

# An equitable basis for charging continuous cruisers



*Prepared for Save Our Waterways by Bruce Napier, Continuous Cruiser*

One of the most contentious elements in the discussions concerning British Waterways' proposals for changes to its licence fee structure is the position of those who do not have a permanent mooring, and are identified as continuous cruisers.

In fact, this group comprises two quite separate groups of people, those who are genuine continuous cruisers, that is they are engaged in a "genuine journey around the system", and those who choose to live aboard whilst holding down a job, sending their children to school and so on, the "continuous moorer".

The recent BWAf report acknowledges this distinction, and makes an ingenious proposal for dealing with the latter group, namely the "roving mooring permit". It seems sensible that this scheme should undergo trials in areas where there are particularly large groups of continuous moorers.

This leaves the original group, the genuine continuous cruisers. Here the principal complaint is that they make a smaller contribution to the upkeep of the waterways than those who pay for a mooring, whilst making more extensive use of it. In addition, they are deemed to be "more willing to pay", and so should be charged more.

Although BW estimates that 9% of the typical commercial mooring fee is paid to them, its argument for charging the continuous cruiser an additional £150 rests on the 'increased usage' and 'willingness to pay' elements.

Both of these premises are grievously flawed. Not only are there no data on the actual cost of navigating the waterway as opposed to remaining static on it, many continuous cruisers move only a limited amount in each day's cruising, and are indeed only required to move from one "place" to another every 14 days.

Since the typical distance between one "place" and the next is of the order of 5 miles, it will readily be seen that many continuous cruisers will accomplish in a month that which a hire boat achieves in a few days, doing so with greater skill and care for the waterways. Similarly, there are many boaters occupying moorings who cruise intensively during the summer, covering distances at least as great as the typical continuous cruiser.

As regards willingness to pay, many continuous cruisers are living on fixed and very restricted incomes, and are likely to be even harder hit by the present turmoil in the world economic system than those still in work and keeping their boat on a mooring.

We suspect that the reason BW and BWAF have not pursued the more compelling argument, that which rests on the contribution to BW's finances flowing from the payment of mooring fees, is that this is an extremely confused area, with many accidents of history and legislation obscuring the view.

Some marinas pay a substantial element to BW in connection charges, others none at all. Some end of garden moorings exist as a result of negotiations surrounding the original legislation which created the navigable waterway, others were priced by local managers on an ad hoc basis only a few years ago.

It seems to us that a far more transparent and justifiable approach would be to remove from all mooring fees the element that is a contribution to the maintenance of the waterway, and recover that funding by an across the board increase in licence fees.

Most would thus find themselves comparatively unaffected overall, their mooring fee going down by the same amount as their licence fee has risen. Those who to date have been escaping such a contribution, either because they are continuous cruisers, or because they happen to have been the beneficiary of some historical arrangement, would hardly be in a position to complain that they were now being expected to pay the same as everyone else.