

Royal Canal Amenity Group

Opening Statement

The members of RCAG have been advised of the proposal by Waterways Ireland to introduce new bye laws for the canals and rivers coming under their remit and have considered the draft put forward for such. The draft regulations have been examined and discussed at a number of meetings and views formed on their relevance to the operation of the Royal Canal but these may also be applicable to the other waterways concerned.

A. Need for new byelaws.

We have examined the proposed draft laws in combination with the existing 1988 laws and believe that most of the 'new' proposals are already covered by existing laws. There has been little or no enforcement of these bye laws since the inception of WI until the last two or three years.

There has been updated legislation in areas like pollution control, biodiversity and marine safety which would require modification to these earlier bye laws. The other main exception would be the issues arising from a dramatic increase in the demand for residential boats on the waterway system.

B. Residential Boats.

The current bye laws did not envisage the substantial increase which would occur within this aspect of waterways usage. There are now more than 50 residential boats on the Royal Canal and most of these are without basic services (water, sewage, power). Should WI have a role in providing housing facilities or in acting as landlords by allowing people to moor on their water assets ??

C. Enforcement Powers.

We are concerned by proposals to allow WI staff to be granted powers to enter onto boats to check on compliance with proposed regulations. Members of an Garda could not do this without a search warrant so we may need a system of checks and balances on such proposals. WI Staff would also be

permitted to issue fines for perceived breaches of rules. There is no proposed appeal procedues envisaged leaving those 'fined' to seek redress through the already overburdened courts system.

C. Fees /Charges.

Current fees charged by WI have remained unchanged for more than 40 years - this is unsustainable in any business. While we are not willing to endorse every proposed charge WI have put forward we will concede that substantial increases are justified.

However, any charges should be justified by the provision of suitable services which have not been provided heretofore.

D. Communications/Transparency

While RCAG have experienced a good relationship with WI over many years we have always had difficulty in accessing information on their future plans. There is no regular consultation and meetings only occur when we demand such.

E. Conclusion

We believe that any Government body should have a policy of regular consultation with all groups representative of users. We have taken part in discussions on these draft bye laws for almost 8 years and while there has been 'footdragging' on both sides we believe the process has taken far too long.

We hope that the work of this Committee can hasten the speedy resolution of the process.