



ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR THE WATERWAYS

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To: RT. Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Dear Rishi,

Waterways businesses in England and Wales

At a meeting of the APPG for the Waterways on Thursday 14th May, we heard from waterway organisations, navigation authorities and individual waterway businesses from across England and Wales that many inland waterways businesses were on the verge of collapse.

There is an urgent and immediate need for a dedicated financial intervention by Government to save this distinct and vital sector of the UK tourism.

The inland waterways leisure industry is worth approximately £1.5bn a year to the UK economy, but there is currently a very real threat that when restrictions are lifted and people can take holidays and days out again, many of the leisure opportunities on the inland waterways will no longer be there. The sector is responsible for at least 30,000 jobs, so is significant.

At the meeting we heard from the Inland Waterways Association that the high dependency on income during the spring and summer months means that the Covid-19 crisis has hit at the worst possible time, with annual expenditure already having been paid out in maintenance and running costs over the winter. Without an early resumption of business, the industry will face another round of annual costs, without any income. It simply cannot bear this unaided.

The meeting heard directly from a number of waterway businesses who gave real life examples of how financial help is much needed. Most waterway businesses have had to cease trading completely while the current restrictions are in place. Without income from their usual operations at this time of year, they will have no means to repay any sort of loan and will have no option but to cease trading. Some businesses have already closed permanently and many are at significant risk of collapse before the end of the year. The timing has hit many businesses doubly hard off the back of the hard winter that caused widespread flooding and closures of some waterways.

A joint letter from four organisations (The Inland Waterways Association, The Broads Authority, British Marine and Canal & River Trust) to the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at Defra on 23rd March asked for urgent assistance for the waterways sector in the form of a £20m financial package, similar to that offered to the fishing industry, which so far has not been forthcoming. Those four organisations have provided supplementary information and evidence to the inland waterways

policy team at Defra over the last few weeks and there should now be no doubt that this assistance is desperately required as a matter of urgency.

There is intent from government to support the waterys sector however because many such businesses do not pay rates and council tax they fall outside of the current eligibility criteria for the various government backed assistance schemes. Therefore given the unique situation and urgency we believe a dedicated fund of financial support will be the simplest and swiftest way to prevent these business from collapse.

The meeting acknowledged that the government have responded at pace and with considerable financial resources to support business due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We appreciate that it is not possible for the government to have considered every eventuality in such a short period of time. It is however clear to APPG for the Waterways that this sector is not getting the attention and support it most desperately needs and from its commendable actions to date, we believe the UK and Wales government will no doubt want to support waterways businesses. Therefore we support the dedicated fund of £20 million to waterways businesses and ask for this matter be given the utmost urgency.

Yours ever



Michael Fabricant MP
Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

And supported by the following Parliamentarians who took part in the APPG meeting on 14th May:

Heather Wheeler MP
Jerome Mayhew MP
Simon Baynes MP
RT. Hon Lord Mike German

**Please reply to the APPG for the Waterways secretariat;
Jonathan.shaw@policyconnect.org.uk**