



Our waterways - a plan for 2025

Date: April 2025

Version: 2

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment.

We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth.

We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

Published by:

Environment Agency
Horizon House, Deanery Road,
Bristol BS1 5AH

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

© Environment Agency 2025

All rights reserved. This document may be reproduced with prior permission of the Environment Agency.

Further copies of this report are available from our publications catalogue: www.gov.uk/government/publications or our National Customer Contact Centre: 03708 506 506

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction.....	4
How we developed the plan	4
Our objectives.....	5
How we will deliver the plan	8
How we will update on our progress	8
Would you like to find out more about us or your environment?	9

Introduction

Welcome to the plan for our waterways in 2025. We are the second largest navigation authority in the UK, responsible for managing 1,010km of inland waterways.

This includes:

- the non-tidal River Thames
- Anglian waterways
- Medway navigation
- rivers Wye and Lugg
- Rye and Lydney harbours

We have developed this plan in response to feedback from our customers that the service we provide is not meeting their expectations. We share our customers' concerns, and it is important for us to respond quickly to the feedback we have received.

We have developed this plan so we can:

- focus our resources on what will make the biggest impact for our customers and the waterway communities we serve
- work more effectively and efficiently with the funding and resources we have

The plan focuses on the main boating season from April to October 2025. It has a short-term focus, while we work to:

- establish the future ambition of our waterways
- better understand our longer-term funding position

The emphasis is on our core boating customers who contribute towards the cost of the service. However, it is important that everyone who benefits from our waterways can enjoy their experience.

We recognise this plan will not address all the issues or meet everyone's expectations. We have faced challenges from increased inflation and pressures on funding over recent years which has impacted the service. This plan will help us to achieve as many of the improvements as we can.

How we developed the plan

We have developed this plan at pace in response to customer feedback from our boat registration charges consultation in 2024. This is reflected in the approach we have taken and the level of detail.

We identified the objectives and priorities by:

- reviewing and analysing our risks
- using customer feedback
- engaging with staff representatives

We developed a draft proposal which we shared with all waterways staff for their feedback. This draft proposal was also shared with our national and local

stakeholder groups for their input. We used the feedback we received from our staff and stakeholders to revise the proposals and create the final plan.

The final plan focuses on 4 objectives, and the relevant activities we will prioritise to help us achieve the objectives.

Our objectives

The objectives in 2025 are to:

- keep our staff and customers safe
- make improvements to the customer experience
- secure more income to move towards a financially sustainable service
- describe the future ambition for our waterways and how we will get there

For each objective we have set out the most important activities that will contribute towards achieving them. We have also included the information we will share to demonstrate our progress.

Objective 1: keep our staff and customers safe

Our top objective is to keep our staff and customers safe whilst working on and using our waterways. This includes:

- site safety
- how activities are done
- the information we share
- regulation of the boats using our waterways

The main activities we will focus on to achieve objective 1 are as follows.

Activity 1.1

Public safety risk assessments (PSRA) examine our assets and determine if they are safe. If not, they identify actions to make them so.

We will:

- prioritise any outstanding public safety risk actions on a risk basis
- continue reviewing our assets in line with the requirements

Activity 1.2

We will complete a project that reviews our ways of working to protect the safety of our lock and weir keepers in all their activities. This includes during incident response. Safe operation of our locks and weirs also protects the safety of our customers.

Activity 1.3

We will continue to maintain high health and safety standards in the way that we work. We will do this in both routine activities and incident response by following our operational instructions.

How we will demonstrate progress

We will:

- report on the number of public safety risk assessments carried out, the number of actions identified as a result, and the number of actions completed
- complete the ways of working project and update the operational instructions that set out how our staff do specific tasks, if necessary
- share our analysis of any reported health and safety incidents

Objective 2: make improvements to the customer experience

We want to make improvements to customer experience. This includes:

- navigating our waterways
- the visibility of our staff
- the availability of information

The main activities we will focus on to achieve objective 2 are as follows.

Activity 2.1

We are facing significant challenges in the health of our assets. We want to work effectively to manage the risk of any further decline in asset performance. We also want to improve the availability of our network as much as we can.

We will:

- inspect and assess our priority assets ahead of the boating season to understand their condition and any impacts of high flows on our structures after the winter
- aim to address any issues in advance of the peak boating season where we can make repairs efficiently

Activity 2.2

We want to be more visible in what we do. We will proactively let our communities know what we are achieving through targeted engagement such as social media and press releases. We will also explore creating a National Navigation Facebook account to make information more accessible.

Activity 2.3

We will improve our digital services by expanding what can be done online via gov.uk and online payments.

Activity 2.4

Where possible, within our available resource, we will look to focus our staff at important locations at important times through the season.

How we will demonstrate progress

We will:

- report on the number of actions completed to address any asset defects
- share information on the percentage of locks receiving a pre-season operational check
- update on implementation of the new defect reporting procedure to improve efficiency
- feedback on the number of press releases and social media account posts,

- with an assessment of their reach
- update on the number of new digital products provided
- keep you informed via social media of our activities at important times and locations

Objective 3: secure more income to move towards a more financially sustainable service

Money is critical to deliver the best possible service. The navigation service is supported by:

- grant in aid funding from government
- charge income from boat registration, moorings and other services
- commercial income

We want to ensure we are maximising this income and moving towards the financial sustainability of the service.

The main activities we will focus on to achieve objective 3 are as follows.

Activity 3.1

We will prioritise compliance checks for boat registration. We expect everyone with a boat on our waterways to register and comply with our registration requirements. This is because it:

- is the legal requirement
- is fairer to everyone
- will bring in essential income to help us provide our service

Activity 3.2

There are commercial opportunities across our waterways and the land we own. We want to realise the maximum income from these. We will continue to carry out commercial improvement projects and define our commercial strategy.

How we will demonstrate progress

We will:

- report on our compliance activity and outcomes and the number of boat registrations against 2024 figures
- report the number of commercial projects completed and any additional income these will raise
- publish a navigation commercial strategy

Objective 4: describe the plan for navigation in future years

This is a short-term plan to respond to an immediate need. It also aligns with a one-year settlement for our grant in aid funding. We have developed it with the main principles we will include within any long-term strategy:

- safety as a priority
- valuing our customers

- being financially sustainable

We will use this year to look further into the future and plan on a longer-term basis.

The main activities we will focus on to achieve objective 4 are as follows.

Activity 4.1

We will respond to the Spending Review 2025 settlement with a plan for delivery. We will also set out our plan to take our navigable waterways and harbours into the future, so they are:

- financially sustainable
- viable in a climate crisis

Activity 4.2

We will build on our current data to establish consistent baselines. This will improve our future planning and reporting and provide the information we need for confident decision making.

How we will demonstrate progress

We will:

- publish a new plan before April 2026 with a longer-term outlook
- confirm the baseline data sets that we will use for future reporting and decision making

How we will progress the plan

We will work together as one business across all our waterways to achieve progress this plan with the resources we have available. We will use the priorities to focus our work and to adapt to challenges if they arise.

At the end of 2025, we will use evidence to show the progress we have made against the 4 objectives.

How we will update on our progress

We will:

- report to our stakeholder groups on our progress halfway through the boating season and at the end
- update all our boat registration customers in their registration renewals at the end of the year
- communicate our progress throughout the year through social media and other communication channels

Would you like to find out more about us or your environment?

Then call us on

03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Or visit our website

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

incident hotline

0800 807060 **(24 hours)**

Floodline

0345 988 1188 **(24 hours)**

Find out about call charges (<https://www.gov.uk/call-charges>)

Environment first

Are you viewing this onscreen? Please consider the environment and only print if absolutely necessary. If you are reading a paper copy, please don't forget to reuse and recycle.