



Environment Agency charge proposals for boat registrations from January 2025

Consultation response form

Date: May 2024

Introduction

The Environment Agency is the second largest navigation authority in the UK. We are responsible for managing 1,010km of inland waterways, plus Rye and Lydney harbours. It's our job to keep these waterways open and safe for a variety of uses, but especially for boating.

Around 26,000 boats are kept or used on the waterways we manage. It is a legal requirement for the owners to register these boats with us. We charge for registration so the people who benefit from our navigation services contribute towards the significant costs of managing and maintaining our navigable waterways. We operate and maintain approximately 2,500 assets, such as locks, weirs, and moorings. We maintain riverbanks and manage channels to ensure safe navigation. We remove boat wrecks and other debris including fallen trees.

Around 96% of our boating customers are private individuals using their boats for leisure, and in some cases as their homes. The remaining 4% are businesses or not for profit organisations or charities, who use their boats commercially or to provide a service to others.

To achieve this, from January 2025, we propose to increase our boat registration charges for the River Thames, Medway navigation and Anglian waterways. This consultation sets out our proposals from 2025 for the 'National navigation boat charging scheme' for these waterways.

The consultation document, 'Environment Agency charges proposal: boat registration', sets out our proposals in more detail. This and the supporting documentation listed below are available on our consultation web site on [Citizen Space](#):

- guide to how we calculate our charges
- draft national navigation boat charging schemes from 2025

We would like you to share your views on the proposed changes to our charges for boat registration.

What we are consulting on

We propose to increase the 'Environment Agency national navigation boat charging scheme' (Boat Charging Scheme) by 9% for the River Thames, Medway navigation and Anglian waterways. These increases will come into effect from 1 January 2025 for the River Thames and 1 April 2025 for the Medway navigation and Anglian waterways.

We also propose to use this increase for negotiations about our national joint registration agreements with Canal & River Trust (Gold Licence), Paddle UK and British Rowing.

We aim to secure an increase in funding in response to inflation over the last three years. This will help us to continue to deliver the navigation service, while we develop our longer-term strategy. Over the next year we will work with stakeholder groups and listen to the needs and priorities of our customers to develop our strategy and improve the service we offer now and in the future.

We recognise that the last few years have been challenging for everybody. We have tried to balance our proposals, considering the inflationary pressures on the service with the current economic climate for our customers. We do understand that these proposals will be difficult for some customers, especially for some of our customers who call our waterways their home or use them to make a living.

Without the additional funding these proposals will bring, we will not be able to sustain the current service. Our boat registration charges have not kept pace with the rate of inflation, and we need to address this in the short term.

To help customers understand what our proposals mean for them, we have estimated impacts for a range of different types and sizes of boats in section 3.1 of the consultation document.

How to respond to this consultation

This consultation will run for 12 weeks, from 24 May 2024 to 16 August 2024. You can view the consultation document, questions and all supporting documents using the [Citizen Space online consultation tool](#).

Please use this form if you are responding by email rather than online. Complete the questions, and where there are text boxes, give supporting information where possible to support your answer.

To provide you with background information you will need to complete the questions about our charge proposals for boat registration, we refer you to specific sections in the consultation document.

To return the completed response form, please email the form to enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk using the heading 'Charges consultation: boat registration'.

The consultation will close at midnight on Friday 16 August 2024. We will consider all responses received by this date before finalising our proposals to submit for approval by government.

Ask for a copy of the consultation document

Please contact us if you need a copy of the consultation document to be sent to you. You can do this by contacting our:

National Customer Contact Centre

Telephone: 03708 506 506
Minicom for the hard of hearing: 03702 422 549
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Consultation principles

We're running this consultation in line with the guidance set out in the government's [Consultation Principles](#).

If you have any questions or complaint about the way this consultation has been carried out, please email Consultation.enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

How we will use your information

We will take into consideration the feedback we receive and summarise this in a consultation response document which will be publicly available on GOV.UK after the consultation closes. We may include comments or quotes, unless you specifically request that we keep your response confidential.

We will not publish names of individuals or personal data, but we will publish the name of the organisation for those responses made on behalf of organisations. We will not respond individually to responses. If you have asked to be notified, we will contact you to let you know when the consultation response document is published.

We will circulate a link to our response document to all consultees and other interested parties who have asked to be kept informed. We will not respond individually to consultees.

Please answer the following questions.

Privacy

We would like to keep you informed about the outcomes of this consultation.

If you would like to receive emails acknowledging your response and or telling you when we have published the summary of responses, please tick the relevant boxes below.

- yes, I would like to receive an email acknowledging my response
- yes, I would like to receive an email to let me know the consultation response document is published

If you have ticked either of the boxes above, please tell us your email address.

Email: secretariat@bargee-traveller.org.uk

By giving us your email address, you consent for us to email you about the consultation. We will keep your details until we have notified you of the response document publication.

We will not share your details with any other third party without your explicit consent unless required to by law.

You can withdraw your consent to receive these emails at any time by contacting us at enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

The Environment Agency is the data controller for the personal data you provide. For further information on how we deal with your personal data please see our [Personal Information Charter](#) on GOV.UK. You can also email our Data Protection team: dataprotection@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Can we publish your response?

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we may be required to publish your response to this consultation but will not include any personal information. If you have requested your response is kept confidential, we may still be required to provide a summary of it. For more information see our [Personal Information Charter](#).

This is a required question, please tick one of the following:

yes

no

If you answered no, please tell us why.

About you and the use of our waterways

To help us analyse and assess the consultation responses, we would like you to answer a few questions about you and the use of our waterways

Are you providing an individual or personal response or a response on behalf of an organisation?

Please tick one of the following:

- (a) responding as an individual
- (b) responding on behalf of an organisation or group
- (c) other

If you selected (b), what is the name of the organisation or group?

National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA)

The NBTA is a volunteer organisation formed in 2009 that campaigns and provides advice and support for itinerant boat dwellers on Britain's inland and coastal waterways. This includes anyone whose home is a boat and who does not have a permanent mooring for their boat with planning permission for residential use. The NBTA is the only national organisation in Britain dedicated to upholding and defending the rights of itinerant boat dwellers. The NBTA has around 2,000 members on all the major navigation authorities' waterways and beyond. The NBTA deals with approximately 200 individual cases each year. The navigable inland waterway system in Britain is home to an estimated 15,000 to 50,000 Bargee Travellers. There are as yet no accurate statistics for the number of people living on boats either with or without a permanent mooring in the UK.

Please tell us about your boat registration.

The majority of NBTA members who live and travel on Environment Agency (EA) waterways hold either an annual private boat registration or a Gold licence. Some members use a visitor boat registration if they are using the EA waterways to transit between other navigation authorities' waterways. Some members are roving traders and hold a business boat registration.

Please tick one of the following:

- (a) I have an annual private boat registration
- (b) I have an annual business boat registration
- (c) I have a charity or not-for-profit registration
- (d) I have an annual joint registration (Gold, canoe, rowing)
- (e) I normally purchase a visitor boat registration
- (f) I do not have a boat registration
- (g) I have more than one type of boat registration

If you chose (a) or (b) or (c) please tell us which river or waterway your boat or boats are registered on.

Please select one of the following:

The members of the NBTA live and travel throughout the EA waterways but most are located on the Thames, Anglian waterways and Medway.

- Great Ouse System – Anglian Waterways
- Lincolnshire waterways – Anglian waterways
- Medway Navigation
- River Cam – Anglian Waterways
- River Nene – Anglian Waterways
- River Stour – Anglian Waterways
- River Thames

If you chose (e), purchase a visitor boat registration, please select which of the following waterways you use.

NBTA members' most frequently used EA visitor registrations are for the Thames, Anglian waterways and Medway.

Please select all that apply.

- Anglian waterways
- Medway navigation
- River Thames

What type of boat do you have

Please select all that apply

- powered boat
- unpowered enclosed boat (houseboat)
- unpowered open boat
- other
- not applicable

How did you find out about this consultation?

Please tick one of the following:

- from us
- from another organisation
- through an organisation, group, or trade association you are a member of
- press article
- social media, for example, Facebook
- through a meeting you attended
- other

If you selected *other*, please tell us how you found out about this consultation.

Charge proposal: proposed boat registration charges on our waterways

We propose an increase of 9% for all boat registrations on these waterways:

- River Thames
- Medway navigation
- Anglian waterways (Great Ouse system and River Nene, River Stour, and Lincolnshire waterways)

These proposed increases will also impact the charges for our national joint registration agreements with Canal & River Trust (Gold Licence), Paddle UK and British Rowing.

Before responding to the following questions, please refer to these sections in the consultation document:

- Introduction (section 1)
- Definitions changes to the Environment Agency national navigation boat charging schemes from 2022 (section 2)
- Customer impact (section 3.1)

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to increase boat registration charges on the River Thames, Anglian waterways, and Medway navigation by 9%?

Please tick one of the following:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- do not know
- not applicable

Why do you think this?

The NBTA does not support any increases in registration charges apart from increases that are genuinely in line with inflation. An increase of 9% is not justified by the current rate of inflation. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 2.2% in the 12 months to July 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 14th August 2024). The proposal to increase registration fees by 9% will have the greatest impact on boat dwellers, who depend on being able to pay the charges in order to avoid criminal prosecution under the Inland Waterways Order 2010 as a consequence of continuing to occupy their homes, and in order to keep their homes, which may otherwise be vulnerable to seizure by the EA.

Question 2: With the proposed increase of 9% in the boat registration charges, how will this affect your use of our waterways?

The majority of boat dwellers, especially those without a permanent mooring, are in the lowest income sector of the boating community, and cannot afford to pay a 9% increase in registration fees. They will be vulnerable to criminal prosecution under the Inland Waterways Order 2010 if they cannot afford to pay for their registration fees in full or at all. Their homes will therefore be at risk of seizure by the EA, potentially making the most financially vulnerable section of the boating community homeless.

The effects of the cost of living crisis coming on top of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many more people, including boat dwellers, experiencing financial insecurity and hardship. Many boat dwellers are either in low paid, insecure, casual work or are on fixed incomes such as pensions and unable to work to increase their income. Their costs have risen out of all proportion to their incomes: the cost of diesel, oil, coal, wood, bottled LPG gas, insurance, boat safety examinations, boat maintenance or repairs, boat mortgage/loan repayments, mooring fees and food, have all risen significantly since 2021, in some cases by as much as 100%. What little financial resilience they may have had before 2021 has been negated by these price increases.

Gold licences will also increase and this is on top of the Canal & River Trust (CRT) escalating surcharge and above inflation increases over 5 years on the licence fees of boats without a home mooring. The surcharge will result in an increase in CRT licence fees of between 64% and 130% over 5 years. The surcharge will be applied in full to Gold licences and will not be applied pro-rata despite the fact that Gold licence holders do not navigate on CRT waterways all year round.

Many roving traders are sole traders, couples or families who live aboard. They run very small businesses and their workplace is also their home. An increase of 9% in registration fees will have a significant adverse impact on their ability to earn a living, especially when taken with the CRT escalating surcharge on the licence fees of boats without a home mooring, which will affect Gold licence holders.

Question 3: Please share any additional comments that you think may help us improve our current proposals.

If the EA implements the proposed 9% increase in registration fees, this would amount to the unreasonable exercise of its statutory powers and an unreasonable interference with the Public Right of Navigation.

The EA made an effort to look after boat dwellers during the Covid-19 pandemic. This effort needs to continue with the recognition that many boat dwellers will not be able to afford the 9% increase in fees. The poorest in the boating community will be hit the hardest by a 9% increase in registration fees. Not all boat dwellers are eligible for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Many boat dwellers live on small incomes or pensions that are just above the threshold to claim welfare benefits. In addition, the NBTA regularly sees boat dwellers wrongly denied help with their boat registration, licence or mooring fees by DWP Universal Credit decision makers or local authority Housing Benefit offices.

If the EA decides, despite these objections, to increase registration fees by 9%, it should only do so if it has developed a policy whereby the fees of those who rely on their boat for their home can be waived, or part fees accepted, in cases of financial hardship. Otherwise, the consequences for boat dwellers of being unable to pay the boat registration fee will be extremely serious: either criminal prosecution, or loss of their home.

In addition, the EA should refuse to implement the CRT surcharge on the licence fees of boats without a home mooring to the Gold licence, and should require CRT to remove the surcharge from the Gold licence on the grounds that it will not be applied pro-rata.

End of the consultation

Publishing our consultation response

Thank you for completing this consultation. We aim to publish our response on GOV.UK within 12 weeks of this consultation closing and before we implement any changes. It will include a summary of the comments and queries we received, and a link to this document will be added to the consultation page of Citizen Space

We will include a list of organisations that responded. We will circulate a link to our response to all consultees and other interested parties who have asked to be kept informed. We will not respond individually to consultees.

Would you like to find out more about us or your environment?

Then call us on

03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Or visit our website

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

incident hotline

0800 807060 **(24 hours)**

floodline

0345 988 1188 **(24 hours)**

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