



Middle Level Commissioners

PRESS RELEASE

Middle Level Navigation Advisory Committee set 2021/2022 navigation licencing fees.

The Middle Level Commissioners (MLC) are one of the four largest navigation authorities in the country and control over 100 miles of navigable watercourse with six locks and two permanent Lock Keepers. This year the team has been expanded to include a full time Navigation Officer. Annually the MLC spend in excess of £200K on managing and maintaining the navigation elements of the system. This is set to increase with the introduction of licencing, policing and improvements to the system.

On 10th November the Navigation Advisory Committee (NAC) a body set up to discuss, recommend and report back to the Middle Level Commissioners met and discussed future plans for the system and its management, together with what next year's licence fee should be set at. In making their decision they took into account comments by users of the system and the comparison with other authorities such as the Cam Conservators and the Environment Agency (Anglian) waterways.

After extensive discussion the NAC determined that it was reasonable for navigation fees to be set in line with those of the Cam Conservators and the Environment Agency (Anglian). In coming to this decision, they took account of the fact that although the EA have more waterway by length this, unlike the MLC system, is not always navigable over its entire length due to strong stream warnings and that the Cam Conservators offer substantially less length for navigation hence length alone should not be the only factor. They also noted that the EA has as many as 15 times the number of boats within its system, hence the licencing income is closer to £2.5M as compared to the Middle Level Commissioners' equivalent income of £150-180K assuming licencing charges are aligned.

However, the NAC did appreciate that boaters, who have for years been able to benefit from Middle Level waters for nothing, will not welcome paying fees, however fair, and listening to calls for a phased introduction of fees the NAC have resolved the following initiative to reward those who currently use our waters.

- The fees will be set at the same level as the Environment Agency's (Anglian) waterways but for those vessels that are licenced here before 31st December 2020 a discount of 25% will be offered against the 2021/2022 licence fees. Any boats licenced after this point will not receive the discount.
- The requirement to be licenced before enforcement action is considered will now similarly be extended to 31st December 2020.

The NAC wished to say that the many boats that have already applied for licences will automatically receive the discount and It is hoped that vessel owners yet to apply will appreciate that the NAC have been listening to concerns over charging, but also accept that the balance of general and agricultural ratepayers subsidising navigation needs to be redressed, and that for investment in provision of facilities to occur, and for us to implement and police a licencing system, will require adequate funding.