

INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

PETERBOROUGH BRANCH

Memorandum

Date: 23rd November 2007

To: Jo Gilbertson

From: Nigel Long

Subject: IWA Restructuring

- 1) This branch proposed that the membership should continue to be represented on a geographic basis at the highest levels of the organisation. Council has consistently set its face against such a solution. We remain adamant that in a membership organisation such as the IWA such representation is required if membership is to mean anything and to this we will no doubt have to return at a later date.
- 2) We draw attention to the paper from Lichfield Branch dated 26th October 2007 in which it was pointed out that Council had yet to release the summary which it no doubt has of the responses of Regions and Branches to the consultation process. We add our voice in support of that branch's request that the summary be made available at the earliest opportunity: such a summary will, of course, need to be updated from time to time as further contributions are received. If Council has decided not to distribute any summaries we ask that it publish a justification of its position: with its present silence on this subject members are having to form their own views as to the reason for that silence, which views are not necessarily flattering to Council or good for the reputation of the IWA.
- 3) The primary purpose of this memo is to address certain of the decisions made by Council as a result of the paper dated 30th October. Noting that it is still work in progress and the invitation for further contributions we set out a number of points for further consideration coupling with it a request for a response in the next paper relating to Council's intentions.

A. Skills of Trustee

The paper sets out what skills are perceived to be required from trustees. They can be divided into "hard" e.g. legal, financial, human resources and "soft" e.g. knowledge of inland waterways, their users and of members. Any long serving volunteer within the IWA who has also used the waterway system could credibly claim to hold the soft skills. The original purpose of the whole restructuring process was said to be to recruit to Council those with hard skills. The current proposal is that all members of the Trustee Board should be elected in an open election. We do not see in the proposed mechanism any way of ensuring that those with the hard skills would be elected. Rather, we would expect a Board so elected to consist of those well-known to the voting membership of the heartland of the IWA. They would be generalists with soft

skills [like the present elected portion of Council]. What steps, if any, is Council proposing to alter this?

B. The Executive Committee

Is it being suggested that the creation of a new two- tier system of Trustee Board and Executive Committee is required to comply with Charity legislation requirements? If so, have there been letters of complaint from the Charity Commission as to the present system and in what terms? It is not accepted by us that a new two- tier system needs to be created in order to enable the Trustees to meet their legal obligations.

The current model, once the work of the national committees and subsidiary companies has been fully delegated, is of a Council (all members of course being directors/trustees) which decides on strategy and delegates functions to the committees/ companies for execution. Council and the committees and companies are serviced by a paid staff.

Given the size of the IWA this is a system which is effective in terms of resources and has over the years delivered. We are totally unconvinced of the necessity for, or purpose of, inserting between the Trustees and the committees etc. an additional subsidiary body to be known as the Executive Committee. We would wish to see a fully detailed explanation of the purpose and extent of the functions of the Executive Committee.

C. Membership of the Executive Committee

The present paper says little about the membership of the Executive Committee other than to indicate that it would be comprised of both volunteer and paid staff. We wish to know what will be the maximum number of members of this body, the division in terms of numbers between paid and volunteer members and the full details of how the members of each of these two categories will be appointed, by whom and for how long.

The paper suggests that there is no clarity in the current structure under which paid staff support the volunteers and that this can lead to conflicts and grievances. This is not a criticism we have ever heard raised previously at any level of the IWA and is not a criticism we would make ourselves. We believe it to be false. To resolve this false premise the paper then goes on to suggest that the structure of the IWA should be radically altered so that volunteers report to paid staff and vice versa. This we would have thought to be a recipe for creating the very conflicts and grievances which it is allegedly sought to avoid. Please specify the charities where such a system is currently in place.

We believe that the appointment of paid staff to full membership of the highest ranking bodies of the IWA such that they would be seen to be giving instructions to volunteers and carry more weight than most of the volunteer membership would be a totally retrograde step. There are many volunteers who would resent receiving instructions from those whose salary they nominally pay.

Please distribute this memo to Council members.