



**The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland**

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**IWAI opening remarks to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment,  
Culture and the Gaeltacht. 25 March 2014**

We thank the Chair and Members of the Committee for inviting us here today.

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) represents over 3,000 enthusiasts, with 22 branches across the island of Ireland. IWAI was founded in 1954 as a voluntary body to campaign for the future of the Shannon Navigation, in the 1960's the IWAI campaigned to prevent the Grand Canal in Dublin City from being turned into sewerage infrastructure, and now 50 years later we are campaigning again to save the Canals and Barrow in terms of their navigation potential.

The IWAI regrettably advises that the proposed amendments to the Canal Bye-laws do not, we repeat, do not put user requirements, local communities or tourism at the centre of the regulations.

In relation to the Canals and Barrow Navigation, 2 important issues must be noted;

Firstly, unlike the other navigation systems, there are no private mooring provisions or service providers, Waterways Ireland are a monopoly, with no choice for boaters.

Secondly, the canals are effectively linear waterway with specific issues and challenges such as low water levels, weed issues, obstructions underwater and in locks, etc. thus travel on the canals tend to be lengthy tours of duty so to speak rather than short cruises and this travel is typically done on weekends over a period of months, i.e. the Green and Silver Route promoted by Dublin IWAI.

The proposed Canal Bye-law amendments are not compatible with current boating practices on the canals; they are more reflective of boating practices on the River Shannon and lakes. They do not take into account the difficulties and challenges of canal boating.

Why do boaters travel the canals?

The Royal and Grand Canals and Barrow Navigation waterways are a magnificent marriage of nature with early engineering feats. They reveal beautiful picturesque navigations that wind their way through wooded valleys, peat lands, small villages, town lands, bigger towns and our capital city. They link the north, south, east and west of all the navigations across Ireland as you can see from the chart in our submission including the Shannon, the Erne, the Liffey, the Suir and the Nore, all accessible by boat through the Canals and Barrow.

There are the emotions and the magic of canal travel, the slow pace, echoed by a speed limit of 4 miles per hour, yes 4 miles per hour, people move faster than the canal boats on the system! Couple this with the serenity, the peace, the discovery, the nature, the magic of a night under stars, with only a few locks away, the big city and bright lights. There is also unfortunately the adventure in between, at some areas, being targeted by unsocial behaviour or delayed for hours trying to remove obstructions from the canal or from the props on your boat. It's not all plain sailing!!

Our submission lists our concerns which we are happy to expand on later, these include

- downgrading the original Combined Mooring and Passage Permit
- the 5 day rule changes
- no specific winter mooring provided similar to the Shannon
- lack of selection criteria or consultation on extended moorings
- houseboat management
- dry docks, tolls & the proposed penalties of €150 per day

The three navigations total 336 kilometres, issues have arisen in less than a handful of places due to location. The length of waterway affected by these areas is a couple of kilometres, less than 1%?

So byelaws that will be detrimental to 99% are being introduced to address issues in less than 1% of the system.

Some may view aspects of these bye-laws on their own as reasonable, but they impose a huge burden and risk collectively, with no evidence presented publicly as to what risk analysis has been done in relation to these proposals or why only one user group is being targeted for payment.

The proposed byelaws approach is one of taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut, without taking into account the mess that will be left behind.

IWAI has a long history of working with various statutory bodies, including Waterways Ireland, and we appeal to the regulators to listen to the boat user voices, clamouring to be heard, along with Communities and International Organisations. These collectively submitted over 2000 responses to Waterways Ireland on their public consultation of only 21 days.

Other users are also to be welcomed; bikers, hikers, anglers, paddlers. But never at the expense of the lifeblood of the navigation, the vessels that keep the waterways open.

Irish Boaters, Communities and occasional visitors have helped keep these navigations active and open, it is time now to expose and develop them for national and international tourism – with appropriate promotion, management and community engagement. They can be a vibrant recreational resource for the 21<sup>st</sup> century users linking slow tourism with invaluable industrial, archaeological and environment legacies. They can be a world class branded waterways route, similar to the Lakes of Killarney, the Norfolk Broads, the Four Counties Ring in England and the Lakes of Canada.

*To conclude*

The Canals and Barrow Navigations need proper bye-laws that put user requirements, local communities and tourism at the centre of the regulations and not be suffocated by excessive and badly written regulations.

IWAI thank you for listening.