

# Navigation Committee

04 September 2025

Agenda item number 10

## Water depth specifications

Report by Head of Construction, Maintenance & Ecology

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### Purpose

This report outlines the proposed process to review the existing Waterways Specifications so that they remain fit for purpose in guiding the maintenance and navigability of the Broads' waterways. This review process and stakeholder feedback will identify any practical or technical amendments needed to reflect current usage or environmental conditions. The timeline will be in line with the refresh of the next five-year Action Plan due to be completed by March 2027.

### Broads Plan context

This review contributes directly to strategic actions C1 and C2 of the Broads Plan 2022–27, which focus on maintaining defined navigation depths, reducing sediment input, and improving access for a range of craft. It also supports A2 by helping ensure dredging operations are efficient and environmentally responsible, and B1 through alignment with lake and sediment management practices. The process will inform future planning by identifying areas where specifications can be clarified or adjusted to reflect actual usage, ecological constraints, and stakeholder priorities. In doing so, it helps deliver a more inclusive, resilient, and well-maintained navigation network across the Broads.

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Broads Authority maintains a set of Waterways Specifications that define the intended navigable dimensions (dredge depths) and associated maintenance standards for the public navigation area. These specifications are a key operational tool, enabling targeted dredging, vegetation control, and channel marking in alignment with strategic objectives. See section 3.2.2. in [Broads-Authority.gov.uk/Waterways-Management-Strategy-Action-Plan-2022-27.pdf](https://broads-authority.gov.uk/Waterways-Management-Strategy-Action-Plan-2022-27.pdf)
- 1.2. To assist refresh and development of the next five-year phase of the Action Plan 2027/28 – 2031/32, a review is required to verify the ongoing relevance of the existing waterway specifications. The scope of the review will be to identify any minor adjustments to depths and streamline prioritisation, so that maximum user benefit can be obtained from the resources dedicated to the maintenance of the Broads navigable waterways. This report seeks feedback on the approach to reviewing Waterways Specifications for the different identifiable sections of the Broads navigation.

# 2. Approach

The review will follow a three-part approach:

## 2.1. Document Review and Mapping

- Cross-checking current specifications against objectives in the Waterways Management Strategy
- Correct historical depth or boundary errors
- Identify areas where Waterways Specification depths can be harmonised/simplified in adjacent stretches of the navigation
- Refresh and review the mapping data to show relative activity usage, as captured through mobile phone location data. See previous [Waterways Compliance report](#) to Navigation Committee, September 2024.
- Review all incident reports logged with Broads Control, gain Ranger team feedback, and review internal operational notes from the past three years.

## 2.2. Targeted Stakeholder Engagement. Conducted interviews with:

- Internal - Ranger team (user safety perspective) and Ecology & Design team (environmental concerns and licensing requirements)
- External stakeholders to be invited to 1-1 discussions with supporting information shared in advance - Navigation Committee members; Broads Hire Boat Federation; NSBA; individual sailing clubs with mainly deeper draft vessels
- Results of the of the survey will be presented to the Navigation Committee for consideration.

### 2.3. Technical and Environmental Screening

- Analysis of recent bathymetric and sediment accumulation information to double-check for any unforeseen negative impacts from varying the Waterways Specification at any individual location
- Review channel obstructions, reported pinch points, and any recurring deviations from stated specifications.

2.4. The review will start in earnest in 2026/27 as staff resource is already committed through 2025/26. A more detailed timeline to meet the objectives above will be confirmed later in 2025.

## 3. Effectiveness of the Waterways Specification depths

- 3.1. The specifications continue to provide an effective baseline for navigable maintenance and operational planning. Most stakeholders view them as useful and sufficiently flexible in practice, with no calls for fundamental redesign of the process.
- 3.2. However, some specific areas needing clarification or light amendment includes; where localised flexibility should be acknowledged where environmental or heritage constraints restrict full compliance (e.g. narrowness in historic channels, channels where tree growth is an accepted feature over the water space, areas of natural gravel or peat substrate that are beyond the scope of maintenance dredging); and updating the specification depth maps to increase transparency and public understanding.

## 4. Financial implications

- 4.1. Review of Waterways Specification depths for certain areas aims to focus effort in the most beneficial locations. Whilst this doesn't directly save money, it does ensure that maximum benefit for the widest range and number of waterways users is achieved.
- 4.2. By aligning dredging priorities with actual usage patterns and environmental constraints, the review helps reduce the risk of over-specification and ensures maintenance budgets are directed where they deliver the greatest public and ecological return. This approach also supports more predictable work programming, aiding long-term financial planning and resource allocation

## 5. Risk implications

- 5.1. There's a slight risk that dredging in parts of the Broads that aren't often used could lead to spending time and money achieving depths that most boaters don't actually need. This could mean resources are used inefficiently, without clear benefits for the majority of users.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The Waterways Specifications remain broadly sound, practical, and in alignment with the Waterways Management Strategy. This review sets out a transparent and inclusive

process to identify minor refinements to improve clarity and user understanding. This specification depth review may also highlight potential issues for more detailed consideration during the next scheduled strategic review cycle, such as total volumes to be dredged and their locations, requirement for sites for the beneficial re-use of dredged arisings and potential additional work programming priorities through to March 2032.

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Background papers: [Broads-Authority.gov.uk/Waterways-Management-Strategy-Action-Plan-2022-27.pdf](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/Waterways-Management-Strategy-Action-Plan-2022-27.pdf)

Waterways Compliance report, Navigation Committee, September 2024 [www.broads-authority.gov.uk/Waterways-and-Compliance-report.pdf](https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/Waterways-and-Compliance-report.pdf)

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: **A2** - Work towards making all Broads Authority operations carbon neutral by 2030 and carbon zero by 2040; **B1** - Restore, maintain and enhance lakes and use monitoring evidence to trial and implement further innovative lake restoration techniques; **C1** - Maintain navigation water depths to defined specifications, reduce sediment input and dispose of dredged material in sustainable and beneficial ways; **C2** - Maintain existing navigation water space and develop appropriate opportunities to extend access for various types of craft; **E1** - Improve the integrated network of access routes and points (with easier access for people with mobility and sensory needs), linked to visitor facilities