Westerly Owners' Association

Press release

WOA appeals for time and thought on red diesel issue

The Westerly Owners' Association, which represents over 3000 UK yacht owners, wishes to express its strong concern over the decision that red diesel can only be purchased for use by boat owners within UK waters. This will have a dramatic impact on the boating industry.

The Westerly Owners' Association wishes to make the following points:

a. The Association and its members have no objection to paying the full rate of duty on diesel, whether red or white. All Association members have sailing boats, whose use of diesel engines is for secondary propulsion only.

b. Only red diesel is available at most marine outlets within the UK, i.e. white diesel is not available to most boats.

c. Once red diesel has been used in a boat and its tanks, the dye will always remain. Even if a boat's fuel system is flushed and refilled with white diesel, there is a significant probability that red dye will be detected. Boat owners can be penalised in the future even if they comply with all the requirements of European Law.

d. Many people buy boats for the opportunity to travel to nearby EU countries. This opportunity will be lost if there is a risk of significant penalties. As a result, many may reconsider if it is wise to join the boating community, with consequent impact on the Boating Industry, and on the Exchequer because of lost tax revenue.

e. Foreign boat owners, who travel to the UK in significant numbers, will be deterred from visiting, simply because they will only be able to get red diesel. This will impact on the tourist revenue.

f. Most marine suppliers have made the decision that it was uneconomic to install a second white diesel delivery system. Even if they decided to go ahead, the deadline of 1 April makes it impossible for any suppliers to comply in that time.

In summary, there are fundamental problems with this proposal. There is no time to take any palliative measures, which would be likely to be nugatory because red dye will linger in a boat where it was once used. Secondly, this will both prevent UK people from visiting the continent by boat and prevent Europeans from visiting the UK.

It is therefore strongly recommended that introduction of the legislation be delayed or withdrawn whilst practical solutions to this dilemma are explored and implemented. In the meantime, it is considered that the strongest representations be made to the European Commission not to impose penalties on boat owners who have paid the full duty on fuel, at least in the interim.

More information from:

John Ruskin
WOA press and communications