

PRESS RELEASE

12 February 2026

CANAL & RIVER TRUST MOVING FORWARD WITH COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The Canal & River Trust is today (12 February 2026) providing an update on how recommendations from the independent 'Commission on Boat Licensing Report', published at the end of last year, will be taken forward. The response forms part of a wider plan to improve the experience of boating on the waterways, which also includes more investment in day-to-day navigational maintenance.

The Report includes 36 recommendations designed to make licensing requirements clearer and improve the management of the waterways. The Trust acknowledges the Report's findings that the current landscape is not working for many boaters or for the management of the network on behalf of boaters.

The Trust aims to act swiftly upon the recommendations where possible, noting that some actions will take some time to implement. Many will involve consultation with boaters. A summary of the Trust's response to each recommendation will be published in late spring, along with a timetable for engagement and consultation for those it will be consulting on.

Phase 1 of the Trust's response is already underway with changes that can be started immediately, including a review of the Trust's many communications with boaters to make them clearer, improve tone, and to recognise and understand the varying communications needs of boaters. Options for enhancing welfare support will be outlined, for implementation in Phase 2, and testing of a new Boater App will be underway by the summer. Phase 1 will also include a programme to increase the removal of sunken and abandoned boats on the canal network.

Phase 2 (likely to last until end of 2027) covers recommendations that will involve consultation with boaters and boating organisations. This will include clarification of movement requirements for boats without a home mooring, a review of boat safety and insurance requirements to ensure boats are fit for navigation, and a review of licence fee discounts.

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Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792.

Phase 3 (expected to be 2028 and beyond) will look at changes that would require new legislation. These recommendations are around seeking additional powers to manage the waterways fairly and effectively, including measures to help manage congested areas and new powers around issuing and enforcing licences, while ensuring legal safeguards for boaters. The Trust will engage with boaters throughout, including through formal consultation.

Today, the Canal & River Trust is also announcing a £2 million additional investment in the year ahead to fix leaking locks, tackle overgrowing trees and encroaching weeds and start a phased increase in dredging. The Trust is continuing the investment introduced last year to target broken paddles and fix boater facilities more quickly, bringing the total investment to over £10 million in two years to improve canals for boaters. Boaters can see how the charity is performing via dashboards on the Trust's website.

Campbell Robb, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, said: "The independent Commission's Report shines a light on how waterways are used by boaters today. The recommendations offer a chance to reset our relationship with boaters and for us to work together so that boating will continue to thrive on our waterways into the future.

"Alongside this, we're continuing to increase our investment in the things that we have heard matter most to boaters, spending more on cutting back overgrowing trees, dredging and fixing leaking lock gates. This builds on the measures we introduced last year and, despite the challenges of the extended summer drought and winter storms, we hope boaters are seeing a difference. There's a huge amount of work to do over the coming months and years, but we are already getting stuck in so that we can improve things for boaters."

The Report is published online: [Commission to review future framework for boat licensing | Canal & River Trust](#)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The report of the independent Commission set up to review the legal framework around boat licensing was published by the Canal & River Trust on 19 November 2025.

The Commission was set up in November 2024. Chaired by Andrew Cowan, a former senior partner at law firm Devonshires, it also included Penelope Barber, one of the elected boating representatives on the Trust's Council, and trustee Sir Chris Kelly, a former senior civil servant and former boat owner.

During their extensive review, the Commissioners engaged with thousands of individuals and representative organisations, including through an online survey that prompted over 4,500 responses and multiple follow-up meetings.

The Commissioners concluded that boat licensing arrangements need reform in order to reflect the reality of how the network is used today and how usage will continue to evolve.