

Proposals for the Future of Ireland's Inland Waterways

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Foreword

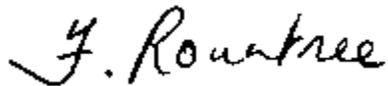
Ireland's inland navigations have been used since people first sailed up our river estuaries nine thousand years ago. Our man-made inland waterways were created at the beginning of the last century as a means of transporting goods. The development of road and rail networks over the past two hundred years have now made that primary transport function redundant.

The potential of the inland waterways as a multi-use tourism resource, and as an amenity for their local communities is currently being realised. They have important potential for nature conservation and the industrial archaeology of the waterways is gaining appreciation from an ever-wider public.

The document acknowledges the changing uses of the inland waterways, and it points to the need for a wider focus in planning for the future development of the waterways.

The Heritage Council initiated a consultation process in the summer of 1998 through the production and dissemination of a consultation document. This process continued through a seminar in November 1998 where delegates were asked to respond to the document.

This document represents a consensus approach to the future management of the inland waterways, and promotes the continuing involvement of all stakeholders into the next millennium.



Freda Rountree
Chairperson
THE HERITAGE COUNCIL
June 1999

Introduction

The Heritage Council was very encouraged by the number of positive responses received to the Consultative Document on Inland Waterways which was circulated during the summer of 1998. There was widespread agreement with the principal recommendations. This was further demonstrated at the seminar on 24 November 1998 which was attended by most of those who had submitted written responses. Much of the discussion at the workshops had, therefore, been covered in the written responses, but the seminar did provide a useful forum for people to discuss their points with others. It was also a valuable stage in the consultation process, enabling members of the Inland Waterways Committee of the Heritage Council to meet people, both while chairing the workshops and in conversation throughout the day. All those present were given ample opportunity to raise issues and a record was made of the proceedings.

Since the consultation process began, the mounting speculation that inland waterways were likely to be one of the cross border bodies (implementation bodies) obviously had significance. However, it became clear that the establishment of such a body would merely add urgency to the question of how to manage the waterways and made little difference to the findings of the process that had been followed. This fact was echoed at the seminar on 24 November where it was suggested that whether or not waterways were selected as an implementation body, a sufficient level of positive collaboration already existed to guarantee an all-island approach in the future. The high level of co-operation between Dúchas - Waterways and the Rivers Agency N I will be valuable to the new body as it moves 'progressively' towards its function defined in the statement issued on 18 December 1998 as, 'The management, maintenance, development and restoration of the inland navigable waterway system throughout the island principally for recreational purposes.'

Three issues have emerged from this consultation process which it appears, although included in the recommendations in the Consultative Document, did not receive sufficient emphasis:

1. While the inland waterways are accepted as an important part of our national heritage, they also contain within themselves individual heritage items which fall into other heritage areas such as architecture, wildlife, archaeology - underwater and industrial.
2. The need for an overall strategic plan for the waterways and their corridors was identified by many. This issue was raised in particular by the local authorities who saw a role for themselves in the formulation and implementation of such a plan. While most people agreed that the plan could best be achieved by the creation of an overall waterways authority, it was the need for the strategic plan that was uppermost.
3. Much emphasis was placed on the importance of the heritage aspects of the waterways in the light of their role as recreational and tourist amenities. Although the built heritage aspect was stressed by some respondents, it was the natural heritage which was the greatest cause of concern. It was felt that the Consultative Document placed undue emphasis on development and did not underline the sensitivity essential for the preservation of the unique ecology of the waterways. Sustainable tourist and recreational development involves the protection of the resource which it is seeking to exploit and need not be at odds with economic growth. It was also indicated that the conservation of the natural heritage was not sufficiently emphasised in the prioritisation of waterway restoration projects.

While the contents of this document are the final recommendations arising out of this current round of consultation, the Heritage Council will continue to consult with all those concerned and report to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands from time to time.

Overall Aim

1.1 The inland waterways and their corridors should be developed in an integrated broad-based way, conserving where possible their built and archaeological heritage features and protecting their unique ecological systems, to enhance the enjoyment and appreciation of that heritage now and for future generations.

Organisational Management

2.1 In addition to the management and maintenance of the engineering aspects of the navigations, the functions of the organisation entrusted with the management of the inland waterways should include the following:

- (a) co-ordination between all the departments and agencies involved in the management of the inland waterway resource or impacting on it, including liaison with and creation of partnerships between private, voluntary and community sectors;
- (b) monitoring and advising on heritage issues including both the man-made and natural heritage aspects;
- (c) realising the potential for understanding and enjoyment of all aspects of built and natural heritage along the waterways through education and promotion;
- (d) realising the socio-economic benefits of developing the inland waterways, using conflict management between conservation of the heritage and usage of the waterways and between users and development pressures;
- (e) the strong central control of all aspects of waterways management.

2.2 In order to fulfil these functions adequate professional staff would be required in the following areas:

- (a) Strategic planning
- (b) Navigation & Engineering
- (c) Planning & Development
- (d) Natural & Built Heritage
- (e) Education, Promotion, and Marketing

Resource Management

The current situation of a multiplicity of government departments and other agencies involved with various aspects of management of the waterways has led to a lack of cohesion. The following recommendations are made to lead to improved co-ordination:

3.1 Fully costed 5-year and 10-year strategy plans should be drawn up for the management of the inland waterways and their immediate corridors in consultation with the local authorities. This should ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development of the resource in a sustainable way, and involve local communities in accordance with Local Agenda 21.

3.2 Water quality enforcement and monitoring should continue to be carried out by the local authorities and other agencies which have a statutory obligation to do so but there should be a high degree of co-ordination between them and the new implementation body.

3.3 Given the limited role of Ardnacrusha Power Station in supplying the national grid, the ESB's statutory rights to control water levels on the River Shannon should be transferred to the new body.

Funding

4.1 To carry out the functions in section 2.2 above, adequate funding will have to be allocated for the additional professional officers in strategic planning & development, natural & built heritage and education, promotion and marketing.

4.2 Funding will be required to carry through the 5-year and 10-year strategy plans with a clear distinction between operational and development budgets. Where funding is required for amenity works in the waterway corridors this could be raised in partnership with the local authorities and the private sector. Other sources of funding will also have to be explored.

4.3 Where restoration work involves the replacement of low level culverts by new bridges, these are works which would have been needed had the waterway been operational at the time the culverts were constructed. They should therefore be at least part funded by either the local authority or the National Roads Authority and not treated as the sole responsibility of the new body.

4.4 The first priority in restoration works is the completion of all works in progress and this should include additional infrastructural works on the existing waterways.

Development Control

5.1 Where development, industrial or recreational, could impact negatively on the waterway corridors, Areas of Special Control should be identified in consultation with local authorities and included in their county development plans. There must be a high degree of co-ordination and common enforcement of standards among local authority development plans in waterway corridors.

This could be carried out in conjunction with the overall 5-year and 10-year strategy plans. The local authorities in N Ireland are already involved in the waterways and their corridors and a good model is to be found in the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007. This plan states that tourism development must not damage the assets it seeks to exploit and it divides the corridor around the lakes into thirteen clearly defined areas assigned to one of three zones: Conservation Zones (in which only very small scale developments are likely to be acceptable), Sensitive Zones (in which sympathetic development might be acceptable and Opportunity Zones (in which opportunities exist for suitable development).

5.2 Waterways corridors should not be defined by distance from the waterway but in terms of impact upon it.

User Management

6.1 There should be increased enforcement of the existing bye-laws which requires increased levels of staffing. 'No Wake' zones should replace the existing speed limit areas.

6.2 The infrastructure of the inland waterways system needs to be improved in partnership with the local authorities, local communities and the private sector. However, the new body has an important role in ensuring that such developments are within the clearly defined strategy plan and do not harm the natural or man-made heritage. Private sector developments which meet these criteria, should also be encouraged by the new body.

6.3 All user groups should be encouraged to draw up voluntary codes of conduct.

6.4 Designated cycleways should be encouraged in urban areas while the use of towpaths for cycling in rural areas needs further examination.

6.5 Horse riding should be permitted on towpaths under special licence in designated areas.

6.6 The existing bye-law relating to shooting on the towpaths of the Grand & Royal Canals and the Barrow Navigation should be retained for safety reasons.

6.7 The establishment of serviced sites for house boats should be considered.

6.8 It is suggested that potential conflict between waterway users could be avoided by the establishment of structures to facilitate co-ordination and consultation. Users forums, held on a regular basis, could fulfil this function and would also serve as a two-way link between users and the new body.

In N Ireland, a model already exists with three advisory groups established on a regional basis: L Erne Advisory Committee, L Neagh Advisory Committee and the Lr Bann Advisory Committee.

Heritage Conservation

7.1 Appreciation and understanding of the individual heritage aspects of the inland waterways should be promoted. It is clear that conserving heritage enhances people's enjoyment of it, and that conservation need not be at odds with economic growth but rather protects the very asset which that growth is seeking to exploit.

7.2 The Birds, and Habitats Directives must be implemented in full in the areas designated as SPAs and SACs. Other aspects of heritage must not be neglected either. For example underwater archaeology is an area which demands greater investigation and resources. There is a need for inventories to identify and protect the unique industrial archaeological and architectural features of the waterways.

Opportunities for Development

8.1 Recognition of the wider socio-economic benefits derived from waterway projects must be considered in development plans for urban waterways to ensure the maximum advantage for the areas involved. Waterways can be used as a catalyst for development.

8.2 All developments in waterway corridors including tourism-related projects should take into account potential adverse effects on the heritage of the waterways. Policies and guidelines are needed to ensure sustainable developments in waterway corridors. In addition, policies and guidelines should be developed so that heritage sites can be developed sensitively to the benefit of all.

8.3 In line with the principles of Local Agenda 21 encouragement and guidance should be given to local authorities, fishery boards, voluntary and community groups, to carry out development work on the waterways and in their corridors.

8.4 The voluntary sector should be encouraged to continue its involvement in waterways development and non-governmental organisations should be recognised as important partners by the new body.

Marketing And Promotion Of The Waterways

9.1 Marketing and promotional efforts need to be co-ordinated by the new body. The distinction between marketing and promotion needs to be recognised. Since the preparation of the Consultative Document, there have been developments in this area with the coming together of many of the hire boat companies north and south under the brand name 'Ireland Waterways'. Funding has been made available for tourism projects through the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & the Islands and some promotional material is being prepared. The firms on the canal system and the Barrow Navigation, many of which are relatively small, are selling a different product and this must not be overlooked. There is a view that there is insufficient communication in this area.

9.2 Marketing and promotion of integrated inland waterway holidays needs to be encouraged, with the development of cluster patterns of water-based leisure activities

Expansion of the Waterways System

10.1 The 5-year and 10-year strategy plans should address the issue of the expansion of the waterway system depending on the projected availability of funding. The plans must also ensure that adequate funding is directed towards the upkeep and operation of the navigations.

10.2 All existing disused waterways should receive protective designation in local authority development plans to ensure that future restoration will not be jeopardised.

10.3 The following criteria have been identified as having the greatest relevance:

(a) how the projected expansion of the system would impact on the built or natural heritage.

(b) whether the projected expansion extends the 'connected network' and/or improves access to the sea and/or opens up new destinations, and whether it has the ability to attract users.

As EU structural funds under the Operational Plan for Tourism 1994-9 were used in recent restoration schemes, the success of these scheme is measured solely in tourism related and economic terms. However, the expansion of the waterways system has far wider implications. We have become far more conscious of the need to conserve both the natural and built heritage, and waterways and their restoration are now seen as an important part of this heritage. The recognition of the local and recreational amenity value of our waterways has increased enormously in recent years. We still have a considerable network of derelict canals in Ireland, north and south, and it is imperative that this heritage of the waterways does not fall into irreparable decline.

Following the consultation process the Heritage Council is suggesting the following prioritisation which shows changes from that suggested in the Consultative Document. The projects are arranged in three groups in order of priority but no attempt has been made to prioritise within each group. Should strong local authority and community support exist for a project, this should increase its priority rating.

A. COMPLETION OF WORKS IN PROGRESS

Royal Canal, Main Line & Longford Branch, including restoration of non-tidal access from the River Liffey through Spencer Dock.

Work in progress on the restoration of the Royal Canal does not include the restoration of the sea lock at the entrance from the River Liffey nor the North Wall and Sheriff Street lifting bridges, for which no financial provision was made in the 1994-9 Operational Programme for Tourism. Whilst Spencer Dock remains tidal it is most likely to preclude the passage of hire craft between the Grand and Royal Canals in Dublin because of the difficulties and time delays involved in working tidal access. For this reason restoring the non-tidal navigation through Spencer Dock must be given high priority.

When restored, re-connection of the Royal Canal to the existing network will increase the latter by 154 km and there is no doubt that it will be extensively used by boats. This will lead to an increased use of the eastern end of the Grand Canal by boats passing through Dublin to enter the Royal Canal or moving from the Royal Canal to return to the Shannon via the Grand Canal. Already two hire-boat companies have been established on the 75 km landlocked Blanchardstown-Mullingar restored section. However, without the development of non-tidal access to the canal, its potential is unlikely to

be developed especially in relation to the hire business. The failure to include the full restoration of Spencer Dock in the current programme of works will inevitably preclude the movement of hire craft between the two canals in Dublin. It is widely accepted that full use of the restored canal will not be achieved unless the non-tidal access is restored. It should be noted that restoration of the Longford Branch would have the added advantage of providing an additional urban destination for Shannon-based craft.

River Suck Navigation and Boyle River extension

The River Suck and the Boyle River are extensions to the connected network and add to destinations.

Limerick Navigation works

The work is aimed to increase the tidal 'window' between Baal's Bridge and Mathew Bridge and thus considerably improve access to the sea and safety of navigation through Limerick. These works were associated with major drainage works and it now seems possible that the navigation element may need to be re-assessed in the light of the underwater archaeological findings.

Tralee Ship Canal

This canal is not part of the connected network . A sum of £1 million was allocated to this work in the Operational Programme 1994-1999 which falls into 3 phases:

- (a) the excavation of the channel
- (b) the restoration of the lock and replacement of the opening bridge
- (c) the excavation of the harbour

Should the funding allocated prove inadequate to complete all three phases, the possibility of raising funds from sources outside Dúchas should be explored, such as the local authority, given that the canal is being restored largely as a local amenity.

All Existing Navigations

On-going need for increased mooring facilities and infrastructural improvements.

Northern Ireland Waterways

These must be included in any prioritisation on an all-island basis:

Lagan Navigation, phase 1 Belfast to Lisburn

The local authority is planning works in Lisburn involving the restoration of locks and a section of canal.

Lagan Navigation, phase 2 Lisburn to Lough Neagh

This could involve extending the navigation some distance further up the River Lagan before re-entering the canal to by-pass the section used for the motorway

Newry Canal

This canal is currently owned by the local authorities who have commissioned a number of feasibility investigations with full engineering costings.

B. FURTHER WORKS

Ulster Canal

The Ulster Canal has been the subject of a full feasibility study undertaken on behalf of the Waterways Service and the Rivers Agency NI by ESBI and Ferguson and McIlveen. Restoration of the Ulster Canal will involve a major cross-border initiative with enormous potential benefits. Its importance is recognised as one of the waterways that will immediately come under the remit of the new implementation body. It would attract considerable boat use if reconstructed to the gauge of linking waterways (e.g. the Shannon Erne waterway). In addition it would link Lough Neagh and the Upper and Lower Bann navigations to the connected network with an outlet to the sea at Coleraine.

The feasibility study does, however, need to be carefully examined. There are options available other than the clearly polarised options presented in the study.

River Shannon, Wineport, Inner Lakes, Lough Ree to Glassan

This is a comparatively small scheme to enlarge an existing stream from the Inner Lakes, Lough Ree, a short distance up to the village of Glassan which would provide a very useful new destination on this lake providing safe moorings and good facilities in the village with a number of restaurants, shops and pubs. This scheme must be the subject an environmental impact assessment because of the sensitive nature of the Inner Lakes and their designation as an SAC.

Grand Canal, Kilbeggan Branch

Since the publication of the Brady Shipman Martin (BSM) Strategy in 1992, the canal stores and harbour in Kilbeggan have been restored by voluntary effort. Re-opening the 13 km lock-free canal would provide an additional destination on the Grand Canal and significantly increase the time spent by boats in this area of the midlands. Moreover, the possibility also exists of extending the operational waterways system in the region by linking the Grand Canal at Kilbeggan with the Royal Canal at Mullingar via the River Brosna and Lough Ennell.

Grand Canal, Naas Branch extension to Corbally

It is well recognised that the short Naas Branch of the Grand Canal is under-used by boats. This is partly attributed to the need to pass up through the flight of five locks in a distance of 4 km to reach Naas harbour. Unfortunately, a culverted road crossing on the outskirts of Naas prevents access to a very attractive 8 km lock-free stretch of rural waterway to the harbour at Corbally. The Corbally extension is in-water and used as a feeder channel and all that is required to extend the navigation is to replace the culverted road crossing. There are some canal buildings at Corbally Harbour which could be saved in a restoration project.

Grand Canal, Milltown Feeder

This is the main supply to the summit level of the canal and is navigable to Milltown Bridge but navigation is limited to 0.75m depth x 1.8m headroom at Pluckerstown Bridge. Increasing the draft and headroom on the bridge would provide an alternative route for the Robertstown passenger boats giving access to Milltown village. A turning point should be made at Milltown Bridge which should be the limit of the navigation in order to protect Pollardstown Fen.

Grand Canal, Blackwood Feeder

This once navigable feeder is four miles in length and was supplied from a storage reservoir at Ballynafagh Lake, entering the Grand Canal Main Line one mile east of Robertstown. Recent studies suggest the feeder could be restored without adversely affecting the ecology of the lake. As well as supplementing the water supply to the summit level of the canal, it would provide an additional lock-free destination for tour boats from Robertstown. It is understood that ownership of the feeder was transferred by C.I.E. to Kildare County Council.

Grand Canal, Mountmellick Branch: Phase 1 to Portarlinton

The Brady Shipman Martin (BSM) Strategy states that full restoration of the Mountmellick Branch of the Grand Canal could not be justified economically, but it makes a case for the partial restoration between the junction with the Barrow Line at Monasterevin and Portarlinton, a distance of 8km with one lock (extant). According to the BSM Strategy this 'would further expand the still water canal cruising 'use-zone', add another urban destination to the network, one with an interesting industrial heritage complementing that of Monasterevin, and enhance Monasterevin as a major canal centre'.

It is recommended that CIE transfers all lands still in their possession to the new body and that Kildare and Laois Co. Councils preserve the line of the canal and the alternative route where necessary - the latter route would need to be defined by the new body following an on-site survey.

Boyne Navigation

The Boyne Navigation is not part of the connected network but was accorded high priority in the BSM Strategy for the following reasons:

- (a) It passes through an important tourist area which has now been accorded World Heritage Site Designation.
- (b) There is easy access from Dublin.
- (c) It is largely owned by An Taisce, which should lead to an easier resolution of many of the legal problems which restoration can pose.

For these reasons, it is considered, that this project should continue to be accorded a high priority among waterways which do not form part of the connected network. However consideration could be given to a phased restoration with priority being accorded to linking the new visitor centre at Donore with (a) Slane & (b) Drogheda and finally extending the navigation upstream to Navan. An Taisce handed over the stretch at the Visitor Centre to Dúchas The Heritage Service in the expectation that it would be developed in conjunction with the centre.

The fact that it may prove feasible to form a link between the Boyne Navigation and the Royal Canal, which is part of the connected network, should also be taken into account.

Erne Navigation, extension to Lough Oughter

The BSM Strategy recommended this extension as a short-to-medium term project. It would consolidate and strengthen the Upper Erne Cruising Zone and the emerging node at Belturbet in addition to providing a most attractive new destination at Killykeen Forest Park and further destinations at Killashandra and Butlersbridge. Preliminary studies undertaken by the Waterways Division of the Office of Public Works would seem to indicate that this would be an extremely costly project involving amongst other works, a new lock and weir together with considerable dredging to create a channel. This project, as with the Ulster Canal restoration, would therefore have to be undertaken with special funding.

As this project would require considerable dredging with consequent possible adverse effects on the ecology of the system, this tourism-related project needs to be carefully assessed for its heritage implications.

Tidal Navigations of the South and South East

Local authorities in this region have expressed an interest in exploring their potential.

C. Longer Term Works, some of which have natural heritage implications that would need to be carefully assessed:

Grand Canal, Mountmellick Branch: Phase 2 Portarlinton to Mountmellick.

The BSM Strategy's suggestion that only a partial restoration would be justified is based on the fact that the Portarlinton ring road has been built along the line of the canal (between the R420 and R419 roads) over a distance of 2.5 km. Thus to reinstate the canal to the south of the town would be prohibitively expensive. However, a less costly alternative might be to make the River Barrow navigable through Portarlinton, with short links to the east and south west of the town. The feasibility of this option should be studied before restoration to Mountmellick is finally ruled out. Because the Mountmellick Branch was not transferred to the Office of Public Works in 1986 and is now in multiple ownership, the line of this canal is much more vulnerable and needs to be safeguarded so that any attempt to restore it in the future is not rendered more difficult.

Corrib Navigation, restoration of the Eglinton Canal and extension into Lough Mask

The BSM Strategy stated that concern was expressed over the impact of motor vessels on fishing and wildlife on Lough Mask and for this reason no recommendations were made in respect of the extension of the Corrib Navigation into Lough Mask. Nevertheless, it was also stated that, viewed as a complete, fully navigable system, Loughs Corrib and Mask would provide a waterway system which would be an important tourist resource even though not part of the connected network. Prior to according this system its relative priority, full consideration will need to be given to all of the factors involved, not least to the feasibility of using the disused Cong Canal to connect the two lakes.

The extension into Lough Mask is firmly resisted by fishing interests and both Corrib and Mask are SPAs.

The restoration of the link with the sea through Galway via the Eglinton Canal has been rendered very difficult by the erection of a number of fixed bridges.

Grand Canal - Royal Canal link

Various possibilities for a midlands link between the Grand and Royal Canals have been discussed. The BSM Strategy gave such a link a low priority. It seems that the BSM Strategy may have underestimated the potential of such a link to increase the boat traffic on both canals and extend the connected network by some 24 km. The project is strongly supported by Westmeath Co. Council. This priority could be reviewed following a feasibility study.

River Boyne - Royal Canal link by extending the Boyne Navigation to Longwood

The potential means of linking the Boyne Navigation to the connected network has been suggested by the Boyne Branch of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland. It would involve extending the original navigation from Navan via Trim to a junction with the Royal Canal near the Boyne Aqueduct at Longwood. The practicality of such a project arises mainly as a result of the extensive dredging work carried out along the river in implementing the Boyne arterial drainage scheme. The project could open up an extensive new area of the east midlands to waterways tourism with considerable potential economic and tourism benefits for the towns of Slane, Navan and Trim, as well as several intermediate villages, and also provide an additional access to the sea from the connected network at Drogheda.