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**British Waterways Scotland  
Scotland Group**

**Continuation of Meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2003 at 1300 hours**

**Open to Public & Held in The Lovat Arms Hotel,**

**Fort Augustus, Inverness-shire**

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**Representing British Waterways:** Susan Achmatowicz  
Ian Darling (Chairman)  
Professor George Fleming  
George Greener  
Arthur McCourt  
Kenneth MacKenzie  
Rod Michie  
Sandra Purves  
James Simpson  
Jim Stirling  
Patricia Rettie  
Nigel Bell  
Beatrice Clark

**Other Attendees:** **As listed in Appendix 1**

### **Introduction & Purpose of Meeting**

Ian Darling opened the meeting and welcomed all present. ID explained that he was deputising for Campbell Christie, Chairman of BWSG. He then introduced Jim Stirling, Director British Waterways Scotland, who was on the panel, then George Greener, Chairman of British Waterways, Beatrice Clark, Waterway Development Co-ordinator for the Caledonian Canal and Patricia Rettie, Group Secretary.

ID went on to give an overview of the matters discussed in the morning meeting. These included a presentation by Beatrice Clark on the work that is taking place along the canal and the links between BW and the community, Cath Cain's overview of the arrangements in place for the World Canals Conference, to be held in the International Conference Centre in Edinburgh from 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September this year, Iain Herbert & Nigel Bell talking about the Business Plan and Future Vision for the Falkirk Wheel & Visitor Centre and a number of local issues concerning the Caledonian Canal.

ID then opened the meeting to questions.

**Ian McKay, Highland Voyages thanked The BW Scotland Group for coming to Fort Augustus and said it was refreshing and encouraging that they had done so, as an Operator he recognises the importance of communication. He spoke of the disparity of rates between England and Scotland, difficulties with transport links and asked why there is a gap.**

ID stated that BWSG are aware of the issues and keen to find an equitable solution. JS agreed that at the present time there is no definitive answer, but that BW has been meeting with the Caledonian Operators and is committed to reviewing the level of charging with an outcome being reached by September 2003. JS went on to say that BW has given its commitment that there will be no hidden agendas and to strive to overcome any feelings of mistrust, which may have arisen, in order to reach a solution where both sides think the arrangement is fair.

Ray Norris, West Highland Sailing pointed out that the next meeting date has still to be agreed.

Robin Black, Loch Ness & Great Glen Cruise Company & Chairman of Caledonian Canal Operators Association, referred to the meeting held between BW and the Caledonian Operators on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 and stated that in talking of trust, he and others wondered if they had been at the same meeting. He went on to say that he and other Operators want parity with English counterparts and gave some comparisons with English canals. He went on to say that within 2 weeks of the meeting BW were to come back to the Operators with proposals, but within 3 weeks had come back with a list of options and proposed increases which are not acceptable. He also referred to mooring charges in England and differences with Scotland in this area. He said that Operators are looking for a level playing field and that this had not been addressed and expressed a desire for things to move forward.

JS responded that he had sent a written response and had also had a 1 hour telephone call with RB and that he had agreed at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> April that BW would go away and investigate the matters raised and come back with a proposal and would offer a way to help those in distress. Then they would look at the English market. JS pointed out that in England a Licence Fee and a Mooring Fee are charged, whereas in Scotland only a Licence Fee is charged. JS also made the point that at the meeting it was agreed that both Operators and BW would go and gather information, then meet again to discuss and that this would not have been possible within a timescale of 2 weeks. What RB received was a response to those in financial difficulties.

JS stressed that to avoid any misunderstandings at any future meetings both BW and other attendees must be clear about what has been agreed and it should be put up on a flip chart and agreed before leaving the meeting.

All agreed this should be done.

ID informed the meeting that a discussion had taken place during the BWSG meeting that morning, and that it was agreed that BW does not yet have all the facts, but that JS is gathering information in order to report back to the BWSG in order to find the way forward.

RB stated that Operators would also like to report back to BWSG.

Kor & Greta Zijlstra, Boat Owners made the point that BW is basing rates on caravan parks and marinas and that these types of businesses have more facilities, they provide security and other options not offered by BW and therefore are too expensive for comparison.

JS stated that charges are based on market rates and that the new charging system for private boats will allow for differences in price based on demand and facilities. JS understood Dochgarroch to be full.

Again the point was made that BW was charging too much for moorings and that in some cases they were a long way from the facilities and therefore should be made cheaper.

JS said that BW accept that if moorings charges are too high people will not use them. BW charges aim to be at market rate based on market demand. At present on the Caledonian

moorings prices are the same along the length of the canal. The new charging system introduced on April 1<sup>st</sup> will allow for the possibility of differential pricing. We believe our customers do have alternatives due to the availability of moorings at e.g. coastal marinas.

**Kor & Greta asked did that simply mean 'take it or leave it'?**

JS replied it did not. He understood Dochgarroch was full, therefore, people were obviously prepared to pay. Again, the new system could allow for differential pricing in the future.

**Kor asked why he pays £1,400 to be on the canal whilst others pay only £100.**

JS explained that this fee of £100 is intended to generate winter sailing on the canal and it is not intended that they should stay and therefore did not think that they would displace anyone. JS said that he would look at this.

**Myrtle Allardyce, SIWA, raised the point of pricing and market competition. MA said that provision on the canal was for transit yachts and wanted an explanation of charges being based on marina prices and the market mix BW was trying to achieve.**

**MA referred to Scottish Executive funding which is provided to ensure the continuity of the canals and raised issues of correspondence/communications and Licence Review, previously raised at the public meeting held in Edinburgh in February of this year and a meeting requested by SIWA to discuss all these matters and that BW had been too busy to hold this meeting.**

JS responded that he had written to SIWA following the meeting in February and had explained that as a result of extra funding from the Scottish Executive enabling BW to carry out extra works prior to the year end, together with associated work in the lead up to the end of the financial year, it would not be possible to hold such a meeting at that time. However, JS did offer to meet with SIWA immediately after the User Group Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March in Grangemouth. SIWA had not taken up this offer. JS also pointed out that he did not agree to meet to discuss licence fees as a review had been carried out including consultation, resulting in a final document being issued, together with the new Fees and conditions publication. Therefore, there would be no further discussion on the new system and BW had done what they said they would do.

**MA stated that customers feel that instead of encouraging boaters to come to the canals, they are going away.**

JS said that he was not aware that boaters were going away, but that numbers were increasing.

GG asked MA if she would still wish to have a meeting, and JS agreed that a meeting would be held.

**Alec Hume stated that he felt BW provided no options, it was take it or leave it.**

JS responded that customers do have an option, that there is now the scope for differential pricing depending on facilities. The latest published charges were designed to be neutral to owners on the Crinan and Caledonian Canals and designed to encourage new business on the Lowland Canals.

ID made the point that BW is aware of the need to deliver value to its customers and we will take note of the concerns expressed.

MA stated that SIWA proposed that moorings and licence fees will not develop business on the canals which will be competitive and that a foundation strategy to promote business is needed.

JS stated that he will be talking with Commercial Operators over the next few months.

MA said there was an issue of trust and that she had hoped at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> April that there would have been some outcome, but that BW had not intended it to be the case.

MA stated that attendees did not believe that there would be a response within 2 weeks of the meeting and that there should have been a minute taker and BW did not provide one, therefore, trust will not happen.

NB said that it was clear that there had been a breakdown in trust and regrettably things had not improved since the meeting.

JS stated that at the next meeting attendees should not leave the room until key points are agreed.

MA said a feeling of co-operation is needed, a feeling of working together, that we are not making the most of opportunities that we have, Scotland has better opportunities than other countries.

MA again raised issue of a letter of complaint from December 2002, to which BW did not respond. She spoke of a lack of customer care and asked what has been done since the last meeting.

JS responded that BW has reviewed its complaints procedure and now has a robust system in place. He asked MA what the issue was.

MA responded that it did not matter what the issue was, then went on to explain that there had been an issue with a Ratho Boater and a householder, the matter was resolved and Richard Millar the Waterway Manager had said that he would send a letter outlining the conclusions and had not done so.

JS responded that communications are being improved and that he was certain that this matter had been resolved.

MA then raised issue of private boaters not being issued with an invoice in order to pay their fees and that this could result in them losing out on discount for early settlement.

JS responded that BW is changing over to a new system which will generate invoices and will provide a much more accurate record keeping system, but would enquire as to why Waterway office did not respond to the boaters request for invoices to be sent.

JS said that he does not accept that BW does not put effort into customer care and gave the example of the work Beatrice Clark was doing on the Caledonian and how this is also being rolled out on the Lowland Canals.

MA went on to say that there are certain things BW will accept and others they will not. This does not mean that SIWA is wrong and does not mean that issues cannot be resolved.

Robin Black stated that the Caledonian Canal is a big boat canal and requires big boat facilities. He said that there is a lack of water and pump out facilities and that there is a need for an efficient, full-time Canal Manager and wanted to know when one would be in place.

JS agreed that the matter of the Canal Manager must be resolved, but the main reason for not appointing sooner is that BW are in discussion with the Trade Unions over the Local Agreement and that it had been agreed with the Unions that it would not be right to bring in a new manager during these discussions.

Iain MacKay agrees with RB about the big boat facilities. He stated that some of the big boat jetties are disappearing and not being replaced. Although some have been replaced with floating pontoons which are not suitable.

JS agrees and would like to see a 'Big Boat Plan' which will involve operations/customers/staff/lock keepers.

There is a problem of basic public utility infrastructure along the canal. There are problems getting power supplies, water supplies and sewerage supplies. For example, Scottish Water is not obliged to provide a sewerage system if it is beyond economical cost.

If we could collaborate and get clear plans in place we might be able to persuade the Utility Companies to provide connections.

Rod Michie made the point that having a proper plan in place would improve relations and remove mistrust.

JS said that the first step would be to get management in place, but this would not be immediate, then, with dialogue taking place throughout this year the Business Plan could be drawn up and in place for April 2004.

KZ has received a letter from Danny Kennedy, Acting Manager for the Caledonian Canal informing him that he would have to move his boat down stream from its mooring at Dochgarroch, he would like to know who to discuss the matter with.

JS suggested that the Waterway Office staff should be able to help.

KZ said that had not been the case.

JS if BW is carrying out major work to the canal they would talk to customers in advance and move boats depending on whether boats are in use or not. JS agreed to look at this and communications with customers, level of information and method of accommodating customers, ensuring that where work is to be carried out they will know in advance and have some input.

KZ made the point that customers should not be expected to pay full fees if they cannot use the system.

Alec Hume asked, in relation to the Boat Safety Scheme, if it was correct that someone who is an approved Inspector should be allowed to certificate his own craft, did this not leave the system open to abuse.

JS replied that there is an audit system in place to ensure against any abuse of the scheme and that he will draw this to the attention of the BSS.

AH felt there was no consistency in pricing of certificates.

GG made the point that the Boat Safety Scheme is not a BW scheme, but if there are inconsistencies he asked if BW could do something to alleviate this.

JS explained that on the Crinan Canal, because of the geography, where a number of customers require inspection BW brings them together in order to lower the cost.

AH made the point that all boats resident or trading on the canal must have a Boat Safety Certificate, but short-term boats did not require this and that this is putting others at risk.

JS stated that all craft are subject to random boat safety checks, but BW cannot inspect all visiting craft.

KZ made the point that in France, Belgium, Holland and a number of other countries boats would not be allowed into any marina without a safety certificate and that Lock Keepers should be able to check boats as they go through the canal.

JS responded by saying that there are 'gas sniffers' available for carrying out random safety checks and reiterated that this is not a BW Boat Safety Scheme. JS also stated that BW requires boats staying longer than 28 days to have a Boat Safety Certificate and if they are staying for shorter periods they are subject to Dangerous Boat Checks.

ID suggests that JS has further discussion on this matter with Stewart Sim, Operations Director.

Robin Black asked about discussions between BW and Scottish Southern Electric Company re Foyers Pier.

JS said that discussions have taken place, but is not sure if they are concluded.

AH asked if outcome of these discussions should go through Loch Ness Harbour Company.

JS agreed it should, together with Loch Ness partnership

MA asked that, due to the increased use of towpaths as cycle routes to work resulting in people going faster, would it be possible to ask people to have bells fitted when getting their licences.

JS replied that if they apply for a licence they are asked to do so.

GG thanked people for their views and said that this had been a good meeting with people speaking their minds. He made the point that there is a difference between consultation and negotiations and we may not agree on all elements. Board Members of British Waterways are all non-executive. The Chairman is appointed by the Secretary of State. Issues are discussed at British Waterways Board Meetings and the Board will advise the BW Executive, but will not instruct.

GG spoke of the importance of getting the process right and dealing properly with our customers and if there is sloppiness we should apologise.

We will be getting a new Minister and when the new Minister is appointed we will have to get back to where we were before election, but we need a united front that will get us where we want to be and get us the best financial support. We must not forget how much the system costs to maintain and we must agree to help each other to get a sustainable system, this will get the best from the Scottish Executive.

ID then asked if there were any further questions, as there were not, he thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution and closed the meeting.