

**British Waterways Scotland
Scotland Group**

Continuation of Meeting held on 20 May 2004 at 1300 hours

Open to Public & Held in The Offices

of Inverness & Nairn Enterprise

The Green House

Beechwood Business Park North, Inverness

Representing British Waterways: Susan Achmatowicz
George Ballinger
Jonathan Bryant
Campbell Christie (Chairman)
Nicola Christie
Ian Darling
Robin Evans
Professor George Fleming
George Greener
Guthrie Hutton
Jane Karwoski
Eva McCracken
Kenneth MacKenzie
Rod Michie
Richard Millham
Sandra Purves
James Simpson
Jim Stirling
Pam Swanson

Patricia Rettie (Minutes)

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

Introduction & Purpose of Meeting

Campbell Christie, Chairman of the British Waterways Scotland Group (BWSG), opened the meeting by welcoming all those present and introducing himself and the panel, which consisted of Jim Stirling, Director of British Waterways Scotland and Pam Swanson Manager, Highland Canals.

CC explained that this meeting would take the form of a short presentation by Pam Swanson, followed by discussion and question time.

CC then gave a brief overview of the formation and concept of the British Waterways Scotland Group (BWSG), and that it is a non-statutory Group formed in September 2000, following the formation of the Scottish Parliament. CC explained that the BWSG does not decide policy within BW, but is there to advise BW. CC also explained how the Group meets several times a year in areas where the canals have an impact on the community. Thus allowing people with an interest in the canals to come along and join the discussions.

CC briefly described the matters discussed at the BWSG meeting held in the morning. Included in this was the introduction of the three newly appointed members to the BWSG, Eva McCracken, Campaigner for rights of access for all, Guthrie Hutton, Writer & Researcher and Richard Millham, former Principal & Chief Executive of Motherwell College. This was followed by presentations from members of the Senior Management Team for Scotland, providing up to date information for the Group and in particular the new members. There was discussion around planning issues, development around The Falkirk Wheel, Highland Market issues, the Strategic Transport Authority, the Water Framework Directive and the Scottish Canals Steering Group. The minutes of that meeting and this public meeting will be published on the Scottish Canals Website at www.scottishcanals.co.uk

Pam Swanson introduced herself and explained that as part of the BW reorganisation, she had recently been appointed Manager for the Highland Canals, responsible for the Caledonian & Crinan Canals. PS then gave a presentation outlining her role and responsibilities, which she describes as transforming customer service in an idyllic setting.

PS provided a potted history of her career to date, and explained that one side of her role, as Manager Highland Canals, covered all aspects of delivery, and the other side, as Service Manager, Scotland covered all areas of customer service and service development. PS went to describe her team, covered some of the key achievements to date on the Highland Canals and spoke of the way forward as meeting customer expectations in an affordable way, providing engineering excellence and improved facilities, together with operating hours that meet the customers' needs and through the development of partnerships.

CC thanked Pam for her presentation and opened the meeting to questions.

Gavin Hogg – Trailer Sailor

Gavin began by saying that last year it had been possible to purchase a licence for the canals as a Trailer Sailor and expressed his thanks to BW staff for their assistance throughout that time. Mr Hogg then asked if he went to Loch Ness, how much would it cost to moor on the canal and go to lunch. He had been told it could cost him £300. Mr Hogg then stated that he believes BW loves its canals, but does not want boats on them. He claims that there is no provision on the Caledonian Canal for small boats, no facilities for boaters, nowhere safe for trailers. Mr Hogg stated that he uses slipways on Loch Lomond and feels these are excellent examples of good facilities for small boats. Mr Hogg was also very critical of the treatment he receives from the frontline people in The Caledonian Canal Office. Mr Hogg also complained that there had been a change from 7 metres and under to 5 metres and under for small craft allowed on the canal, therefore, he can no longer purchase a small boat licence.

Mr Hogg also asked for a list of who was consulted during the review of the licence system and suggested that BW needs to look at its small boat policy.

Jim Stirling began his response to Mr Hogg's complaints by first of all explaining that there had been a misprint and that the length remains at 7 metres or under.

Jim agreed that there is a shortage of slipways on the Caledonian Canal, but that this issue is being addressed, although, there are safety issues due to the transit of large craft, which must be taken into account.

Jim stated that BW is not against small boats being on the Caledonian and that there are quite a number of shower and toilet facilities along the canal, at regular intervals. Jim went on to explain that the issue of trailer boats had been raised late in the consultation process, but had been considered.

Mr Hogg referred to the discounted licence fee of £50, which only allowed seven nights mooring.

JS pointed out that small boats could be taken out of the canal overnight, avoiding the need for mooring.

Mr Hogg mentioned again his dissatisfaction with the service from the office on the Caledonian Canal.

Campbell Christie suggested that the best way forward to resolve this problem would be for Mr Hogg to meet with Pam Swanson and discuss the issues.

Mr Hogg stated again that there is an issue in Scotland and he would like to see the canals developed for greater use by small boats. He suggested a charge per lock system for small boats going through.

Sandra Purves agreed that there was a similar problem of lack of usage and slipways on the Lowland Canals and that it is a national issue.

Robin Evans said that the issue of encouraging small boats would be looked at in England to establish how BW is participating in the consultation of this.

Joan Stewart, Inverness West Community Council

Asked about the monitoring of speed limits on the Caledonian Canal and expressed concern that quite a number of ducks were being hit.

Pam Swanson said that she would look into this.

Joan Stewart also asked about the proposed canal crossing.

Jim Stirling responded that a Public Enquiry, into objections to the Inverness Local Plan, commenced in April 2004. He explained that BW has provided a written submission to the enquiry and that BW's preference is for a tunnel or an aqueduct as this will have the least impact on the canal.

Tina Butterworth, Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council

Asked about renewable energy schemes, hydro schemes and transportation of materials.

Jim Stirling responded that BW has a national policy of encouraging the transport of materials by water, where and when it is possible and practicable to do so. BWS would contact Scottish & Southern re the possibility of using the canal as a supply route for the building of the new hydro scheme at Fort Augustus.

Tor Justad, Boat Owner

Made reference to the regulations of the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) applied to small boats on the Caledonian Canal and stated that he felt they were the most stringent he has come across. He asked if they were there to protect BW assets rather than individuals or their boats.

Mr Justad praised the Lock Keepers on the Canal and said that he felt they were BW's best asset.

Another issue raised by Mr Justad was the lack of commercial development at Muirtown Basin and how the area appeared lifeless and a bit like a building site. He stated that the area would benefit greatly from some commercial development.

Jim Stirling responded firstly to the lack of commercial development in this area and how BW is keen for this to happen and has indeed been trying to take this forward since 1992. He explained that BW is working with the Local Enterprise Company and the Local Authority, but that it would take time, as there are other development priorities for these bodies in Inverness.

Jim Stirling then asked Mr Justad for examples of where a BSS certificate was not required.

Mr Justad responded that on Loch Lomond his boat was not inspected, he did not require a licence, but paid for his mooring. Whereas, on the Caledonian Canal, he had been required to have work carried out on his boat, which had proved quite costly for the required modifications to the engine.

Jim Stirling explained that the BSS is not a BW scheme, but it is endorsed and adopted by BW as a protective measure for the boat owner, other canal users and the canal infrastructure. Chiefly because canals tend to have many boats and people in close proximity to one another and the scheme approach is to minimise the risk to these people.

If a yacht is at sea and suffers an explosion, whilst the occupants are at risk, it is unlikely that other passing vessels would be at risk.

Campbell Christie made the point that BW has a responsibility as a Board to protect the users of its assets.

Mr Justad claimed that the cost of meeting the standard is putting out of the reach of many.

Campbell used the MOT certification of cars as another example of a protective measure against endangering those around you. This has clearly been a success and nobody would now challenge this.

Campbell also made the point that in terms of development for the canals, it can take time to generate interest and to encourage the private sector to take a risk.

Mr Hogg made the suggestion that if BW were to provide more slipways suitable for different types of small boats it may generate more interest from developers.

Christine Forbes, Muirtown Community Council & Home Owner at Muirtown Locks

Complained of a smell coming from the canal and that, recently, it had been necessary to call Transco emergency services as it had been so strong and a gas leak was suspected.

Pam Swanson stated that BW was aware that there have been complaints in this area and

that they had been investigated, but no cause established. Further investigation will be carried out.

Catherine Fraser

Miss Fraser had attended the meeting for part of the time, but had to leave before she had the opportunity to raise her point about the dangers of trials bikes on the towpath from behind the old quarry to Tomnahurich Bridge. Miss Fraser also pointed out that they use the Toruean Circular Walk which is now all churned up and can no longer be used by walkers.

Russell Thomson will be responding in writing to Miss Fraser, following his investigations into the matter. Russell will be looking, in particular, at what BW's powers are in such situations.

As there were no further questions Campbell thanked everyone for attending and for their contribution and the points raised.

Campbell informed the meeting that the next meeting of the British Waterways Scotland Group would be held in Falkirk, at The Falkirk Wheel site, on Thursday 25 November 2004 and that he looked forward to welcoming all interested parties on that date.