

PRESS RELEASE

29 July 2022

CANAL & RIVER TRUST LAUNCHES FIRST 'BOATER CENSUS'

The Canal & River Trust is launching the first ever Boater Census and is asking every boat licence holder to take part and help paint a picture of who boats on the charity's waterways.

The Boater Census has been designed with input from boater representatives on the Trust's Council to help understand the different needs of those who live on or who use their boats for leisure on the 2,000 miles of waterways the charity looks after in England & Wales. The anonymous data will be available to share with other organisations, such as local authorities and health service providers, to help them understand boaters' needs and ensure they are met.

Matthew Symonds, head of customer service at Canal & River Trust, said: "While we know quite a lot about the boats that are on our network, for example the size, type and even their age, we know much less about the people onboard and their circumstances. The Boater Census will give us a comprehensive overview of the people who boat on our waterways, what they are using their boats for, and the challenges that they might face.

"From the conversations we have on the towpath, we know that some boaters face specific challenges, for example raising a family on the water, boating with a disability, or difficulty accessing services such as doctors' surgeries. The information from the Boater Census will prove invaluable in informing our work so we are more able to understand and support the needs of different boaters and, alongside boating groups and other partners, we will use the information to find common themes and identify areas where we can help. It will also add weight to the work we do with other organisations who may not be familiar with the practicalities of life afloat.

"The Boater Census is short, easy to complete, and completely anonymous, with no data attached to any boater. We are asking boaters to take part and help us build a picture of life on the waterways in the 21st century, 250 years after they opened to navigation."

Tracey Clarke, co-opted boater representative to represent the views of disabled boaters on the Trust Council, said "For those of us who live on the water, we know that there's a huge diversity of people in the boating community. However, very little information about them is formally recorded and that makes it much harder provide evidence to those who make

Canal & River Trust, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire

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

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decisions about the services that boaters need. I hope boaters will complete the census to help fill this gap in information about who's on boats on the Trust's waterways."

Dave Mendes da Costa, also a boater representative on the Trust Council, said "Spending time on the water is a great experience, but life on a boat is not without its challenges. I know how hard it can be to access basic services like a GP and have seen the obstacles which many face when bringing up children aboard or acting as carers. This census provides the first opportunity for boaters to give the Trust a full picture of these challenges, whether that's finding places to maintain our boats, access to health services or barriers to claiming benefits. The more boaters who complete the census the better the Trust can understand our needs so I'd encourage everyone to take part."

The Trust will be sending a unique e-link to the Boater Census to every boat licence holder who has provided an email/or mobile phone number. This will be sent out in phases during August. All answers will be anonymous and cannot be linked to individuals or boats.

Boaters are encouraged to complete the census survey by 30 September 2022, and the Trust will send out reminders ahead of that date.

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For further media requests please contact:

Fran Read, Canal & River Trust

m 07796 610427 e fran.read@canalrivertrust.org.uk