

Navigation Committee

03 April 2025

Agenda item number 9

Abandoned and sunken vessels and financial implications

Report by Director of Operations

Purpose

To update the Navigation Committee members on the financial risks that abandoned and sunken vessels have on the navigation budget, existing mitigations and progress in removing non-compliant vessels from broads' waters.

Broads Plan context

Theme C2 – Maintain existing water space

Theme C4 - Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviour on the waterways

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Sunken vessel notification trends	3
3.	Insurance	3
4.	Current list of vessels	4
5.	Cost of living crisis and the effect on boat owners	5
6.	Existing mitigations	5
7.	Financial risks	6
8.	An option to reduce the financial burden	7

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988, Section 10(1)(a) states: *The Authority shall maintain the navigation area for the purposes of navigation to such a standard as appears to it to be reasonably required: and*

(b) take such steps to improve and develop as it thinks fit.

Schedule 5(12) (1) states: *The Authority may raise, remove or destroy any vessel which has been sunk, stranded or abandoned, ¹{or which is unserviceable}*

- 1.2. On 7 November 2024, a [Navigation Committee paper](#) (agenda item 9) described the terminology, highlighted the concern of unserviceable vessels and the increasing trend in non-compliant vessels.
- 1.3. The powers bestowed in Section 10 and Schedule 5(12) of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 mean the Authority has discretion when it comes to removing wrecked vessels, and the Senior Ranger Team uses several factors to assist them in deciding on appropriate actions.
 - i. The position of the wreck within the navigation area;
 - ii. The risk to other navigators striking the wreck;
 - iii. The pollution risk (for example, from oils, fuels or the vessel contents)
 - iv. The safety of those involved in the recovery; and,
 - v. The degree of specialists required, for example, a dive team, suitably sized cranes and other plant and equipment (e.g. airbags).
- 1.4. We exercise the powers under paragraph 12 of Schedule 5 of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 (Removal of wrecks). The Broads Authority uses a 28-day² removal of wreck process, issuing a Sunken Vessel Notice (SVN). This process explains that the Authority intends to remove and dispose of the vessel after 7 days from the date of this notice. It also explains that the Authority can recover expenses incurred in raising, removing, storing, disposing, or destroying vessels. This notice allows the registered owner to remove the vessel within the notice period.
- 1.5. The process of raising sunken vessels can be broken into three categories:
 - i. Smaller vessels. These have usually taken on water or are submerged near moorings or land and can generally be handled quickly by the Rangers. These vessels can typically be pumped out and raised with minimal resources.
 - ii. Our in-house team can recover larger vessels or those in deeper waters. The recovery will be planned based on the availability of necessary equipment (e.g., 360 excavators, Nato floats, cranes, etc.). This scheduling depends on the urgency of the recovery; it may be carried out during regular operations or before a scheduled construction project.
 - iii. Vessels in deeper waters. Those requiring a more specialised approach, whether due to size, difficult tidal conditions, or a skills factor, will require the

¹ As amended by Schedule 7 of The Broads Act 2009

² If the risk to navigators is high, we can use a shortened notice period, usually 14 days

engagement of external contractors with the necessary expertise and equipment.

- 1.6. In **every case** of a sunken vessel, the navigation hazard will be marked with the most appropriate means to warn other navigators, and these hazard marks will be checked and maintained until the hazard is removed.

2. Sunken vessel notification trends

- 2.1 Table 1 shows the trend of abandoned, sunken or unserviceable vessels dealt with by the Ranger Team.

Table 1

	Abandoned	Sunken	Unserviceable	Other*
2023	8	8	0	3
2024	15	6	3	5
2025 (to date)	0	4	5	0

*where we have not issued a notice but taken on responsibility for a vessel after illness, police involvement, etc.

3. Insurance

- 3.1. For a vessel to be classified as 'Compliant' to be on broads' waters, it requires:

- i. a current toll for the class of vessel;
- ii. correctly displayed Registration Marks;
- iii. a valid Boat Safety Scheme Certificate (If applicable); and,
- iv. insurance.

- 3.2. The insurance requirement is laid out in the Broads Authority Act 2009 Section 14(2), which states:

(2) The owner or master of a vessel to which this section applies shall not keep, let for hire or use the vessel in the navigation area or on adjacent waters unless there is in force about the vessel a policy of insurance complying with the requirements of Schedule 3.

Schedule 3(1) states:

A policy required under section 14(2) shall insure the owner of the vessel and such other person, persons or classes of persons (if any) as is or as are authorised by the owner to have control of the vessel, in respect of any liability which may be incurred by the owner, or any such other person, resulting from the presence of the vessel in the navigation area or on adjacent waters, in respect of death of, or bodily injury to, any person or any damage to property.

4. Current list of vessels

- 4.1. Table 2 contains the current list of vessels and comments on the actions being taken (as of 18 February 2025).

Table 2

Vessel Name	Location	Comments	Estimate costs
Tauri 1288B	River Yare	Divers have assessed the wreck and quotes received for 3rd party contractors to recover.	Tauri & La Bergere combined quote of £72,000.
La Bergere 276F	River Yare	Recovery is required as in the navigation channel, working with the registered owner to recover costs.	
Windrush M392	River Yare	C&M crews recovered, no scrap value.	In-house recovery £900
Black & Blue (day boat)	River Yare	Recovered to dockyard. Awaiting disposal, no scrap value.	In-house recovery £900
Aziz 458Y	River Yare	Sunken near timber dolphins is making a recovery challenging—a possible recovery with a workboat Shoveller is possible.	In-house recovery £1,200
Loch Leven T102	River Yare	C&M crews will recover using Dredging Grab and dispose.	In-house recovery £1,200

- 4.2. Table 3 identifies vessels already recovered in 2025.

Table 3

Vessel Name	Location	Comments	Estimate costs
Triggers Broom	Dockyard	Sunken Vessel Notice	Awaiting crushing at the dockyard
Fait Rien	Dockyard	Sunken Vessel Notice	Awaiting crushing at the dockyard
USV	Dockyard	Sunken Vessel Notice	Awaiting crushing at the dockyard

5. Cost of living crisis and the effect on boat owners

- 5.1. A further worrying trend, a tactic that the Ranger Team has noticed has increased, is the 'gifting' of a vessel to another person. This 'gifting' happens when a vessel is no longer wanted or affordable (due to costs of mooring, maintenance, running costs, general upkeep, etc) and the craft has little to no resale value. In these cases, the vessel is 'gifted', and in some instances, these are given into the possession of existing non-compliant boaters, who add the craft to their flotilla of non-compliant boats or who accept the 'gifted' craft and abandon their existing, but worse conditioned vessel in favour of the gifted vessel.
- 5.2. Another method deployed to pass on unwanted vessels is using social media sites like eBay Marketplace to advertise the vessel as 'free' and other social sites where crafts are advertised for a few hundred pounds if the buyer collects. These tend to be local craft to the Broads.
- 5.3. We have also had a recent case where a marina providing private moorings moved a vessel from its basin to a Broads Authority 24-hour mooring because the vessel owner had failed to pay their berthing fees. Despite the local Rangers knowing where the vessel had been privately moored for many years and after contacting the registered owner (who was living abroad at the time the vessel was moved), we were unable to provide definitive proof that the marina company had moved the vessel, leaving the Authority with the responsibility for dealing with the abandoned vessel. The current estimate of time and expense in removing this large vessel from the 24-hour mooring to a safe location is £4,000.

6. Existing mitigations

- 6.1. All vessels deemed to be wrecked (as defined by the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 Section 12(1)) will require Ranger resources and Ranger time to resolve, and the level of input is dependent on several factors:
 - i. Is the vessel compliant (tolled, BSS, insured, correct Registration Marks)?
 - ii. Can the registered keeper be identified and contacted?
 - iii. Can the vessel be pumped out and re-floated using equipment onboard Ranger launches?
 - iv. Was the wreck discovered during a Ranger patrol, or was the Authority notified via the owner/member of the public?
 - v. The vessel construction material.
- 6.2. If the steps above are completed, the local Ranger Team will often deal with the situation as part of their everyday tasks and report to Broads Control once the wreck is recovered and returned to its home berth or owner.

- 6.3. However, an increasing trend with wrecked vessels is the number of these wrecks Rangers are dealing with, where the results of the enquiries in the steps above are unclear, and extra diligence is required to solve the problem. We see the River Yare as a hot spot for wrecked vessels (see Table 2 above), and the block size and weight of wrecked vessels are increasing.
- 6.4. This trend means the Authority's existing equipment (used for waterway maintenance and dredging) is not rated to lift the vessels; in deeper waters like the River Yare, we need specialist divers to survey the wrecks before recovery, and we need to bring in contractors with specialised airbags and lifting capabilities to recover these wrecks.
- 6.5. The Authority uses the '*Unserviceable Vessel*' powers to prevent known vessels from sinking and becoming a more expensive problem in the waterways; the ranger service is already using these revised powers effectively.

7. Financial risks

- 7.1. The recovery of a wreck does not have a consistent and stable costing as many factors need to be considered, such as size, location, depth of water, the duration of the downed vessel, the level of staff and equipment required to recover it or the need to employ specialist contractors, including divers and applying the strict health and safety all these actions require, as well as tides and weather conditions. Other factors, such as time to locate the owner, liaising with insurance companies or more punitive enforcement actions, such as debt recovery, all add to the removal of wreck time and cost.
- 7.2. Using Rangers and equipment commonly found on a launch, the historic wreck recovery fees can be circa £400 - £500. If the wreck requires additional inputs from Construction & Maintenance teams and equipment, the costs typically increase to around £600 - £1,000. However, this does not factor in the disruption and time lost on the programmed tasks and projects that these crews have been moved away from and does not include the expensive mobilisation costs to get equipment and plant to the wreckage site and back again. Finally, the high costs of needing specialist contractors and dive teams can quickly add up to £40,000 - £80,000 just for recovery, still leaving disposal fees.
- 7.3. In **ALL** cases, the Authority looks to recover costs from the registered vessel owner. If the wreck has residual value after recovery, we can sell the recovered vessel to recoup losses. In some cases, we pursue debt recovery through the court process, but obtaining a 100% cost recovery is rare, meaning the navigation budget bears the brunt of this navigational safety requirement.

8. An option to reduce the financial burden

- 8.1. Given the high recovery costs and the scarce and expensive vessel disposal opportunities offered to broads' users, the Navigation Committee is asked to consider a potential scheme to reduce the high recovery time and expense.

Amnesty/Buy-back Scheme – Within a period of the Authority's choosing, allow vessel owners to bring their unwanted craft to the Dockyard. They can be officially handed over to the Authority and disposed of, ensuring correct breakage and disposal protocols are maintained. This scheme would allow unwanted vessels to be disposed of responsibly. This scheme could be offered free of charge or at a small fee. Once the vessel had been handed over, it could be assessed for spare parts or salvage opportunities. The benefits of this scheme are:

- i. Proactive cost savings as the vessel would be dealt with whilst afloat;
 - ii. Timesaving as an investigation into ownership would be removed;
 - iii. Over time, this approach would slowly remove unserviceable vessels from the network; and,
 - iv. Provide a service to vessel owners who no longer want the expense of a vessel's upkeep and provide responsible disposal opportunities.
- 8.2. Where vessels are offered for low resale values (for example, free or between £100 - £500, as seen on social media sites), provide a scheme whereby the Authority could consider purchasing the vessel (after considering its retail value). This would allow us to take charge of the vessel and prevent it from becoming a 'wrecked vessel,' entering the non-compliant boating community, or becoming a 'never-completed project.' Again, these vessels could be stripped for parts before being scrapped at the dockyard facility.
- 8.3. As demonstrated in this report, the upward trend is for more vessels to fall into the unserviceable or wrecked category, resulting in ever-increasing costs to the navigation budget. Without a proactive strategy, the costs to the Authority of recovering wrecked (sunken or abandoned) vessels are forecast to increase, taking the much-needed navigation income away from river maintenance and moorings and dealing reactively with non-compliant vessels.
- 8.4. The increase in wrecked vessels is not just a Broads Authority issue, with many UK waterways reporting increases. On 21 February, the BBC News (online service) reported on the problem faced in Cornwall [Registration 'would help deal with abandoned boats in Cornwall' - BBC News](#). The BBC online News covered the removal of wrecks by Bath and Northeast Somerset Council [Relief over plans to remove sinking boats from Bath river - BBC News](#)

Author: Rob Rogers

Date of report: 05 March 2025

Background papers: [Navigation Committee papers, 7 November 2024, Removal of Wrecks
Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: Theme C