

**Statement to the The Senedd Petitions Committee by Mark Flood
For Meeting on 22 September 2025**

P-06-1525 Preserve the unique character of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal for the future generations of Wales

Thank you for your Deputy Clerk's email dated 8 September 2025, inviting me to share my reflections on the plenary debate on 9 July 2025, as well as upon any updates or developments since then. As you know, I am not the petitioner but submitted a further petition on the same matter that was rejected as a duplicate. I am therefore most grateful for you seeking my views on the matter.

I am a member of the 'Preserve and Protect the Mon and Brec' Campaign Group (PPMB). This note is written from a personal standpoint but also reflects the views of the Group. I am a liveaboard boater on the canal, so it is my home that is at risk. There are a number of other liveaboard boaters on the canal who have made it their home, and all have their personal reasons as to why this is the case; but we all have in common a love for the beauty, tranquility, ecology and heritage of this very special place.

I will begin by turning the clock back to March this year. Around the beginning of that month, the fact that severe restrictions were being placed on the supply of water to the canal first became known to canal users and those businesses that rely upon it to generate millions of pounds of income to the local economy every year. PPMB was established in response. The winter works to the canal cease in mid-March, and that is when the length of the canal is open for use. Within a few days of opening, I received a notification from the Canal and River Trust (CRT) that I should find a safe place to moor with access to a fresh drinking water supply, as it was expected that the water level in the canal would drop so as to be unnavigable; this only requires around a 100 mm reduction from the normal level. The perilous effect of the onerous new water abstraction limits was immediately plain for all to see. Boat hire companies could not guarantee the delivery of booked holidays to their customers. Hospitality and tourism businesses along the length of the canal suddenly faced an uncertain future. I did not know whether to keep my boat on the canal, or be forced to move to another part of the canal network in England.

The CRT deal with Welsh Water, which followed concerted pressure from PPMB and others, secured top-up supply just in time; but at substantial financial cost to CRT and limited to a 12 month period only. CRT has consistently advised Welsh Government that the future extension of the deal on its current terms is unsustainable for a charity.

The petition attracted huge support. PPMB has fully supported Cllr Jan Butler, the petitioner, and as you know that petition resulted in the plenary debate on 9 July. I attended the debate and listened to what Members had to say, and it is clear that:-

- Welsh Government fully supports the canal and finding a solution that ensures it continues to function and thrive as it does today
- This support is heartfelt from Members and is cross-party
- The Petitions Committee has been particularly supportive, having visited the canal and discussed the issue with canal users
- All, including PPMB, recognise the challenges facing the River Usk, but the challenge facing the canal is not severable; these watercourses interact.

However, on the day I was frustrated by the indeterminate outcome of the debate, and I know that my colleagues in PPMB shared that frustration. The following day, a pre-arranged meeting of stakeholders took place (it seems I am not a stakeholder, although my personal stake in the canal could not be greater). From this meeting emerged an announcement by the Deputy First Minister that Dwr Cymru would be granted £5 million to upgrade the pumping station used to deliver the top-up water to the Usk. This was presented as a measure that secures the future of the canal. To date, I have seen no evidence to support this assertion. I am sure that Dwr Cymru is delighted that Welsh Government (and therefore the tax payer) has given it money to upgrade its infrastructure; however this is of no obvious benefit to the canal unless it means that Dwr Cymru does not then charge CRT for top-up water, or the charge is substantially reduced to account for reduced operating costs in delivering it via more efficient infrastructure. If neither scenario applies, then plainly the £5 million investment has no effect whatsoever in making the top-up water affordable to CRT as a registered charity.

There was a second element to the Deputy First Minister's announcement after the stakeholder meeting. This was the establishment of a 'task and finish' group (TFG) to consider long term options for finding a sustainable water supply solution of the canal. This was welcomed by PPMB, albeit the composition of the TFG has been somewhat shrouded in mystery. Its first meeting was to take place on 9 September 2025, and PPMB took a decision to wait for that meeting to take place, seek to establish its outcome, and only then consider further steps to promote the interests of the canal. In the event, the meeting was cancelled on 8 September due I understand to availability of the Deputy First Minister. We are assured that securing the future of the canal is a matter of urgency for Welsh Government, so I am sure you can imagine that I and my colleagues struggle to reconcile that with the meeting cancellation.

I assume that the purpose of the Petitions Committee meeting on 22 September is to review what progress has been made in response to Cllr Jan Butler's petition. There is no doubt that the petition and PPMB's campaigning has succeeded in drawing public and political attention to the perilous position of this much valued asset. Everyone wants to see the canal survive and thrive. Sadly, however, the reality is that the perilous state of affairs that pertained in mid-March 2025 remains the position. There is no solution for water supply to the canal once the current deal with Welsh Water expires in March 2026. Once again, I will receive a notification telling me to move to a 'safe place'. Once again, the hire companies will be faced with cancelling bookings (and right now they are in an invidious position in taking

bookings for 2026), and once again all the local businesses will face the same concerns about their viability. Leisure boaters will again be forced to decide whether to leave their boats on the canal; some have recently already made the difficult decision to take their boats to English canals.

The TFG needs to convene and undertake its work as quickly as possible, to avoid an annual cycle of uncertainty for all concerned. However, in the immediate term, a solution needs to be found for 2026 and subsequent years also, for as long as it takes to implement the TFG's long term solution. The immediate term solution needs to be found NOW, not in March 2026 when the adverse impact is already occurring. I respectfully request that the Petitions Committee recommends that an immediate, separate group forum is convened that includes CRT, Dwr Cymru, PPMB and the Petitioner; its sole purpose being to establish a solution for 2026. That solution should take into account the substantial financial benefit of the committed infrastructure improvement for Dwr Cymru, and how that is fairly reflected in what CRT is required to pay.

In the meantime, I shall continue to enjoy my floating home as best I can, notwithstanding the constant worry about its future.

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement.



Mark Flood
Narrowboat 'Take Five'

and on behalf of Preserve and Protect the Mon and Brec Canal.

