

PRESS RELEASE

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BOAT LICENCE FEES FOR 2023-24

The Canal & River Trust is today announcing a rise of 9% in boat licence fees from 1 April 2023 for both private boat owners and boating businesses. When combined with the interim increase introduced from 1 October 2022, this will mean an overall year-on-year increase of 13% for those renewing an annual boat licence in the period from 1 April until 30 September 2023.

The Trust, a not-for-profit charity charged with the long-term care of 2,000 miles of waterways, comprising 10,000 individual assets and structures, many of which are up to 250-years old, is facing significant increases in a range of its costs, notably the prices of energy, fuel, materials and other construction costs which are rising by more than the headline consumer price index – which today stands at over 11% – leading to a projected shortfall in the Trust’s finances in 2023 and beyond. Additionally, the Government grant payment, which goes towards the cost of maintaining the waterways, is frozen this year (and hence declining in real terms) and until 2027, with no certainty of what grant will be made available from 2027.

Richard Parry, chief executive at Canal & River Trust, said: “We are all facing the highest levels of inflation in over 40 years and, as the Trust’s costs soar, we must address the budget shortfall to safeguard navigation and the safe upkeep of the waterways. We recognise that our boating customers – both private boaters and waterway businesses - will also be feeling the effect of inflation across their personal finances, but we hope there is an understanding that this is an essential step to ensure the ongoing maintenance and repair of the historic canals and river navigations in our care.

“We continue to secure as much income as we can through our commercial and charitable activities and focus our resources on those priority works which are required to support navigation, and on controlling our costs where possible. Our network is old and vulnerable, especially to the extreme weather events that are becoming more common, and this winter we will deliver one of our largest programmes of repairs and maintenance to date, with large increases in our expenditure on vital reservoir safety works (which are mandatory under the UK Reservoirs Act) in particular.”

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Looking further ahead, the Trust proposes to carry out a consultation in 2023 to gather feedback on how boat licence pricing might look over the next ten years to support the long-term future of the waterway network.

Richard Parry continued: “Boat licences account for around an eighth (12%) of the Trust’s annual income and help fund some of the vast amount of work necessary to keep the waterways safe and navigable; as we set out in our annual Boater Report, our core network expenditure is around four times what we raise from boating. Nevertheless, with our Government grant frozen since 2021, and currently undecided after 2027, this income is more critical than ever. We are doing all we can to generate more income from other sources where possible albeit with the difficult economic environment also affecting investment returns.”

The Trust will continue to support boaters who may be struggling to pay their licence fees on a case-by-case basis. This may include arranging flexible payment plans and signposting to relevant services, for example the Waterways Chaplaincy, local authorities and Citizens Advice. For more information visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/do-you-know-a-vulnerable-boater

More information on boat licences is available here: canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/buy-your-boat-licence/long-term-boat-licences

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Notes to editors

The cost of an average boat licence is £857 inc VAT (£71 month). For an average boat licence, the additional 9% is approximately £77 (£6 month).