

Brexit: boaters voice their concerns

RYA push to protect boaters' benefits

The coming months will be crucial in ensuring the interests and concerns of boaters are at the forefront of the Government's thinking as ministers continue negotiations in Brussels.

Last year, we began work on ensuring that the final Brexit deal works for recreational boaters in the UK. From discussions with our members, three key issues emerged. These are:

- The treatment of recreational craft as 'Union goods', allowing continuous free navigation around the waters of the EU;
- The way in which voyages on recreational boats are treated under the new border control system introduced by the UK Government after Brexit;
- The ability for UK citizens who have RYA qualifications to travel freely to and from the EU for work – something undertaken by a significant proportion of the 19,507 RYA qualified instructors.

In conversation with MPs and key Government departments, we have highlighted the importance of safeguarding the benefits boaters enjoy under the current terms of the UK's EU membership, and the inconvenience and economic damage that could be caused if these are not preserved beyond March 2019.



Government reassurances

The Government has committed to two measures that will help UK boaters after Brexit. Firstly, the Prime Minister has secured a deal that guarantees the rights of UK citizens living in the EU after Brexit, and vice versa. This will reassure RYA qualification holders based in our 249 training centres throughout the EU, as well as the many EU citizens who work for marine businesses in the UK.

Secondly, former Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis confirmed to us that there will be no immigration controls on sea voyages between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit, maintaining the integrity of the Common Travel Area and avoiding significant disruption to the many UK and Irish boaters who currently enjoy travelling freely between the two countries.

These announcements provide a good foundation for our lobbying activities in 2018, which will include:

- Persuading the Government to negotiate an agreement for recreational craft to retain Union goods status post-Brexit (regardless of whether they are kept in UK or EU waters) and have a means by which they can readily prove this status;
- Ensuring UK recreational craft without Union goods status can visit the EU after Brexit without being subject to the 18-month restriction on Temporary Admission procedures for relief on customs duties and VAT, provided they do not change ownership. We believe they should be treated as personal possessions, not traded goods;
- Ensuring that any new border controls proposed by the Government do not require

boaters to obtain prior permission before entering or leaving the UK, do not compromise navigational safety or restrict freedom of navigation, and that any proposals for visa controls take into account the nature of recreational boating tourism;

- Supporting the creation of a system enabling UK nationals entering the Schengen Area to stay for periods in excess of 90 days in 180 (the current time limit for non-EU nationals);
- Pushing for a scheme that lets UK citizens with RYA qualifications visit EU countries on business or for seasonal work relevant to those qualifications without having to obtain a visa.

Learn more about our work on the RYA Current Affairs hub: www.rya.org.uk/knowledge-advice/current-affairs

Spreading the word

We are helping to organise a Westminster Hall debate in Parliament to further reinforce to ministers the importance of treating the issues above as priorities as the Brexit negotiations proceed. Through our Brexit-related engagement and other ongoing initiatives, such as 'Push the Boat Out', we have ensured a significant number of MPs are aware of the importance of the recreational boating sector to their constituencies and the UK.

However, there is still more we can do to spread the word. Once a date for the forthcoming debate is confirmed, we are encouraging all our members and supporters to contact their local MPs to encourage them to attend the debate and support us in highlighting the importance of safeguarding the future of the recreational boating sector in the Brexit negotiations.



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP helps Push The Boat Out in West Sussex