



## **Voluntary Access Arrangements for all year access to and along water – Explanatory Note**

**Issue date: 25 March 2009**

A new benchmark Voluntary Access Arrangements (VAA's) has been set, with the adoption of all year round access, on a number of rivers. This is a significant change from previous arrangements that have restricted access to a set number of days or at most a few months a year.

Canoe England believes there is growing support and a strong case for existing and proposed VAA's to be revised to this new benchmark. A consistent and readily understood national standard would be applied.

Support has been demonstrated by the Environment Agency, Natural England, National Trust, and some National Park Authorities, local authorities, angling organisations, landowners, and other individuals. Their adoption of the principle for all year *round* access with environmental protection as appropriate has enabled this type of arrangement to be established on both lowland and upland rivers in England. Conditions of use are also an important factor in this new standard that applies to particular sections of river listed below.

It has been clearly established these arrangements have continued to work well since being introduced in 2005 and 2006, and prove it is feasible to successfully provide all year round access to inland waters. The Ipsos Mori report (1) confirms this view. Furthermore, Government policy for access to water is based on research by the University of Brighton that produced VAA's with all year round access.

VAA's are only one solution (2) to address the imbalance of the limited access to inland waters. The preferred resolution is legislation similar to that proposed by government for coastal access and in place with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

If VAA's are used Canoe England maintains they should have all year round access. During the next 18 months Canoe England will undertake an exercise to renegotiate existing VAA's to this standard.

Canoe England will reserve the option to withdraw from VAA's that do not meet an all year settlement.

Rivers with Voluntary Access Arrangements and all year access:

Mersey

Waveney

River Greta

References:

(1) Ipsos Mori Report (provide link to doc)

(2) "Water based sport and recreation: the facts (2001)", University of Brighton considered policy scenarios to address the provision of access to water. Options identified included VAA's (with and without dedication) plus:

Compulsory access orders

Statutory rights of navigation to all major rivers, canals and water bodies

A selective increase in statutory rights of navigation

Targeted acquisition of land and water rights

Targeted purchase of services and revised funding arrangements

Minor development of current planning policy