

Craig Mackinlay MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Constituency Tel: 01843 603242

Westminster Tel: 0207 219 4442

His Excellency Rudolf Hugelen
Belgian Ambassador to the United Kingdom
Embassy of Belgium in the United Kingdom
17 Grosvenor Crescent
London SW1X 7EE

Low Excellency

12th July 2017

Fines levied against UK visiting pleasure boat owners when visiting or accessing Belgian waters because of red diesel usage

I am the Member of Parliament for South Thanet which includes the port of Ramsgate. Due to geographical proximity to your country, pleasure boating between Ramsgate and Belgian ports is commonplace and we also benefit from regular Belgian visitors; indeed we are pleased to receive and welcome them.

I am receiving reports of fines being levied against UK boat owners by Belgian authorities in Ostend and Nieuwpoort because of the existence of 'Red Diesel' within UK boat-owners tanks. I hear of fines of €500 to €750 being routinely levied, and even against boats passing within 6 miles of the Belgian coast whilst having no intention of making landfall, but merely passing to the Netherlands.

I am aware of conflicts within EU directives that has led to the UK continuing the availability of Red Diesel, even though it is fully taxed at full rates of duty, but UK boat-owners are in an impossible position because bulk diesel at UK marinas is routinely only available as 'Red' even though it is fully taxed and legal in accordance with UK customs and duty requirements.

I am not only aggrieved on behalf of local boat-owners, but it must be recognised that this is surely working to the detriment of Belgian marinas, harbours and your local economy as UK boat-owners are simply boycotting any pleasure trips to Belgium because of the risk of penal fines.

I understand that a derogation was allowed by Belgian authorities in 2014 following representations from Belgian marina owners, but a change to the Finance Minister has seen that common sense reverse.

This is a perverse situation that needs to be addressed else visits from the UK by pleasure boats will simply cease permanently and irreversibly. I would respectfully ask for your input to help solve this situation.

Sincerely yours

Craig Mackinlay MP

cc Carol Paddison, Cruising Adviser, Royal Yachting Association
Dick Smith, Vice-Commodore elect, Head of Navigation School, Royal Temple YC, Ramsgate