



NOTES

NIWE Meeting, 9 Dec 2020 (ZOOM)

Attendees:

Organisation	Name
Canal River Trust	Danny Brennan (Chair)
Canal River Trust	Chris Barnett
Canal River Trust	Kate Hanks
De Vlaamse Waterweg nv	Véronique Sterkens
Waterways Ireland	Caroline McCarroll
Waterways Ireland	Theresa McElholm
City of Ghent	Rudy van der Ween
Watercreatieland	Marleen Maarleveld
Telemark Canal Regional Park	Dawn Marie Syvertsen
Rijkswaterstaat	Paul van der Maat
Voies Navigables de France	Nicolas Delaporte
Voies Navigables de France	Perrine Lavelle

Apologies:

Organisation	Name
Canal River Trust	Stephen Higham
Canal River Trust	Jenny Shepherd
Laggan Navigation Trust	Brenda Turnbull
Provincie Antwerpen	Sabine Denissen
Waterboard Hollands Noorderkwartier	Manon van Meer

1. Questions about previous meetings notes.

DB will update previous notes as final unless further amendments arrive. CMcC asked about the benefit of a full version for internal use + a shorter public facing version for the website. This was considered by all as excellent idea. CB agreed to do this (CMcC subsequently offered to prune this year's notes).

2. Round table on COVID (and NON-COVID!) present positions/issues/updates (All)

Chris (CRT) Most waterways operating fully - but subject to local lockdowns.

Paul (RWS) business as usual operationally, no current restrictions on waterways - but second NL lockdown may change this slightly. He will be WFH until September 2021! He had been contacted by Omrine Wilson from STC / the *Competing* project who had presented their work in *River* at our Rotterdam meeting in July 2019. Great to see this networking through NIWE.

Rudy (Gent) Second lockdown - Flanders more challenged than Wallonia at this point. Most Work From Home (WFH) until March/April (so no NIWE meeting in Gent until at least May 2021)

Véronique (DVW) confirmed all Flemish waterways are open though - with no restrictions.

Marleen (WRN) Dutch waterways are largely open. She confirmed that WRN are very keen to work with NIWE to develop and participate in an EU funded project in 2021. Marleen asked



about the use of “Euromapping” maps - Rudy will check copyright issues with DE-M (who subsequently agreed to allow free use for NIWE members as thanks for supplying info for maps)

Nicolas (VNF) Business as usual on FR waterways for freight. Not so good for leisure boating and cruises. But not as bad as feared at present. Summer numbers only down 20%, Leisure hire held up well, and more local usage/visits. Big problem was that cruise hire was down by 80%. Fortunately, no significant company bankruptcies.

Véronique asked about the 20km / 3hours limit on boat cruising and if this applied to leisure boats as well? Nicolas confirmed.

Caroline (WI) Different COVID-19 rules exist in IRE and NI, infection rates are much higher in NI. There has been significant pressure from the business community to reopen the economy in December, and this has already commenced in IRE. As previously reported, there continues to be high ‘green/blue’ leisure use - in fact, 2020 was the best ever holiday boat hire season and new markets have emerged to meet domestic demand; fleet sizes are reported by the sector to increase in 2021 to meet expected continued domestic market growth.

Mentioned the NI/IE cross border Ulster Canal Restoration project’ (see below) which is important for WI particularly in the context of Brexit.

Mentioned the NI/IE cross border ‘project’ (see below) which is important for WI. Wanted more info from partners by next meeting to keep up momentum on this.

Dawn (Telemark) Generally OK in Norway. 50/50 split WFH and ‘at work’ Waterway season ended but like IE the business has been good. High(er) Telemark Canal usage and good holiday rental income seen.

Explained reasons for dropping out from NIWE (purely a prioritisation/financial decision - and hope to retain strong links and will gladly help through her role as Smart Regions Co-ordinator for the North Sea Commission. DB confirmed that common interest will ensure we keep in touch and hopefully do business in the next phase of EU programmes.

Interesting to note that NSR areas enlarged to include Northern France and more of Belgium and Netherlands - so there may be opportunities for more NIWE partners to participate in NSR projects as well as NWE. Paul vM mentioned the many ‘Inland Ports’ (far from the coast) being created!

Danny thanked Dawn for her huge contribution to NIWE - was certain we would keep in touch and continue the excellent relationship we have with Norway.

Perrine (VNF) gave an update about the Seine/Schelde project which continues to 2022-23. VNF received funding for large infrastructure works - including modernisation and mechanisation of locks, automated control centres, dredging etc. This all helps improve connections to Europe’s TEN-T routes.

3. Post COVID Project: lessons on retention of waterway engagement and use - building the base position + Waterway Engagement Study



Caroline gave an update and thanked members for their comments on the Questionnaire. (see additional comments from Theresa).

This is also a very important piece of work for IRE and NI. The UK and IRE governments, through a recent meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, are very interested in the 'post Covid' research WI is leading and have asked to be kept informed.

The research findings will also provide demonstration of the value of Blue/Green space in the context of the current cross-border proposal to restore the Ulster Canal, the subject of a €12.2 million 'Rural Regeneration and Development' proposal submitted by WI to the Irish government on 1st December. The project is located 1 km from the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland - the border area is where Brexit is likely to have the greatest adverse impacts if an appropriate deal between the UK government and the EU is not secured.

There is an opportunity to present a contemporary research report of use to all waterway organisations across Europe. It is a strong and 'news-worthy' story which could also unlock involvement in a future EU funded project – to be followed up.

CMcC confirmed that there was a need for NIWE group to agree (1) Content of the survey questionnaire (2) Timescales for implementation (3) How and who within NIWE member organisations will conduct the surveys?

Theresa confirmed CRT, Watercreatienerland, and Rijkswaterstaat have provided initial inputs in relation to the research. Any further member inputs are invited, in order to finalise the questionnaire and ensure 'bespoke' questions can be included that will gather information that may be more relevant to individual NIWE members. If no further comments/questions are received, WI will finalise and issue to members for implementation.

Danny said the main purpose of this exercise was to capture the positive things that have come out of the COVID-19 crisis. This is a 'good news story' amongst all the bad. How we capture the (increased) customer needs is now very important so that we can fashion ways to retain and build upon new interest in waterway use and support.

Marleen said we may get different answers depending on frequency of visits (will get different answers if sending the Questionnaire out in June than in January? Fast changing situation (had been improving) and we need to be careful to consider these seasonable influences affecting data?

Véronique was left off the email by mistake - but would contribute DVW input (duly sent 22 Dec)

Nicolas reminded us that VNF cannot receive word docs by email (IT security reasons) Need PDFs

Véronique and Nicolas both said we must be sure who we're targeting with this research.

Caroline confirmed the purpose and context was set out in her briefing paper of 10 Sept, with the target research group being all users '**On and Along**' the waterways. The research was urgently needed to capture this unique time in our shared history, and while the desire was to complete the surveys during the same time periods in each country/region, this may prove difficult in the short term if further lockdown restrictions are in place. The scheduling of the survey research will be reviewed at the next NIWE meeting with the Spring period hopefully being a possible implementation date.



Partners will be responsible for carrying out their own research and analysis (so it's relevant to their organisation), NIWE can then produce a bigger, consolidated report.

Danny asked Caroline to summarise this approach.

Marleen said we could use existing data e.g. boat rental data (see also Nicolas's similar point above).

Danny proposed some QUICK WINS summarising the (later, more detailed) research, e.g.:

- Upsides from crisis (i.e. our increased usage)
- Downsides
- 'Reflections' Lessons learned. How can we sustain the increased interest and usage?

Chris will develop a first draft of a document that summarises the above elements of the discussion at our previous meetings on this as a basis to proceed with a summary "issues and lessons" report.

4. **Wellbeing Project: next steps**

Chris reported on a very useful Theme Group Meeting on 2nd Dec. Highlights were:

- Discussions on how we can build up the NIWE "Wellbeing Evidence Library";
- WI led survey of Covid impacts and how to retain higher levels of engagement with waterways as a result (see elsewhere in Notes);
- Horizon 2020 Blue Health project <https://bluehealth2020.eu/>. This has much useful data, reports, and tools - all about wellbeing benefits to be gained from being near water.

NL said VNF had fairly recently surveyed over 3,00 people about their leisure use of waterways so this data will be useful to include in the WI / NIWE report. Plenty of other info they can build in:

- Their 'nautical' activity experiences (??)
- Their 'Savoir Faire Tourism' research of historic / spectacular sites and how / need to improve visitor numbers through smarter marketing (Danny suggested each partner provide a case study to send to VNF to help build this up?)

5. **Issues to return to at the February meeting:**

- I2I project update/next steps (CB/All)
- IWTS (SH/CB)
- COVID-19 survey research
- Green Deal proposal (if Brenda can join us)
- Joint NIWE/IWI meeting Dublin Spring 2021 (CMcC/All)

6. **Next meeting**

Friday 12th February 1pm (UK) 2pm (CET).

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