

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage
Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DF

14 July 2026

As sent by email: PSSharonTaylor@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

Rights of Boat Dwellers Bill [HL] - Second Reading Scheduled 17 July 2026

As the national trade association for the marine industry British Marine would be extremely concerned if the above Private Members Bill were to receive Government support and be allowed to progress as introduced. Whilst perhaps well intentioned, many of its provisions would dramatically undermine the ability of "relevant authorities" to safely and effectively manage UK's inland and coastal waters. That, in turn, would have far reaching ramifications. Similar concerns are shared by others including the Canal & River Trust, British Ports Authority and the Harbour Masters Association. Indeed, it is why I have already written to Baroness Hayman at DEFRA and to Keir Mather MP at the Department for Transport.

Whilst there might be a case for the Government to do more to help ease the challenges that some boat dwellers may incur when trying to access public services, this Private Members Bill strays far from that issue. Rather than propose ways to better address the social, health and education needs of vulnerable people who live onboard boats (many of whom may be affected by the lack of affordable housing), or to improve the planning process so that more legitimate residential moorings can be provided, this Bill risks leading to some perverse outcomes.

The legislation would make necessary and proportionate enforcement action far more challenging and costly for "relevant authorities". That would not only affect leisure boating and the industry we represent but could also impact commercial shipping and even jeopardise the safety of boaters, including those who currently live onboard. For example, we have been informed that 'non-compliance' on the Norfolk Broads is a growing problem, with the Broads Authority identifying more boaters who lack a Boat Safety Certificate, over-stay on moorings or do not pay tolls. It is concerned for the growing number of people that live on 'craft' not safe for habitation and who choose to moor in locations where there are no public amenities, lack proper sanitation and do not have the means to safely heat, cook or navigate in those craft. From initial discussions, we understand the Broads Authority fears if this Bill were to be enacted it would simply encourage more people to choose that way of life, potentially putting themselves at risk, and would make it harder for the Authority to work with non-compliant boating residents.

Not only would this Bill require amending primary legislation and place additional burdens on the Secretary of State (reference sections 4 & 5), but it could increase pressure on local authorities as boat dwellers could effectively by-pass the planning process currently required for residential moorings. It would also infringe the ability of marina businesses, riparian authorities and others, to manage their land and moorings as they see appropriate within the law. Moreover, this Bill threatens to disrupt the various regulatory frameworks that effectively give everyone an opportunity to share in, and safely enjoy, Britain's inland and coastal waters.

Section 5 of the Bill should be seriously questioned as any attempt to confer "security of tenure" for boat dwellers, with the same rights and protections afforded to business premises under the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 would be highly contentious and, in our view, flawed. Whilst a boat may be a person's home, the water and moorings that a boat uses are distinct from that home. Most moorings are provided under license or through a mooring contract as opposed to a tenancy. Such mooring contracts may be renewed but there is no automatic right of renewal. That does not mean a boat dweller has no rights. Where necessary,

disputes can be settled in court where the rights of a boater, as well as the requirements on the 'relevant authorities' to act in a proportionate and lawful way are taken into consideration.

Section 2 defines "boat dwellers" as those for whom their boat is their "primary residence". The term "permanent mooring" in the Bill risks confusion and, in our view would be better replaced with "residential mooring". Certainly, in the case of the Canal & River Trust's inland waterways, where a person chooses to make his boat his primary residence, he is then required to have either a "residential mooring" or a continuous cruiser license and to then abide by those license conditions. Where boaters fail to comply with license conditions, or mooring / anchorage regulations, the relevant authorities must be able to take appropriate enforcement action. However, much of the provisions in this Bill would impede their ability to do so. In regard to inland waterways, online moorings are a finite resource, hence the need to have time-bound visitor moorings. Navigation authorities already struggle to enforce these essential regulations particularly in premium sites. This Bill would make that task far harder and could ultimately push out people wanting to holiday on the inland network, directly hitting the hire boat trade.

Whilst we appreciate your focus is on housing and local government, our primary concern is that the cumulative impact of the provisions in this Bill could seriously deter leisure boating in the UK and thus damage the businesses we represent. Therefore, on behalf of our members and the wider industry, we urge the Government to take into consideration these risks. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the UK marine industry, when combined with the tourism and hospitality spend of people whilst boating, generates an estimated total GVA of £17.4bn per annum, with approximately 40% of that arising from activity on inland waterways. To prioritise the rights of boat dwellers above others and neutralise the ability of "relevant authorities" to take enforcement action when required would adversely impact recreational boating and marine tourism that not only helps maintain attractiveness of Britain's rivers and canals but, also through the 38,000 plus direct jobs which the industry provides, the vital economic contribution the industry makes to UK coastal communities.

British Marine will continue to work with our partners and other affected stakeholders in opposing this Bill as currently introduced. We would also be pleased to provide the Government with more detailed briefing if you consider that necessary.

In the meantime, I would be most grateful if you could provide us with an assurance that you will take into consideration our serious concerns when deciding how to respond to the Second Reading on Friday. Should your office require further information or clarification on any of the points raised above please do not hesitate to contact me directly or contact our External Relations Manager, Joanna Richardson, on Telephone 07860 848834 or email: jrichardson@britishmarine.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Earle Stanner
Chief Executive

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