floc. Well, apologies for that. Argue that down to one floc, that's fine. You know, or whatever you think's easy to measure. And we went with flocs, because that's the measure that the sightings officers are already using, so if you're a continuous cruiser.

You should already be, aware, aware of these and how, and how they. work to some extent. So, go with an existing system rather than make up something new and have arguments about the distances, but you know, it's, over to you on that one. I realize there's also some problems with it.

If it isn't the situation that you only want to move every fortnight, if you want to move much more often than that, then you could just go somewhere for a couple of nights and go back. Well, that's fine, as long as on that time span on the fortnight, you're in the different place. I think that's fine. I think everybody just let's just all relax, and let's just really prioritize getting a bit of movement at least every fortnight.

And then the other, component to that was to say that once a year, or within your license period, if your license period is shorter than a year, once a year, you must be 50 kilometres away from where you started. So that's not at the end of the year. Any time at all. It could be a week after the start of your license, you go somewhere, 50 kilometres away.

We didn't say how long that should be for, we thought that was getting into a bit too much detail. What we did think was that if you just went and did an out and back for a weekend, that wouldn't be really in the spirit of sharing out the space. But, again, you know, you have your ideas on that.

Somebody asked me only yesterday, well, what if I what if I do that for my 50 and it's only 20 to go back that way, do I have to I won't have met it as and I thought, as far as I'm concerned if anyone asks, I think, you've done your 50, yeah, if there's a shortcut to come back, that's fine, you've still been 50 away from where you started. So, those are our ideas around that And currently, if you're a continuous cruiser, you're a pawn. You've got to keep, if you'll forgive the chess analogy, you have to keep doing this until you get to the end, and then you're not absolutely sure what you're allowed to do at the end, particularly if you're on the K&A and it's a river and it's in flood. But you're a pawn, you've got to keep going like that. This the idea of this is you become queens, you can go backwards and forwards in any direction, as much as you like.

And I think I've gone slightly over, apologies for that. That's all I've got to say for now. I will shut up until anybody asks me a question that I think I can answer.

5. Narrative Summary of Discussion and Chat Contributions

This section captures:

- reactions,
- fears,
- quotes,
- opposing views,
- clarifications,
- organisational positions,
- thematic points.

[Chair Hannah Halliday]

So we'll start by going back through the slides, and I will read each point as we go to begin, and then we'll pick up on the questions. So Penny's first point,

Recommendation 1

Under the title, Movement Requirements. The requirement for boaters without home moorings and other boaters when cruising to change their moorings at least every 14 days or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances. For example, to allow for unplanned navigation stoppage should be retained. (paragraph 44)

Are there any first conversations within the room? Any points that want to be particularly raised? There are a lot on the chat, I'm just opening it up to the floor in the room first.

So, there was some concerns around Annex 5, and lots of points around questions 13, 14, 17, and Annex 5 onwards.

From this point block text is narrative summary of comments and text in italics verbatim quotes

5.1 14-Day Rule and Enforcement

There was near universal agreement that 14 days is not contentious and agreement it should be 14 days inclusive. The issue is the interpretation of what is reasonable which CRT officers decide but legally only a court can determine. A strong message that the 14-day rule should be properly, consistently enforced and a belief that if it is enforced consistently a lot of the problems of congestion and overstaying will be resolved. We were reminded that the 1995 BWB act set the 14-day rule as clear guidance of what BWB considered to be bone fide navigation

5.2 Concerns About CRT Powers

[A contributor reminded us that CRT have]

"bylaw powers to regulate behaviour, including antisocial behaviour, or what's called nuisance in the bylaws. They have Section 43 of the Transport Act 1962, to impose terms and conditions. They have Section 18 and Section 7 of the 1971 British Waterways Act, Section 17 of the 1995 Act. Section 18 of the 1995 Act and Section 8... Subsection 5 of the 1983 Act, they could do everything that they agree with in the report by using that legislation, as it exists now. "

The above is compounded by the lack of candour regarding CRT's intentions around the Transport and Works Act. Concern about a lack of clarity in CRTs motives.

5.3 Fines, Enforcement and Homelessness Risk

A roving trader mends canopies often breasts up alongside customers boat and overstay CRT need to cross reference actual usage and make allowance. A clear example of what should be regarded as reasonable.

Bemusement as to why CRT don't use the powers they have and belief that if they did use them in a consistent, proportionate way that would quickly lead to a much wider compliance.

Why don't CRT ask DEFRA to consolidate all the relevant legislation.

Fear expressed that given their funding situation giving CRT the power to issue fines could be seen as a way to raise revenue. A fear raised that under recommendation 14 CRT could remove someone's home because of an unpaid "fine" for littering which because of the costs of removal could render a boater homeless without CRT ever having to justify their action in a Court of Law.

5.4 Movement Requirements and Annex 5

There was further discussion re Recommendations 13 and 14 which as drafted at the moment could allow CRT to seize a boat, there is no reference in the recommendations that CRT should check if the vessel is being used as a home. Very real concern that if implemented as drafted this could lead either deliberately, or as an unintended consequence, to a boater being made homeless without CRT having been near a court. We were reminded that the then Waterways Minister, Richard Benyon, gave an undertaking to

Parliament in 2012 that CRT would never attempt to remove a boater's home without recourse to the courts.

Unsurprisingly the biggest single subject surrounded recommendation 3 regarding movement, what is the minimum acceptable distance a boater must travel to satisfy CRT requirements?

A general agreement that there must be flexibility in the way any rules are applied that they should not be determined by legislation and recognition of the reality of life of a boater without a home mooring. Very often the boater will move a significant distance to fulfil the necessities of life, freshwater, waste disposal but that might mean a "there and back" movement rather than being able to travel in one direction this should be acceptable. A note that a FLOC is a tool, not an obligation.

[A comment, supported by many,] that our lifestyle is, for very many boaters around communities which some boaters move between to give support. It is an important element of the way we live and whatever regime is eventually agreed must respect and allow for this to continue.

5.5 Licensing, Debts and Safeguards

[A question from online regarding floating lodges, in maritime terminology "dumb boats", that is engineless craft. At the moment this category of craft is not recognised with a specific licence.

"RBOA produced a document entitled Water Spaces a couple of years ago which suggested using unconnected water space for boats that don't want to travel and we believe CRT are considering the potential for using such space for floating homes as a new income stream, these will need to be licensed."

[Recommendation 8 the removal of the rivers only discount.] This will severely impact and be very unfair to the owners of vessels that are too large to use any of the waterways that connect with the rivers they occupy.

[There was agreement that CRT's rivers appear to suffer from even more underinvestment than canals.]

[Referring to recommendation 17 and Annex 5 a delegate asked why and went on to say] there are no suggestions on how to enter into more productive relationships with boaters enabling true community engagement. And there should be an appeals process to hear the other side not just CRT word for what is abusive behaviour.

[A comment from a London based boater regarding the suggestion that boaters must move 50km] Today, 20-plus miles can be achieved without going through central London, and be in reach of trains, but 50 kilometres, everyone would have to cross central London at least once a year which would add to congestion.

[A comment regarding recommendation 17], refusing a licence because of unpaid debt. You cannot prevent someone from paying for something if there are unpaid debts to the same organization owed for a different purpose.

If implemented CRT would have the power to effectively remove someone's home or to ban them from CRT waters, which in many instances would render the boater homeless. As was pointed out this is a level of punishment that would never face anyone living ashore and therefore further discrimination against the liveaboard community.

It was suggested that CRT could say someone can have a criminal prosecution for something quite violent to their next-door neighbour on a boat, but CRT would still have to issue a license to them, and perhaps the community would rather that they did move away. Perhaps there are models from housing regarding difficult tenants where it might be useful and a better way of informing this sort of thing.

[One delegate said of recommendation 17 that] *"I think it's very appropriate, the proportionate nature of it. It doesn't mention proportionate, in terms of its, safeguarding and licensing".*

5.6 Ownership Register and Privacy

[Comment re recommendation 19] *"there is no way, currently, to conclusively prove that you own a boat. This register that was proposedif that's implemented, it may, provide suitable identification. But currently, that just does not exist."*

[A counter viewpoint:] *"CRT really has an account about who owns a boat, it doesn't need to be made public. I don't want to lose my privacy about which boat's mine. You know, no one should have to."*

It was suggested that an ownership register should be created and administered by a body independent of Government, CRT or any statutory body. This is linked to the issue of proving identity especially for those whose boat is their primary residence but don't have a home mooring.

Concern that CRT staff shouldn't be given more powers because they already make mistakes; *"this year, I was spotted on, on the Grand Union when I was on the Thames. It was an error. giving them another thing to make a mistake about, something that could go so wrong"*

[Recommendation 33 first comment;]

"We are concerned that the Trust is using alleged antisocial behaviour of boaters in Bath as the drive for increased powers. As evidenced in the Bath MP questions to Parliament and subsequent news coverage, how do we ensure boaters are consulted and not divided and abused, shamed by this process? When will CRT start consultation, and will it be in the advance of solutions so we can all shape these, not just be asked to agree or disagree?"

[This comment generated a lot of applause online and this response from a panel member:]

"Don't think having a home mooring stops you being treated badly, because you still get treated badly and get treated like a naughty schoolchild, smoking in the toilets Being

threatened with eviction at the end of any letter from the moorings manager is standard..... A point they have improved since I finally had the nerve to take it up with that manager."

Apparently, commissioners were very struck by all the comments in the survey, and by everyone they spoke to that everybody seemed to think that they were treated quite badly. Appallingly.

5.7 Communications and Culture Change

[The originator of the first comment came back to say;]

"I just wanted to reiterate what we said in the question, really. Obviously, this is in our local area, and it's hugely concerning to us, and I'm sure to everybody else, to see the first talk of the possible legislative changes to be framed in this fashion as a way to deal with issues with boaters on the canal. It points the finger at the whole community. And if that's the way that CRT are going to take things forward, really concerning, so how do we make sure that we are part of these conversations moving forward? Because this has happened before any consultation. How do we hold them to their commitment that they will consult with us when this has happened prior to any consultation?

[The RBOA replied.]

"Part of what we're doing today is to address that. The more coordinated we are, the more succinctly our points are made to CRT in response to the consultations. will help us to make progress.

I have accused, to their faces, the managers of Canal & River Trust and the EA, and have said that I believe both organizations are institutionally anti-live-aboard boaters. Of course there's looks of horror, of course they shake their heads.

I then, to CRT, said, well. what's the justification for the extra increasing cost for continuous cruising? Because the vast majority of continuous cruisers are inevitably liveaboard boaters, and without any consultation, you put a surcharge on us. That instantly feels like discrimination.

The answer to your question is that we hold them to account the whole way through, we help them frame the questions in the consultation We hold them to account, and we become ever more robust in doing so".

[The originator replied;]

"Just wanted to say thanks, you're absolutely right. And the other point I wanted to make was that this has all been in the national press, so any opportunities for us to tell positive stories about boaters in the press, I think we should all jump at any opportunities we get."

[And a contra opinion:]

"I appreciate I might be in the minority here, because I don't actually feel penalised as a liveaboard boater, and I don't feel like CRT is trying to remove liveaboard voters.

But I do thoroughly agree with this recommendation about the trust reassessing the way it communicates and works with boaters. I sit on one of the subgroups of NAG, on the comms group. for the very reason that I pointed out to, Canal and River Trust at | I think it was Crick, or somewhere like that that, they really should work on their comms with boaters, because they get it very wrong a lot of the time."

And since then, probably for the last two years, I've been sitting on that group, and I have been regularly putting in the view of a liveaboard continuous cruiser boater, and, you know, on all sorts of comms issues. I think the only thing I'd say so the first thing I'd say is, firstly, this is a recommendation.

5.8 Working With CRT and Between Boating Organisations

CRT actually haven't told us how they're going to do it. The recommendation was that they should do it via consultation, which I'm sure they will. I have sat on a board and have said to them that consultation is consultation. You need to really think about how you ask your questions so that you get good responses from boaters, and that you explain what you're going to do with the consultation and how you're going to change it. So, first of all, this is just a recommendation. We haven't heard yet what CRT are proposing, and I think this one, this communications recommendation, I think they know that they've got to improve their communications with boaters, and they've got to, improve relationships, because we have to work together to save our waterways.

And there are so many different types of communications that we have been asking for, sort of, some consistency as well, because sometimes you hear one thing from one person and something different from something somebody else. So I did want to just sort of reassure that there are boaters voices, but I totally agree that we have to be really concise and really consistent and, punchy with how we respond. Otherwise, as we've seen on this one, you know, We want a really strong voice. We want strong voices saying the same thing, not millions of voices saying something different. Otherwise, it'll be too hard for them to navigate the way through for you know, a really good outcome for us all".

[A panel member commented;]

"I've been trying to get this changed for nearly two years, and I don't seem to be getting anywhere, it's delightful to hear that other people are also trying to do something.

I do know that Campbell Robb read page 68 of the report, paragraph 176,.....a comment that came from the stakeholder engagement survey where one respondent for example, contrasted what he described as the good treatment he receives as a volunteer with the treatment which, in his view, he receives as an itinerant boater. The latter makes him feel like he is dealing with a completely different organization. So we know the skills to treat people well do exist within the organization. there's clearly an attitude problem, but Campbell Robb says he has picked that up,

So, we'll just hope he's capable of bringing the cultural change that's needed, because it's about a lot more than how things are written and people being told how to do that. It's about what's in their hearts when they do it."

5.9 Residential Moorings and Supply Issues

[We then heard from a boater in Bath – in his own words a clear instance of lack of communication on so many levels.]

"A few people know about the incident I had at the disabled mooring in Bath. It's the one that's on the river. It's a new project. There was 5 new mooring bays put in, and they classified the middle mooring bay as a disabled mooring.

Unbeknown to me, the main rainwater and foul water sewer from the centre of Bath enters the river at the disabled mooring. So, at the end of the summer.

Last year, with the first downpour of rain. 200 litres a second was heading towards my boat. And if I'd not been on board, and I had help from people on the quayside, my boat, including me, would now be at the bottom of the River Avon.

I'm a disabled boater. I've mentioned this at the Disabled Boaters Forum for the CRT twice. No one has contacted me. All they have done is put my concerns onto their loss adjusters, and they have not replied to me. So, I have been without power, water, not able to move my boat since the end of summer.

So, if this is a lack of communication from the CRT a really desperate situation that I am in, I don't know what I've put a link to an article that was put in by Bath New Museum under the chats, so I don't I don't know where to go from here. I cannot even take it to the Waterways Ombudsman, because I have to get an official reply from the CRT it's a typical catch-22"

5.10 Boater Testimonies and Case Examples

A question was raised querying if the commission discussed the surcharge on boats without home moorings and why isn't it referenced in any of the recommendations. It was explained that the terms of reference for the commissioners precluded them from comment on the price of licences. However, it says under recommendation 30, there should be reasons for everything they do regarding surcharges and discounts.

[A panel member commented]

"I don't agree with it at all. I think, I think there should be a flat rate navigation license. We all, we all pay the same, and it's up to us what craft we have and how we, how we use, the Waterways Network." I think there should be a flat rate navigation license. We all, we all pay the same, and it's up to us what craft we have and how we, how we use, the Waterways Network.

[And another said]

"I have 6 council's opinions, 6 barristers' opinions, saying the surcharge is discriminatory.

But the point is, there's no opportunity to challenge it. I wanted to say something about communications,"

[But re recommendation 33.]

"We know that CRT are masters of spin. There's no question about this. We also know that the relationship between the itinerant boat dwelling community and CRT is toxic, and this has been described to several MPs, and they were absolutely shocked.

"There seems to be an absolute disconnect between the true but hidden policy objectives of CRT, and what they say in the spin, and what they do on the ground. And until we can get to the bottom of this and have some transparency about what their true policy objectives are, even if we find them repugnant we're not going to get anywhere. And so the answer is, well, what to do? And with the greatest respect to the Commission, I think this is a much bigger issue than something that the Commission has the ability to take on. I think this runs as a vein through CRT, it always has done, and through British Waterways before it. And it's a really big problem. This is the sort of thing that Nelson Mandela was addressing. You know, this is not something that can be discussed in 20 minutes in a meeting. And how the culture has changed within CRT, I haven't gotten onto that at all. I'm not sure any of us have"

[A question directed to Penny]

"What I wanted to ask is about purpose of this report. We're going through, I'm hearing more and more valid concerns from people deeply involved in the community. We're deeply engaged I mean, this is a Saturday, and we're all listening attentively.

We care. So where's the real rethinking in there? Should it just be about nicer emails from CRT? Where's the getting the value out of our community? Where's the participation? Where's the rethinking about working together? I mean, I have the privilege of working for a council. In times of financial austerity, we don't have money to waste.

We need to listen to our communities and partner them. It's worthwhile. Where's this rethinking? So if you're saying you're bringing in all ideas, why weren't more ideas on this angle brought in?"

[Penny replied]

"Okay, well, why did we bother? And why did we pick these particular things? Well, I think we were appointed in response to Canal and River Trust having a Transport and Works Order Act kind of ready to go, and part of the organization went, oh, we're not so sure about that. Let's have a commission to look at all these problems you think you're trying to solve with this transport and works order. That's what I think happened. I don't know that for certain, but the timing pans out. What we tried to do was do what we've been asked to do in the in the terms of reference, which I won't read it out now, but you're welcome, obviously welcome to look them up.

The Trust thought that boat licensing need reviewing, needed reviewing, and so we did what we were asked, if you like, as hired hands, although obviously a couple of us were volunteers anyway, so that's how it was, really".

A comment was made that we had not discussed the issue of premium charges in popular areas. The fear that it would create financially exclusive area "a financial exclusive gated community".

[A comment that generated a lot of support]

"I appreciate that the report says that there needs to be better communication between CRT and boaters, but the thing is, I mean, when it comes down to communications that just puff the air, you know, it's words. You know, on one end, we've got a whole list of different powers that CRT to have, and loads of things that a lot of us dislike. And then on the other end, they're meant to improve their relationship with boaters. A relationship with boaters start when they stop bringing in new policies that a vast majority of us disagree with you know, and then we can communicate with them better. You know, because otherwise, it's just words. Which, I'm not against words, but I want actual actions. I want things to change on the ground"

There was then a plea for the boating community to support the organisations that represent them, like the RBOA and the other user groups. Without their membership, or financial support the organisations don't have the financial resources they need to support the liveaboard community.

[Followed by]

"I've got sort of one question, which is, so what are the next steps? How can we all work together, to make sure that our voices are heard? And my second, sort of slightly devil's advocate-y question was I hear a lot about the toxic relationship, and even though that's a view I don't share.

I'm sort of really curious to ask, is there a, willingness to work with CRT to get things right, or is it and I'm afraid, and I don't mean to, pick on NBTA as a particular thing, as a particular organization, but I see so many posts on social media that I feel that that that organization doesn't represent how I feel, and judging by the comments they get in social media, it doesn't represent they don't represent all of the boaters. all across the land, if I might say. So, what I really want to know is about positive action going forward. How can we all work together? Not just in terms of licensing, but in looking after our canal work..... There's a whole community. There's a whole community of boaters who love the waterways, we live on the waterways because we care passionately about them, and we love our way of life, and we love living there.

So how can we work together? That's what I want to know. I want to hear about positive ways. I don't actually want to hear about the past. We have to, at some point, put a pin in where we are now and say, right, it hasn't worked previously, how can we make it work now? How can we work together and sort it out? And so that's my plea, really, is can we think a little bit less about bashing and more about how we work together?"

[Followed by]

"Just in response to that comment, just to say that in almost every single meeting that we have with CRT, we ask really, really quite explicitly to work with them, and we demonstrate that that's what we want to do. In fact, I can almost probably speak on behalf of a lot of the other boat organisations present here, to say the last meeting with the CEO, that was almost unanimous.

All of the boat organisations around that table were almost begging CRT to work with them. Having said that, I am gonna, yeah, so having said that, I'm gonna momentarily take my, NBTA hat off and say, from my personal perspective. I think whatever the solution is, it will definitely involve working with CRT, but a very different CRT, and I think that is what. I personally think that's what stands behind a lot of NBTA's criticism of CRT. It's not that we don't want to work with CRT, it's just that, from our perspective, there's a lot of changes that need to be made, because we find them to be a fairly prejudiced organization.

It's not that we don't want to work with them, we really, really do. And I do also hold up quite a lot of hope with the new CEO, so hopefully he will be good to his word, because he indicated a really, really strong interest in working with both organizations. So, so yeah, maybe we can get there."

[And a further comment]

"The relationship between Canal and River Trust and itinerant Live Aboard boaters is a completely unequal relationship. We have no power, Canal and River Trust has all the power. Canal and River Trust can make us homeless, and that is one of the most catastrophic things that can ever happen to a person. So, in order for NBTA and CRT to be able to work effectively together we need it to be an equal relationship, and there's gonna have to be a huge amount of change within CRT for that to happen".

[A comment about the organisations working together]

"Yes, just, somebody mentioned about the boaters organizations getting together, and I was just gonna say, with my IWA hat on, that the four organisations, IWA, RBOA, NBTA and NABO anyway, those the four main ones, did have a meeting before Christmas. Specifically on residential boating, because we think that that's one of the big issues, and hopefully going forwards we'll do that again, and that means that we can all coordinate, and then meet with CRT, with a focus, rather than perhaps on differing views. But that's that's going forwards".

[And from Nick Brown]

"I just wanted to say I'm the founder of the NBTA, and, the organization is obviously a lot bigger now than it was 14, 15, 16 years ago. But we have a context now where the NBTA is regularly actively excluded from engagement. And we need to see an end to that. So, if we're going to move forward, and move forward positively, and engage, and have conversations, and sort these things out, we need to have a culture change, a culture shift, as Pamela has said just now it will be a new CRT that we engage with, and that maybe the new CEO will help that to happen".

[And from the RBOA]

"Just to reinforce what's been said, the four organisations, RBOA, NBTA, IWA, and NABO had a joint meeting, just before Christmas.

We were going to have one a couple of weeks ago, but, to be absolutely honest, I didn't have the bandwidth to sort it when we were thinking about this gathering, and there was an element of wanting to know what came out of this before we moved on.

I can assure you, and everybody listening, that the four organisations, which are principally concerned about residential boating, and primarily RBOA and NBTA, it's sort of on the tin that our concern is about people who live on boats, primarily. That is what we are in business for. And we are beginning to work more closely together. We are coordinating. And as I think was said earlier, the meeting that we had on the 4th of December, which was when we were invited to meet Campbell Robb was, and I actually said it at the time to Campbell, was the most encouraging meeting I've ever I've ever been involved in with CRT. It really did feel that we are working together. I keep saying, we need to work together. CRT and the EA and every other navigation authority, to a lesser or greater extent to a greater extent with CRT than any of the others need boaters. Residential boaters are becoming an increasingly large proportion of their revenue. They need us, they know they need us, and they are beginning to recognise the fact that we need to work together. So, don't give up the faith. We will get there. This is the beginning of that process".

[A further comment]

Can I come back in on that? Because I'd just like to say I'm, you know, really pleased to hear that everybody's working together, and I apologize if I picked on NBTA, but it's from personal negative experience on social media, I am delighted to hear that you're all working together, and I totally agree that CRT need boaters. That's something I've been and residential boaters, after all, we're the ones that live on the canal all year round. they need us, and I firmly believe that we can all work this out together. But, I'd just like to see a little bit more positive social stuff social media stuff. And, you know, tell us, tell the rest of of the boaters that don't know that you're all working together. You know, that's the sort of thing we need to know, and just, please let's be positive and move forward. But I'm really glad to hear you're working together.

[And a change of subject from within the room]

"I have been 22 years as a liveaboard boater I think a lot of the issues around moorings, and particularly residential moorings, is a question of supply and demand .Well, I would think that it's an important fact to add to this. Commission's report. Steps, vigorous steps, need to be taken to increase the supply of moorings. Particularly for residential".

[A comment from a delegate in the room]

"Unusually I've kept very quiet, but I've listened to what I think is a really brilliant debate. But I think just picking up some of the very recent comments.

It's quite clear that canal and river trusts desperately need us. As an organization, they're in a dire situation. You know, we've all seen the state of the waterways, the number of long-term stoppages, and next year Government funding will severely reduce. So the importance of relationship and communications to them And they've got to get it right, and they've got to get our support, whether we're liveaboard boaters, or other boaters, or indeed, any customers of CRT, because there's many other people who use the waterways. We've really got to work together.

A lot has gone wrong in the past, but we've got to try and somehow work together as organisations and with the navigation authorities, So that there are waterways in the future that we can all enjoy."

[Running out of time we moved to Annex 5.]

[Penny Barber re set the scene]

First of all, I just want to absolutely check that everybody understands what CRT currently believe is the correct interpretation of the legislation. I think nearly anybody else who's looked at it thinks that they are incorrect, but, they swear blind they are correct.

And if you've been wondering why I'm being fiddling with my phone, I was just getting the latest guidance up on my phone.

What they say is",

You must be genuinely cruising a fair range of our network. Our team looks at the range of furthest points your boat has visited over the year. If you're cruising only a small range, you may be restricted when you come to renewing your license. What's important is that you're genuinely cruising on a journey around the network, not just remaining in a relatively small area, shuttling back and forth.

"That clearly isn't a reasonable interpretation of the Act.

And it clearly isn't how people have always lived their lives ,on boats. I mean, the working boats quite often would do a very short stretch over and over again. That's what they were built for. So, just to make sure everyone's clear

And those are interpreted very capriciously. If you ever get involved with a case with someone, there's all sorts of cruelty and allegations and difficulty around correcting incorrect sightings, and goodness knows what else, and no consideration of what is reasonable under the circumstances, no consideration of what the Equality Act might have to say about it. So, that's what we're up against, and that's what without Annex 5, we're trying to say forget all about that. How about doing this instead, which reflects what people want to do?

So. I would ask you just to look at the principles of Annex 5 before you perhaps get pulled into, should it be one floc or two, should it be a floc at all, should it be should we start talking about parishes again? If you like think about what you're fighting in the guidance, this continuous, lengthy journey that's unspecific.

And think about what you're fighting in the guidance, and if you like some of the things in the annex, or have some better ones to suggest, then go with those and argue for those when you're looking at commenting on Recommendation 3.

I think, look at, if you if you like if you like the idea that you can basically live your life in a small area, if that's what you want to do. We're not stopping obviously, we wouldn't want anybody who does want to do grand tours of the country, and go up the Curly Whirly, that's absolutely blooming marvellous, thank you very much. But not everybody is in a position to do that, or wants to live like that, so have a look at the principles, and have a look at what would make it easier for people"

[First response]

"Before COVID, there used to be a much stronger social contract for boat movement, and I think an authoritarian system that involves hard rules is going to well, it's going to be costly to implement, it's going to exclude some people who have very good reasons for not being able to achieve an average cruising distance, and it's going to push more boats into becoming unlicensed. Alternatively, a social contract approach, an approach that is actually more based around encouraging a social contract of movement and re-establishing that.

Underpinned by the 14-day rule is going to be much more cost-effective, because it doesn't require such vigorous enforcement, and it involves less policing. It's going to be much more inclusive. It has worked before, so we know it can work again.

And my question is, do CRT even have the resources to enforce a rigorous movement structure? I feel like a social contract approach where we encourage that is going to be much more cost-effective".

[Second response]

"CRT misinterpret what is understood by bona fide navigation quite often, so I'm wondering why the Commission didn't push for getting them to reinterpret or understand bona fide navigation within the spirit of which it is meant to be understood, which is, you know. Moving every 14 days.

Why didn't they push for that, rather than creating this quite prescriptive movement criteria, which is effectively quite unworkable over a lifestyle that is meant to be inherently quite flexible?"

[Penny replied]

"To answer your point, why didn't we press them harder for a better understanding of the legislation.

If you've got the lawyers in the room saying, this is the very best legal advice, and we've gone here, and we've gone there, and we've gone everywhere for it, and it's perfect, it's very difficult.....it would have been difficult to do that, so we didn't. But yeah, you're right. If I'd got

very, very long pockets, I would have perhaps done something different, but I was part of a team, and to some extent, we had to go with the evidence CRT put in front of us, which we did interrogate them on.

The point on a stronger social contract pre-COVID, if you say so, I'm not sure that's going to be everybody's, experience, and obviously something that people are generally agreed upon following does work, does work, work better. So, yeah, why, why not?

8. Closing Remarks

8.1 Penny Barber

And I don't have any closing remarks other than to say thank you very much, everybody. I'm very happy to remain in touch through the RBOA. I'm also perfectly happy to come and do meetings like this with other user groups, boat clubs.

I know I've got a very nice booking that I'm looking forward to with Floaty Boat in Bradden Haven at the end of February. Excellent. So, but please talk to me, and I'm happy for my contact details to be made available

8.2 Chair (Hannah Halliday)

"Thank you, Penny. So I'm going to step away and let Rex do the closing remarks, but thank you, everyone, for making my life easy today. Not talking over each other or fighting".

8.3 RBOA Closing Statement

"All I wanted to say was thank you to the people who are in the room, thank you to all of you who've, been watching along with us and listening and making your comments passionately, this is the beginning of a new era. This meeting, we funded, we conceived, we did it because we care about our community. Not just the members of the RBOA, everybody who lives on a boat.

I have said to the EA and to CRT, if there's any hierarchy of people on the waterways, those who live on their boats should be at the top.

It's where we live.

It is so important to us. We have got to be at the top of that pyramid. Interestingly, I said that to Campbell Robb on the 4th of December, and he said, I absolutely agree with you.

I believe, I don't think I'm being naive, I believe we are at the beginning of a completely new relationship with CRT.

This was an experiment. I hope you agree it's worked. We will get the report as a result of this out as quickly as we can. We will start consulting with people. Maybe we need to have another one, probably wholly online, because it would be easier.

But we will work on it. Believe me, we are going to make progress, but we need to work together, and that's what we're doing. And finally

Huge thanks to Penny for her time.

To Hannah for her time.

And the guys who made it all work. I have been involved in a number of these sorts of meetings, and the online experience has been ghastly. And from what I can gather, most people online number of exceptions, have found it to work well.

So, bless you all for coming, thank you very much for your support, and please let us know what you think. You can do it via the RBOA website, or you can email us, or you can even ring us. So, thank you very much.

It's been an interesting experience; one we may repeat.

God bless you all. Thank you very much indeed. Safe journey home. Thank you"

9. Attribution

RKW

16th February 2026