

**PE1693/Q**

Graeme Harvey submission of 28 November 2019

Information in response to the Interview with Senior Management of Scottish Canals.

As the original named petitioner, I appreciate that I no longer hold the position as chair of the LCA, however having been involved with Canal Restoration volunteer groups since 1975 I still have a strong interest in the progress of this proposal. I would also add that I am in full agreement with many of the other groups like the RYA and IWA that consideration should be given to the provision of a recourse mechanism for all waterway's users whether inland or coastal in Scotland.

There are a number of points raised by the Scottish Canals management team which I make the following comments.

With regard to comments made about British Waterways being split in 2012, the Canals south of the border were made part of the new Charity organisation the Canal and Rivers Trust and removed from British Waterways control. What was left of British Waterways remained in Scotland and still exists but operates under the Trading Name of Scottish Canals.

There is no doubt that much of the disquiet between Scottish Canals and the waterway users was the price increases foisted upon us and the way in which they were conducted. While Josie Saunders states that the Independent Consultants did eventually visit many of the mooring sites experience shows that the visiting consultants paid little or no attention to what the boaters were telling them. My personal experience of meeting said consultants at two separate locations was that they did not make any record of the conversations or make notes on the information provided. It is also worth noting that a major pricing review had already taken place between 2004 and 2006 when agreement had been reached between British Waterways and it's customers, part of the agreement included that any future price increases would be in line with inflation or RPI.

As to further consultation on this exercise the only real consultation that took place was on how the price increases would be progressed. As Richard Millar states it was promised that price increases would be restricted to a maximum of £100 per annum ( plus inflation) until such time as the designated price had been reached, however that would take some customers twenty years to reach the designated cost for their mooring. This not only indicates the dramatic increase in costs (in some cases being well in excess of 100%) but the promise of restricted increases became quite hollow when we were informed that there would be another review in five years.

The base methodology was seriously flawed to start with as much of the calculations were based on fees charged for moorings in Marinas in England which bear no comparison to the facilities available in those in Scotland. A separate report was produced by a very highly experienced canal user but was completely rejected by Scottish Canals.

It had become apparent that the introduction of the Living on Water scheme was being used as a method of justifying massive increases in the "Market Rate" and the initial method used was questionable in the extreme. Ten moorings were put up for auction on Ebay. One client made a bid for a mooring in Edinburgh, the starting price was £3,500. They were continually outbid until they reached £4,300 when they withdrew having been outbid again. Subsequently they were contacted informing them that the other bidder had "disappeared" and they could have the mooring at their final bid of £4,300. This they accepted reluctantly. In response to Rhona Mackay's comment about boaters being frightened to speak out, and one boater had allegedly been threatened with legal action, there is no allegedly about that, I was that boater. This happened well before Catherine Topley took over as CEO.

In all fairness the relationship between Scottish Canals and the boating community has seen a massive sea change for the better since Catherine Topley became CEO and it has been a great relief to us all that her tenure of that post has been resolved. There is now much better communication and co-operation with most of the Senior management team. The Lowland Canals Volunteer Group has now been expanded and includes members of the SC management team. It now "trades" under the name Scottish Waterways for All. In the meetings held to date much information has been shared by both sides and their latest consultation document was recently discussed and several changes accepted and made as the result of input from the user's side.

While this bodes well for the imminent future the real question and purpose of this petition remains. There is NO system in place to provide recourse for complaints and issues. Further there is also the ongoing question about security of tenure for boaters both residential and leisure.