



An update from British Canoeing about a return to paddling

1 May 2020

I want to share with you again our advice about paddling at this time and also to reassure you that we are working hard behind the scenes on behalf of members to encourage the government to allow a return to socially responsible paddling as soon as possible.

The Big Picture: Taking a step back to look at the big picture first, all forms of sport and active recreation other than running, walking and cycling have been suspended. No other community sport or active recreation is being encouraged. This is being driven by the government and reinforced by the arms' length organisations including Sport England and the Environment Agency.

Public health risks are real: There remain significant public health risks associated with COVID-19 and the way in which it can be spread. There is currently no effective treatment or vaccine for the virus which we know can be fatal in some cases. We all recognise that the NHS is under massive strain and the country is still in lockdown until further notice.

Our advice: Our strong advice of 26 March remains in place, that paddlers ought not to paddle at this time until some of the restrictions are lifted.

The frustrations: We fully recognise that this is a deeply frustrating position for our members and the wider paddlesport community, as our paths and parks are full of people walking and running, there are more cyclists on the road than normal, and yet our waterways are empty and paddling is being discouraged.

The case for a return: Whilst we can make a compelling case why independent, socially responsible paddling should be allowed now and that that paddling can be done safely within social distancing guidelines, many other organisations will argue the same for their sport; angling, open water swimming, single sculls rowing, horse riding, rambling, climbing and golf to name just a few. The government is not yet ready to make the call for further relaxations at this time, for all the reasons we understand when we watch or read the news.

Social and economic impact: Government recognises that activities such as paddling are really helpful to an individual's physical and mental wellbeing and that this lockdown is impacting not only on the health and wellbeing of individuals but also significantly affecting the economy of professional and amateur sports. The economic impact on our clubs, centres, self-employed providers, trade and retail and on British Canoeing as the NGB is significant. These social and economic drivers cannot be totally ignored.

Actively working with national agencies: We are working closely as part of an Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Group, led by Natural England, to put plans in place for a phased return to sport and active recreation. We are working hard to ensure that paddlesport can be



in the first phase. The government is unlikely to consider a sport by sport return to activity. By working closely alongside colleagues in the British Mountaineering Council, Outdoor Industries Association, the Ramblers, National Trust and many more, we can ensure that we have a consistent and clear approach that delivers a swift and safe return to activity for our respective communities.

We will also continue to work closely with the Environment Agency, Canal & River Trust and the Broads Authority to assess the risks and put plans in place for a return to paddling on our 5000km of Public Navigations.

Long term relationships: It is our preferred and considered approach to work in collaboration across the sector and with national agencies. Many of the agencies and government departments with whom we are working to achieve a return to paddling, are the same ones that will help to create a change to legislation to bring clarity around rights of navigation and who will support us in our long term promotion and development of paddlesport.

A phased return for sports: The risks that different sports and activities present are very different, and so we are advocating that a phased return to activity is the best approach and that NGBs should take a strong lead in issuing guidance to their members and participants. We are working with other NGBs and Sport England to further develop this approach.

A return to individual paddling: We believe that the first phase of lifting restrictions ought to include a return to individual paddling. When this is agreed by government, we are likely to have to agree some limitations and guidelines for paddlers and these may include;

remain local; be alone, with family members or in small groups; be well within capabilities; respecting rural communities and other users; be once a day for a short time; respect social distancing; respect access points and local restrictions; be sensitive to the environment; be clean, washing hands, equipment and #check clean dry.

Remaining patient: Patience is still required, but that's the same for all aspects of the situation we find ourselves in. I am confident that we are taking every step possible to encourage a relaxation and a return to individual paddling as soon as possible. We are planning behind the scenes about what further phases will look like around club activity, courses and events and these reintroductions will probably come a little later in the year. Getting individuals back on the water is a clear focus at this stage.

Stronger Together: We have made a lot of progress within British Canoeing in the last three years through working in a joined up way. This approach offers the best way forward on this issue too. We are working hard at national level and we are being heard. Members could best support this process now by respecting the strong guidance we have issued to refrain from paddling for a little longer and by sharing the messages with your local waterway authorities and MPs about the importance of a phased return to active recreation and how responsible paddling fits into the first phase of this.



Regular communication: We recognise the importance of communicating with you and realise that many have wanted some news a little sooner. We and many other national bodies have been dealing with some significant challenges within our respective organisations and it is only in the last week or so that there has been some meaningful collaboration between partners around the return agenda. This is true of government also. I will ensure that we communicate again as soon as anything significant occurs around the return agenda and that we share an update at least every two weeks.

Finally I would like to thank you for your patience, for respecting the guidance we have issued and for your continued support of British Canoeing during this challenging time.

Kind regards

David Joy

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Joy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D".

CEO British Canoeing