

# PRESS RELEASE

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## CANAL CHARITY INVESTIGATES CAUSE OF FISH DEATHS ON AIRE & CALDER NAVIGATION

Canal & River Trust, the waterways and wellbeing charity that looks 2,000-miles of waterways across England and Wales, has taken the decision to temporarily suspend freight traffic on the Aire & Calder Navigation as investigations continue into the harm being caused to wildlife.

A significant number of fish deaths have occurred in a localised stretch of the navigation at Knottingley. Whilst commercial barges have been limited to slower speeds and reduced loads in the past few weeks, the impact to fish has continued without explanation.

On 11 January 2022 (the first passage post-Christmas) Canal & River Trust estimated it sighted around 100 fish deaths following commercial passage.

Sean McGinley, director Yorkshire & North East explained: "It is a priority to complete our investigation to establish why, on this short stretch of the navigation, fish are being harmed in this way.

Whilst there are environmental benefits of barge traffic in taking lorries off the region's roads, we are told by the operators that to reduce load sizes further would make passage uneconomic. While we have taken the difficult decision to temporarily suspend freight, we will continue to work with freight operators as part of our investigations. A series of pre-arranged, carefully monitored passages to determine and subsequently avert the impact of freight vessels on wildlife will continue alongside sampling to identify the presence of any toxins."

The Trust supports freight by water where possible on its waterways, as a greener, more sustainable alternative to lorry loads. Within the last 18 months the Trust has spent £5 million to facilitate freight passage on the Aire & Calder Navigation - dredging sections of the waterway, training freight volunteer lock keepers and repairing the navigation following the major breach in December 2020.

Richard Parry, chief executive of Canal & River Trust added: "We appreciate the frustrations of pausing freight operations, but we must remain mindful of the environmental impact this is

Canal & River Trust

**E:** [press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk) **W:** [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk) **Twitter:** [@CanalRiverTrust](https://twitter.com/CanalRiverTrust)

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having. To allow it simply to continue to operate as normal, knowing that it is likely to cause numerous fish deaths, would be wrong. We are working urgently to determine the cause and to identify effective solutions working with the freight operators.”

For queries on this matter please contact Canal & River Trust by email at:

[enquiries.yorkshirenortheast@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.yorkshirenortheast@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

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**For further media requests please contact:**

Naomi Roberts, Canal & River Trust

m 07557 256482 e [naomi.roberts@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:naomi.roberts@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

**Notes to Editors**

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and river navigations across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

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