

Anand Patil

[REDACTED]

Clerk of the Merits of Statutory Instruments Committee,
Legislation Office,
House of Lords,
London SW1A 0PW

Dear Rt. Hon. Lord Goodlad and Committee,

I am writing to you to express my concerns about the Draft Statutory Instrument, the British Waterways Board (Transfer of Functions) Order 2012.

I am a narrowboat resident in Oxford without a home mooring (a continuous cruiser). Every two weeks or so, I move my boat to a new location on the Oxford Canal or the River Thames, occasionally venturing as far downstream as Wallingford or as far upstream as Eynsham and Shipton on Cherwell.

Until September, I was a postdoctoral researcher at Oxford University. At that date, having accumulated more than 25 peer-reviewed scientific publications, I left to found a software startup in the area of business data analytics and intelligence.

I choose the boating lifestyle because I love the water and the freedom to change my surroundings, and because it allows me the complete financial self-sufficiency that comes from owning my home outright. I am always orderly, considerate of my neighbours on land, and protective of the environment, regularly walking miles with heavy loads to empty my toilet or recycling in the proper way. I enjoy friendly chats and hellos with joggers and walkers. Societal advantages of the boating life have been pointed out by Housing Minister Grant Shapps: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14690157>.

Boaters, and continuous cruisers in particular, are overwhelmingly self-sufficient, creative, colourful, considerate people. Always ready to help each other, we are a little Big Society. I know of very few who are any kind of burden on the larger society. However, we increasingly face harrassment in the Oxford area at the hands of councillors and others who see us as a public nuisance.

You can read my correspondence with these individuals (who have recently begun to call themselves UMBEG) this summer at <https://docs.google.com/open?id=0Bx-zvYbH0TC6N2pYUWJpRlIRaXVDZW1UcEp4VkJLZw> This exchange makes clear their distaste for boaters in general, their willingness to radically overstate their legal ability to take action against us, and their complete disregard for our right to our homes under both standard human compassion and Article 8 of the European human rights convention.

The transfer of British Waterways to either charity status or to a private company will remove the minimal protection we have for our homes that derives from British Waterways status as a public body, namely the Human Rights Act, the Equality Act, in part the Freedom of Information Act, and the Government's Code of Practice on Consultations.

The vast majority of the boating community are upstanding members of society by any objective standard. We are exactly the kind of community the government should be trying to encourage. Please ensure that our homes are given full statutory protection before the transfer.

Yours sincerely,
Anand Patil