

COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

An Advisory Council to the Department of the Environment

Room G-07, Waterman House, 5-33 Hill Street, Belfast, BT1 2LA

Tel: 028 9054 3184 secretariat-hillst@doeni.gov.uk

24 August 2011

VIA Email

Mr John Martin
Chief Executive
Waterways Ireland
2 Sligo Road
Enniskillen, BT74 7JY

Dear Mr Martin,

Consultation on Draft Marketing Strategy 2011 - 2016

The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) is the statutory body providing advice to the Department of the Environment on nature and countryside conservation issues, particularly as they affect Northern Ireland. CNCC welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

We note Waterways Ireland's mission "to strive to provide a high quality recreational environment centred on the inland waterways of Ireland in its care, for the use and benefit of everyone" and the key strategic objectives that flow from this. In seeking to increase awareness and promote greater use of Ireland's inland waterways, it seems to us that the proposed strategy risks devaluing the very resource that them attractive to visitors; namely their unspoilt and peaceful character. We would urge that consideration of the environment become a basic tenet of your operations generally and a key element of the marketing strategy.

Whilst acknowledging that Waterways Ireland is a cross-border body, we would like to seek explicit mention of the objectives set out in the Draft Tourism Strategy for NI, particularly "Demonstrating commitment to taking care of the environment"¹. That document also makes a strong case for the potential for eco-tourism and we would like to see this reflected in your marketing strategy.

Society as a whole and therefore government is becoming increasingly aware of the need for all activities to be conducted in a manner that is sustainable. The strategy needs a statement that the impact on the environment will be an important consideration when evaluating what type of tourism is to be encouraged and when deciding what improvements are carried out on the waterways. We would also like to see acknowledgement of the NI Sustainable Development Strategy in the document.

Irish inland waterways are some of the most biodiverse wetlands in Europe and this should be an important part of the marketing strategy. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act,

¹ DETI NI Tourism Strategy, p. 4

which came into force earlier this month, states that 'it is the duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity' . The balance of needs of the people attracted to our waterways should be a fundamental consideration of both marketing and development and without this the full potential will not be realised.

When you are developing signage, we would like to see recognition of the potential to increase awareness of invasive alien species (noting that the Invasive Alien Species Strategy for NI is open for consultation until 30 September 2011), to which aquatic habitats are particularly sensitive. We would also like to see mention for the need for displays that are not visually intrusive.

We hope these comments are helpful. If you would like further discussion, we would be delighted to meet with you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Casement', written in a cursive style.

**PATRICK CASEMENT
CHAIRMAN**