



IWA AT WORK

BYE-LAW CAMPAIGN 2014

For the last few months IWA has campaigned against the proposed amendments to the canal bye-laws. Greg Whelan, Chairman of the Canals Action Group, explains the latest developments.

In the article in the last edition of IWN I highlighted the background to the proposed byelaws and what we saw as their effect on the boating community.

Since then we have seen the submission of IWA's response at the end of the short consultation period and responded on Waterways Ireland's Draft Corporate Plan. We have continued the information campaign to the media both nationally and locally, in addition to building relationships with politicians. The first part of this was the sending of a Valentine's card to the Minister and TDs expressing our concerns and we engaged with a number of TDs who have expressed concern at the affect of the proposals. The culmination of this was our invitation to a meeting with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht

We made a formal presentation to the Committee and they also took the opportunity to question and probe WI on the proposals. Acting Chairman Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Fine Gael Laois-Offaly, opening the session noted 'Concerns have been expressed that the new bye-laws are not fully fit for purpose and this is why we have

invited the witnesses here today. I hope this discussion will allow us to review the proposed Act and to identify any areas that need to be re-examined, and to recommend any changes that may be necessary'. WI undertook to take the committee's comments and reflect them in their consideration of the byelaws and to come back to the committee.

Since the Oireachtas meeting WI have produced a response to the submissions they had received. It is unfortunate that they did not acknowledge in this some of the submissions made to them. While some of our arguments have been noted no constructive proposals are made in the WI document as to how these will be met, in fact the WI report appears to be an incomplete document in that the following areas are not noted or addressed:

- There is no mention of the meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht
- There is no commentary on requests to change the future consultation period from 21 days to three months so that it is compatible with the Corporate Plan Consultation period and more customer friendly
- There is no commentary on winter mooring provision on the canals and Barrow as is provided on the Shannon navigation

- Service level agreements and customer services charter are not included
- There is no mention of houseboats, despite this being a big issue
- It does not note that only one user group is still being subjected to charges
- There is no mention of the €250 deposit on extended mooring
- There is no mention of the Barrow open boat fishing licence
- There is no mention of requests to have a multi-agency approach to planning
- There is no mention of daily mooring charges in Grand Canal Docks
- There are no details published on any impact assessment reports conducted by WI on proposed amendments
- The Dutch Barge Association submission is not noted or copy posted with others on website
- The report includes a wholly inaccurate statement on negative effect on tourism

In addition WI has indicated that they do not see how the changes in byelaws will impact on economic activity along the canals. This to us highlights their lack of understanding of canal usage and the benefits we all witness as we traverse the canals and Barrow system.

To counter this, a rolling rally took place from Edenderry that culminated in one of the largest attendances at the Dublin Rally. This saw many of the vessels festooned in banners highlighting the Canals

Campaign. These banners were placed in high visibility positions for the duration of the rally to inform the general public and generate support.

We are now seeking to meet with the Minister to put forward our concerns on the byelaws. This was supported by a postcard campaign to national politicians. Ultimately it will be the Minister who signs the byelaws into force and we want to ensure that he is very aware of the damage that can be done by these poorly thought out proposals.

IWA have respectfully requested Minister Deenihan not to impose an outcome without conciliation or agreement.

We have been heartened by the response of Kildare and Offaly County Councils in rejecting WI's proposed byelaws and we have been in contact with other County Councils to gather support. All of these responses are available at the special webpage of the Canals Campaign that is linked from www.iwai.ie.

The campaign was recognised by the Association at the AGM with the presentation of the Endeavour Award for its achievement in progressing the IWA message across the media and the political sphere. While John, Alan and I were mentioned in the citation, the work of the group has been carried out by many members over long hours. We thank all of them for their commitment and energy to this very important campaign. The Endeavour Award marks their contribution, support and enthusiasm to the IWA for which we are all grateful. We thank the membership for the conferring of the Endeavour Cup.

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