

BERTH HOLDERS OF THE WORLD UNITE...

For those of us who keep our boats in a marina, we know that the berthing fees are usually our highest annual cost. We all - usually grudgingly (but sometimes very grudgingly!) - accept this as a fact of boating life. Berth Holders Associations can help us improve the marina and therefore the value we get from our marina fees.

WHAT A BERTH HOLDERS ASSOCIATION CAN DO

It is true that Berth Holders Associations (BHAs) vary greatly in their activities and what they do. The following is really no more than a set of suggestions culled from our own experience, the RYA's suggestions and comments from others.

DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MARINA MANAGEMENT

One of the basic jobs of the BHA is to liaise with – and occasionally negotiate with – the marina management in order to improve facilities at the marina. Hopefully you will have a co-operative management who will understand that marinas are to a degree in competition with one another and so it is in their interests to listen to berth holders (i.e. their customers!) and take their views seriously. Of course, the strength of any BHA depends in part on the numbers of members

it has. In this (whatever your political views) it is not unlike a Trade Union! Therefore, continual recruitment of members is an important part of the role of a BHA.

A sensible relationship between the marina management and the BHA will follow from the management realising that the BHA is in effect a valuable resource to provide free market research and to ensure that its 'product' – the marina – is and remains competitive.



Marina

DISCOUNTS

An active BHA should try and negotiate discounts for its members from the local chandlers, restaurant, cafes and other local traders. These discounts can be very valuable for BHA members. They can easily be worth more than the BHA's membership fee, so that joining your local BHA becomes a 'no-brainer' – as it directly saves you cash. Yes, you can actually end up paying less for something - a true rarity in boating, as we all know!



Getting Discounts

SOCIAL EVENTS

Most BHA's organise a number of social events during the year. These can range from formal dinner-dances through to BBQ's and similar events. Often there is a start of season event and an end of season event. These can be as formal or informal as your members want. Sometimes these events help raise money for the BHA and / or raise money for local charities. Certainly, they are a great way for members to meet fellow berth holders and make new friends, as well as helping all enjoy life at the marina.

CRUISING EVENTS

Many BHA's organise cruising events – 'cruising in company'.

These are of course dependent on the usual factors such as weather and tides. Thought needs to be given to how you best mix sail and power, the routes, places to meet, communication channels, emergency procedures and (possibly) insurance. And, of course, which pubs and restaurants to visit en-route.



Cruising in Company

SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS

Members should be encouraged to make suggestions for the improvement of the marina, which the BHA can then pass onto management.

However, managing actual complaints against the marina is more controversial. Most BHA's prefer not to get involved in complaints management for several reasons. Firstly, most BHA's don't have the resources (or even the expertise) to manage a complaint. Next, they need to keep a reasonable relationship with marina management. Also, they may not even agree with the complainant. For these reasons, most BHA's only keep a watching brief on complaints.

OTHER EVENTS

This varies greatly from one BHA to another, but could include events such as:

- Demonstrations of first aid. Perhaps see if you can get a demonstration from a local St John's Ambulance – see <http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/first-aid-advice.aspx> - or similar organisations. This could include general first aid and specific techniques, such as resuscitation techniques.
- Talks and demonstrations by the local RNLI and visits to the local RNLI station – see <https://rnli.org/>
- Local traders or marine engineers may be willing to arrange demonstrations of some of their products or services.

WEBSITES

Most BHA's have their own Websites, which can be a very useful source of information. The better ones contain features such as:

- Weather and tidal information
- Local charts and details of any local channels and other nautical and pilotage features, such as buoys, leading lights and areas to avoid!
- Notices to mariners
- Webcams of the marina
- Membership application forms
- Details of discounts
- Events – both boating and other, local, events that may be of interest
- Local facilities, such as cafes, restaurants and touristy things to see and do
- If you are thinking of setting up a website, you are very welcome to contact us for free advice, as we have specific website design expertise.

Some BHA's make use of other social media, such as Facebook. However, your own website gives you control over its contents so that you can ensure that it focuses on information of most use to your members.

DON'T (YET) HAVE A BERTH HOLDERS ASSOCIATION?

If there isn't currently one at your marina, setting up one is fairly simple. Fortunately, the RYA gives detailed instructions at:

<https://www.rya.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/legal/Web%20Documents/Legal%20Leaflets/Clubs/Berth%20Holders%20Association/SETTING%20UP%20A%20BERTH%20HOLDERS%20ASSOCIATION.pdf>

The initial steps involve getting a few like-minded people to start one off. If you want any informal (free) advice and suggestions, contact me at Go Earth on info@boatsearch.earth. We may even be able to offer a (very!) modest sponsorship to help with any initial expenses.

GETTING VOLUNTEERS

One of the challenges in setting up a BHA is getting volunteers to help with initially setting one up. Of course, you could always try the traditional naval approach of press-ganging. See, for example, <http://www.old-merseytimes.co.uk/pressgangs.html> for suggestions on how to do this! However, I suspect that this is illegal nowadays, so you may have to resort to, initially at least, getting a few interested people together to kick-start the process. Beer or gin and tonics (or even tea and biscuits) certainly help the process.

Of course, after the initial setup, you need to recruit members and democratically elect a committee of the willing (or press-ganged!).

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Go Earth assists clients in all elements of procuring boats. For more information email info@boatsearch.earth or visit www.boatsearch.earth.

This is one in a series of articles that Martin is writing for Boat Trader covering a wide variety of topics.