

Navigation Committee

11 January 2024

Agenda item number 10

Report on Surveys by Rangers 2023

Report by Director of Operations

Purpose

To provide the Committee with the 2023 results from Ranger Surveys carried out on hirers of paddle craft and hired motor vessels.

Broads Plan context

Theme C: Maintaining and enhancing the navigation. C4 – Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviours on the waterway.

Recommended decision

To note the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. During the 2021/22 season, Rangers were tasked to undertake the Hire Boat Questionnaire at Super Safety Events and at other random times when an opportunity existed. This data gathering was made possible due to the additional resource we had available from the Assistant Rangers. The purpose of the questions is to gauge key aspects from the helm of the hire craft, such as how often they hire vessels, whether have they seen the safety videos, did they get a handover, what was the duration of the handover and how confident do they feel to helm the vessel.
- 1.2. The questionnaire was developed specifically to gather data relating to the hired vessels' helms competence, as anecdotally there was a perception that hirers were largely inexperienced and the handover instruction was not adequate, following a surge in new waterway users post-Covid.
- 1.3. In the 2023/24 season, Rangers were again tasked to undertake the Hire Boat survey and we added a similar set of questions so paddle craft hirers could also be included within the survey.

2. Hired Paddle Craft Survey results

- 2.1. During the summer season, 141 hired paddle craft users were surveyed; the questions followed those asked of hire vessels and the key results are summarised as follows:

- 67% (94 people) did not receive a recommendation to watch the online free animated safety videos.
- A question was asked testing the licensing requirement for any person hiring a paddle craft is to be given a trial run to demonstrate their basic competency. Of those responding 34% (48 people) had been provided with a 10-20 minute on-water trial, and 26% had no on-water trial or 'show out'.
- Those who did receive a trial run (show out) were provided with advice on waterway safety and protocol (keeping to the right, what to do if a capsizes, wearing buoyancy aid, safe passage through bridges).
- 76% were advised on the best places to paddle as well as areas to avoid (busy or heavy boat numbers).
- When asked about confidence to control the paddle craft when first setting off, 28% were very confident. This improved to 45% after time spent on the water.
- When asked "which best describes your group?"
 1. 6% were 'lone 'paddlers.
 2. 17% were family groups (including children under 16)
 3. 30% were family groups (no children under 16)
 4. 45% were friends

3. Paddle Survey Conclusions.

- 3.1. As this is only the first year of results, trends and patterns cannot be drawn, but maintaining the survey will provide useful information so we can build up a better picture of safety in an area where participation is increasing.
- 3.2. Through the work of the Safety and Communications Teams we will do more work to publicise the online animated safety videos within the paddle hire sector, particularly as the paddling video was updated with added safety advice.
- 3.3. During the licensing in 2024/25, the Hire Boat Licensing Officer will work with Paddle Hire Companies to ensure that show-outs and in-water trials are provided to hirers, in light of 26% of responders not being offered this important element.
- 3.4. The last part of the survey asks paddlers to state what further improvements they would like, and these follow commonly raised topics like more pontoon moorings, more places to stop and get out to explore, specific signage for paddlers and increased Ranger patrols. These aspects will be considered as part of the Integrated Access Strategy, currently being reviewed and consulted upon.

4. Broads Hire Craft Survey 2023/24

- 4.1. Results from this year's Ranger Survey have been compared to the 2022 survey in the table below.

Question	2022% responses (sample size 724)	2023% responses (sample size 427)
First Time Hirers	30%	28%
Did you review the free animated online videos	74%	80%
Did you get a Broadcaster and were you directed to safety pages?	80%	87%
Handover duration was between 20-30 minutes	40%	43%
Handover duration 30-45 between minutes	20%	16%
Percentage of hirers not receiving a trial run	12%	10%

- 4.2. The 2023 Survey results show an improvement compared to the year before again demonstrating that hire company staff are providing satisfactory information at handover on key boat handling issues, like judging speed, passing under low bridges, person overboard drills and advice on personal flotation aids.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The Rangers' surveys are a health check of the competence and understanding of hired vessel helms on our waters, and the results help to counter anecdotal stories of inexperienced hirers being 'let loose' on our waterways.
- 5.2. The 2023 survey shows that 10% of helms reported that they had no 'show-out'. This demonstration of competence under the Hire Boat Code is a compulsory element regardless of experience. For the 2024 season, the Hire Boat Licensing Officer will be picking up this issue with Hire Companies once a no-show-out is identified.
- 5.3. Attributing metrics to health and safety on broads waters is impossible as multiple factors influence incidents and accidents, but the safety measures brought in following lessons learnt from past incidents demonstrate that safety awareness is improving. The Broads Authority will continue to play its part to educate, inform and enforce safety. We are again looking to run the 'Fast Water Training' at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station, for all hire operators, in early 2024, as well as maintaining seasonal on-the-spot health checks on hire companies as well as licensing audits on hire boat and hire paddle craft operators.

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Background papers: [Safety on the Broads-update paper 13 April 2023](#)

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: C4 – Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviours on the waterways.