



River Thames Operational Annual Report

1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

Keeping boating customers informed about our business and performance.

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment and make it a better place for people and wildlife.

We operate at the place where environmental change has its greatest impact on people's lives. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

Acting to reduce climate change and helping people and wildlife adapt to its consequences are at the heart of all that we do.

We cannot do this alone. We work closely with a wide range of partners including government, business, local authorities, other agencies, civil society groups and the communities we serve.

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Foreword

This report describes our work over the year April 2014 to March 2015. Across our locks, on our patrol boats, and in our offices where support officers carry out essential roles that are often overlooked, our staff have worked hard to provide the best service possible.

The weather gave us respite after the winter floods of 2013 to 2014. This allowed us to make progress in some important areas.

The considerable effort put into implementing the Inland Waterways Order in marinas is important work with implications for many years to come. Unauthorised mooring remains a problem so we have invested more time in partnership working with local councils and police forces to try to address the issue.

In response to customer representations we have been developing and improving how we use all available channels to communicate with boaters, especially about breakdowns and other emergencies.

Generating more income from our leases and agreements provides important funds that we can reinvest in the business. We strove to get the very best value possible from our reduced capital funding to keep our assets in good shape.

The support we enjoy from our volunteers has made a terrific contribution to the service we are able to provide on the river. We are particularly grateful for their continued commitment.



Andrew Graham
Waterways Manager

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1. Capital Programme and Assets

The capital programme budget for the financial year 2014 to 2015 was £1.80m, increasing to £2.05m due to additional funding becoming available in quarter 4 (January to March). The authorised final total expenditure was £2.06m, which although above the increased funding target, was within the 1% allowable margin.

Capital funding was considerably reduced from previous years and budget management to complete the programme of works was very difficult. However the programme was achieved by March 2015.

Some works to note:

- The installation of tail gates at Grafton Lock was deferred from financial year 2013 to 2014 to 2014 to 2015 due to the previous winter's flooding event.
- Funding from the Flood and Coastal Risk Management Asset Recovery Programme allowed us to successfully bid for and subsequently complete the replacement of a vehicle access bridge to Mapledurham Lock. This work had no impact on the 2014 to 2015 Waterways investment programme. The bridge was scheduled for installation in early May 2015.
- The project at Sunbury New Lock to re-furbish the lock chamber and replace the lock gates was nominated for an Excellence award. Amongst strong competition, the project was awarded a commendation.

Capital programme spend 2014 to 2015

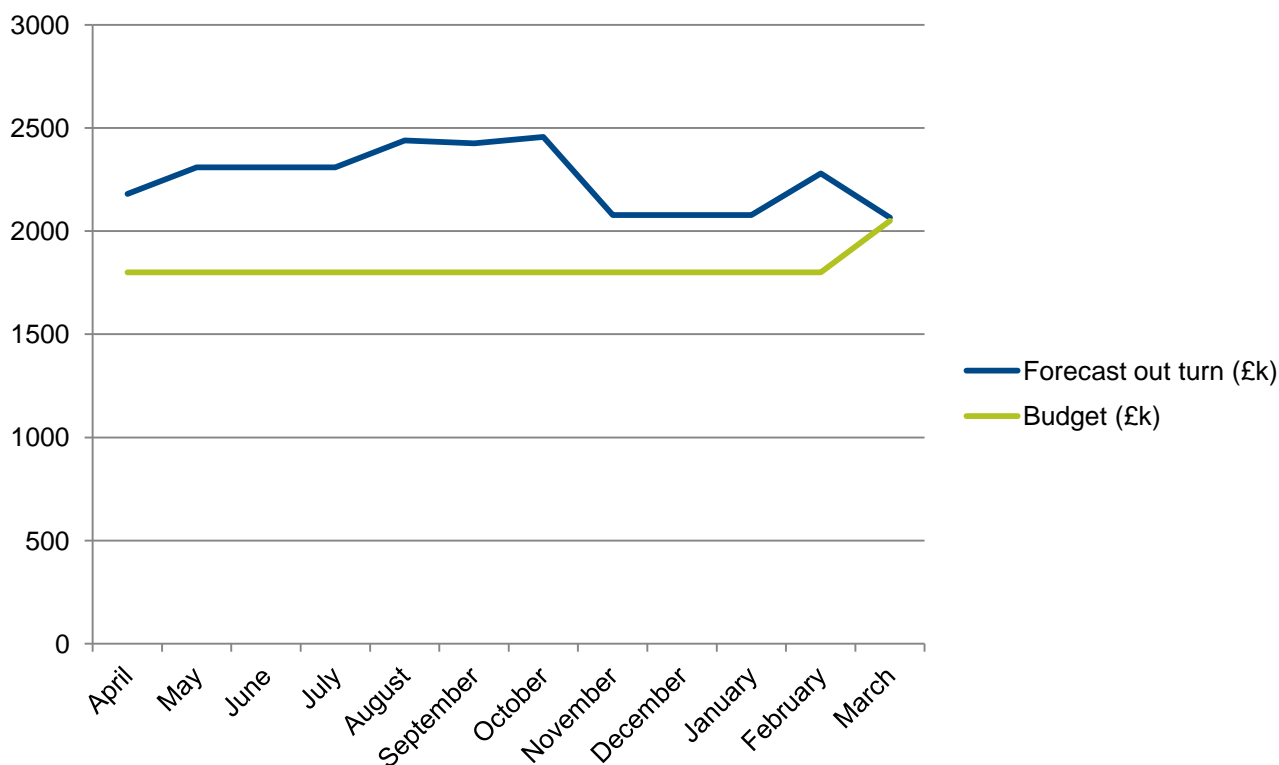


Figure 1.

2. Enforcement

This year our enforcement priorities have continued to include registration, speed and wash and unauthorised moorings. We have undertaken extensive enforcement activity across the river with many hundreds of hours patrolling.

Lock staff, patrol and enforcement teams issued almost 600 registration enforcement notices. We served 14 court summons to boat owners for persistently failing to obtain a valid registration despite being served with an enforcement notice. We successfully prosecuted 4 of the owners, whilst the remaining 10 paid their registration fees before the court date.

Our lawyers' view has always been that the Environment Agency Inland Waterways Order 2010, which requires that any boat kept on the Thames must be registered with the Environment Agency, also applies to boats kept in marinas. In 2014 we undertook significant enforcement in one marina where we found 81 of approximately 350 boats to be unregistered. Any unregistered boat we found was issued with an enforcement notice but a small percentage of the boat owners from that marina still failed to register their boats. We served court summons against those owners and will await the court judgement in 2015. This work has been time consuming and resource intensive for our enforcement and legal teams. However we believe it is important to continue to protect the vital registration income which helps fund our work to maintain the river.

We successfully prosecuted a boat owner who, despite advice from our lock staff that he should stop navigating, insisted on proceeding upstream during Red Board Strong Stream conditions, and generated wash from his boat which caused damage to property and danger to life. The boat owner pleaded guilty and was fined £500 and £110 in costs. We have taken action against another boat owner for navigating without due care and attention where the resulting wash caused damage and endangerment. This was a serious speed and wash offence during Henley Festival where the reckless boater navigated his boat at such high speed the resulting bow wave caused damage to other moored boats and endangered the lives of other river users. We await the outcome of the court case in 2014 to 2015.

Following a successful trial of moorings management using civil procedures, believed to be the first pilot on a UK inland waterway, we held discussions to award a contract to a civil enforcement company. The successful company will undertake the civil enforcement process of any charges issued to boats staying on a number of our more popular Environment Agency 24hr moorings. We are still able to use criminal legislation and our powers under the Thames Conservancy Act 1932, to direct boats to move and carry out enforcement action if necessary. However we believe more modern civil legislation will act as a better deterrent to over-stayers in the first instance, with a quicker route to County Court for enforcement if necessary. We are confident the use of civil procedures will be cost effective, free up mooring spaces for our customers, and our time to deal with other enforcement issues. Civil procedures have now being trialled by a number of other landowners.

We also recognise the importance of sharing intelligence with other enforcement partner agencies, as well as local council enforcement officers. We continue to work closely with Metropolitan, Surrey and Thames Valley Police, Port of London Authority and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Enforcement Activity 2014 to 2015

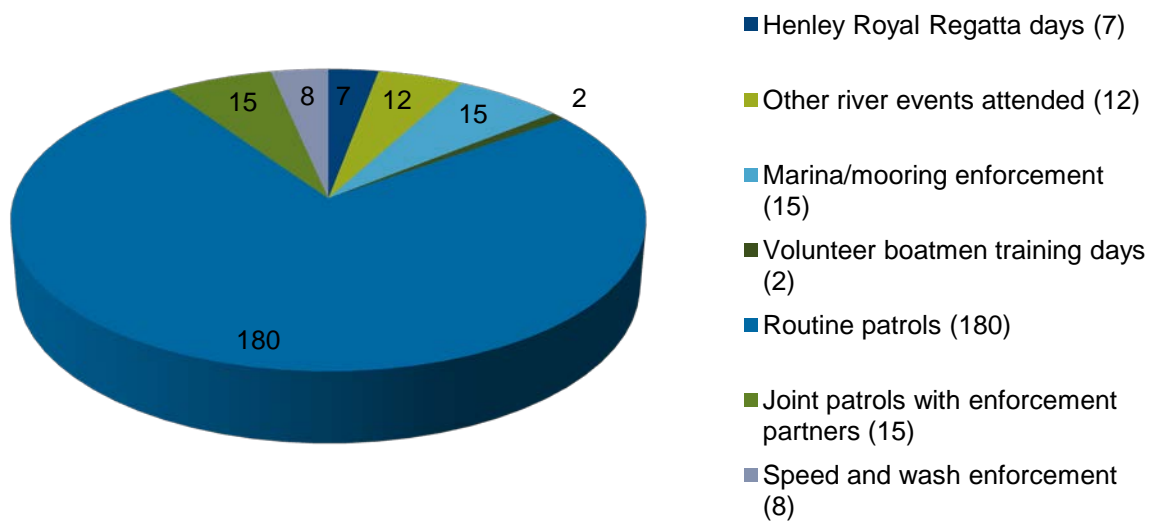


Figure 2.

Unregistered Boat Report - April 2014 to March 2015

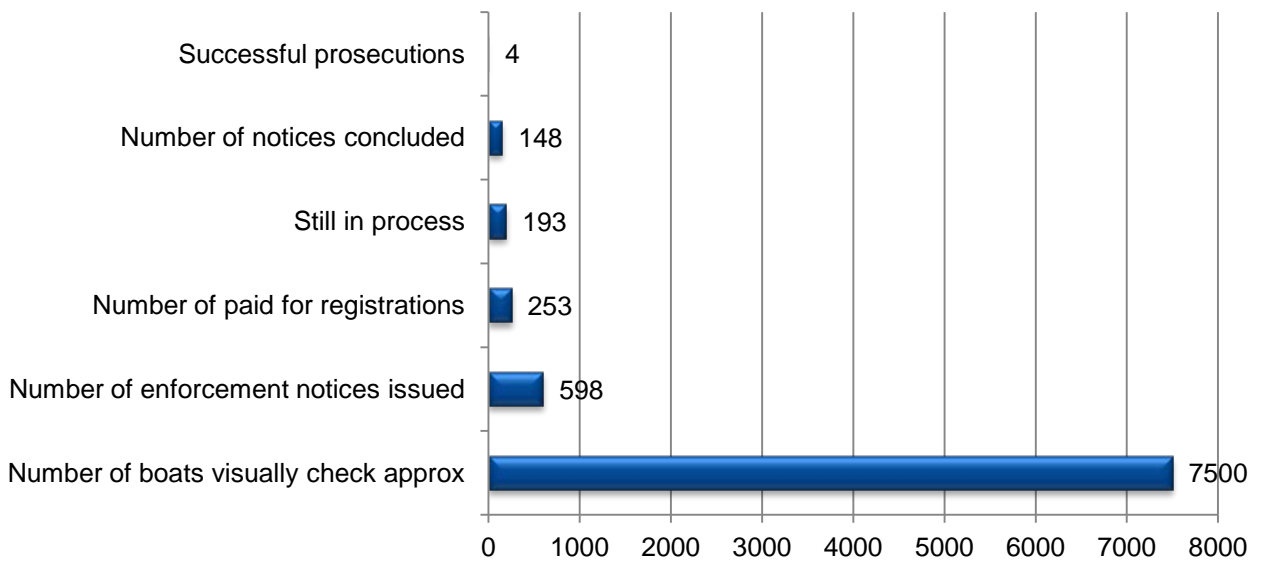


Figure 3.

3. Commercial Operations - Revenues

As a result of reduced operational funding, no new development projects were progressed during the year. The focus instead was on maximising commercial Estates revenue from our Waterway assets.

We concluded a number of high value, long term revenue cases. We secured increases to reflect current market levels, strengthened management clauses and set-up new long term leases. These were all significant successes. The top 5 cases alone delivered an additional £40k per annum bringing the Waterways commercial revenues up to £385k per annum.

A number of these cases were very complex, needing time well beyond their contract due dates to reach acceptable agreements. As a result, we were able to collect additional one-off sums during the year of approximately £135k.

There were no Waterways land or other asset disposals during the year.

4. Customer Charter

Lock Manning

As in previous years, a sub group of the Thames Navigation Users Forum met to agree the lock service standard target for our Customer Charter for 2014 to 2015. Of the 45 locks on the River Thames it was agreed:

- 16 of these would be priority locks to achieve a Full Service May through to mid September (Standard Service for April, May and the second half of September).
- 20 Standard Service locks.
- 8 Expect Self Service Locks.
- 1 Unmanned lock (Blake's Lock on the Kennet is not a priority for manning although lock staff at Caversham Lock take responsibility for operating the weir if required).

We have collated the manning data from our locks for the months April to September and compared the target service level for each day against our Customer Charter 2014 to 2015. The results are set out in the table below. The figures are calculated as a percentage of 'lock days' (calendar days per month) and do not include Blakes Lock.

As an example, in April all locks were expected to offer Standard Service: 30 days at 45 locks = 1350 lock days. Of these, 1180 lock days were provided at Standard Service = 87.42%

Full Service percentages are recorded against the 16 priority locks.

Summer 2014 performance (% achievement of target service)

	Standard service	Full Service	Unmanned
April	87.42	N/A	23.56
May	94.28	81.79	13.20
June	91.25	80.32	13.33
July	91.26	85.65	12.61
August	94.49	77.42	12.61
Sept	95.29	87.00	5.08

Figure 4.

Staffing

April 2014 to March 2015 saw a further change to the way we supported our customer service during the summer period. Working with reduced funding but still wishing to provide a service at our priority locks, we recruited 23 summer relief lock and weir keepers, 1 site warden for the Hurley and Shiplake camp sites and 1 summer assistant to support the 24/7 cover at Teddington Lock. These staff were recruited through the Environment Agency's temporary staff provider. The seasonal reliefs were trained to operate both our locks and weirs over a number of sites on the river, so that they could be used in the most effective way.

With a reduced number of summer assistants we again relied on our well trained volunteers to provide lunchtime and support cover for our permanent and seasonal staff. This worked very well and was well received by river users.

2014 to 2015 also saw a significant organisational change programme within the Environment Agency. All staff were affected by a move from a 3 tier (national, regional and area) organisation to a 2 tier (national and area) organisation. This affected Waterways in that some of our regional colleagues moved to a national navigation team and others moved to Thames Waterways. Although unsettling for those involved with new ways of working formed from a transition plan, we ensured those affected will utilise their skills and experience in supporting and bolstering the Thames Waterways Business Team. This team provides volunteer coordination, improved communications, structure licensing, boat registration and permit renewal processes, and user group representative liaison.

Boat registration

All boats kept or used on the non-tidal River Thames must be registered with us. We use the income from boat registrations to invest in the service we provide on the river. This income is supplemented with government Grant in Aid to provide a working budget for the Waterways department. The total boat registration income for 2014 was £4.04m.

During 2014 we continued to negotiate with our external partners on joint registration agreements to gain the best mutual benefit for our customers while collecting valuable income – this included the Canal & River Trust, British Rowing & British Canoeing (Canoe England/Wales).

Following feedback from our customers on how we sell our visitor registrations, we have introduced a trial option to buy powered visitor registrations over the phone. Customers will then be sent a document by email which they print off and display on their boat. This will only be available for customers buying from the National Customer Contact Centre (NCCC) boat registration team. This gives customers more choice and freedom when buying a visitor registration, together with reducing the need to make a visit to their nearest lock to buy one.

We have also been looking at options to move our boat registration service online. As part of the project's discovery phase, we held workshops with staff and river users to understand their requirements and expectations of an online boat registration service.

We will present our findings in the form of a business case, to the Environment Agency's Programme Board who will make the final decision of whether to proceed with this initiative.

Number and type of boats registered

Boat Type	2009	Income	2010	Income	2011	Income	2012	Income	2013	Income	2014	Income
Private annual powered	8,705	£2,331,490	8,813	£2,424,330	9,032	£2,644,890	9,010	£2,871,224	8,801	£2,957,864	8,604	£3,058,672
Visitors – powered & unpowered	5,372	£278,010	5,014	£252,479	4,817	£275,232	3,958	£213,746	5,424	£273,017	4,593	£243,997
Commercial – hire & passenger	400	£297,984	411	£315,132	409	£317,296	436	£344,910	430	£342,176	401	£329,521
Other – unpowered, events, houseboats, gold licences	10,782	£414,777	11,540	£434,565	6,232	£334,223	5,234	£357,142	4,731	£354,355	4,377	£335,085
British Rowing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,178	£51,350	3,674	£61,620	3,996	£71,231	4,034	£73,160
Total	25,259	£3,322,261	25,778	£3,426,506	23,668	£3,622,991	22,312	£3,848,642	23,382	£3,998,643	22,009	£4,040,435

Figure 5.

Events

During April 2014 to March 2015 there were a total of 132 events on the river and towpath about which the Environment Agency had formal information. Of these 70 required restrictions and the production of Harbourmaster's Notices.

There were 15 major events that required a high level of Environment Agency involvement. These were Henley Royal Regatta, Henley Festival, Reading Festival, Rewind Henley, Oxford University's Torpids and Summer Eights, Thames Traditional Boat Festival, Kingston Head, Teddington Head, Hampton Head, Hampton Small Boats Head, Reading Head and the Windsor Triathlon.

Customer Complaints / Commendations

This year 88 complaints were received, the lowest number for several years. As expected the majority of these were received between April and the end of October and were split under the factors in figure 8.

83% of complaints were responded to within our customer charter standards. There were varying reasons why 17% were not responded to within the standards with several due to requiring further information from the customer.

Disappointingly our commendations fell from last year by 50% to 23. However those received were for the fantastic service customers received and although mainly referred to our permanent lock staff, there were several commendations for volunteers and office staff.

In addition to our complaints and commendations Waterways dealt with 43 pieces of Executive/MP correspondence separately from public enquiries via our enquiries team or through Waterways directly.

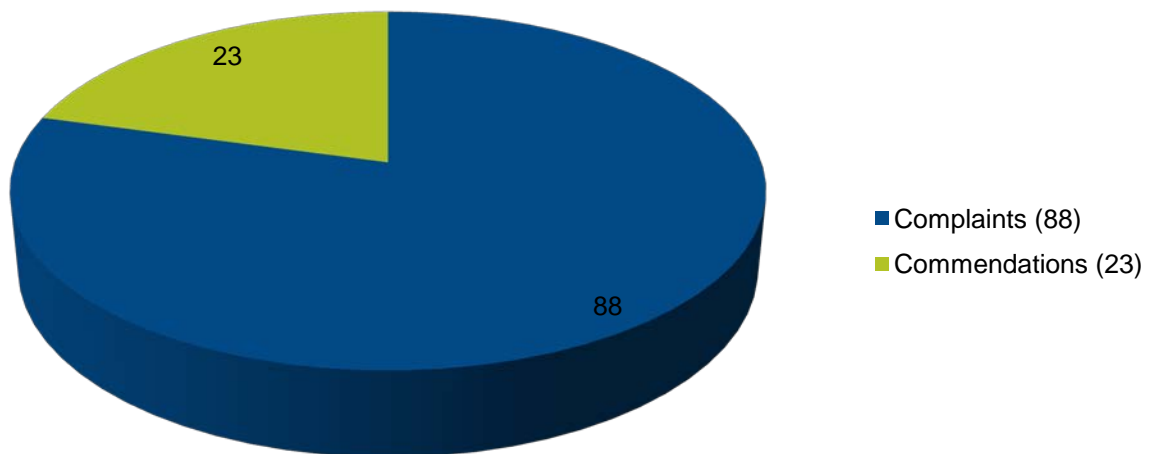


Figure 6. Commendations and Complaints 2014 to 2015

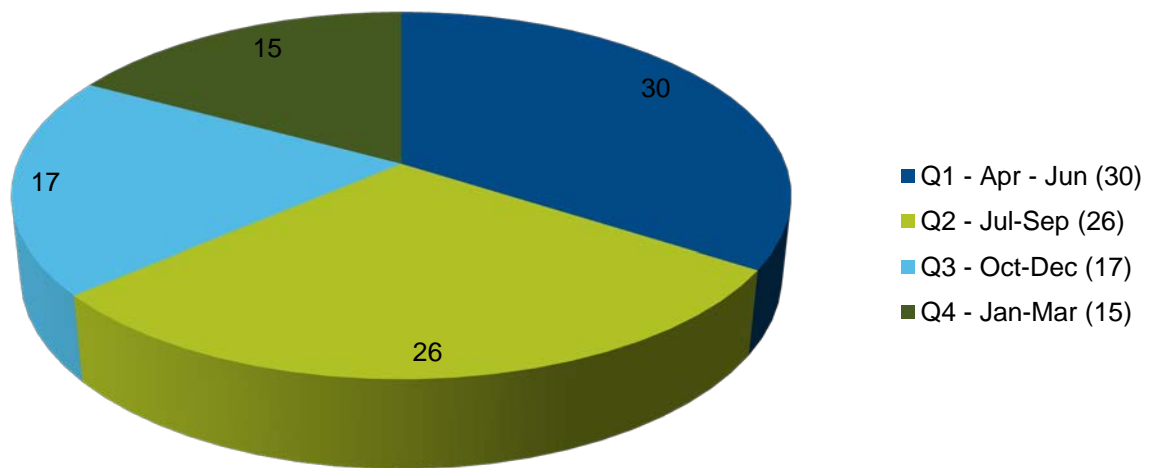


Figure 7. Complaints Breakdown by quarter 2014 to 2015

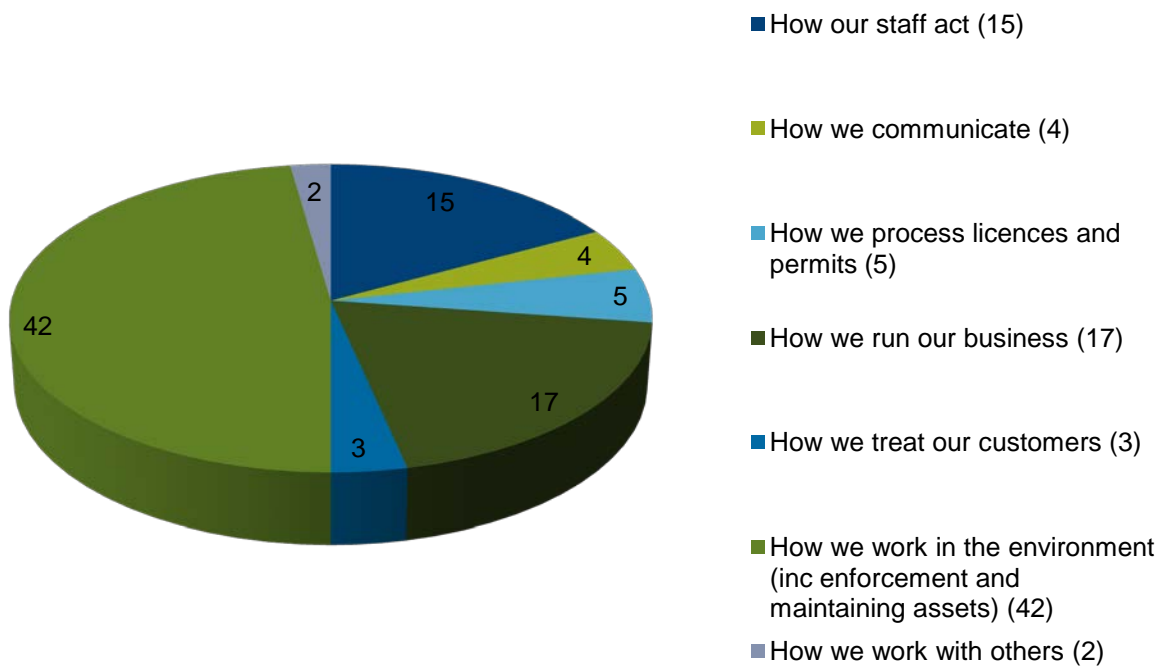


Figure 8. Complaint factor breakdown

5. Water level management

Red and yellow boards

The table below indicates the total number of strong stream boards issued throughout the year April 2014 to March 2015. The table shows the numbers of boards by lock for the season and the percent of the year when boards were displayed.

As a comparison it should be remembered that during the winter floods of 2013 to 2014 the first yellow board was displayed on 17 December 2013 and boards were still in place on 31 March 2014. This was a total of 105 days or 29% of the year in just over 4 months.

Many Waterways staff were involved in the Environment Agency's recovery after the floods. This was important work and other activity was reprogrammed or cancelled.

We identified new shoals made up from deposited material and existing shoals which were enlarged by the flood flows. Any obstructions to Navigation were marked with new navigation markers and hundreds of tonnes of material were removed to provide unrestricted passage.

The floods also caused quite a considerable amount of tree damage. These fallen or de-stabilised riverside trees meant there were unprecedented numbers of obstructions between the locks.

Our Waterways staff have also been undergoing ambassador training to ensure they are in a good position to talk to members of the public as the waters in the Thames rise, stabilise and fall in any future events.

Number of days red/yellow boards displayed 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

		Red	Yellow			Boards displayed	
		Total	Increasing	Decreasing	Total	Total days	%
Upstream of	St Johns	6	44	70	114	120	32.9%
St Johns to	Buscot	42	24	54	78	120	32.9%
Buscot to	Grafton	16	41	63	104	120	32.9%
Grafton to	Radcot	49	17	54	71	120	32.9%
Radcot to	Rushey	42	17	65	82	124	34.0%
Rushey to	Shifford	25	29	70	99	124	34.0%
Shifford to	Northmoor	28	25	69	94	122	33.4%
Northmoor to	Pinkhill	13	32	76	108	121	33.2%
Pinkhill to	Eynsham	20	30	71	101	121	33.2%
Eynsham to	Kings	20	30	71	101	121	33.2%
Kings to	Godstow	17	31	73	104	121	33.2%
Godstow to	Osney	39	19	44	63	102	27.9%
Osney to	Iffley	11	22	23	45	56	15.3%
Iffley to	Sandford	10	45	42	87	97	26.6%
Sandford to	Abingdon	13	39	45	84	97	26.6%
Abingdon to	Culham	10	42	41	83	93	25.5%
Culham to	Clifton	44	22	27	49	93	25.5%

Clifton to	Days	9	30	27	57	66	18.1%
Days to	Benson	11	26	22	48	59	16.2%
Benson to	Cleeve	19	21	19	40	59	16.2%
Cleeve to	Goring	26	14	19	33	59	16.2%
Goring to	Whitchurch	32	9	18	27	59	16.2%
Whitchurch to	Mapledurham	14	28	19	47	61	16.7%
Mapledurham to	Caversham	15	32	77	109	124	34.0%
Upstream of	Blakes	14	26	45	71	85	23.3%
Caversham to	Sonning	48	15	69	84	132	36.2%
Sonning to	Shiplake	25	30	77	107	132	36.2%
Shiplake to	Marsh	47	30	80	110	157	43.0%
Marsh to	Hambleden	53	30	74	104	157	43.0%
Hambleden to	Hurley	43	29	85	114	157	43.0%
Hurley to	Temple	43	29	85	114	157	43.0%
Temple to	Marlow	78	20	59	79	157	43.0%
Marlow to	Cookham	23	43	91	134	157	43.0%
Cookham to	Boulters	10	51	96	147	157	43.0%
Boulters to	Bray	12	47	98	145	157	43.0%
Bray to	Boveney	38	33	86	119	157	43.0%
Boveney to	Romney	17	18	14	32	49	13.4%
Romney to	Old Windsor	25	10	16	26	51	14.0%
Old Windsor to	Bell Weir	9	21	21	42	51	14.0%
Bell Weir to	Penton Hook	21	23	49	72	93	25.5%
Penton Hook to	Chertsey	38	18	37	55	93	25.5%
Chertsey to	Shepperton	20	21	42	63	83	22.7%
Shepperton to	Sunbury	24	14	22	36	60	16.4%
Sunbury to	Molesey	16	18	22	40	56	15.3%
Molesey to	Teddington	20	22	36	58	78	21.4%
	Totals	1155	1217	2363	3580		

Figure 9.

6. Volunteering

Volunteers have been assisting our Lock and Weir Keepers along the River Thames since 2011. Now, at the end of our fourth season, our volunteer project is a successful model of how volunteers can benefit an existing work force while providing a rewarding activity which allows people to contribute to their local environment.

This year was another impressive year seeing a further increase in our Volunteer attendance figures. Once again many of our volunteers from previous years returned to the lock side to assist our staff.

The Volunteer Boatmen were able to assist throughout the season attending events such as Henley Royal Regatta. Volunteer Boatmen activity rose by over 80%.

We held 23 work party days where teams of Volunteers worked on specific locks on the Thames. During these days our Volunteers focus on site maintenance or ecological improvements. Generally held at the beginning or end of the boating season, the Volunteers work together painting, gardening and carrying out general site maintenance to assist our lock staff in improving their sites. 44 Volunteers gave one or more days help, contributing to a total of 130 work party days.

In October 2014 over 100 Volunteers attended the end-of-season meeting onboard French Brothers' "New Queen of the Thames" at Windsor. Awards were given to all and several were presented with the prestigious "Big Blue" badge in recognition of contributing over 120 days lock side.

By the end of March 2015, Waterways had benefited from more than 5,000 days of volunteer assistance on the Thames. This is a 12% increase on last year.

April 2014 to March 2015 in figures

202 expressions of interest

83 applications received

33 attended training to become Volunteer Assistant Lock Keepers

Active Volunteer Assistant Lock Keepers and Boatmen

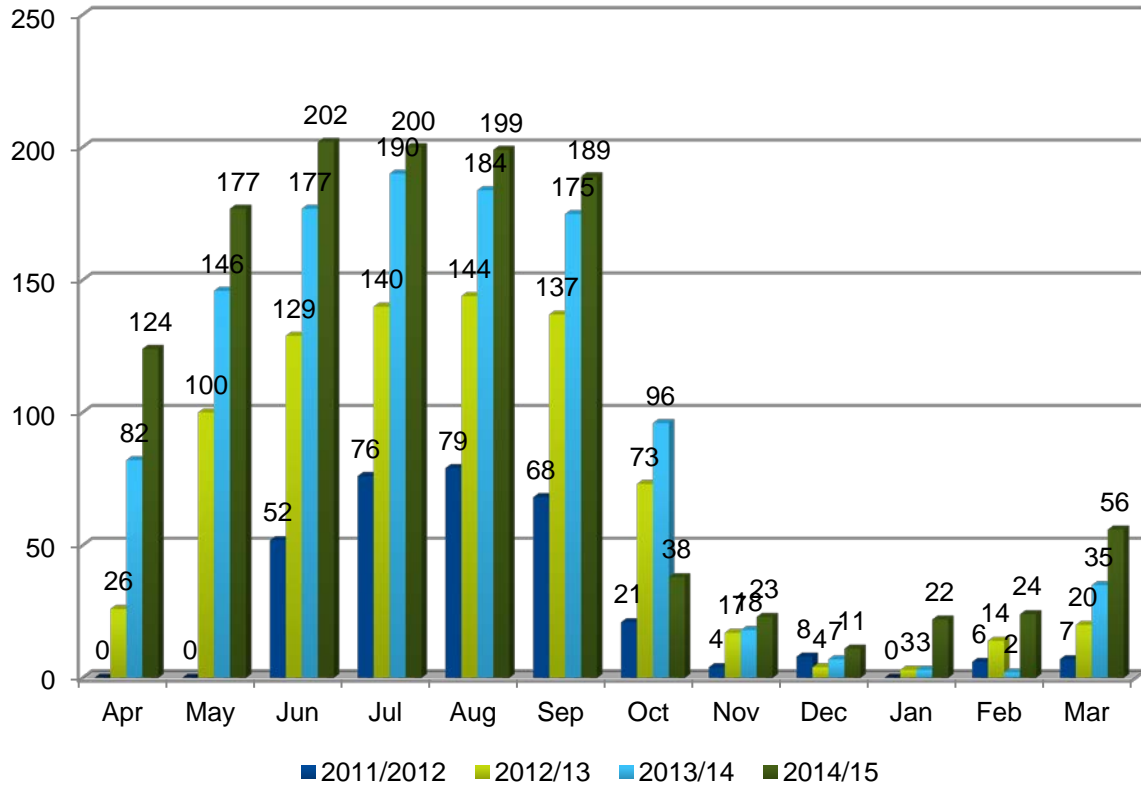


Figure 10.

Total number of volunteer days worked

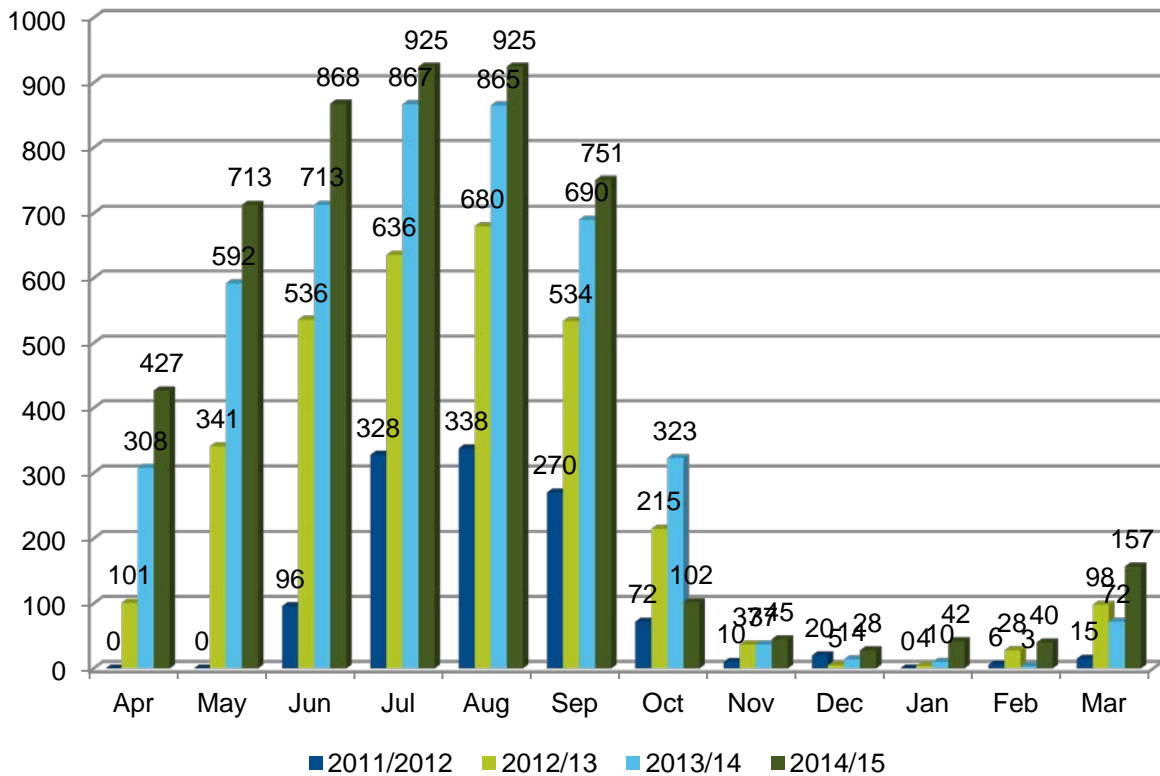


Figure 11.

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