



7 July 2021

## **Spending time on the water can be a perfect prescription to improve health and wellbeing**

*New research shows that being out on the water is beneficial for both health and wellbeing*

With concerns around the negative mental and physical health legacy of the coronavirus pandemic, new research published today (7 July 2021) reveals that spending time on coastal or inland waterways can be an easily accessible and effective way to improve wellbeing.

The research, commissioned by leisure marine trade association British Marine and the charity Canal & River Trust, provides a preliminary exploration of the wider social value associated with boating on inland and coastal waters. Comparing moderate with frequent participation, the research shows that regularly spending time out on the water could be even more beneficial than accepted mindfulness activities such as practising yoga or pilates\* and even generates an increase in life satisfaction of about half that seen from gaining employment. The research shows that the more time spent out on the water, the bigger the benefit: frequent participation in boating and watersports compared to moderate participation is associated with anxiety levels 15% lower and a life satisfaction value of 7.3 on a scale of 0-10 (6% higher).

With positive effects of spending time on the water, and as the UK prepares for another staycation summer with more people looking for activities and days out locally, British Marine has launched a new 'on the water' website ([www.OnTheWater.co.uk](http://www.OnTheWater.co.uk)), giving details of locations across the UK where people can get afloat. The website is designed to connect people with boating and watersports providers offering paddleboarding, motor cruising, surfing, kayaking, narrowboat cruising, sailing and more on either inland canals, rivers, lakes and reservoirs, or along the coast. The Royal Yachting Association (RYA) is a Supporter of OnTheWater.co.uk, and RYA Recognised Training Centres can also be found on the website.

The new research investigates the economic value of inland and coastal boating in the UK and is the first of its type to explore the impact on people's wellbeing or quality of life by being able to get out onto the water. Paddle sports are shown to be the most popular and accessible way to get afloat. With further growth in 2020 during the pandemic, over 20.5 million people annually take to the water doing a paddle sport, and the activity represents almost half (45%) of the economic contribution of wider tourism expenditures associated with the boating and watersports sector in the UK.

Lesley Robinson, CEO of British Marine, comments: "Whilst 'blue space' has long been recognised to contribute to overall wellbeing, offering both physical and mental health benefits, I am delighted that our new research not only confirms this but places frequent boating and watersports alongside activities such as yoga, that are known for their restorative and mindful benefits.

“The many lifestyle benefits are all the more reason to take to the water this summer and we want to share this news far and wide to encourage people to try something that is not only fun but good for fitness and health. The boost received each time we push away from the shore, coupled with fresh air and vitamin D will be particularly welcome as COVID-19 restrictions ease and we move out of the pandemic. The staycation season has begun and OnTheWater.co.uk is geared towards inspiring people to get afloat through finding the right experience in a location of their choosing.”

Richard Parry, Chief Executive of the Canal & River Trust, said: “This study provides an important baseline in the wellbeing research around boating activities. It is the latest piece of research that demonstrates the substantial value of the nation’s inland waterways to people everywhere; from providing vital green and blue spaces in our towns and cities, to supporting biodiversity and helping mitigate climate change impacts.

“It is particularly encouraging to see the positive benefits of paddle sports; with our waterways on the doorstep of nearly nine million people, this can often be the most accessible way to get out onto the water to experience the unique wellbeing benefits of spending time afloat.”

There are a huge variety of experiences that can be enjoyed in the UK to suit everyone and all budgets, whether living by the coast or near inland waterways. Ready to help people try something new, for a day, a week, or a lifetime, OnTheWater.co.uk displays boating and watersports providers, and can be searched by location to find activities close to home or where people may be holidaying in the UK. Incredible experiences await, including paddleboarding, motor cruising, surfing, kayaking, narrowboat cruising, and sailing. Users of the website are invited and encouraged to share their experiences afloat on social media, and in turn inspire others to do the same, by using the hashtag **#OnTheWater**.

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

***Measuring the economic, social and wellbeing value associated with inland and coastal boating: Simetrica-Jacobs 2021.***

This study was commissioned by British Marine and the Canal & River Trust to demonstrate the economic value of inland & coastal boating in the UK and provides a preliminary exploration of the wider social value. Comparing moderate with frequent boaters, social value refers to the total impact on people’s wellbeing or quality of life of an activity.

The references to inland figures relate to all inland waterways – the Canal & River Trust is separately working with Simetrica-Jacobs to understand the boating GVA of the Trust’s waterways.

See below for a synopsis of the study.

The research shows:

- The total inland and coastal marine tourism sector contributed £5.8 billion to the UK economy (GVA) and approximately 300,000 FTE jobs in 2018/19, comprised of:
  - £1,084 million of GVA generated directly by boating tourism businesses.
  - £4,749 million generated by wider tourism expenditures.
- Based on the latest data from the Watersports Participation Survey, paddle sports (canoeing, rowing and paddle boarding) were the most popular activity grouping – with further growth in 2020 during the pandemic – with more people taking part and taking part

more often – and representing almost half (45%) of the economic contribution of wider tourism expenditures associated with the boating sector. The data suggests that paddle sports provide over 20.5 million annual ‘on the water’ experiences.

- \* The wellbeing benefits of frequent boating and watersports compare favourably to other activities such as dancing, swimming, practicing yoga or cycling. Being a frequent boater or watersports participant is associated with an increase in life satisfaction of 0.44, raising overall life satisfaction to 7.3 on a scale from 0 to 10 in comparison to a moderate boater with a life satisfaction of 6.9. As a comparison, practising yoga or pilates is associated with a wellbeing contribution of 0.17 and going from unemployment to employment is associated with a 0.82 increase in life satisfaction. *(Note: the values for boating participation are taken as a single point in time, whilst the data for other activities is collected over time via panel datasets i.e. datasets containing repeat observations of the same individuals).*
- Using the Office for National Statistics’ four measures of wellbeing, the research identified that a moderate boating and watersport user has (on a scale of 0-10):
  - Anxiety of 3.4
  - Happiness of 6.8
  - Sense of worthwhile of 7.4
  - Life satisfaction of 6.9
- The more often someone goes on the water, the more wellbeing benefit they get. Controlling for other known influencers of wellbeing, the research found that being a frequent user compared to a moderate (-ly frequent) user is associated with (on a scale of 0-10):
  - A reduction in anxiety of 0.5 (a 15% reduction)
  - An increase in happiness of 0.3
  - An increase in sense of worthwhile of 0.3
  - An increase in life satisfaction of 0.4
- Threshold selection for moderate and frequent boating or watersports participation
 

<u>Type of user</u>	<u>Participation frequency</u>
Moderate user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once every six months</li> <li>• Once a year</li> </ul>
Frequent user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once every two to three months</li> <li>• Once a month</li> <li>• Once a fortnight</li> <li>• Once a week</li> <li>• More than once a week</li> </ul>
- The estimated wellbeing effect of being a frequent boater compared to a moderate boater is associated with a wellbeing increase equivalent to £6,400 a year worth of additional income. This figure is similar to wellbeing values associated with other comparable activities and supports the evidence of the positive impact on wellbeing. This wellbeing valuation infers value by estimating the impact of various boating activities on the subjective wellbeing of individuals who experienced them. Impact can then be converted into a monetary valuation by estimating the increase in income which provides the equivalent increase in wellbeing as the outcome analysed.

The OnTheWater.co.uk website lists immediately and easily accessible 'pay to play' watersports services. Users search by postcode, browse boating and watersports on offer in the area and can contact a provider directly to book and get afloat.

**Are you a watersport provider? Get listed at OnTheWater.co.uk**

Onthewater.co.uk is a free service for watersports providers. To be listed on the website, please visit [www.onthewater.co.uk/add-your-company](http://www.onthewater.co.uk/add-your-company).

**For more information, please contact**

British Marine Press Team:  
[pr@britishmarine.co.uk](mailto:pr@britishmarine.co.uk)

**About British Marine**

British Marine (the trading name of British Marine Federation Limited) is the trade association for the UK leisure, superyacht and small commercial marine industry. It has over 1,500 members drawn from both seagoing and inland sectors and represents an industry which employs more than 38,700 people in the UK.

For more information about the work of British Marine and how to join, please visit the website: [www.britishmarine.co.uk](http://www.britishmarine.co.uk), or follow British Marine on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

**About the Canal & River Trust**

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)