



## ***The Oireachtas Joint Committee Members on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht express their concerns to Waterways Ireland on the proposed Canal Bye-law amendments.***

Carmel Meegan, President of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) led our delegation 25 March 2014 meeting the above Joint Committee to outline concerns that the proposed bye-laws do not put user requirements, local communities or tourism at the centre of the regulations.

Committee Members feedback on the day confirmed this opinion:

- Acting Chairman Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy. Fine Gael Laois – Offaly opening the session noted “Concerns have been expressed that the new bye-laws are not fully fit for purpose and this is why we have invited the witnesses here today. I hope this discussion will allow us to review the proposed Act and to identify any areas that need to be re-examined, and to recommend any changes that may be necessary”
- “I am of the view that Waterways Ireland must return to the beginning and reconsider this matter from a very practical viewpoint. What is proposed is going to lead to the closure of the Canal” - Deputy James Bannon. Fine Gael Longford - Westmeath
- “People should not feel pushed out of an activity they have grown up with, love and wish to pass on to other generations and the community to help local economies with the tourism income it can provide” - Deputy Barry Cowen. Fianna Fail Laois - Offaly
- “I am fearful that proposals will be implemented without further recommendations” - Senator Cait Keane. Fine Gael Labour Panel.
- “The Bye-laws will impact heavily on a small number of people” - Deputy Catherine Murphy. Independent Kildare North
- “The huge increase in some fees is unacceptable and there is serious concern that the proposed fees will damage tourism and drive people from the waterways” Deputy Sandra McLellan. Sinn Fein Cork East
- “The new bye-laws will make exacting demands on users of the Canal” - Deputy Seamus Kirk. Fianna Fail. Louth
- “The five day rule, which I believe is completely unworkable” - Deputy Ann Phelan. Labour Carlow- Kilkenny

The short public consultation period of just 21 days, ended on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, resulting in over 2000 submissions on the issue. Public discussion on the matter has included - the Canals and Barrow as a tourism resource; queries raised in the Seanad and the Dail; County Councils input; public meetings; national and local press articles; television and radio interviews; community websites; blogs and facebook pages. These all reflect the reservations of users, communities and public representatives as to the significant impact of the draconian suggestions in the proposed bye-laws.

Politically, this is now a very big issue. It is featuring highly as candidates face into local elections this summer. The IWAI have gained the interest of local, regional and national politicians on this matter to date, who on behalf of their constituents, want to develop, not constrict, waterway use.

The boating community is not averse to appropriate management, facility provision, and access to waterways. But boats are key attractions, as the lifeblood of the navigations, and need to be welcomed.

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## Notes to Editor – the IWAI

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) is a voluntary body representing over two thousand enthusiasts, with 22 branches across the island of Ireland.

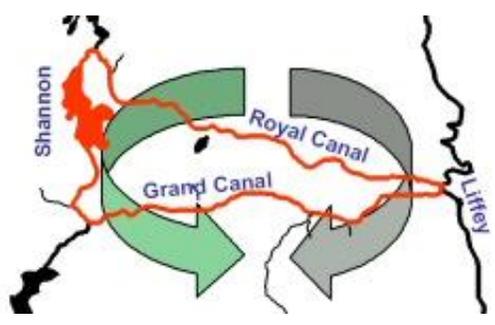
The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) is an energetic, fun, voluntary organisation with members from all corners of the Island of Ireland, all sharing a keen and passionate enthusiasm for the waterways of Ireland.

The IWAI advocates the navigation, use, maintenance, protection, restoration and improvement of the inland waterways of Ireland. It was formed in 1954 to promote the development, use and maintenance of Ireland's navigable rivers and canals.

When the Shannon was almost totally undeveloped for pleasure boating, the IWAI campaigned against the building of low bridges, thus ensuring the development of the river as a national asset. In the 1960s IWAI successfully fought plans to close the Circular Line of the Grand Canal in Dublin. Later the Association campaigned for the re-opening of what is now the Shannon - Erne Waterway (formerly the Ballinamore & Ballyconnell Canal) and the Naas Line of the Grand Canal.

IWAI played its part in the restoration campaign for the re-opening of the Royal Canal between Dublin and the Shannon in recent years. IWAI assistance to the campaign to re-open the Ulster Canal has also borne fruit with the announcement that work is to begin on re-opening the section from the Erne to Clones. Currently, IWAI members are active in restoration projects on the Boyne, Newry and Lagan Canals.

IWAI Branches hold approximately 200 events each year across inland navigations with the wider communities in many locations. These events include Boat Rallies, Harbour Festivals, Walks, Social Gatherings, Heritage Activities; Family activities and Youth focused events.



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