# Government's net zero plans threaten Broads boating industry



The Broads, the United Kingdom's second largest boating area, faces significant changes under government proposals aimed at decarbonising the maritime industry as part of a broader strategy to reach net zero carbon emissions across all sectors by 2050. The plans set out by the Labour government include mandating new boats to be fully electric and increasing taxes on marine fuel, moves designed to promote a shift away from diesel engines currently prevalent in the region.

James Fraser, managing director of Norfolk Yacht Agency—which operates from several key locations including Brundall Bay, Ferry Marina in Horning, and St Olaves Marina in Great Yarmouth—has voiced strong concerns about the impact of these policies on the industry. Speaking to the Eastern Daily Press, Fraser described the potential consequences as "catastrophic," warning that the plans "could destroy the industry overnight." He criticised the pace and feasibility of enforced electrification, stating, “We’re staring down the barrel of net zero and Ed Miliband is turning his guns on the boating industry by talking about electrification.”

Fraser highlighted persistent technological limitations, explaining that despite improvements in battery technology, current electric propulsion systems fall short for certain types of boats. “People have been trying to get traction in the market for electric boats on the Broads here and elsewhere for years,” he said, “The problem in the industry is that the technology isn’t there to make it a sensible option for buyers.” He particularly noted the challenges faced by seagoing performance power cruisers, remarking, “It’s hard to imagine how they are going to produce something off electric power that’s going to make its way to Holland at 20 knots and keep going for five or six hours. You can’t just pull over to charge up in the North Sea.”

The Norfolk Yacht Agency has recently invested £2 million in acquiring St Olaves Marina on the River Waveney, underscoring their ongoing commitment to the local boating economy amid these uncertain times.

These measures echo the government’s approach to the automotive industry, where new petrol and diesel car sales will be banned starting in 2030. This policy shift has already prompted car manufacturers, including Lotus in Norfolk, to invest heavily in transitioning to electric vehicle production—a transformation that some in the marine sector fear may not be as straightforward.

Compounding the challenge, the eastern region is grappling with a declining skills base critical for maintaining and advancing its boating industry. Once home to more than 100 boatyards in the 1960s, East Anglia’s boat building trade has dwindled significantly. This trend was exemplified by the closure in 2022 of the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC) in Lowestoft after nearly five decades, leaving a void in formal training available locally.

Fraser emphasized the difficulty in recruiting new talent, stating, “The industry isn’t getting enough young blood in and there doesn’t seem to be that next generation of boat builders, engineers and skilled people coming through.” He added, “We’ve had a few apprentices here, but they are not easy to find. There’s no proper official boat building training in the east anymore. Boat building apprenticeships which used to exist in Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft are no longer here. To find courses for our marine engineer apprentices locally is impossible.”

The decline in traditional boat building has also been recognised at a national level. In 2023, traditional wooden boatbuilding was added to the 'Red List of Endangered Crafts' by the Heritage Crafts Association, illustrating the cultural and economic pressures facing the trade.

The Labour government’s net zero strategy sets ambitious targets for the UK’s energy system, aiming to decarbonise electricity generation by 2030 through a dramatic expansion of renewable energy infrastructure. This includes doubling onshore wind capacity, tripling solar power, and quadrupling offshore wind projects. Such initiatives have been elevated to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), which bypass local planning permissions, with energy secretary Ed Miliband wielding ultimate authority over approvals.

As these policies advance, the boating sector in the Broads and wider East Anglia faces significant transformations. The industry's future will depend in part on technological advancements in electric marine propulsion and the revitalisation of skills and training programmes to support boat building and maintenance in the decades ahead.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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