

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland
Cumann Uiscebhealaigh Intíre na h-Éireann

*The Inland Waterways
Association of Ireland*

A Submission to

the

**Fine Gael Seminar
On the Environment**

October 2000

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1 Introduction	3
2 Environmental Policy	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Vision	4
2.3 Development	4
2.4 User Code	6
3 Specific Recommendations	7
3.1 Surface Water	7
3.2 Facilities Around the Waterways	7
3.3 Zebra Mussels	9
4 IWAI	10
4.1 Background	10
4.2 Objectives of IWAI	10
4.3 Membership and Structure	10
4.4 Linkages	11
4.5 Publications	11
4.6 Major Activities	12

1 Introduction

This document is submitted in response to a request from Ivan Yates, T.D., Fine Gael spokesperson on the environment for the Association's views on matters of environmental policy.

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland was founded in 1954 to promote the development, use and maintenance of Ireland's navigable rivers and canals. When the Shannon was almost totally underdeveloped for pleasure boating, the IWAI fought against the building of low bridges, thus ensuring the development of the river as a national asset. Later, the association successfully resisted the threatened closure of the Grand Canal in Dublin and has done much to instigate the improvement of the Barrow and to focus interest and activity on the restoration of the Royal Canal with our sister body the Royal Canal Amenity Group.

In this document we provide some general statements in relation to the association's environmental policy and also some specific inputs in selected areas.

2 Environmental Policy

2.1 Introduction

Ireland's waterways heritage was created in an attempt to promote the industrial development of the country through the improvement of transport.

While the vision of the early entrepreneurs largely failed to materialise, they have left us with a unique heritage fulfilling a role never envisaged by the engineers who built the system.

The waterways heritage combines man-made structures and natural features and eco-systems to provide a varied environment which appeals to the naturalist, historian, boater, hiker and fisherman alike.

The challenge facing the people of Ireland is to preserve this unique heritage while allowing it's use and enjoyment by all.

2.2 Vision

IWAI has the following vision for the waterways of Ireland:

"The Inland Waterways of Ireland, a key part of our national heritage, will be protected, preserved and sensitively developed for the use and enjoyment of all the people of Ireland and our guests from overseas"

"An integrated management structure will exist to manage the waterways and their environs, with the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland acting in a consultative role."

The Association advocates taking a holistic view of matters relating to the protection of the environment, in particular the need for waterways, navigations and their immediate environs to be managed as an entity.

2.3 Development

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland envisages a future in which the waterways of Ireland are managed in an integrated manner for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people of Ireland.

All too often in the past "development" has been synonymous with the destruction of some part of our natural or built environment, either through pollution, the inappropriate location of industries, dwellings or other facilities or the replacement of older structures that we don't have the imagination or willpower to protect and re-use.

We must replace this approach with one which allows the existing assets to be used for the benefit and enjoyment of the community without detracting from their essential character and without reducing the options open to future generations.

People who use our waterways in rural areas, be it for bank walking, fishing, canoeing boating or other, expect to see a largely undeveloped, essentially wild, land and waterscape combined with discrete and sensitively placed facilities for eating, lodging, entertainment, safe mooring etc. Their enjoyment of these amenities and any economic benefit to be derived therefrom now and in the future will be greatly diminished if inappropriate development is allowed to take place.

For some parts of our waterways, this may mean a strategy of minimal interference with what exists. In other areas, it may mean limiting development to a few activities which are harmonious with the location.

In urban areas, the expectation is that waterways form an integral and attractive part of the built environment while retaining their essential function as a transportation infrastructure, nowadays used for leisure purposes.

The Corridor Studies on the Grand and Royal Canals in Dublin, point the way to a model for the overall management of the waterways. The studies view the navigations, and their environs as entities, regardless of the legal and administrative infra-structure that currently exists, and present an integrated view of their use and development for the future. The studies draw on the expertise of a variety of organisations, and attempt to take into account a wide variety of sometimes conflicting interests.

In the context of the Inland Waterways, sustainable development means recognising the potential of the waterways as a long term source of enjoyment and recreation for the People of Ireland and their foreign guests.

From this enjoyment can come economic benefit but economic benefit must not come at the expense of the destruction of the asset or by depriving future generations of the opportunity to enjoy that which we enjoy.

The association believes that a management structures must be created that are able to view Inland Waterways and their immediate environs as a whole. These structures must be able to gather, understand and integrate the needs and views of all interested parties and to formulate and implement policy that provides for the protection, management and controlled development of the waterways for the benefit of the community as a whole.

IWAI welcomes the establishment of Waterways Ireland as a step in the right direction but we believe that further initiatives are required to include the broader remit mentioned above.

In the shorter term, it is imperative that government issue planning guidelines to local authorities to prohibit inappropriate development along the waterways and in their immediate environs.

The Inland Waterways of this island are a unique, sustainable, resource that can be enjoyed by the people of Ireland and our foreign guests into the future if they are protected and managed appropriately. Steps must be taken immediately to provide the protection and management that is required.

2.4 User Code

For users of the waterways, IWAI has a very simple three part code:

Enjoy yourself on and around the waterways but observe three simple rules:

1. *Don't compromise safety - yours or anyone else's.*
2. *Don't compromise the amenity or the environment.*
3. *Don't compromise anyone else's ability to enjoy the amenity or the environment.*

Based on this code, especially clause 2, waterways users are expected to behave in an environmentally responsible fashion. This would include:

1. Dispose of all your rubbish properly.
 - Recycle bottles and beverage cans.
 - If there are no proper facilities nearby, take your rubbish home with you. Don't leave it on the bank or let it enter the watercourse.
 - Dispose of waste engine oil or contaminated fuel oil in approved facilities only.
 - Dispose of old batteries in approved facilities only.
2. Operate craft at reduced speed in confined areas - excessive speed can cause damage to the banks, disturb wildlife and cause annoyance to other people
3. Don't pump oily bilge water overboard.
4. Take care when re-fuelling not to spill fuel overboard.
5. Fit a holding tank or cassette toilet to your boat and dispose of the contents at an approved location.
6. Use shore based sanitary facilities wherever possible
7. Use environmentally friendly detergents and soaps.
8. Use only environmentally safe anti-fouling paint.
9. Use only approved fishing tackle and recover all your line. Discarded line and tackle can ensnare people and wildlife.

3 Specific Recommendations

In this section we outline some areas which we see as requiring action by government and local authorities.

3.1 Surface Water

The main threat to surface water quality in Ireland is over enrichment caused by excessive levels of phosphates. This leads to algal blooms, all too familiar to IWAI members, which appear on our waterways each year and which inhibit the enjoyment of the waterways.

The primary causes of over-enrichment are:

3.1.1 Municipal Sewage Outflows

In recent years, many larger towns have had improvements to Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) including the installation of Tertiary Treatment which removes phosphates. These STP improvements are a step in the right direction and are showing improvements in river water quality in some areas. However an anomaly has arisen in that the improvements in larger towns are eligible for EU funding leaving smaller towns and villages to compete for Exchequer Funding. Towns with populations of less than 2000 are not on the priority list in the Waste Water Directive. As these smaller towns and villages are growing at an unprecedented rate due to the current building boom, it is vital that their STPs are upgraded. A package of STP improvement in these areas should be introduced without delay in order to protect water quality.

3.1.2 Agricultural Activities

Up to 50% of the phosphorous burden being added to our waterways is coming from agricultural activities. It is important that the Phosphorous Regulations by-laws currently being introduced in some counties in the Shannon Catchment be implemented on a countrywide basis. Intensive pig and poultry units are a particular cause of concern.

3.1.3 Industrial Outflows

The introduction of Integrated Pollution Control Licensing by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a step in the right direction. More resources are needed by the EPA to monitor these licenses and extend their introduction to more industries.

Local Authorities also need to have the funding to do a meaningful job in policing the discharge licenses which they grant to industry.

3.2 Facilities Around the Waterways

In this section we make specific recommendations in relation to the provision of facilities in and around waterways.

3.2.1 Pump-Out Stations

IWAI recommends that all boats be fitted with holding tanks which contain the waste from onboard toilets. A network of pump-out stations has been constructed in recent years to allow the holding tanks to be emptied. In many cases the Sewage Treatment Plants to which these pump-out stations are connected are inadequate, being already under pressure from land based development in the local area. Holding tanks can discharge 50 gallons or more of effluent at a time plus an equal quantity of contaminated flushing water. It is important that the impact of

these pump-outs is considered when resources are being allocated for STP upgrading.

While a number of pump-out stations have been installed, IWAI considers the number and location of these to be inadequate given the volume of traffic on many of the busier navigations. We recommend that this network be extended considerably to meet the demand.

IWAI believes that a large number of the pump-out stations that have been installed are non functional for significant periods of time or require intervention by an operator who is frequently difficult to contact. We also understand that some of the systems do not meet the specifications laid down by the Dept. of the Environment. We believe that there should be a major effort to ensure that all pump-out stations are fully operational on an ongoing basis.

3.2.2 Cassette Toilet Discharge

Where vessels, particularly smaller ones can not practically be fitted with holding tanks, the use of cassette type toilets ("Porta-Pottis") is common.

It is essential that harbours and marinas have facilities for the safe discharge of these units. In particular, the STPs must be capable of handling the formaldehyde or other chemical used to treat the effluent in the tank.

IWAI recommends that all harbours have facilities for the safe emptying, flushing and re-charging of cassette toilet units.

3.2.3 Toilet and Shower Facilities

The best way to minimise the impact of boat wastes on water quality is to provide top-class, user friendly, well maintained toilet and shower facilities in all harbour areas on the inland waterways. Some Local Authorities are much better in this regard than others. The facilities at Shannon Bridge, Athlone (New Town Jetty), Portumna and along the Shannon-Erne Waterway are good examples.

Proper facilities should be part of the planning permission for any new developments along the waterway - whether the development is private or public.

3.2.4 Litter and Waste Collection

IWAI encourages it's members to be conscientious in disposing of refuse and not to throw litter or other deleterious matter overboard because of it's impact on the visual amenity and wildlife. Where suitable facilities are not available, IWAI asks it's members to take their rubbish home with them, however it must be recognised that this is not always a practical proposition.

IWAI recommends that improved facilities be installed in all harbours for the collection and disposal of domestic refuse from boats.

Rubbish bins in harbours are frequently of inadequate size and are emptied too infrequently. Boats typically do not have large amounts of space to store refuse for extended periods so it is essential that all harbours and jetties are provided with adequate facilities.

Few harbours have any facilities for glass or aluminium can re-cycling and IWAI recommends that such facilities be installed, at least in the busier harbours.

IWAI would also like to see more widely available facilities for the disposal of waste engine oil, lead-acid batteries etc.

3.3 Zebra Mussels

This exotic species which originated in the Caspian Sea was accidentally introduced to Ireland about 1996 having been transferred on the hulls of imported boats. They have rapidly spread throughout the Shannon system and will inevitably become established on the entire connected inland waterways network. They cause problems for industrial and water treatment plant abstraction points due to the fact that they grow and block pipelines and machinery. However their main effect is on the ecosystems of the water bodies which they inhabit. More research is needed into what changes we can expect in our waterways as the Zebra Mussels spread.

Most important of all is that a co-ordinated strategy is adopted to prevent the spread of these mussels to the "Un-connected" waterways e.g. Corrib, Boyne etc. Zebra Mussels can be carried on boats and fishing gear which is transferred from one waterway to another.

4 IWAI

In this section we give a brief overview of IWAI, its origins and work to date.

4.1 Background

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland was founded in 1954 to promote the development, use and maintenance of Ireland's navigable rivers and canals. When the Shannon was almost totally underdeveloped for pleasure boating, the IWAI fought against the building of low bridges, thus ensuring the development of the river as a national asset. Later, the association successfully resisted the threatened closure of the Grand Canal in Dublin and has done much to instigate the improvement of the Barrow and to focus interest and activity on the restoration of the Royal Canal with our sister body the Royal Canal Amenity Group.

IWAI is itself a cross-border body, having members north and south of the border.

4.2 Objectives of IWAI

The main objects for which the Association was formed are:

- *To promote the use maintenance and development of the inland waterways of Ireland, and in particular, to advocate and promote the restoration to good order, and maintenance in good order of every navigable waterways and the fullest use of every navigable waterway by both commercial and pleasure traffic provided such is not injurious to the environmental health of the waterways and the surrounding areas*
- *To support any proposal may be calculated to maintain or improve Irish waterways and also to improve navigation, lay moorings and carry out other works of improvement on and adjacent to the waterways.*

4.3 Membership and Structure

The association currently has approximately 1500 "members" throughout the island of Ireland of with most of the memberships actually being a family unit. Members are organised into branches of which there are currently 14, including 2 in Northern Ireland.

Each of the branches is represented on a national council and the national AGM elects a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary each year. In addition the AGM elects twelve ordinary members to Council.

IWAI is an entirely voluntary association and has no paid officials.

Membership of IWAI is open to all those interested in the inland waterways upon payment of the appropriate membership fee (currently £20.00 a year).

Boat ownership is not a pre-requisite for membership. IWAI does not maintain records of boat ownership among its members but it is estimated that perhaps half the members do own a boat of some sort. Boats range from small open rowing boats to large cruisers and barges.

4.4 Linkages

4.4.1 Voluntary bodies

The association works closely with the Royal Canal Amenity Group, the Ulster Waterways Group (a lobby group in Northern Ireland which focuses on the development of the Ulster Waterways as an economic asset) and Inland Waterways International (an international organisation for people and organisations interested in inland waterways).

The association also enjoys good relations with a number of canal and boating organisations in the UK, US, Canada, Australia and a number of other countries.

The association works with the Irish Sailing Association in a number of areas but particularly in relation to the training of boat users.

At a branch level, the association enjoys good relationships with sailing, fishing boating and heritage organisations.

4.4.2 Public Bodies

The association has enjoyed a good working relationship with Duchas - Waterways for the past number of years and with the Rivers Agency of Dept. of Agriculture Northern Ireland. We expect these good relationships to continue with the new body established under the Belfast Agreement, Waterways Ireland.

At a branch level, the association is represented on a number of local authority strategic policy committees.

The association is also represented on the Lough Erne users forum.

The association has been consulted in recent times by the Dept. of the Marine, especially in relation to boat safety issues.

The association has participated extensively in the development of the Policy Document on Inland Waterways published by the Heritage Council.

4.4.3 Commercial Organisations

The association has enjoyed generally good relations with the Irish Boat Rental Association and more recently the Erne Charter Boat Association.

At a local level, members are regularly called upon to assist hire craft in difficulties and are also called upon to assist the civil authorities in search and rescue activities from time to time.

4.5 Publications

The association publishes its own newsletter ***Inland Waterways News*** four times per year. The newsletter is circulated free to members and is also circulated to other bodies interested in the waterways.

The association has established an Internet website www.iwai.ie which is intended to be a resource for anyone interested in the inland waterways of this island. In conjunction with the website the association also operates an Internet discussion group.

For many years, the association has published, in conjunction with others maps and charts of various navigations and a variety of other special publications, often associated with specific events.

The association is also a regular contributor to RTE's ***Seascapes*** radio programme.

4.6 Major Activities

4.6.1 Representation

The association engages in dialogue, both formal and informal, with a wide variety of bodies to represent the interests of its members.

It is an active participant in a wide variety of forums and discussion groups organised by state and local authorities on topics related to the waterways.

4.6.2 Restoration

As well as lobbying state and local bodies on the restoration and development of waterways, IWAI members take a direct part in conservation and restoration activities on local projects around the country.

4.6.3 Land-Based Activities

The association organises regular meetings for its members and the general public. The topics can include waterways history, heritage awareness, wildlife, water safety, boat maintenance etc. The association also organises a range of purely social events. The association also organises walks and visits to sites of interest to waterways enthusiasts around the country.

4.6.4 Water-Based Activities

The association organises regular outings for its members either as small Cruise-in-Company events or as larger Rallies.

The larger events usually include a variety of competitions, often with a safety theme.

4.6.5 Training

The association operates (in conjunction with ISA) a training scheme for boat operators especially adapted to inland waterways.

The association also runs courses on boat maintenance, VHF Radio Usage, First Aid etc on an ad-hoc basis.

4.6.6 World Canal Conference 2001

IWAI is working with Waterways Ireland to organise the 2001 **World Canals Conference** in Dublin, Belfast and Lisburn in May of next year.