

Special Marine Notice – No. 1 of 2026

The purpose of this Special Marine Notice is to provide an overview of the key navigational, safety and vessel requirements necessary for all users to safely enjoy and responsibly operate on the waterways under the remit of Waterways Ireland. This Special Marine Notice highlights the essential information needed for safe passage and general waterway use, further detailed information is available from:

- Waterways Ireland Website: www.waterwaysireland.org
- Specific navigational and boating queries to: Inspectorate@waterwaysireland.org
- General enquiries to: [Waterways Ireland - Contact Us](#)

1. Marine Notices. Marine Notices are the primary means by which Waterways Ireland communicates important operational, navigational and safety information to waterway users. These notices are published on the Waterways Ireland website and issued via a GDPR-compliant email distribution system. Other waterway users may join the distribution list by submitting a request to Inspectorate@waterwaysireland.org

2. Safety on the Water. All users have a responsibility for their safety on the waterways, and should familiarise themselves with current safety guidance and the advice of relevant governing bodies, notably:

- Department of Transport (Ireland) [Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft](#) and www.safetyonthewater.ie
- UK Maritime & Coastguard Agency: [Maritime and Coastguard Agency - GOV.UK](#)
- RNLI: [RNLI - Royal National Lifeboat Institution - Saving Lives at Sea](#)
- Water Safety Ireland: [Water Safety Ireland – Public awareness and education on water safety.](#)

3. Registration of Vessels. All vessels on the Shannon Navigation (including the Shannon–Erne Waterway) and the Erne System must be registered with Waterways Ireland, except open undecked boats with engines less than 15BHP on the Shannon or less than 10BHP on the Erne. Registration includes Powered Watercraft and jet skis. Registration is free should and should be completed online at <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/boat-owners/craft-registration>.

4. Canal and Barrow Navigation Permits. All vessels on the Grand Canal, Royal Canal and Barrow Navigation must display valid permits; a Combined Mooring and Passage Permit of €126 and, if remaining longer than five days, an Extended Mooring Permit of €278 is required. Applications: <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/boat-owners/permits>

5. Passage through Dublin - Grand Canal. For lock passage east of Lock 12 on the Grand Canal please contact the Eastern Regional Office no less than two working days by emailing dublincanals@waterwaysireland.org. Waterways Ireland Water Patrollers will then deploy to support the passage.

6. Passage through Dublin - Royal Canal. Again, please email the Eastern Regional Office at dublincanals@waterwaysireland.org. Due to ongoing works at Newcomen Bridge, a separate Marine Notice will be issued in early 2026 providing an update on the works and the associated navigation arrangements.

Masters of vessels are also advised that a maximum beam (width) restriction of 3.5 metres applies at Lock 10 on the Royal Canal, arising from structural profile limitations at that location. Consequently, vessels of 3.5 metres beam or greater cannot pass Lock 10 on the Royal Canal.

7. Events on the Waterways. Organised events require prior approval from Waterways Ireland at least 6 weeks in advance and must include:

- Letter of insurance
- Letter of indemnification (indemnifying Waterways Ireland)
- Event risk assessment and method statement (RAMS).

All applications should be submitted here: <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/contact-us/organise-an-event>

8. Shannon Navigation Berthing Limits. Berthing limits apply on the Shannon Navigation to ensure fair access for leisure and tourism use. Please note:

- Public harbours on the Shannon system are designated for short-term recreational and visitor use and are not intended for long-term or permanent liveaboard occupation.
- On the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon–Erne Waterway, vessels may berth in public harbours for a maximum of five consecutive days, or a total of seven days within any one calendar month.
- On the Erne System, vessels may berth at a public mooring for a maximum of 48 hours, after which a minimum four-hour intermission is required before re-berthing.
- Compliance with these Bye-Laws supports equitable access to public infrastructure for all waterway users. Boat owners requiring longer-term berthing should make alternative arrangements at private or commercial marinas.
- Extended Mooring Permits are available for eligible berthing on the Grand and Royal Canals.

9. Winter Mooring. Winter Mooring (1 Nov–31 Mar) is available by application (€63.50 per boat). Electricity and water services are disconnected during winter. Users should avoid advance purchase of electricity prior to decommissioning. During this period, most Shannon Service Blocks are also closed. Those availing of Winter Mooring are advised to check their vessel on a regular basis to ensure they remain safely at berth.

10. Smart Cards. Smart cards are required for lock operation on the Shannon–Erne Waterway, access to service blocks, pump-outs, and shore power. [Smart Card Sellers](#) are listed on the [Waterways Ireland Website](#).

11. Berthing. When berthing, masters of vessels must:

- Use appropriate mooring lines and fenders
 - Avoid creating trip hazards
 - Maintain approx. 1m separation for fire safety and rescue needs
 - Avoid blocking ladders, slipways or pump-outs
 - Avoid overhanging anchors
 - Ensure animals are under control
 - Refrain from tying to infrastructure not designed for mooring
 - Stern-on mooring is prohibited at Carrybridge.
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12. Commercial Passenger Vessel Berths. Masters of leisure vessels must not berth on commercial passenger berths when an arrival is imminent. Commercial Passenger vessels typically occupy these only briefly, for which they pay a licensing fee.

13. Lock Lead-In Jetties. Lead-in jetties are for vessels awaiting lock passage and must not be used for long-term mooring.

14. Vessel Wake. Masters must monitor and minimise wake, especially near moored vessels, harbours, jetties, and anglers. Please respect other users, understand the impact of bank erosion.

15. Speed Restrictions. Speed limits include: 5 kph on the Shannon Navigation near infrastructure and moored vessels; 5 kph on the Shannon–Erne Waterway; statutory 5kt/6mph/10kph zones on the Erne System; 6 kph on the Royal and Grand Canals; 11 kph on the Barrow Navigation (except where required for safe passage in fast flow). Respect other users, be considerate; these are recreational areas for all to enjoy.

16. Unusual Waterborne Activity. Hovercraft, seaplanes and similar craft must follow normal navigation rules and allow extra manoeuvring room. Talk to the Inspectorate if additional permission or guidance is required.

17. Sailing Activity. Significant numbers of sailing yachts and dinghies operate on Lough Derg, Lough Ree and Lower Lough Erne from May to August. Courses are marked by yellow buoys. Masters must proceed slowly and follow navigation rules. Power gives way to Sail!

18. Rowing Activity. Expect rowers and canoes, particularly near Athlone, Carrick-on-Shannon, Coleraine, Enniskillen and Limerick. Slow speed and minimum wash are essential. Masters of vessels must actively seek to avoid swamping low-profile rowing boats.

19. Canoeing. Canoeing is an adventure sport; participants should seek guidance from Canoeing Ireland or the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland. Canoeists must take extreme care near weirs, sluices, locks and during high flows. Shooting weirs is prohibited without permission. Portage is required at unmanned locks. Masters should expect increased canoeing activity on Blueways routes and minimise wash accordingly. Paddlers must recognise and pre-empt the limited manoeuvrability of larger vessels.

20. Rockingham and Drummans Island Canals. These canals on Lough Key are accessible only to non-powered craft.

21. Fast Powerboats and Personal Watercraft (PWC). High-speed craft (over 17kts) must exercise extreme caution, especially in confined waters. PWC (or jet skis) are not permitted on canals and must respect other water users. Under S.I. 921/2005: no person under 16 may operate a PWC or fast craft; no person under 12 may operate a craft greater than 5hp/3.7kW.

22. Towed Activities. Masters of vessels towing skiers, wakeboarders or inflatables must maintain safe separation from other traffic and should carry an additional lookout.

23. Prohibition of Swimming. Swimming in Ireland's waterways can be an enjoyable, exhilarating, and rewarding experience; however, all swimmers must remain hazard-aware: [National Drowning Prevention Strategy 2018-2027](#) & [Respect the Water](#)

Swimming within navigable channels, particularly in the vicinity of bridges and weirs, is strictly prohibited. While swimming is permitted in canals, it is not permitted in or near canal or river locks, where significant hazards exist.

Put bluntly, people (particularly younger people) tragically die every year across Ireland's inland waterways, so please be hazard aware, act responsibly around water and role model safe behaviours. Water users are strongly encouraged to consult guidance issued by the RNLI and Water Safety Ireland

24. Personnel Flotation Devices (PFDs or Lifejackets). PFDs must be carried for all persons and worn in accordance with S.I. 921/2005. Additional requirements apply to persons under 16 and all towed activities. All persons conducting deck operations must wear PFDs when transiting all locks (canals and rivers) on our waterways as a safety condition of using Waterways Ireland facilities.

25. Lough Ree Firing Range. A designated Defence Forces firing range on Lough Ree is marked by way of "X" buoys displaying "Danger". Vessel navigation is prohibited in this area.

26. Navigation to Limerick via Ardnacrusha and Sarsfield Lock. The passage requires detailed planning and advance booking. Please note:

- Contact ESB Ardnacrusha 48 hours in advance (Tel: +353 (0)87 9970131).
- Transiting is unsafe when more than one turbine is running.
- Only powered craft capable of >5 knots may enter the headrace/tailrace.
- To book Sarsfield Lock call +353 (0)87 7972998. Transit is not possible two hours either side of low tide.
- Due to siltation near the Shannon Bridge, vessels should approach on a rising tide.

27. Overhead Power Lines (OHPL). Masters must identify OHPL locations and ensure adequate clearance, especially with sailing vessels or equipment with height. Shannon OHPL clearance is maintained at 12.6m above the normal summer level. If contact occurs, do not move the vessel; maintain a safe distance and contact emergency services. Anglers must keep at least 30m away from OHPLs.

28. Submerged Cables and Pipes. Anchoring near submerged cables or pipelines is prohibited. Users should observe bank signage indicating their presence.

29. Water Levels – Low Levels. During low water, masters should stay near the channel centreline, avoid shortcuts, reduce speed to limit squat, and use caution on slipways where traction and depth may be reduced. Dry banks are more prone to erosion. Lock-sharing conserves water. Shannon Water levels are available here: [Water Levels](#).

30. Water Levels – High Levels. High water may obscure navigation markers, reduce bridge air-draft, and increase flow near infrastructure. Use extreme caution in harbours where water may be level with walkways; PFDs are recommended.

31. Lower Bann Navigation. Users should be familiar with Waterways Ireland's [Lower Bann Navigation Boating Information](#). Canoeists should carry the Lower Bann Canoe Trail guide. Contact DfI Rivers Coleraine (Tel: +44 28 7034 2357, rivers.coleraine@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk) for flow-rate advice.

32. Lower Bann – Newferry No Wake Zone. A no-wake zone is in force at Newferry; vessels must proceed accordingly.

33. Slipways. Slipways must be used only for launching/recovery. Mooring cleats on the lead-in jetty are for the temporary holding of vessels launching or being retrieved and not for overnight mooring. Prior to launch/recovery users must check traction, depth, trailer alignment, vehicle capability, and availability of lifesaving equipment. Two-person operation is recommended.

34. Invasive Species Biosecurity. All waterway users have a responsibility to reduce the spread of invasive species such as zebra mussels, quagga mussels, Asian clam, lagarosiphon, Crassula, crayfish plague, fish diseases, and knotweeds. These significantly damage ecology, navigation and infrastructure. All users must implement the Check, Clean, Dry protocol before and after using waterways. Imported vessels must undergo strict biosecurity cleaning. Guidance is available at [Home - Invasives.ie](#)

35. Aids to Navigation. Navigation aids include both fixed and floating markers. Floating aids may shift position as a result of weather conditions or flow rates. Mariners should not rely on any single aid to navigation and are advised to consult the most up-to-date navigation guides and notices. Waterways Ireland has marked the safest navigational channel where practicable. However, due to seasonal variations in water levels, particularly during periods of low water, masters of vessels are advised to remain mid-channel. Boaters are requested to report any damaged aids to navigation, or any floating markers that appear to have moved off station to: Inspectorate@waterwaysireland.org

Summary. In summary, this Special Marine Notice highlights the key considerations for operating legally and safely on designated Inland Waterways, yet, this notice is not exhaustive. Masters of vessels and waterway users are reminded that compliance with the relevant navigation Bye-Laws and marine safety legislation is mandatory. Further information is available at:

- [S.I. No. 247/1988 - Canals Act, 1986 \(Bye-Laws\), 1988](#)
- [Shannon Navigation Bye-Laws 1992 \(IR SI 80/1992\)](#)
- [Lough Erne Navigation Bye-Laws](#)

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