

Navigation Committee

03 April 2025

Agenda item number 10

Report on Surveys by Rangers 2024

Report by Head of Safety Management

Purpose

To provide the Committee with the 2024 results from Ranger Surveys carried out on hirers of paddle craft and hired motor vessels.

Broads Plan context

Theme C: Maintaining and enhancing the navigation. C4 – Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviours on the waterway.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. During the 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons, Rangers were tasked to undertake the Hire Boat Questionnaire at Super Safety Events and at other random times when an opportunity existed. This data gathering was made possible due to the ongoing additional resource we had available from the Assistant Rangers. The purpose of the questions was to gauge key aspects from the helm of the hire craft, such as how often they hire vessels, whether have they seen the safety videos, did they get a handover, what was the duration of the handover and how confident do they feel to helm the vessel.
- 1.2. The questionnaire was developed specifically to gather data relating to the hired vessels' helms competence, as anecdotally there was a perception that hirers were largely inexperienced and the handover instruction was often not adequate, following a surge in new waterway users post-Covid.

1.3. In the 2024/25 season, Rangers were again tasked to undertake the Hire Boat survey.

2. Hire Paddle Craft Survey results

2.1. During the summer season, 86 hired paddle craft users were surveyed; the questions followed those asked of other hire vessels and the key results are summarised as follows:

Broads Paddle Hirers Survey Result main findings from this year’s Ranger Survey have been compared to the previous year survey in the table below.

| Question | 2023% responses (sample size 150) | 2024% responses (sample size 86) |
|--|--|---|
| Did you review the free animated online videos - Yes | 24% | 13% |
| Trail run/show out duration less than 10 minutes | 33% | 34% |
| Trail run/show out duration between 10-20 minutes | 49% | 43% |
| Trail run/show out duration more than 20 minutes | 18% | 6% |
| Percentage of hirers not receiving a trial run | 0% | 17% |
| Were the dangers of boating with alcohol consumption discussed with you? – Yes | 44% | 29% |

2.2. Main statistical analysis of interest follows from comparing the years 2023 and 2024:

- In 2024, 69% (58 people) did not receive a recommendation to watch the online free animated safety videos. Also, in 2024, 13% (11% less than last year) confirmed they had watched the free animated online videos.
- A question was asked testing the licensing requirement for any person hiring a paddle craft to be given a trial run to demonstrate their basic competency. Of those responding, 43% (36 people) were provided with a 10-20 minute on-water trial. They were advised on waterway safety and protocol (keeping to the right, what to do if a capsizes, wearing buoyancy aid, and safe passage through bridges).
- 17% (14 people) had no on-water trial or ‘show out’. They confirmed in responses that they were given information on the following, which are stated here with the averaged percentages that those people received this information (keeping to the

right 95%, what to do if a capsizes 62%, wearing buoyancy aid 98%, safe passage through bridges 39%)

- 78% were advised on the best places to paddle and areas to avoid (busy or heavy boat numbers).
- A reduction from 44% of respondents in 2023 to 29% in 2024 confirmed that the dangers of boating with alcohol consumption had been discussed with them.
- When asked about confidence to control the paddle craft when first setting off, 37% were very confident. This improved to 49% after the initial time spent on the water.
- When asked “which best describes your group?”
 1. 6% were ‘lone’ paddlers.
 2. 28% were family groups (including children under 16)
 3. 34% were family groups (no children under 16)
 4. 28% were friends

3. Hired Paddle Survey Conclusions

- 3.1. This is the second year of results, so analysis between the two is useful to ascertain any trends and patterns and to build up a better picture of safety in an area where participation is increasing.
- 3.2. The paddling video was updated with added safety advice in 2023. Through the work of the Safety and Communications Teams, we will continue to do more work to publicise the online animated safety videos within the paddle hire sector.
- 3.3. During the licensing in 2025/26, the Hire Boat Licensing Officer will work with Paddle Hire Companies to further ensure that show-outs and in-water trails are provided to hirers, especially since 17% of respondents were not offered this essential element. Focusing on the dangers of boating and alcohol consumption will also be important in communications with yards hiring such vessels.
- 3.4. The last part of the survey asks paddlers to state what further improvements they would like, and these follow commonly raised topics like more pontoon moorings, more places to stop and get out to explore, specific signage for paddlers specifically regarding distance to the next village or stopping area and increased areas just for paddleboarders. Paddle UK visited the Broads in the summer of 2024 and favourably audited the trails, signage and launch points. These aspects of the paddle survey are being monitored and considered for any potential improvements including as part of the Integrated Access Strategy.

4. Broads Hire Craft Survey 2024/25

- 4.1. Results from this year’s Ranger Survey have been compared to the 2022/23 surveys in the table below.

| Question | 2022% responses (sample size 724) | 2023% responses (sample size 427) | 2024% responses (sample size 558) |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| First Time Hirers | 30% | 28% | 29% |
| Did you review the free animated online videos | 74% | 80% | 68% |
| Did you get a Broadcaster, and were you directed to safety pages? | 80% | 87% | 84% |
| Handover duration was between 20-30 minutes | 40% | 43% | 38% |
| Handover duration 30-45 between minutes | 20% | 16% | 19% |
| Percentage of hirers not receiving a trial run | 12% | 10% | 13% |
| Were the dangers of boating with alcohol consumption discussed with you? – Yes | 50% | 51% | 55% |

- 4.2. The 2024 survey results are similar in most cases in percentages compared to the previous two years, with some factors that are nearly static and minor differences between what is required and expected for yards and their hirers. The statistics show there is a good spread of information supplied and demonstrated at handover on key boat handling issues, like judging speed, passing under low bridges, person overboard drills, and advice on personal flotation aids. There is room for improvement and to continue emphasising the importance of these areas.
- 4.3. It is important that the statistics on the messaging concerning alcohol and boating continue to be disseminated and improved, as this is shown to be a significant factor in some of the reported incidents and accidents. The Hire Boat Licensing Officer will be continuing to include information on these topics during site visits to hire yards and facilities. In addition, our communications team will include information relating to these highlighted factors in social media posts throughout the season.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The Rangers' surveys are a health check of the competence and understanding of hired vessel helms on our waters, and the results help to counter anecdotal stories of inexperienced hirers being 'let loose' on our waterways.

- 5.2. For 2025, the agreed and confirmed reduction in ranger team staff will impact the Authority's ability to collect these surveys practically in the field. Work is currently underway, so they will continue to be available online and promoted via other means, including QR codes on leaflets in Broads Authority tourist information centres.
- 5.3. A continuing concern remains that the 2024 survey shows that 13% of helms reported having no 'show-out', which is slightly higher than the previous two years. This demonstration of competence under the Hire Boat Code is critical and a compulsory element regardless of experience. For the 2025 season, the Hire Boat Licensing Officer will again be picking up this issue, paying particular reference to hire companies during spot checks, especially when a no-show-out is identified. Rangers and field staff working with the boating public will continue to be vigilant and proactive and report such issues whenever they become aware of them.
- 5.4. Additional safety communication opportunities are being deployed, such as new floating keyrings that will be distributed to all boatyards and recommended wearing lifejackets. The Norfolk Water Safety Forum, which the Authority works closely with, will also be carrying out lifejacket usage promotion with boatyard staff in key areas during 2025.
- 5.5. At the Great Yarmouth Yacht Station, where some of the most demanding boating conditions can be experienced, significant new safety signage will be installed, and important safety information will also be distributed in a leaflet to all site users.
- 5.6. Attributing metrics to health and safety on Broads' waters is problematic as significant and multiple factors influence boating incidents and accidents. The safety measures brought in following lessons learnt from past incidents demonstrate that safety awareness remains generally at a good level. The Broads Authority will continue to play its part to educate, inform and enforce safety. The Hire Boat Licensing Officer and Rangers will maintain seasonal on-the-spot health checks on hire companies as well as licensing audits on hire boat and hire paddle craft operators in 2025. We will plan to do a repeat run of the 'Fast Water Training' in 2026 at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station for all hire operators as a refresher from recent previous years and to maintain skills.

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[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: C4 – Maintain and improve safety and security standards and user behaviours on the waterways.