

# enjoying safer boating



Staying safe on Anglian Waterways  
Safety guide

We are the Environment Agency. It's our job to look after your environment and make it **a better place** – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

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# Introduction

**Rivers can be both fun and dangerous. This booklet is designed to illustrate how river activities can be enjoyed with minimum risk if these simple guidelines on safety are followed.**

This safety booklet forms part of a series of guides which contain information about the Rivers Nene, Welland, Glen, Ancholme, Great Ouse and Stour. Each River Guide contains specific information on:

**Locks**

**Facilities**

**Marinas**

**Speed limits**

**Moorings**

**Bridge headroom clearances**

A booklet is also produced, which contains all the relevant Navigation Byelaws for the Anglian Region.

## **General principles of responsibility**

- When navigating on a river, people must accept they are dealing with flowing water.
- Boaters must be self-reliant and responsible for their own safety.
- The decision to navigate must be taken by the boat skipper.
- It is the responsibility of the boat skipper to be properly equipped for the type of boating undertaken.
- When there are strong currents, higher river levels or cold weather conditions, the risk associated with any river activity increases.
- Be courteous and always navigate with care and avoid speeding.
- Do not take risks and never underestimate the power of the river.

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# General safety tips when boating

## Before setting off

Before you set off, follow a few simple safety tips...

- Check your boat is in good condition and meets safety standards.
- Check you have lifebelts, an emergency light and a first-aid kit as an absolute minimum.
- Make sure you and your crew know how to handle the boat.
- Get local information before going onto unfamiliar waterways.
- Plan your cruise and allow enough time to complete it without rushing.
- Do not cruise at night, in the dark or when visibility is poor.
- Make a visual check on river flows. If in doubt over high flows, telephone our Floodline Number (Rivers Nene, Great Ouse and Ancholme only) on 0845 9881188 (for more information see Page 11).

## Once aboard

- Use suitable footwear with non-slip soles and never run around deck.
- Use the grab rails when you walk around deck, even when moored.
- Lifejackets or buoyancy aids should be worn by children and non-swimmers at all times and by everybody in adverse weather conditions, or when alone on deck.
- On some boats children can be out of sight; they often sit in dangerous positions and a sharp turn, change of speed or wash from another boat can toss them into the water. Make sure that children are always in a safe place.
- Take care on landing stages and around locks at all times but especially in wet conditions, as surfaces can be slippery.

## When underway

Speeding is dangerous and illegal. For river speed limits, please refer to the Waterway Byelaws booklet. Accidents occur more frequently at high speeds, particularly from the wash that speed creates. Unlike a car, a boat will not 'stop in seconds' and therefore needs a longer stopping time, especially when travelling downstream, when control over the boat is less.

All moving vessels make wash.

Excessive wash can:

- Endanger people
- Damage moored vessels
- Harm wildlife
- Cause accidents in galleys of moored craft
- Swamp small craft
- Damage river banks
- Interfere with angling

Keep a frequent check on your wash. Due to differing shapes, some boats make more wash than others. Even at a slow speed, your wash will be increased when in convoy. Resist the temptation to keep in a convoy at the speed limit if the resultant wash is too great. It is often sensible to stop briefly to allow your wash to settle to an acceptable level.

Think ahead. Slow down and check your wash when:

- There are moorings ahead
- There are small craft, swimmers or anglers
- The channel ahead narrows

Do not let time rule your journey, relax and enjoy the trip. It is an offence to navigate without care and caution, or in a manner likely to endanger the safety of others, or damage the banks of the river.

Keep a sharp lookout for anglers, who normally fish from the bank and try to keep a good distance from them. Avoid their tackle and create as little disturbance as possible.

When sailing boats are near, maintain a slow steady course but be prepared to give way to avoid collision. In times of little or no wind a sailing boat has almost no control and it will be up to you to avoid it.

In the vicinity of events, take advice from officials or marshals. Sailing races are usually held round a series of buoys, and vessels should avoid these turning marks. There may be congestion near sailing clubs when dinghies gather to race. This should clear within minutes. Motorised craft should be prepared to stop and when clear, proceed at a slow and steady pace.

If in convoy, ensure that there is ample space between each boat to allow good vision ahead and room to manoeuvre.

When near rowing craft, remember that the crew of an uncoxed boat has a problem keeping a lookout ahead, and even a cox may have a limited field of vision.

### **Anchoring and mooring**

When stopping overnight, or leaving the craft for any appreciable length of time, do not moor in shallow water, or with a tight rope or chain, as water may fluctuate by as much as one metre in a few hours. If the level drops and a craft is beached or moored in shallow water, it may be damaged. If the level rises, and mooring ropes or chains are tight, the launch may take on water, be pulled under or even break free.

Always ensure there is ample water below your keel and sufficient vertical play on any mooring rope or chain.

### **An introduction to using locks**

There are over 65 Environment Agency locks in the Anglian Region. Boaters, especially those new to the rivers, should make sure they know how to operate and use locks correctly. Children should not be allowed to operate any lock and should be supervised at all times.

The majority of locks in the Region have steel or wooden pointing doors (also known as mitre or ‘vee’ doors) and vertical steel gates (known as guillotine gates). On some locks guillotine gates are powered (electrically operated), whilst others will require manual winding. Keys are required to operate locks on the River Nene, Great Ouse and the Ancholme, because the vertical gates have security locks. Keys can be purchased from some marinas or by contacting 08456 031 043 (Please ask for the Anglian Navigation Licence and Registration Department). A windlass is also required to operate the paddles in the mitre doors. Windlasses are available from boat yards and chandlers.

**Please note, when navigating the Nene always leave locks with the pointing doors closed and the vertical gate raised, secured and locked.**

### **When doors/gates are open on approach:**

- Enter lock slowly and moor up, ensuring an adult has control of the head and stern mooring lines.
- Make sure that the guillotine gate, mitre doors and paddles (if present) are closed. Should these be left open, the flow through the lock chamber when in operation will be greatly increased making it difficult to maintain control of your craft.
- According to the direction of travel, open the paddles in the mitre doors or lift the guillotine gate a few centimetres slowly. Take into account the consideration of other boats. Great care should be taken when opening the guillotine gate, and if water flows into or out of the lock pen too quickly close the gate and start again.
- Whoever is controlling the boat mooring lines should maintain a taut line, as water levels change. Make sure that the boat does not snag on the lock during emptying and that the boat does not drift close to the lock doors. Several locks, particularly on the Nene, can have water flowing over the mitre doors, which could be a hazard to a boat that is not properly controlled during mooring.

- When water levels have equalised open the mitre doors / guillotine gate fully in the direction of travel.
- Make sure that any paddles (if present) are closed ready for the next user before leaving the lock chamber slowly and safely.
- Narrow boats in particular, should be fitted with side fenders to avoid the boat settling into safety chains which run alongside the lock.

### **When doors/gates are closed on approach:**

- Moor on the landing stage provided and check that all doors, gates and paddles (if present) are closed. Should these be left open, the flow through the lock chamber when in operation will be greatly increased making it difficult to maintain control of your craft.
- Fill the lock following the procedures outlined above. Take particular care to fill the lock pen at a slow rate.
- When water levels have equalised open the mitre doors / guillotine gates fully to allow entry into the lock and follow the procedures outlined above for lock use.

## A special note on River Nene locks

The following warning notice is displayed at manually operated locks with guillotine gates on the Nene.

### CAUTION

**DO NOT ALLOW CHILDREN TO OPERATE LOCK MACHINERY.**

**ALWAYS GRIP LOCK OPERATING HANDLE FIRMLY BEFORE RELEASING THE SLIDING LOCK-BOLT WITH KEY.**

**ALWAYS MAINTAIN A FIRM GRIP ON THE OPERATING HANDLE WHILST RAISING OR LOWERING THE GUILLOTINE GATE.**

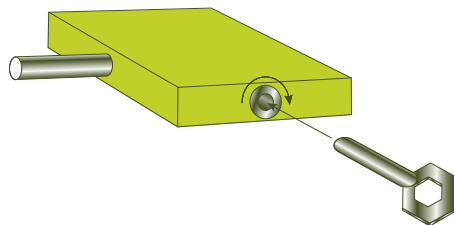
**DO NOT OVER-WIND (OR FORCE) THE OPERATING HANDLE WHEN THE GATE IS EITHER FULLY UP OR DOWN, AS WHEN UNLOCKED THE OPERATING HANDLE COULD SPIN AND STRIKE THE USER.**

**ENSURE BOAT IS POSITIONED AWAY FROM WATER FLOWING OVER THE POINTING DOORS.**

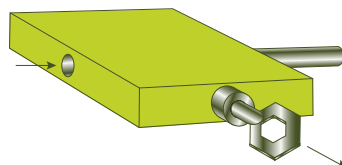
Please report any problems encountered to the Environment Agency on -

**0800 80 70 60**

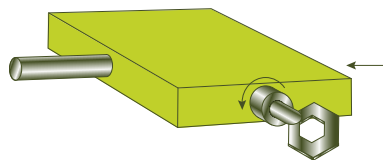
## Lock security - vertical gate



Insert the abloy key and turn clockwise



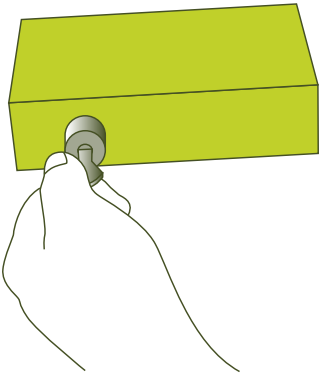
Pull out to release the lock barrel, this will release the spring loaded sliding lockbolt and allow the handle to turn



When the gate is either fully raised or lowered, re-lock the winding gear by relocating the slide bolt, while holding the slidebolt with the thumb, push in and relock the abloy lock barrel. Remove the key On electrically operated gates simply use the abloy key to open the control box and press the appropriate buttons, ensuring that the pointing 'V' doors are properly closed before lifting the gate and that the gate is fully raised and the control box relocked when passage is complete.

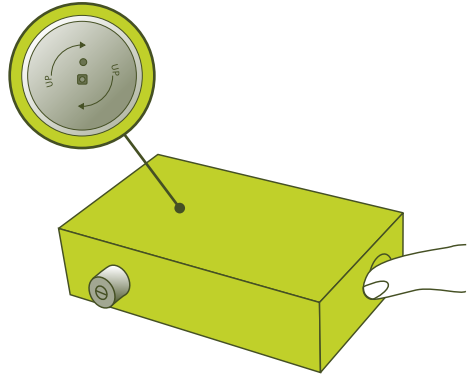
# lock - wheel operation

At certain lock sites on the Rivers Nene and Great Ouse lock winding wheels have been fitted to improve the safety of users. Should you encounter any difficulties call us on 0800 80 70 60. These are operated in the following manner:



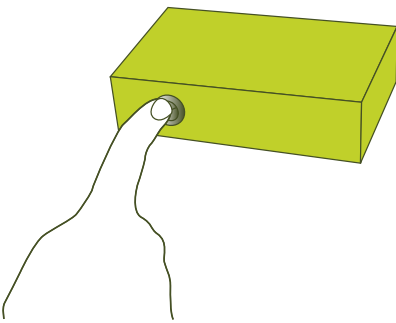
## To unlock the wheel

Insert the Abloy key turn clockwise and release the lock barrel. The spring loaded sliding bolt will release and the wheel may be operated.



## When the gate is either fully raised or lowered

Re-lock the winding gear by lining up the indent on the inside of the wheel and relocating the slide bolt.



## To lock the wheel

Whilst holding in the slide bolt push in and re-lock the Abloy lock barrel.

## Low bridges and other structures

On the Nene navigation, many bridges and other structures that have a low (less than 2.8m) clearance have headroom gaugeboards installed. The gaugeboards are located immediately up and downstream of the structure, with a board installed further upstream. The gaugeboards will help boat users to assess whether there is adequate clearance for their boat. Gauge boards will also be found at some locations on the Great Ouse, many of these low bridges are also narrow. The waterflow is increased as the boat gets closer to the bridge. This has the effect of 'drawing' the boat towards the bridge. When travelling downstream, when levels are high, extreme caution should be exercised.

## Learn how to cope if an accident should occur

You should:

- **Know** how to help a person in difficulty in the water.
- **Learn** an approved resuscitation technique.
- **Learn** how to administer first aid.
- **Learn** how to deal with hypothermia.
- **Get help!** - if in doubt do not put yourself at risk.

In the event of a river accident, in the first instance ring the emergency services on 999. Try to give the operator as an accurate description as to your location as possible. Use landmarks and your grid reference if you know it. Please also notify our emergency 24 hour hotline as soon as possible by calling 0800 80 70 60.

# Dangers

## Weirs are dangerous areas

Most weirs are identified by a sign (a boat going over a weir). These warning signs should always be respected. It is both dangerous and illegal to interfere with weir gates and sluices. Many weirs can also be identified by the presence of buoys and/or booms.

## Water levels

Water levels can never be guaranteed. This means extra care should be taken:

- When approaching any river control structures – weirs, sluices, and locks etc. – particularly if there is significant flow in the river. Greater quantities of water will be flowing over river structures and this can make boating hazardous. At higher water levels, significant quantities of water can cascade over the lock upstream mitre doors. **This represents a risk of sinking** and boats should moor away from these mitre doors.
- When stopping overnight, or leaving a boat for a considerable amount of time (for example, over winter in places where boats are permitted to remain in the water) or when a river is in flood, do not moor in shallow water or with a tight rope or chain, as water levels may change rapidly. If the levels drop and the craft is ‘grounded’, it may be turned on its side or be damaged. If the level rises and mooring ropes or chains are tight, the boat may take on water, be pulled under or break free.

## Reversed locks

During periods of high (flood) flows, some locks may be used for flood water discharge purposes. **Absolutely no attempt should be made to pass through a lock if the mitre doors are chained back and the vertical gate is partially lifted.** In this position the lock is ‘reversed’ and warning signs will be sited upstream. These signs must be obeyed. ‘Reversed’ locks are closed due to heavy rain resulting in exceptionally high and fast river flows. Under these conditions navigation is hazardous and **we strongly advise users not to attempt to boat on the river.**

The following locks can be reversed on the Nene:

- **Doddington**
- **Cotterstock**
- **Titchmarsh**
- **Warmington**
- **Wadenhoe**
- **Elton**
- **Lower Barnwell**
- **Yarwell**

The following locks can be reversed on the Great Ouse:

- **Bedford**
- **Godmanchester**
- **Cardington**
- **Hemingford**
- **Eaton Socon**
- **St Ives**
- **Offord**
- **Brownhill**
- **Brampton**

## Strong Stream Advice (SSA)

The Rivers Nene and Great Ouse are unique in the Region because we ‘reverse the locks’, an operation that closes the affected locks to navigation. **Our Strong Stream Advice (SSA) tells boat users that locks are ‘reversed’**

**and that we strongly recommend against attempting to navigate.** We also provide strong stream advice on the River Ancholme to indicate river level changes to users especially at South Ferriby when the sluices are in operation. An automated voice message (AVM) is relayed to a predetermined set of telephone numbers when the rivers reach certain levels or flows. The telephone numbers belong to boat clubs, marinas and others on the Rivers Nene, Great Ouse and Ancholme navigations.

**River users are also able to telephone our Floodline Information Service to hear the recorded AVM which will inform users whether Strong Stream Advice is on or off. To do this complete the following steps:**

- 1. Call Floodline on 0845 988 1188**  
- You will be welcomed to Floodline and offered different touch tone options
- 2. Choose option '1' to 'listen to pre-recorded information for flood warnings currently in force'**
- 3. Then simply enter one of the following quick dial SSA numbers when prompted:**
  - **River Nene**                   **032112**
  - **River Great Ouse**       **033211**
  - **River Ancholme**       **031211**

In partnership with the British Waterways and the Middle Level Commissioners we have signs

to inform users of Strong Stream Advice. Signs on the River Nene are located at the top and bottom locks of the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal, at Stanground Lock, Peterborough, at Dog-in-a-Doublet, many of the moorings and all reversed and some other locks. At a number of sites on the River Nene, boat clubs (in association with the Agency) raise red flags when SSA is in operation. These flags not only inform club members that SSA is on, but are of value to other river users as well.

On the River Great Ouse all reversed locks and some other lock sites display SSA signs. A flag warning system (Red for SSA in force or Green for off) also operates at Hermitage lock.

The River Ancholme uses signs to notify users if SSA is in force, these can be found at South Ferriby and at Glanford Boat Club in Brigg.

If you would like to add a contact number for yourself onto any of the SSA lists please contact our National Customer Contact Centre on 08708 506 506. Please note that automated warnings can be generated any time of the day or night.

## Safety at Locks

In narrow lock cuts, please remember that some pleasure craft draw up to 1.2 metres (4 feet) or more and might not be able to manoeuvre quickly.

When waiting for a lock, form an orderly queue at the landing platform.

Queue jumping is bad manners, arouses ill feeling and can cause confusion and delay entering the lock. Always moor on the platform as near as possible to the lock so that later arrivals can moor astern of you. When a lock is full of craft, any remaining boats should move forward along the platform to enable those waiting in the channel (perhaps in difficult conditions) to moor at the back of the queue. Stop your engine once the boat is moored in the lock. Please turn off any radio, or other form of noise.

If you have a dog on board, please keep it on your boat or on a lead while passing through locks.

Please take care, and whilst in the lock:

**Do not** fend off with hands, feet or boat hook (experience shows that this can result in crushed or broken limbs).

**Do not** open fuel tanks or strike matches.

# Specific advice for non-powered craft

## Canoeing

Buoyancy aids or life jackets should be worn at all times with helmets when in wild water. Canoeists should preferably have had formal instruction, be able to swim and adhere to the British Canoe Union Code of Practice.

**Do not** canoe just above weirs or try to shoot weirs.

**Keep clear** of sailing boats, motor cruisers and rowing craft (sculls, pairs, fours and eights) particularly when racing or coaching is taking place. Remember it is difficult for rowing craft to see canoes.

**Do not** follow close behind larger vessels.

**Do not** get in the way of other craft by suddenly altering course, particularly in narrow waters. Remember that larger boats are less manoeuvrable and canoes can use much shallower water than any other craft.

## Rowing and Sculling

In strong stream conditions it is advised that rowing craft stay off the river. If you choose to row in strong conditions, stay away from weirs, obstructions and bridges, especially

whilst turning round. At such times, a rescue boat should be in attendance.

If on water at dusk, after sunset or in restricted visibility, rowers and scullers should wear light coloured tops, and an all-round **white** light or two **white** lights covering 360° should be displayed.

Look out for others on and in the water, and change speed and direction as necessary to avoid incident.

Remember the cox is always in charge and is the master of the craft.

Remember when travelling faster than another craft that the overtaking craft must keep clear. Do not turn across the bows of an oncoming craft; wait until it is safe.

Remember it is difficult for other users to see fast moving rowing craft that lie low in the water.

When rowing for pleasure, ensure you do not interfere with other organised activities.

Coaching/rescue vessels must watch their speed and wash.

## Sailing

Sailing craft should look out for other river traffic, and keep clear of weirs and busy channels.

**Do not** suddenly alter course immediately in front of other craft. Power driven craft are not always as manoeuvrable as sailing craft, especially at low speeds when sailing craft have reasonable winds.

Tacking is often essential, but can present a hazard to navigation. Keep a proper lookout; failure to do so is the cause of many accidents.

Buoyancy aids or lifejackets should be worn at all times.

## Dinghy racing

Lay starting lines where they cannot cause trouble to passing traffic. If in doubt please contact your local navigation River Inspector. Sailing marks should not be placed near locks, lock cuts, marinas, fuel wharves, passenger boat landing stages or narrow and shallow places.

The length of the starting line must allow a clear passage to craft proceeding up and down the river. A navigable channel should be available for non-racing vessels.

Starting signal intervals: keep the time between Warning and Starting signals to a minimum.

When there are several starts in succession, allow an interval between races. During this interval, craft intending to race should avoid congregating in the starting area. This allows other vessels to proceed and avoids annoying delays.

# Regulations

There are various regulations governing the use of the Anglian navigable rivers and their banks for boaters of all sorts, anglers, riparian owners, towpath walkers, etc.

Whether you want to erect a landing stage, or hold an event such as a regatta or raft race, check with the Planning & Corporate Services department, You can get in touch with any of the local Planning & Corporate Services Departments via our National Customer Contact Centre, please call 08708 506 506 Mon to Fri 08:00 to 18:00 and ask for the relevant office below stating it is in Anglian Region:

## **For the Rivers: Ancholme, Welland, Glen and Nene:**

Lincoln Office: Waterways Team, Waterside House, Waterside North Lincoln LN2 5HA.

Telephone: 08708 506506.  
Fax: 01522 512927

## **For the Rivers Great Ouse and Stour:**

Peterborough Office: Waterways Team, Kingfisher House, Goldhay Way, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5ZR.

Telephone: 08708 506506.  
Fax: 01733 231840

## **Registration and Licensing**

All vessels (motor launches, canoes (except members of the British Canoe

Union), sailing dinghies, sailboards, rowing craft) must have a current registration and licence with us. Registration certificates usually expire on 31st March, although short period certificates may be obtained for visiting craft entering the Anglian Region's navigable waterways from other waterways.

Other classes of licences are available which allow access to both Environment Agency and British Waterways navigations - for example the 'Gold Licence'.

The Agency must also be notified by the registered boat owner of any change of ownership taking place during the registration period. Failure to do so is an offence. Licences are not transferable and the licence plate must be clearly displayed.

All vessels used on the Environment Agency Anglian Region's navigable waterways are required to comply with construction and equipment specifications. From 1997 onwards, depending on the age of the vessel, owners have been required to produce a valid Boat Safety Certificate when applying for a licence to use the vessel on the Anglian Region's navigable waterways.

For any navigation license and registration related enquiries please contact 08456 031043.

## **Boat safety scheme**

Safety is vitally important for boat owners and users. The Boat Safety Scheme, developed in co-operation with boat user representatives and the boat trade, is designed to reduce the risk of fire and/or explosion on craft. The scheme currently applies to both Environment Agency and British Waterways navigations.

## **How does it work?**

Boats subject to the scheme have to be examined independently at least once every four years by authorised examiners.

## **Who does it apply to?**

The scheme applies to all powered vessels, including hire craft. Manually propelled craft and sailing vessels, which do not carry fuel and are not fitted with cooking, heating, refrigerating or lighting appliances do not have to comply.

For further details on the Boat Safety Scheme please refer to the 'Boat Safety Scheme' booklet available from the Boat Safety Scheme, at Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford, Herts, WD17 4QA

Telephone 01923 201 278

Fax 01923 201 420

Email: [Bss.enquiries@britishwaterways.co.uk](mailto:Bss.enquiries@britishwaterways.co.uk)

[www.boatsafetyscheme.com](http://www.boatsafetyscheme.com)

## **Navigation byelaws**

Obey the rules of navigation and the navigation byelaws. Copies are available by calling our National Customer Contact Centre on 08708 506 506 or from Area Offices, the Regional Office and the Navigation Income Section in Peterborough.

## **Other publications available in this series:**

**Navigating the River Nene**

**Navigating the Rivers Welland and Glen**

**Navigating the River Ancholme**

**Navigating the River Great Ouse**

**Navigating the River Stour**

**Boating the right way, Recreational Byelaws, Anglian Waterways**

# Useful Contacts

In the first instance you may find answers to any queries via our web site at:  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/navigation](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/navigation)

However should you need further information enquiries can be made through our National Customer Contact Centre, details for which are:

**Telephone:** 08708 506 506 (Within UK, lines open Mon to Fri 08:00 – 18:00)  
00 44 1709 389 201 (Outside of UK)  
08702 422 549 (Minicom Service for the hard of hearing)  
**e-mail:** [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

You can get in touch with any of our Regional / local Area Offices via the National Customer Contact Centre telephone number above, by fax or in writing to the following addresses:

## **Anglian Regional Office:**

Waterways Team, Environment Agency, Kingfisher House, Goldhay Way, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5ZR. Fax: 01733 231 840.

## **Anglian Northern Area Office, Rivers Ancholme, Welland, Glen & Nene:**

Waterways Team, Environment Agency, Waterside House, Waterside North, Lincoln, LN2 5HA. Fax: 01522 512927.

## **Anglian Central Area Office, River Great Ouse:**

Waterways Team, Environment Agency, Brampton Office, Bromholme Lane, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE28 4NE. Fax: 01480 413381

## **Anglian Eastern Area Office, River Stour:**

Ipswich Office. Icen House, Cobham Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP3 9JE. Fax: 01473 724205.

For any craft registration and licensing enquiries please contact the following office:

## **Craft Registration and Licensing:**

Navigation Income and Licensing Team, Environment Agency, Aqua House, London Road, Peterborough, PE2 8AG. Tel: 08456 031 043. Fax: 01733 231840.

## **To report any incidents or breakdowns please call our 24-hour incident hotline:**

0800 80 70 60

## **For Strong Stream Advice please call our Floodline:**

0845 988 11 88

Dial option '1' followed by the relevant quick dial number:

River Nene: 032112 - River Great Ouse: 033211 - River Ancholme: 031211

**Would you like to find out more about us,  
or about your environment?**

**Then call us on**

**08708 506 506** (Mon-Fri 8-6)

**email**

**enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk**

**or visit our website**

**www.environment-agency.gov.uk**

**incident hotline 0800 80 70 60** (24hrs)

**floodline 0845 988 1188**



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