



NBTA LONDON

NEWSLETTER

For the community and rights of boat dwellers



Back to the Future: The 'New' Overcrowding Enforcement Policy

There's a lot of talk on the cut about CRT's new policy on cruising distances – boaters worried that they will lose their homes, others unsure if next time they apply for a licence they'll be allowed to continue their way of life. This attack from CRT takes the form of a new policy, but there is nothing new about it.

Our rights

An essential right of our community is to be able to live on the inland waterways without a home mooring. For many of those waters, this right is enshrined in the British Waterways Act 1995 (section 17(3)(c) (ii) if we are being precise) with the condition that we navigate the waters and don't remain in any place for longer than 14 days unless it is reasonable to do so. This right, which defines us as continuous cruisers and allows the waters to be our homes, was almost not ours to have, as it was previously opposed by British Waterways (BW) – the predecessor to CRT.

The nineties, fighting back...

During the debates and deliberations which led up to the British Waterways Act 1995, BW argued that the canals were overcrowded and that tough action was needed to solve this 'problem' – sound familiar? BW fought hard for this, but they were beaten back and the law retained a right for our community to exist.

The naughties, fighting back some more...

Defeated, BW went off to lick its wounds, but was back in 2003 to attack our community again. A policy was trialled requiring boaters to move minimum distances (where have I heard that before?). Those navigating the waterways were expected to travel 120 lock-miles (if you travel 3 miles and go through 2 locks that's 5 lock-miles) every three months without turning round at any point.



In a bid for legitimacy, BW consulted on this plan but failed to include views of continuous cruisers. A pair of boaters challenged this and ran their own consultation, travelling along the cut talking to hundreds of people to understand the impact this extreme policy would have. The results showed it would be devastating on their lives. Many boaters refused to follow the rule and pressure from local groups built against BW who dropped the policy.

Recent years.. and some more!

BW took their time before attacking again in 2010. This time proposing to define 'neighbourhoods' with a requirement to move from one to the next every 14 days and only turning round if it was impossible to navigate further. This was planned on the Kennet & Avon and on the Rivers Lee and Stort which were to be carved into 6 pieces. Huge portions of these neighbourhoods were to have 7 days mooring restrictions, including the whole of the River Stort! Once implemented, Stage 2 of the plan would have been to extend this to the Regent's Canal. The reason – to deal with overcrowding, of course.

The boaters of the Lee and Stort responded to this attack by forming the original 'London Boaters' group. Working together with other canal users including cyclists, and residents to build support and attending public meetings in their hundreds to form strategy and fight the plans, the group forced BW to shelve their proposals in 2011.

"It is the same old story"

Today...

So we arrive back where we started: CRT's 'new' policy – with its minimum distances to deal with 'overcrowding' - in fact smells pretty old. It is the same old story...but we know how the story can end. Time and time again, our community has been attacked and every time we work together to defend each other and each time we have won. If we stand together and act, this time will be no different.

Boats are Homes: National Demonstration

Join us in a national demonstration to demand that CRT stop evicting, or threatening to evict, travelling boat dwellers based on their pattern of travel or distance travelled. We will also be demonstrating to stop reductions to the 14-day rule, stop the sale of our waterways and to demand the maintenance of the waterway banks, and to install more mooring rings and more facilities.

Saturday 16 April at 12.30am
Central London, Gower Street / Euston Road,
London NW1

Expectant mother wins 'Equalities Adjustment' from CRT

An expectant London Boater mother, supported by the NBTAL Case-Worker Group, has just won the right to a vastly reduced cruising pattern for both before and after the birth of her child.

The boater, already a mother with two children, contacted the case workers for help after being given a restricted licence by CRT 'for not moving far enough', despite her telling them that she was 6 months pregnant.

The case worker group took advice from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and helped the boater to challenge the decision.



After negotiations, CRT agreed to include the boater within its 'Equalities Adjustment Policy' and the boater was given a reduced pattern of movement - including a period of no movement at all - for the period before and after the birth. The boater was also given a full licence.

A spokesperson for the NBTAL Caseworker Group said:

"We would like to thank the Equalities Commission for their advice in this matter."

"This is the first time that we know of a pregnant boater being included in the little-known about CRT Equalities Adjustment Policy, so this is an important and ground-breaking case for our community."

The CRT 'Equalities Adjustment Policy' derives from the Equalities Act 2010 and means that CRT have to ensure that disabled boaters, elderly boaters and pregnant boaters whose condition interferes with their ability to cruise in the same manner as an able bodied person, are entitled to a reduction in the cruising pattern set within CRT guidance and within enforcement practice.

If you are a pregnant mother and wish to continue to live on your boat, contact the NBTAL Caseworker Group for help.

NBTAL's advice sheets on 'restricted licences' and new enforcement policy

The NBTAL has published new easy-to-read advice sheets on restricted licences and the new CRT enforcement policy that was introduced early last year. To see them go to our website at www.nbtalondon.wordpress.com/2015/12/25/help-sheets/

The advice sheet will tell you step-by-step what you can do if you are given one of these three or six month conditional licences.

It has all the relevant CRT contact details and template letters/emails that you will need, as well as the contact details for the NBTAL Case-Worker Group who can help you to successfully challenge a restricted licence.



Help!

It's Only the Beginning: Let's Stop CRT's Policy Together

A new vague policy

As many of you know, last May CRT rammed through a policy that saw the restriction and refusal of licences to people who they claimed hadn't moved 'far enough'. This statement from CRT to say how far 'far enough' was, was vague to say the least:

"[it's] very unlikely that someone would be able to satisfy us that they have been genuinely cruising if their range of movement is less than 15-20 miles over the period of their licence. In most cases we would expect it to be greater than this".

So, is 21 miles enough, or 25 miles, or even 100 miles? They don't say how far, but they are happy to say 'YOU'RE not moving far enough', leaving boaters uncertain to what they've supposedly done wrong, creating much anxiety.

Gets vaguer...

NBTAL have been supporting affected boaters through a case-worker group, which offers help and advice to boaters facing reduced licences and eviction. We can see no clear guidelines to adhere to as CRT seem to be imposing different expectations on a case-by-case basis. More and more people are getting restricted licences despite travelling in excess of the 'required' 15-20 miles. However, over this period, we've never heard CRT tell any able-bodied person that a 15-mile range is fine. So in effect, it is at least 20 miles.

The distance CRT demands is increasing, but the time in which to do it is decreasing. We initially thought when CRT stated 15-20 miles, they were referring to a 12-month licence period. However, we found CRT demanding boaters on involuntary 6-month restricted licences to do at least 20 miles too.

Making it up as they go along

It seems that CRT chose the 15-20 mile range because it was a

number they could get away with publicly, but when they could push it further, when dealing privately with individual boaters, they did. We often found 20 miles was not enough.

We've found people who had done 30 miles, and 100 miles in some cases, still had CRT on their backs. This is because, for CRT, distance isn't enough, it's how you travel over that distance too. If they decide you stay in an area 'too long', then it doesn't matter if you have travelled over 50 miles, for example. In certain cases, they have tried to enforce a pattern of movement - a 'continuous journey'.

One boater was refused a licence and threatened with eviction after travelling approximately 60 miles on a 6-month licence.

Why? Because CRT didn't

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Image: Ludovic Pujol



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like that at one point he did a U-turn to get some coal. They claimed his travel pattern was inadequate as he did not stick to a 'continuous journey'. Nevertheless, after a petition and 6 days of campaigning, CRT backed down and we got his licence back. CRT pushed their luck – but we pushed back and we won.

Fear as enforcement tightens

This isn't the only time we've helped someone get their licence back. However, many people remain under enforcement. From May to October 2015, CRT has issued **826** restricted licences. A large proportion of these are in London, and of the **1,225** boats in the city without a home mooring, **295** boats were given restricted licences between May and November 2015. That's **24%**, almost 1 in 4, of boats without a home mooring in London.

During this period, **10** boats were removed and **four** are at seizure point, with a further **four** planned and awaiting removal, and another **11** in planning. With hundreds of boaters currently on restricted licences, there is fear of even more evictions in the future.

"It's only the beginning of the policy"

Quoted Simon Cadek, Enforcement Supervisor for London, at the London Waterway Forum in October 2015.

Many in our community feel it ourselves, or know someone that feels the pressure of this policy already. The idea that this is 'only the beginning' worries many of us. But it is also only the beginning of us stopping their policy.

Fighting back

We must come together as travelling boaters. We must stop CRT case by case. Each time someone is under attack, we must support them, we must campaign for them, and if necessary, physically stop their eviction. But, we can't just *deal* with the effects of the policy, we must get *rid* of the policy.

We must reach out to non-boater groups and individuals, and use the press to show-up CRT.

One way we will do this is by marching with other housing groups at the People's Assembly demonstration on 16 April. On the day, we will hand in a petition to Parliament, one that is already over 20,000 strong and growing, demanding that the Government pressure CRT into getting rid of their unjust policy. We hope you will join us.

People's Assembly demo - **16 April 12.30am, Central London, Gower Street / Euston Road**

Sign the petition - <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/boats-are-homes-prevent-the-eviction-of-boat-dwellers>

Contact a London caseworker -
Email: nbta.london.caseworker@gmail.com
Ring/text: 07974 298 958

Losing Facilities: Stonebridge under Lock and Keypad?

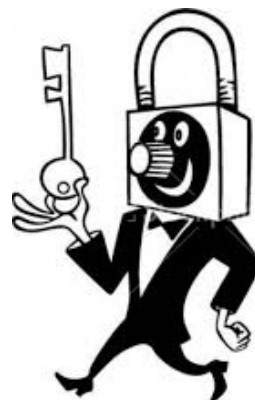
It's unlikely that getting undressed and readying yourself for a shower in a cold, damp, muddy room is part of your childhood that you'd eagerly fantasise about reliving. But it's become pretty standard for continuous cruisers and home moorers up at Stonebridge Lock 16. That with the blocked elsan, flushing problems, and loss of a pumpout and water point in Waltham Abbey, it seems CRT is struggling to keep up. At Stonebridge, they want to restrict the times in which people use the facilities to the café's opening hours.

This is not the answer. Be it vandalism or normal wear-and-tear, these facilities should stay accessible when, and to all, that need them. We need a solution that is affordable and limits the varied damages incurred during use, answers which don't involve a drastic measure of a keypad only available to those on the home moorings. This could be self-shutting gates, and the hard fought-

for caretaker boats (won by London Boaters in 2012), limiting access to plumbing by installing tamper-proof showers and, dare I say it, some pitching in by us boaters to keep it clean. Let's not leave it to CRT who have proven unable to make sustainable changes.

Their inefficient subcontracting has caused massive over spend on pumpouts. In 2014, each job was priced at a staggering £762 a go, in August 2016 London Boaters got a quote for £175 for regular visits and £225 for one-offs.

"We need a rethink on budgets, a big rethink on contracting"



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We need a rethink on budgets, a big rethink on contracting, and **act collectively**, to show how much value this site brings us.

Don't let CRT take Stonebrige from us. Join us on **Sunday 27th March, 12pm, for a Tow-path Gathering at Stonebridge Lock 16, River Lea.**

More Facilities: Boaters Meet With CRT

On Wednesday 9 December 2015, NBTA London chaired a public conversation with CRT and London-based boaters. It was a productive forum, where we asked direct questions and were given some straight answers.

At the meeting, CRT's Customer Operations Manager, Sam Thomas, and Boaters' Liaison Officer, Sorwar Ahmed, demonstrated a willingness on the part of CRT to be in ongoing communication with boaters, to listen and to work with us.

Sorwar stated:

"The Trust is not trying to get continuous cruisers off the waterway in any shape or form. We are fully behind you as a new group of boaters – the growing number of continuous cruisers you might look at as the future of the waterway."

T for Trust

The Trust however needs to work much harder at gaining *our* trust.

"The Trust however needs to work much harder at gaining our trust."

There is a deep skepticism among live-aboards without a home mooring, which is a result of previous sabotage and discrimination by CRT, and British Waterways before them.

Whilst this skepticism is not unfounded, we also need an openness to possibility – the possibility of negotiation, discussion, focused demands, clear questions and relentless seeking of transparency from CRT.

Under Pressure

Some answers remained vague and more discussion is warranted, particularly around navigation and mooring facilities. However, with mediation and continued pressure from NBTA,

we can strive for boaters to be heard, for transparency and for CRT to follow things through and work together with the wider boating community.

CRT was asked prior to the meeting – what would be different this time, with the opening up of discussions that had previously been muted at Better Relationship Groups and other meetings? Sam Thomas said the difference is their 'priorities have now changed'. The real difference is that CRT are now under pressure by NBTA.

After years of taking our facilities, taking our mooring spaces and introducing an enforcement policy that threatens many with eviction, we demand action from CRT. We will keep the pressure on the Trust to ensure they keep their promises.

Get involved

Now that a public conversation has begun, you can join the NBTA Facilities Working Group forum at <http://nbta.boaterpedia.co.uk/>

The NBTA Winter Warmer

On Thursday 12 November 2015, The NBTA London organised a Winter Warmer meal, with an attendance of almost 50 people. With food and booze, it was a great night with an electric atmosphere. Old-timer and itinerant boater, David Luff, spoke about the campaign our community won back in 2003, when the British Waterways (CRT's predecessors) tried to push our community off the water through similar tactics. A discussion took place on what we should do about CRT's recent attack with a shared agreement to stand up to CRT.





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TRAVELLERS
ASSOCIATION
Defending the Homes
Boat Travellers

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Spring's here so let's celebrate
with a day of music, food,
craft and open mic



12pm Sunday 27th March, 2016

Stonebridge
LOCK 16