

# Broads Authority

28 November 2025

Agenda item number 14

## Hire Boat Code- Personal Flotation Devices

Report by Head of Safety Management

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### Purpose

The report highlights safety information on the manual/automatic self-inflating types, how they vary and from a 2025 survey where manual types are issued to hirers of Broads hire craft.

### Broads Plan context

Broads Plan objective C4 includes an action - Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviour on the waterways. Key action: Incorporate Hire Boat Code through local licence conditions.

### Recommendation

All Broads hire boat operators be given a deadline of 1 April 2028 for the conversion from manual to automatic self-inflating personal inflation devices.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Hire Boat Code is a Code of Practice for the operation of hire vessels on inland waterways. It is co-owned by the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) and British Marine, and supported by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).
- 1.2. The Code outlines the basic principles for safe operation of all types of craft hired to members of the public and clarifies the responsibilities of each of the parties involved. The focus is on ensuring that the operator has a suitable safety management system in place to ensure the continued safe operation of vessels under their responsibility.
- 1.3. Along with all other inland navigation authorities who are members of AINA, the Broads Authority incorporates the Code into its Business Licencing Terms and Conditions.
- 1.4. Broads hire fleet operators already abide by the Hire Boat Code and are familiar with its contents and the requirements that are placed upon operators, users and navigation authorities.
- 1.5. Relevant to this report, the Code documents guidelines and requirements for boatyards in risk assessing and the issuing of personal flotation devices (PFDs).

## 2. The Hire Boat Code and Personal Flotation Devices

- 2.1. The British Marine/AINA (Association of Inland Navigation Authorities) Code for the Design, Construction and Operation of Hire Boats states the following about risk assessing Lifejackets, PFDs for Hire Boat Activity in Appendix II:

Man overboard	Hirers, Boatyard Staff. Drowning	Grab rails present on appropriate areas, Staff wear personal flotation devices (PFD) when on boats and during show out. Hirers issued with PFD for the period of hire and hirers are briefed on how to correctly wear and fit a PFD. Hirers instructed on how to recover person from the water. All boats with large freeboard supplied with a means to assist recovery of a person from the water.
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- 2.2. The Code then states the following on the application of standards for PFDs:

Risk control measure	Application
Personal flotation devices	Issued to each child, non-swimmer and passengers of reduced ability, and 'offered' to all others for Cat A and B waters; and issued and put on board for all on Cat C and D waters.  Personal flotation devices must have minimum buoyancy of 100N on Cat A and B waters and a minimum of 150N on Cat C and D waters.

- 2.3. Sections (b) and (d) of 3.3.3 of the Code also cover the following areas of handover to hirers:

b) Using the boat – Moving around and getting on and off the boat. **Use of lifejackets**

d) Briefing material: The handover should be supported by briefing material which may include information on: – Personal safety – moving around and getting on and off the boat; **and the use of lifejackets.**

- 2.4. The Broads Authority Hire Boat Licensing Officer conducted a survey of all Broads hire boat operators during the main season of 2025 and in relation to compliance with the Code. Information was sought to establish what types of PFDs were being issued to and used by hirers.
- 2.5. The vast majority of hire operators confirmed using either the automatic or foam type PFDs. Three yards were found to be using manual PFDs. One of these was a small operator with only two dayboats accompanying holiday rental properties, the other two were larger hire yards with a full range of hire boats, including cruisers.
- 2.6. The manual inflating PFDs require the user to pull a toggle to inflate the lifejacket. If they are struggling to do this or unconscious, then the lifejacket will not inflate, and this could be when it is most needed. The only other option available on these types of PFDs is they can be manually inflated by blowing into them.
- 2.7. Automatic PFDs inflate instantly on contact with the water. They also incorporate manual pull toggles and manual inflation capability as per 2.6 as a last resort and as an override. These are widely recognised as being particularly suitable for use by

inexperienced boaters, where cold water shock is a risk and where falling in could be accompanied by other factors including being personally injured during a fall.

- 2.8. The above information highlighting the shortcomings of the manual inflation type was presented to the Broads Boat Safety Management Group (BSMG) at its meeting on Monday 13 October 2025. The members of the Group supported the Authority encouraging hire operators to only issue and use automatically inflating PFDs/ Lifejackets to hirers. The BSMG supported the report detailed here and that its findings should be taken to the Navigation Committee for its view.

### 3. Financial implications

- 3.1. The following table shows the differences in costs for some of the most common manual and automatic PFDs. Note that there are a significant number of types available including many different internal parts and mechanisms. Therefore, this information is to provide a guide only.

<b>Table A</b>	<b>Manual</b>	<b>Automatic</b>	<b>Examples of original purchase price difference</b>
<b>Crewsaver Crewfit 150N Lifejacket</b>	£66.66 Ex VAT	£70.79 Ex VAT	£4.13 Ex VAT
<b>Seago Seaguard 165N Life Jacket</b>	£45.79 Ex VAT	£53.99 Ex VAT	£8.20 Ex VAT
<b>Bluewave 150N Lifejacket</b>	£65.99 Ex VAT	£74.99 Ex VAT	£9.00 Ex VAT

- 3.2. Both manual and automatic PFDs require regular checking and annual servicing. If they have been fired, then they need to be serviced before further use. This can be done in house if there are suitable trained personnel or by using a recommended service agent. The costs are normally around £10 to £15 per PFD for the service itself depending on the numbers being checked in one batch.
- 3.3. The main difference between the two types (manual and automatic) for servicing and parts is the automatic part of the system, everything else is the same. The automatic element comprises of an operating head of which there are numerous types and these retail from between £10 around £30. Operating heads are sometimes in one unit or include a head and a separate firing mechanism. These items are supplied as dated and last for approximately 5 years from purchase date with a use by date. From there they have to be replaced.

- 3.4. Additional average costs for the automatic type original purchase over and above the equivalent manual models is shown in table A in section 3.1. A cost of £10 Ex Vat average difference covers for a number of the popular models. The expectation is that these types of PFDs should give at least 5 years' service with the regular use that is expected for hire boats.
- 3.5. The servicing parts difference cost for the automatic type is on average between £20 and £30 over this 5 year period.
- 3.6. It is therefore estimated that an additional £30-40 is required for purchase and use of the automatic inflating PFD as opposed to the manual type over the 5 year period.

## 4. Consultation

- 4.1. The Navigation Committee was consulted on this issue on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025. They strengthened the BSMG recommendation stating that where inflating personal flotation devices are issued by Hire Operators, they must be the automatic type. The Committee proposed that operators should be given the deadline of April 2028 to phase out the manual type.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The self-inflating automatic types of PFDs add a layer of safety for anyone on board a vessel, experienced or not. They activate immediately: automatically inflate upon contact with water and providing instant buoyancy. They are hands-free: ideal for situations where you might be unable to pull the cord, such as if you're injured or unconscious. There is peace of mind knowing the lifejacket will activate without any action needed.
- 5.2. It is proposed to appraise all hire boat operators of the main differences between the two types of PFD and given a deadline of 1 April 2028 for conversion from the manual to the automatic type.

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[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: C4

Appendix 1 – [The Hire Boat Code](#)