

Customer consultation

Navigation charges 2018/19

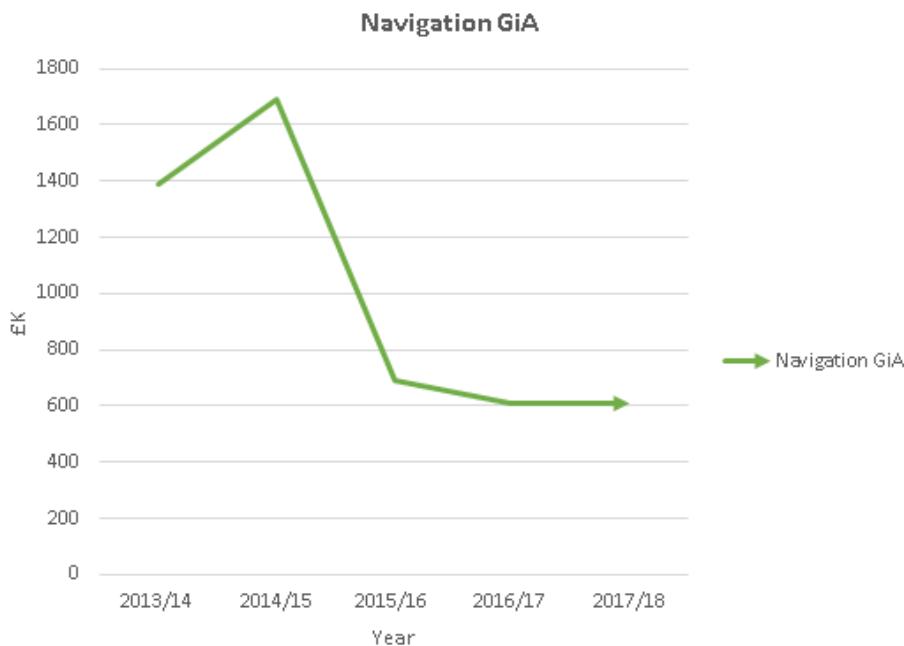
July 2017

Introduction

We need to increase the boat registration charges payable for any boat kept, used or let for hire on our waterways in 2018/19. This increase is essential to help maintain existing levels of funding for all aspects of the navigation service we provide even if the additional financial support we receive from Government, in the form of navigation grant-in-aid (GiA), reduces.

The navigation service we provide receives funding from a variety of sources. Income from most of these sources remains broadly the same each year. However, navigation GiA has been steadily falling over a number of years.

Table 1



We expect this trend to continue so are planning for a further reduction in 2018/19.

The amount we spend on the navigation service has to match our income. As navigation GiA reduces, so does the amount we have to spend, unless we are able to make up the shortfall via the other income streams.

The funding position

As well as navigation GiA, our navigation service is part-funded by Government GiA provided for investment in flood risk management activities. We receive a variable amount each year based on the amount of work undertaken by our staff specifically to manage water levels and to contribute towards the maintenance of navigation assets to reduce flood risk. This sum makes a significant contribution to the costs related to managing our waterways.

On some of our waterways, we also receive income from the water abstraction permit charges paid by the utility companies and other abstractors of water. This is for the weir work undertaken by our staff specifically to facilitate water abstraction.

We also receive regular income from a range of commercial activities and local charges from boating related activities, including property rental, occasional one-off boosts from land and property sales, long term moorings and other miscellaneous services.

Apart from GiA, the largest contributor to our income is boat registration charges. These charges have been frozen for the last 2 years, and were linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the 3 years before that (CPI only for 1 year and CPI + 2% for 2 years), as agreed with our waterway user representatives through consultation.

Over these 5 years additional income from boat registration fees and other sources of funding has not matched the reduction in navigation GiA. This has resulted in a shrinking budget for our navigation service, as our spending must match our income. Additionally, overall Government funding for the Environment Agency has also declined. This has resulted in reduced allocations for much of the work which this funding supports. This includes capital investment in the locks and weirs without which, boating on our waterways as we know it would simply not be possible. Less money for capital projects means more money must be spent on maintenance and repairs of existing assets, rather than replacing them. This increases the pressure on budgets already reduced through shrinking navigation GiA.

For some time, overall funding for our navigation service has been falling increasingly short of the investment required just to maintain essential infrastructure and keep the middle third, or 'fairway' of the river, free from obstructions.

In response, we have worked to reduce our costs and increase our income in other areas to minimise any deterioration in these, and all other aspects of our service, as best we can and continue to do so. The increases to the 2018-19 boat registration charges, alongside other measures, will provide a small but necessary contribution towards greater financial sustainability, and stability, for our service.

The national position and the rationale

Our proposed increase to boat registration charges are part of a package of increases to registration charges for all the waterways for which the Environment Agency is the navigation authority. We have been granted permission to consult on these proposals by the Environment Agency board, and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

All our waterway areas are funded in different ways, as can be seen from the table below (based on forecast budgets for 2017/18):

Area Name	Boat registration Charges (£k)	Water Resources income (£k)	FCRM income (£k)	Moorings and landing rents	Other local Navigation income *	Commercial income - estates (£k)	Navigation GiA (£k)	Total (£k)
Thames	£4,522	£890	£1,350	£900	£416	£376	£68	£8,522
Anglian	£2,030	£0	£520	£170	£42	£0	£262	£3,024
Medway	£178	£0	£85	£60	£17	£49	£282	£671

* includes Thames Conservancy Act income for Thames

They also have different running costs. This year, we have reviewed the funding position for each waterway area and based our proposals on the individual funding pressures. This means for the first time, rather than applying a uniform percentage increase, we are proposing different percentage increases for the different waterway areas as shown below.

- Increase charges for the River Thames by 5.7%
- Increase charges for the Anglian Waterways by 7.5%
- Increase charges for the River Medway by 10%
- Increase charges for unpowered boats, which have a nationally consistent charge and boats (powered and unpowered) covered by our joint registration agreements with third parties (i.e. Canal & River Trust - Gold Licence, British Canoeing, British Rowing) by 7.7% *

** This is taken as an average of the 3 individual percentages for each waterway area because they have nationally consistent charges.*

Together, they will provide approximately an extra £430,000 which will contribute towards reinstating planned preventative maintenance in order to stop further decline, and channel maintenance which customers have told us is fundamental to the service they receive.

Boat registration charges support the delivery of our navigation service across all our waterways and currently, costs far exceed the funding recovered from charges. Charge increases will reduce the impact of continuing reductions in this funding.

All boat registration charges have remained unchanged for the past 2 years so this year, we need to increase our charges. These increases will ensure current levels of funding are maintained, without which, some activities will have to reduce further or stop.

The increases and their context

As shown above, our intention is to apply a different percentage increase to all boat registrations for each of the waterways we manage. The only exceptions to this are private unpowered boats, and those boats (powered and unpowered) covered by our joint registration agreements with third parties as mentioned above.

These increases are between 3.1% and 7.4% above the latest published annual consumer price index rate of 2.6% (as at June 2017). Our proposed increase will therefore be largely absorbed by inflation-based increases to our operating costs, but it does allow sufficient headroom to reduce the impact of further reductions in navigation GiA on existing levels of service.

The tables below sets out how these increases will affect boats of a variety of types on the different waterways:

Thames	Private				Commercial			
ANNUAL CHARGE	2017 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)	2017 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)
<i>Unpowered boat</i>	35.50	7.7	38.23	2.73	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Powered boat: 4m x 1.5m (Small)</i>	111.30	5.7	117.64	6.34	171.84	5.7	181.63	9.79
<i>Powered boat: 7.1m x 2.3m (Medium)</i>	296.80	5.7	313.72	16.92	458.24	5.7	484.36	26.12
<i>Powered boat: 11.6m x 3.7m (Large)</i>	779.10	5.7	823.51	44.41	1202.88	5.7	1271.44	68.56
<i>Narrowboat: 16.7m x 2.0m (Medium)</i>	612.15	5.7	647.04	34.89	945.12	5.7	998.99	53.87
<i>Dutch barge: 23.0m x 4.5m (X Large)</i>	1714.00	5.7	1811.70	97.70	2949.92	5.7	3118.07	168.15
<i>Passenger boat: 25.9m x 3.9m</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2893.64	5.7	3058.58	164.94

Anglian	Private				Commercial			
ANNUAL CHARGE	2017/18 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018/19 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)	2017/18 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018/19 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)
<i>Unpowered boat</i>	35.50	7.7	38.23	2.73	54.86	7.7	59.08	4.22
<i>Powered boat: 4m (Small)</i>	280.19	7.5	301.20	21.01	300.29	7.5	322.81	22.52
<i>Powered boat: 7.1m (Medium)</i>	343.98	7.5	369.78	25.80	530.83	7.5	570.64	39.81
<i>Powered boat: 11.6m (Large)</i>	608.79	7.5	654.45	45.66	939.53	7.5	1009.99	70.46
<i>Narrowboat: 16.7m (Medium)</i>	878.71	7.5	944.61	65.90	1356.09	7.5	1457.80	101.71
<i>Dutch barge: 23.0m (X Large)</i>	963.89	7.5	1036.18	72.29	1487.53	7.5	1599.09	111.56
<i>Passenger boat: 25.9m</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1033.01	7.5	1110.49	77.48

Medway	Private				Commercial			
ANNUAL CHARGE	2017/18 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018/19 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)	2017/18 charge (£)	Proposed increase (%)	2018/19 charge (£)	Charge difference (£)
<i>Unpowered boat</i>	35.50	7.7	38.23	2.73	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Powered boat: 4m (Small)</i>	128.56	10	141.42	12.86	220.40	10	242.44	22.04
<i>Powered boat: 7.1m (Medium)</i>	228.19	10	251.01	22.82	391.21	10	430.33	39.12
<i>Powered boat: 11.6m (Large)</i>	346.72	10	381.39	34.67	594.54	10	653.99	59.45
<i>Narrowboat: 16.7m (Medium)</i>	346.72	10	381.39	34.67	594.54	10	653.99	59.45
<i>Dutch barge: 23.0m (X Large)</i>	346.72	10	381.39	34.67	594.54	10	653.99	59.45
<i>Passenger boat: 25.9m</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	445.90	10	490.49	44.59

By applying these proposed increases, in 2018/19 we expect the total income from all boats registered on our waterways to be £7.2m, which represents approximately an extra £430,000 based on income from existing registrations.

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We appreciate that any increase to the cost of enjoying a leisure activity or running a business is rarely welcomed by those who must pay it. But boat registration charges are a relatively small element of the total cost of boat ownership which of course includes the cost of buying a boat, its ongoing maintenance, mooring fees and fuel costs. And while many of those will have been subject to increases considerably in excess of inflation over recent years, boat registration charges have not.

Given that the service we provide is arguably the single most important enabler of boating and successful boating businesses on our waterways (certainly in the case of maintaining our locks and weirs in safe working order and managing water levels) and already receives significant, though reducing, financial support from Government, we believe the relatively small charge increases that we are asking for are reasonable.

What are we doing to make savings and efficiencies?

Increased funding from charges is part of an ongoing wider programme to deliver a sustainable service that meets the needs of our different customers as best we can. We also seek to make sensible efficiencies where we can, prioritise funding to protect capital investment and increase income from commercial and other external sources. At the same time, across the many issues of concern to boaters which we have neither the powers, responsibility nor resources to manage ourselves, we are vigorously encouraging those that do to recognise the impact of these issues on the boating community, and wider users, and to take the desired action themselves.

Additionally:

- With considerable expert support from our corporate Legal services colleagues, we have successfully pursued owners of unregistered boats in Thames marinas to recover boat registration charges. The successful outcome of this test case has protected boat registration income from a considerable number of boat owners for perpetuity across all of our Waterways.
- We continue to work with our corporate procurement specialists to ensure we benefit fully from the collective purchasing power of the Government estate, working with framework contractors to obtain best value-for-money and working according to Government procurement criteria when buying in specialist services to achieve the same outcome.
- We work increasingly closely with police and other enforcement agencies to improve the effectiveness and joint and individual initiatives, and reduce costs.
- We work in partnership with other internal departments and external organisations to share and reduce costs where appropriate to maintain and improve our waterways.

What are we doing to increase our income?

Below is a summary of some of the ongoing activity to increase our income:

- Reviewing all of our estates lease and rental agreements when they come up for renewal, and applying market rates.
- Improving compliance with the terms and conditions of our visitor mooring sites and increasing the number of moorings available.
- Reviewing Thames accommodations aiming to identify those where fees and charges are due and recovering that income.
- Working to establish new commercial income opportunities.
- Working to open up our sites for sponsorship and advertising opportunities.

Consultation questions

We are interested to understand your organisation's answers to the following questions in particular when responding to the consultation on behalf of those you represent as a member of NNUF:

1. Do you support the need for an increase to Environment Agency boat registration charges?
2. Do you support the level of increase proposed through this consultation?
3. If not, what level would you support?
4. If we were not to increase charges, what elements of the service would you be prepared to see reduce or stop?

You will also have an opportunity to discuss our proposals with Waterway Managers at the next NNUF meeting on 26 July 2017.

The closing date for responses is Thursday 31 August 2017.

Appendices

Annex 1: The non-tidal Thames

Our navigation service on the non-tidal Thames

We produce a River Thames Waterway Customer Charter each year which, alongside our lock keeping service targets, provides customers with an excellent summary of the service standards we strive to achieve with the funding available. These documents can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-customer-charter>

We also produce an annual report each year, setting out our performance against these service ambitions. View the latest report here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-annual-report>

In addition, the following summary may help provide a better understanding of the extent of the activity that makes up our navigation service on the Thames, but it is still not exhaustive.

Our navigation service on the Thames is delivered by our River Thames Waterway Operations team. This team is formed of 90 highly trained, well equipped, hugely experienced, passionate and dedicated full-time navigation specialists. This includes 60 full time lock and weir keepers, who between them, carry out duties at our 45 lock sites.

The team's role is to maintain the public right of navigation, and to facilitate safe boating on the 135 miles of navigable non-tidal Thames from Cricklade in Wiltshire, near the river's source, to Teddington in south west London. With support from expert colleagues from a range of other departments, the team provides this service for the non-tidal Thames boating community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Throughout the peak boating months of the summer, the team is augmented by as many seasonal lock and weir keepers as its budget will allow it to employ. This season we are employing 23. In addition, we also have a very successful volunteer programme in place, with more than 250 volunteers carrying out a wide range of duties. Their contribution enables us to provide a level of service far beyond what would otherwise be achievable within our budgets.

Maintaining the infrastructure

Safe navigation of the non-tidal River Thames would not be possible without the network of 45 locks and weirs that stretch along it. Keeping them all in working order requires significant investment and is an extensive, year-round programme of work for us. It requires us to constantly assess and monitor the condition of every single structure, carrying out extensive engineering surveys both above and below water when necessary, and then to plan, cost and prioritise any repairs, refurbishment or renewal works that are required. This includes sourcing and procuring suppliers, materials and parts, or fabricating parts ourselves. This work does not completely eliminate breakdowns however, but it does reduce the frequency and seriousness of them. It also includes ensuring all sites are compliant with the latest Health and Safety legislation, to keep everyone working at or visiting our locks, safe from harm. This work also requires significant investment and generates a substantial workload.

As well as the locks themselves, we also maintain a wide range of other assets. This includes facilities for boaters such as toilets and showers, welfare rooms for our staff, access tracks for emergency service vehicles, without which they could not reach some of our more remote locks, and many of which are extremely long. We also own a large number of footbridges. And of course, we must also maintain our lock houses to a high standard, for the team members or tenants who live there.

Managing water levels

The 45 locks which allow safe navigation of the non-tidal River Thames would not function without the 200 or so sets of weirs which make up the weir complexes to be found at every lock. We operate these weirs to manage water levels, to enable the locks to function, and also to provide a safe depth for navigation within the middle third, or 'fairway' of the river in each stretch between locksites. This includes alleviating the impact of adverse weather conditions (extended periods of heavy, or very little rain) to the limits of what is achievable with the weirs.

Assisted passage

Much of the work we do is focussed on providing the best possible levels of 'assisted passage' that we can. This is when we have staff available at locks to help boaters through. Although all our locks can be operated by members of the public, and have clear instructions on how to do that, at busy times a professional lock keeper can of course fill the lock with boats far more efficiently than if members of the public manage the situation themselves. They can also deal with any incidents which may occur in accordance with our procedures and training. In addition, we recognise that having a professional lock keeper available to take ropes, operate sluices and lock gates and provide expert advice and guidance throughout the process is an aspect of our service that boaters greatly value.

For these reasons, every year we work with our principal advisory group representing boaters on the Thames - the Thames Navigation Users Forum - to develop our assisted passage targets. We then communicate these to boaters so that they are aware of the service levels we strive to achieve:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-customer-charter>

These targets take into account the manpower available, the amount of boat traffic at each lock, any characteristics of a lock which might make it more difficult to negotiate as well as the other important duties that also need to be carried out at some sites and may take the lock keeper away from the lockside.

We put a huge amount of effort into achieving our assisted passage targets. We draw up a rota each week to ensure we cover, as well as we can with the manpower available to us, absences due to holidays, sickness and any vacancies (while we are in the process of recruiting replacements). And when we suffer abnormally high levels of absence, we will pull other team members away from their normal duties to help at locks instead. In addition, to ensure no locks are left unattended for a whole day if at all avoidable, we will ask lock and weir keepers to spend time at two sites on a single day if necessary.

Enforcement and compliance

We have powers to enforce the legislation governing many other boating activities on the river. These are principally the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010 and the Thames Conservancy Acts 1932, 1950 and 1966, along with numerous bye-laws. Our priority when it comes to enforcement activity is boat registration compliance, to ensure we receive all the income we are owed from this important income stream, so that we can reinvest it in all aspects of the service we provide.

All boats kept, used or let for hire on the non-tidal River Thames must register with us each year. In order to do this, the majority must have valid Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certification, issued by a qualified examiner, and confirming compliance with the necessary requirements. They must also be covered by third party insurance. We will not register any boats that do not comply with our registration requirements. We carry out regular boat registration checks along the entire river, and at all our locks, and take enforcement action against all unregistered boats we find. Outside of our locks, we use an intelligence-led approach to target areas where we have good reason to believe there are concentrations of unregistered boats first, before moving on to the rest of the river, including in marinas and boat yards. Unless the owners of unregistered boats bring them into compliance within a reasonable time, we will progress a criminal prosecution against them, with a substantial fine and a criminal record the most likely outcome, as well as payment of the overdue registration fee.

The full 2017/18 enforcement plan can be read here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-enforcement-plan>

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Annex 2: Anglian Waterways

Our navigation service on the Anglian Waterways

The Anglian Waterways includes navigations between the River Ancholme in the north and the River Stour in the south and incorporates the Black Sluice and the Glen, Welland, Nene and Great Ouse rivers - 353 miles (568km) of river with associated locks and other facilities.

The service we provide to boaters and boating businesses is delivered through a team of 29 highly trained, well equipped, hugely experienced, passionate full-time navigation specialists, all dedicated to providing the best possible standards of service that the funding available to us will allow.

That service comprises the following key activities as set out in our Anglian waterways Customer Charter. The degree to which each of these activities is carried out varies according to operational priorities and the funding available to us.

Liaison with customer groups

We meet with customer representatives from across our waterways to discuss issues and the service we provide. The Anglian Waterways Group meets quarterly and covers all Anglian waterways. In addition we will meet regularly with local user groups across our waterways.

Maintaining our locks, moorings and other assets and river channels

We provide and maintain safe access to our lock sites and facilities. Throughout the year we maintain our locks, landing stages, moorings, canoe portage points, slipways and other assets according to our maintenance plans. These plans identify assets that are 'closed' and waiting funding. We review the waterway maintenance plan with the local users each year.

We provide safe access on navigation channels by maintaining river weed according to the maintenance plans. Again, these plans are reviewed with local users. We remove (or arrange for others to remove) obstructions from navigation channels as soon as reasonably practicable. Any obstructions we are aware of, but are unable to remove, we mark them with hazard warning buoys.

Closures and restrictions

We issue navigation closure notices at least one month before any major planned works. We inform customers of any emergency and restriction notices as soon as we can. Closure, restriction and emergency notices are displayed on appropriate notice boards on the river, emailed to clubs, marinas and individuals (who have requested the information), tweeted and placed on 'Team-up'. The information is also listed on www.gov.uk/anglian-waterways-river-conditions-closures-and-restrictions as soon as practically possible.

Boater's facilities

We maintain our pump-outs, water points, toilets and shower facilities, in a clean, safe and usable condition throughout the year. When we receive reports of facility breakdowns we arrange repairs as soon as we can. We review maintenance at our facilities with local users each year.

Service at our manned locks

Our lock keepers help boats pass safely through the following locks every days of the year except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years day: Hermitage Lock and the tidal locks at South Ferriby, Black Sluice, Fulney, Dog in a Doublet and Denver.

River information for boating

Higher river flows can be hazardous for boating. We provide River Advice for Boaters (RAB) messages, free of charge, to our boating customers on the Rivers Ancholme, Nene & Great Ouse. We keep Floodline information updated so users can call at any time to find out river conditions. We provide information by displaying RAB signs and flags along our waterways. We also provide further information and advice on river conditions on the www.gov.uk website.

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Enforcement and compliance

We support a safe and enjoyable environment for our customers. We protect our river and income by undertaking regular enforcement activity throughout the year. We place warning notices on those vessels that fail to register and undertake appropriate enforcement action which may lead to prosecution and/or removal of unregistered vessels. We will provide updates on our enforcement activity to the Anglian Waterway Group on a quarterly basis. We carry out other enforcement activity, according to priority and funding.

Responding to incidents

We support the emergency services in dealing with emergency river incidents, and with colleagues from other Environment Agency departments in dealing with non-emergency incidents and pollution incidents. We work closely with the police who deal with theft, unsociable activities and vandalism on our waterways including through Boatwatch, a partnership scheme dedicated to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour associated with our waterways and make boating safe and enjoyable. We also promote the mobile telephone numbers of our River Inspectors who can be contacted for navigation emergencies.

Annex 3: Upper Medway

Our navigation service on the Upper Medway

The Upper Medway Navigation runs from the Leigh Flood Storage Area (2km to the west of Tonbridge), to Allington Lock just west of Maidstone. We are the navigation authority for this 31km long stretch of river which comprises 10 lock sites and associated weirs and sluices. Our Navigation team consists of 10 Environment Agency Staff and we are based at Allington Lock House, the tidal gateway to the navigation.

The team's role is to maintain the public right of navigation, and to facilitate safe boating on the Upper Medway Navigation. To enable this we maintain 3 standby roles 24 hours a day 365 a year as well as receiving support from a range of staff across other Environment Agency departments.

Maintaining the infrastructure

The 10 locks and associated weirs and sluices are essential in maintaining the safe navigation of the Upper Medway. We keep these assets in a safe working order by undertaking an extensive year round programme of work which includes inspection, routine repair and more extensive repairs usually involving external contractors.

We also maintain a wide range of other assets. This includes facilities for boaters such as the toilets and showers at Allington and Yalding as well as the offices at Yalding and Allington Lock. We also maintain the 2 Lock Keeper's cottages at Allington Lock which house our resident lock keepers to enable the assisted passage we provide at this site 365 days a year. We receive support from our Estates department to maximise our incomes from other sites that we rent out such as at the Allington Lock Boathouse.

As well as maintaining the structures we also spend significant resources in maintaining the navigation channel. This includes regular shoal removals and the removal of overhanging branches using our in-house tug and dredger. We work closely with our specialist colleagues in the fisheries and biodiversity teams to ensure we balance the needs of the boating community with those of the wildlife we share the river with.

Managing water levels

We manage water levels to balance the many uses of the river, including boating, retaining enough for water companies to extract, managing flood risk and ensuring fisheries and water quality are protected. We monitor water levels on each river pen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We manage the weirs and sluices to provide the best conditions possible for all uses of the river. Our ability to control water levels may change in flood or drought conditions.

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Navigation safety

The safety of our navigation is our top priority. Each year we undertake the following tasks to ensure our customers are kept safe:

- Inspect our structures for defects (locks and weirs etc) at least once per month and undertake formal annual asset inspections.
- Undertake twice-yearly Public Safety Risk Assessments (PSRAs) of our sites and structures, to ensure hazards are identified and the risks to the public are appropriately mitigated.
- Issue Strong Stream Warnings to our boating community. We will also close canoe passes that become hazardous in strong stream conditions.
- Respond to reports of obstructions in the navigation (such as trees etc) and mark them with buoys if they are a serious danger or if they can't be removed within a few days.
- Issue Notices to Mariners for works/events or anything else that could affect the navigability of the river with at least 28 days' notice (with the exception of any emergency/urgent notices).
- Undertake regular speed and safety checks with assistance from the police.

Enforcement and compliance

We support a safe and enjoyable environment for our customers. We protect our river and income by undertaking planned enforcement activity on key dates throughout the year. We place warning notices on those boats that fail to register and prosecute owners of boats that fail to respond to these notices.

Other activities

As part of our role to facilitate safe navigation of the Upper Medway, we also provide expert support for the Fire and Rescue Service, Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Boat Safety Scheme and many others, to investigate incidents involving boats, and communicate the findings to boaters, alongside a range of other safety guidance, to reduce the likelihood of future incidents.

We also provide expert advice as part of the planning process on any development affecting navigation or the aesthetics of the river corridor, to ensure the views of boaters, alongside those of all other river users, are properly considered and any negative impacts averted, or mitigated.

In addition to the above we also respond to reports of antisocial behaviour where we can and where it is safe for our staff to attend.