

## EBA Position Statement – Inland Waterways Infrastructure

### Executive Summary

The European Boating Association<sup>1</sup> (EBA) calls on the European Commission and all national and regional Governments to provide support and investment in inland waterways to ensure waterways remain navigable to the class of vessel they were built to serve.

The contribution Recreational Boating<sup>2</sup> can make and the economic benefits of inland waterways tourism should not be overlooked. With the right infrastructure this sector can thrive. However, this will not be the case if the waterways are not maintained in a navigable condition. Contributions from recreational boaters alone cannot fund the maintenance of the waterways.

In mainland Europe inland waterways do not stop at national borders. Maintenance of the inland waterways network must be considered at the pan-European level to ensure that recreational boaters of all nationalities can enjoy the waterways and that they are still available for future generations to experience.

### Background

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Inland Transport Committee, Working Party on Inland Water Transport in its [Resolution No. 52](#)<sup>a</sup> on a European Recreational Inland Navigation Network indicated its belief that public authorities can contribute significantly to the development of tourism by inland waterway through their engagement to the provision and maintenance of an appropriate recreational inland navigation network based on internationally agreed classifications and parameters, which it established in the Resolution.

More recently the [report towards future-proof inland waterway transport in Europe of the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism](#)<sup>b</sup> called on the European Commission to include inland waterway tourism in its upcoming European Agenda for Tourism 2050 and stressed the need to further explore the potential of inland waterways for recreational navigation and other waterfront activities, which would boost growth, create new job opportunities and enhance tourism in the regions concerned.

Many smaller rivers and canals were originally modified to accommodate commercial needs. However, the development of other modes of transport have led to formerly profitable smaller

<sup>a</sup> <https://unece.org/DAM/trans/doc/2019/sc3/ECE-TRANS-SC3-164-Rev.2e.pdf>

<sup>b</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0231\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0231_EN.html)

waterways now having little, if any, economic interest for commercial shipping. Many waterways that were originally developed for commercial traffic, provide an ideal environment for recreational boating and in particular Cruising Boat Tourism to prosper. In some cases waterways which had fallen into disrepair have been revived and now prosper in response to recreational boating demand.

However in too many cases this potential is not realised. As the level of commercial activity on inland waterways reduces, funding for maintenance often also reduces. As a result, in many countries, smaller and more remote waterways are falling into disrepair, for example due to infrastructure facilitating navigation being out of service (e.g. broken locks), weed impeding navigation or silting resulting in water levels no longer being sufficient for navigation. The overall result is a declining waterways with broken links appearing or threatened in what was once a thriving network.

Inland waterways should be treated as part of our heritage and the network should remain owned and financed by state's organisations – see the [EBA position on Transfer of Inland Waterways from State to Private Ownership or Operation](#)<sup>c</sup>

## International Network of Waterways

In mainland Europe inland waterways do not stop at national borders. As can be seen in the map in Annex II of Resolution 52 it should be possible to travel across Europe on a recreational boat. Recreational boaters generally have an adventurous nature and Cruising Boat Tourism<sup>d</sup> will frequently involve remote destinations with the voyage itself being very much a part of the experience. These visitors provide a target market for less frequented destinations wishing to develop their tourist offering.

Maintaining international routes which allow recreational boaters to travel across Europe from north to south and east to west, will allow Europe as a whole to benefit from the economic benefits of inland waterways tourism, as recreational boaters move across the continent.

The network of waterways serving large commercial ships provides a basic international network of waterways, however for many recreational boaters sharing these larger waterways with commercial ships is not an enjoyable experience and commercial ships always take priority which can cause delay. It is therefore important that smaller waterways are maintained, not only as an alternative, but to spread the economic benefit of inland waterways tourism as widely as possible.

The EBA is supportive of the return of commercial traffic to smaller inland waterways as a sustainable form of transport. As well as the advantage of lower emissions, than many other means of transport, commercial traffic contributes to the maintenance of waterways used for recreation use by reducing silting and helping reduce the need for dredging and reducing the problems caused by invasive plants.

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<sup>c</sup> <https://eba.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/site-documents/eba-position-statements/eba-position-transfer-inland-waterways.pdf>

<sup>d</sup> Cruising Boat Tourism is the movement of recreational boaters (sail and motor) through, on and between the inland and coastal waters of foreign states. The boats are primarily privately owned and operated by the owner.

Resolution 52 provides a means of classifying the waterways to ensuring that they are correctly maintained for use by the maximum size of craft they were built to serve. The EBA Members could help to ensure that Resolution 52 remains up to date, by working with their governments to ensure formal submissions to the UN ECE are made in a timely manner.

It should also be noted that, due to the conflicting demands on national budgets the work of EBA Members alone is not sufficient to ensure the future of the international network of waterways. Steps need to be taken at the pan-European level to manage, for example, environmental conflicts.

Whilst a net of inland waterways connected with maritime waters is ideal, particularly to facilitate the arrival of cruising boats from abroad, even isolated waterways and lakes are valuable areas for inland boating as they can be used by owners of trailered boats.

## **The EBA Position on Inland Waterways Infrastructure**

Inland waterways are an important part of European heritage and waterways should be maintained in a navigable condition for the size of vessel they were designed for.

Although recreational boaters can contribute to the upkeep of the waterways, navigable waterways have a much wider appeal than overgrown waterways with infrastructure in disrepair. The contribution made by recreational boaters therefore needs to be supplemented to ensure waterways can be maintained in a navigable condition. The EBA is therefore supportive of the return of commercial traffic to smaller inland waterways to help in this regard.

Waterways extend beyond navigable borders. The financing and maintenance of inland waterways should be considered at the pan-European level to ensure a network that fully services Europe can be maintained for generations to come. -

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### Notes

#### **<sup>1</sup> European Boating Association**

The European Boating Association, Europäischer Sportschiffahrtsverband, Association Européenne de Navigation de Plaisance, is a civil, not for profit association of recreational boat users' organisations, founded in 1982, and established as an Unincorporated Association whose members agree to be governed by its constitution. The EBA member organisations (see <http://www.eba.eu.com/participantorgs>) collectively represent in excess of 1.5 million recreational boaters and an estimated 20 million active participants.

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The purpose of the EBA is to represent the mutually agreed common interests of national recreational boat users' organisations in Europe, and in particular to:

- Coordinate and develop recreational boating activities in Europe by exchange of information, and action on matters of mutually agreed common interest.
- Promote the practice of all activities on the water, promoting and exchanging knowledge and experience between recreational boat users' organisations in Europe.
- Represent EBA members in environmental, regulatory and technical matters affecting their safe enjoyment of recreational boating activities on the water.
- Encourage the safe, unhampered and environmentally sustainable use of recreational boats on all European waters.
- Provide the link between the European institutions and EBA Members for consultation and information on proposed EU directives and regulations.
- Provide the link between other relevant global and regional organisations and EBA Members.

## <sup>2</sup> Recreational Boating

The EBA is the European representative organisation for recreational boating.

There is no general consensus as to the terminology used to describe the types of boat used for "recreational boating", with expressions such as "recreational craft" or "private pleasure craft" being used to describe only subsets of such types of boat for the purposes of specific pieces of EU legislation. "Recreational boating" also includes the use of beach- or slipway-launched water toys such as wind surfers, sailing dinghies, inflatable boats and personal watercraft.

Boats used for "recreational boating" may be small or large, propelled by sail and/or power and used on inland waters and/or at sea. "Recreational boating" at sea can range from close-to-shore to trans-oceanic.

"Recreational boating" also includes the use of such boats privately owned and operated by the owner, hired (on bareboat or skippered charter) or used to provide a service (such as training or race participation).

In the context of this document, therefore, the EBA considers "recreational boating" to mean using boats that are designed or adapted for sport or leisure, whether propelled by sail and/or power, for the purposes for which they are designed or adapted.