

Boat Owners Survey
Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report examines the potential content for a broader survey of boat owners than that conducted in the past. The Vice-Chair of the Authority will lead a discussion on the topic.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Authority has sought the views of boat owners on priorities for expenditure and other matters in surveys carried out in parallel with the circulation of toll reminders. Three surveys have been carried out in 2005, 2008 and 2012 at a minimum cost. The first two used paper copies which were sent with the reminders. Staff volunteered their time to input the data. Given cuts in staff, the 2012 survey was carried out online and there was little opportunity for follow-up or analysis beyond presentation of headline results.
- 1.2 The percentage of private boats kept on the Broads has been steadily increasing over the last three decades. It now stands at 87% of the total fleet. We know relatively little about the characteristics, opinions and behaviours of people who keep boats on the Broads. Following a suggestion from a member, the Authority agreed at its July 2013 meeting to conduct a statistically representative, sample survey of private boat owners who keep vessels on the Broads. Professor Jackie Burgess (Vice-Chair of the Authority) agreed to open discussions with a range of interested parties to see whether there would be support for a partnership project to undertake this research. The Chairman of the Navigation Committee requested that these initial discussions and a proposal be put to the Navigation Committee on 5 September 2013.

2 The Proposal

- 2.1 The proposal is for a six month project in which stakeholders work together to manage a professionally executed, statistically representative survey to gather information about the opinions, attitudes and behaviours of private boat owners who use the Broads. A Steering Group with members drawn from across the constituencies with interests in the Broads would lead the project.
- 2.2 The aims are to agree content of the survey with all partners to ensure comparability with previous surveys (Broads Authority, Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association, Broads Hire Boat Federation, Hoseasons and others); extend the range of questions to cover a number of issues either not previously explored or not explored in depth, and, through a stratified sample undertake more detailed statistical analyses of the data than has been

possible previously. If sufficient funding was made available, follow-up research with a small number of respondents could be undertaken.

2.3. Topics for inclusion in the survey discussed so far cover:

1. Personal and household characteristics of private boat owners
2. Boat ownership and uses within the household/kin group
3. Uses of and opinions about Broads waterways and facilities
4. Costs of boat ownership on the Broads, and comparisons with other inland waterways
5. Interactions with other users of the Broads
6. Experiences of and attitudes towards the Broads Authority, and its activities
7. Experiences of, and attitudes towards partner organisations

2.4 A professionally designed and executed survey will produce data that can be trusted to be objective and reliable. Detailed statistical analyses will produce evidence that will be of value to the Broads Authority and its stakeholders. The findings from the research will assist in the development of new policies and initiatives to benefit water-and land-based activities and businesses across the Broads.

3 Financial Implications

3.1 As with previous surveys the Authority will look to minimise the costs by using in-house expertise and resources where possible. The Vice-Chair of the Authority has considerable experience in social scientific research and is willing to lead the project. But to achieve the goals outlined above, it will be necessary to seek tenders from commercial market research companies for certain elements of the project. The purpose of this report is to seek the support from the Navigation Committee for the proposal at this outline stage, including the principle of a Steering Group which would draw up a research specification and seek tenders from market research companies in the region. At this stage the costs are unknown.

3.2 The Authority sees this piece of work as step one in a programme of social research. The survey of boat owners would be funded from Navigation Expenditure. A second survey of residents within the Broads and its adjacent areas is planned for 2014 and this will be funded from National Park Grant.

Background papers: Nil

Author: Adrian Clarke, Prof Jacquie Burgess
Date of report: 21 August 2013

Broads Plan Objectives: None
Appendices: None