



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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Background briefing: Waterways Ireland

Overview

Waterways Ireland is a North-South Implementation Body, and is responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Its remit covers the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann Navigation, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway, and the Shannon Navigation. Research published in 2006 found that €36,334,696 is spent per annum by waterways users throughout the island of Ireland, with the Shannon Navigation and Erne System the most popular waterways¹. A survey of waterways users in 2004 found that 37% of respondents were regular users, 34% holidaymakers and 21% were 'locals'². Eighteen per cent of respondents were overseas visitors, and the population of respondents peaked in the 35 to 49 years of age category (34%). The four main activities respondents took part in on the seven waterways were walking (27%), private boating (24%), angling (20%) and hire boating (18%).

Two policy issues are of particular note at present: a proposed new set of bye-laws for the navigations of Northern Ireland, and a consultation on a new marketing strategy for Waterways Ireland.

¹ Waterways Ireland. 2006. *Report on the Economic Contribution of Private Boat Owners*.

² Waterways Ireland. 2004. *Survey of Waterway Users 2004*.

1 Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is a North-South Implementation Body established under the North-South Co-Operation (Implementation Bodies) (NI) Order 1999, and British Irish Agreement 1999 and 2002 (Acts of the Irish Parliament). It is governed by the North-South Ministerial Council, and has responsibility 'for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann Navigation, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway, and the Shannon Navigation'³. It is also responsible for the restoration of that part of the Ulster Canal between Lough Erne and Clones⁴.

The following is a summary of the funding provided to Waterways Ireland. This information was provided by DCAL⁵.

Income

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	7,745,568	9,771,852	4,976,710	4,502,000
Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs	24,774,922	30,298,697	30,716,275	-
Donations	-	-	178	-
Other sources	242,003	487,432	385,807	-

Expenditure

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Grant spend	0	0	0	-
Capital spend	11,850,321	14,964,911	8,587,022	-
Fixed asset/collections additions	-	-	-	-
Overhead/admin costs	21,107,691	25,714,836	27,440,284	-
	32,958,012	40,679,747	36,027,306	-
Admin as proportion of overall expenditure	64.04%	63.21%	76.17%	-

³ Waterways Ireland website. 'About us': <http://www.waterwaysireland.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/AboutWaterwaysIr>
Accessed 13.9.10.

⁴ Waterways Ireland. 2011. *Marketing Strategy 2011–2016*: p4.

⁵ Information provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 10.9.10, and included in NI Assembly Research Paper NIAR 384-10 DCAL's *Arms-Length Bodies: Accountability, Governance and Resources*, 13.9.10.

In the final budget allocation for the period 2011/12 to 2014/15, DCAL has stated that in common with the North-South Language Body, Waterways Ireland will have its budget reduced by 8.53%⁶. Its annual DCAL allocation will therefore fall to £3.3m in 2014/15⁷.

2 Proposed new bye-laws

In 2009, Waterways Ireland began a process of consultation on a revised set of bye-laws for Northern Ireland's waterways. Although it had originally intended to create a single set of navigational bye-laws for the island of Ireland⁸, Waterways Ireland subsequently revised these plans and has now drafted separate navigational bye-laws for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, taking account of 'important differences in enabling legislation in both jurisdictions'⁹. Nevertheless, the intention behind the bye-laws is 'to bring cohesion and consistency to the enforcement of navigational rules to all the waterways that are under Waterways Ireland control right across the island of Ireland'. While the proposed bye-laws will bring a degree of change to all areas of the navigations under the remit of Waterways Ireland, in the case of the Lower Bann Navigation the planned bye-laws will introduce completely new statutory controls, as it currently has no bye-laws and operates a voluntary code of conduct.

The draft Waterways Ireland Bye-laws (Northern Ireland) Order contains 37 articles. The following is a summary of the main changes from the existing navigational bye-laws¹⁰:

Bye-law	Description of the change
6	Compulsory registration of craft and payment of fee.
7	Compulsory wearing of personal flotation devices for persons under 16 years onboard a craft while underway, for persons operating/controlling a personal watercraft, motor skimmer or fast power craft while underway; and for persons being towed by a pleasure craft. All persons on board a boat of less than 7 metres in length must wear a personal flotation device, while on board an open craft or on the deck of a decked craft.
16	The length of stay at public moorings is to be increased from 2 days to 3 days.
18	Covers Waterways Ireland's powers to designate speed limits where and when required.
19	Waterways Ireland's powers to designate zoning where and when required, thus restricting or prohibiting certain craft or activities at locations and times.
23	Houseboats will be permitted to moor in excess of the 3 day rule, at designated houseboat locations, if in possession of a berthing licence and having paid a fee.

Table 1: Summary of the main changes proposed in the new Waterways Ireland bye-laws

A timetable for the consultation process has been set out by Waterways Ireland as follows:

⁶ DCAL Officials. 2.6.11. 'Budget 2011-2015'. Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Official Report).

⁷ Written submission from DCAL, *Final Budget Allocations and Consultation Responses*, 25.5.11.

⁸ Brian D'Arcy. 3.6.11. Oral evidence to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Official Report).

⁹ Waterways Ireland. 10.5.10. *Pre-consultation briefing number two: re-draft Waterways Ireland Bye-Laws (Northern Ireland) Order as at 10 May 2010*: Written submission to the CAL Committee, presented on 3.6.10.

¹⁰ Waterways Ireland. 10.5.10. *Pre-consultation briefing number two: re-draft Waterways Ireland Bye-Laws (Northern Ireland) Order as at 10 May 2010*: Written submission to the CAL Committee, presented on 3.6.10: p2.

Phase 1	
3 June 2010	Presentation of draft bye-laws to CAL Committee
June 2010	Issue of draft bye-laws and consultation documents to all identified stakeholder groups/organisations
October – December 2010	Analyses of questionnaires and revision of bye-laws
Phase 2	
January – February 2011	Public meetings
March – June 2011	Final analyses of public consultations and revision of bye-laws

Table 2: Proposed consultation process for the new bye-laws

Once the process of consultation analysis and amendment has been completed, the enactment process for the bye-laws will be as follows:

- Presentation of public consultation findings to CAL Committee and seeking of agreement to make the legislation
- Quality Assurance by Departmental Solicitor Office
- NSMC Approval
- Enact legislation
- Lay before the Assembly for 21 days
- Date of Operation

3 Marketing strategy consultation

Waterways Ireland is currently consulting on a new marketing strategy for the organisation. The consultation document states that¹¹:

Based on the success of the previous Strategy and following the review and evaluation carried out by the Marketing Advisory Group, the Group recommended to Waterways Ireland that the organisation continues with the general thrust of the previous Strategy and to adapt it to accommodate the changing environment...

The 'changing environment' is described as factors such as economic recession, and changes in holiday trends away from long breaks, and towards shorter stays and 'activity-led' holidays. Waterways Ireland also cite research both by themselves and Fáilte Ireland which suggests changing patterns of recreation, with increasing numbers of people participating in recreation along the navigations from a range of socio-economic and age groups, driven in part by greater awareness of the importance of exercise to healthy living. The consultation document states that walking, cycling and watersports in particular have grown in popularity in recent years.

¹¹ Waterways Ireland. 2011. *Marketing Strategy 2011–2016*: p16.

The proposed new strategy involves six elements, as follows:

- Waterway branding programme
- Communication programme
- Product development programme
- Visitor services programme
- Promotional programme
- Research programme

The annual marketing spend by Waterways Ireland is approximately €1million per annum with additional funding of approximately €2million being leveraged from other organisations to support the inland waterways sector¹².

The consultation runs until Friday 26 August 2011.

¹² Waterways Ireland. 2011. *Marketing Strategy 2011–2016*: p12.