



NATIONAL HISTORIC FLEET AT RISK ASSESSMENT

November 2023



Introduction

Between June and September 2023 National Historic Ships UK (NHS-UK) engaged with custodians of vessels on the National Historic Fleet to ensure the latest information was held on file for these craft, that the public record was correct, and to undertake an At Risk Assessment of these significant maritime heritage assets.

Vessels on the National Historic Fleet, previously referred to as the *Core Collection and Designated Vessels Lists*, are distinguished by:

- being of pre-eminent national or regional significance
- spanning the spectrum of UK maritime history
- illustrating changes in construction and technology
- meriting a higher priority for long term conservation.



Telegraph, © Sandy Miller

Being part of the National Historic Fleet carries a level of significance over and above that held by craft on the wider National Register of Historic Vessels (NRHV). It can also enable access to funds not available to other historic vessels.

At the time of assessment, the Fleet consisted of 197 vessels covering a broad range of designs & construction types.

No changes have been made to the composition of the National Historic Fleet since 2013 pending an ongoing review of all vessels on the National Register, which is being completed group by group – see: [Registers review | National Historic Ships](#).

Data for the At Risk Assessment was gathered from a number of sources. All custodians of vessels on the National Historic Fleet were sent an e-mail with a link to a SurveyMonkey© form which asked a number of questions to confirm if record updates were required, whether contact details were correct and also to ascertain the current condition of the vessel. Of the 197 vessels, responses were received for 96 craft via this method. For owners or organization with three or more vessels, an excel spreadsheet was sent to make the data entry more streamlined. Finally, for custodians who were unable to complete the survey online, telephone discussions were held to gather the data.

For 57 vessels whose custodians did not respond to the survey request, an interim At Risk Assessment was completed based on internal knowledge gained from vessel visits, social media postings and other online sources.

In the case of 16 vessels, no contact was made with owners, and no reliable sources of information could be found, so the At Risk Assessment was not completed.

43% of the survey respondents took up the offer of one-on-one calls with the National Historic Ships UK Project Manager. These discussions were very helpful in generating a better understanding of the vessels and issues impacting custodians today.

At Risk Assessment Criteria

An At Risk Matrix was put together with input from the NHS-UK Council of Experts, with the following table of assessment criteria being agreed upon.

This determined the questions included in the survey and helped focus the follow-up discussions held with vessel custodians.

A *traffic light* approach has been used as a means of highlighting and monitoring risk, based on the framework adopted by Historic England in relation to built heritage structures.

Description	1	2	3
Contact with Owner	0-12 mths	12-36 mths	>36 mths
Vessel status: Operational	In regular use	Pending or undergoing conservation	Abandoned / permanently laid up or sunk / subject to deconstruction
Vessel status: Static	In preservation with high level monitoring or environmental controls in place. Well supported structurally.	Under cover / permanently located with limited controls in place / structural support issues identified	Open to elements ashore or afloat with no monitoring in place / abandoned / subject to disposal or deconstruction / major structural issues
Significance Recognized	Significance clearly understood by stakeholders & SOS written	Significance understood by limited stakeholders	Not recognized or appreciated by owners or key stakeholders
Current Condition	Good	Average / Fair	Poor / Deteriorating
Maintenance	Long-term plan in place and being implemented	Ad-hoc / maintenance undertaken as required	None
Governance	Strong governance / management / ownership structure in place	Governance / ownership model requires review or is in difficulty	None in place / disputed, act of court / in flux (i.e. for sale or seeking new owner)
Funding	Clear business model with track record of fundraising / endowment / private funds / major grant in place	Privately financed with limited resources / history of previously unsuccessful funding bids / no reserves	No business model, private means or track record / in need of significant investment
Community Impact / Partnerships	Local community support for vessel / strong public engagement / partnership or outreach programmes in place	Some community benefit / public engagement in place but more needed	Limited or no community impact and public engagement / reticence to enter into partnerships
External factors	No external factors posing an immediate threat	Some external factors flagged as potential concern	External factors posing an immediate or long-term threat

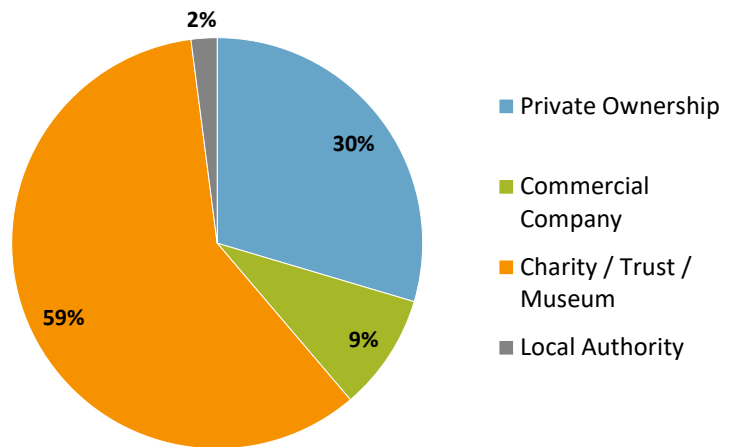
Summary of Findings

Ownership Models

59% of the National Historic Fleet is owned by charities, trusts or museums. 30% is in private ownership. Commercial operators have 9% with a further 2% being owned by local authorities.

The ownership model can dictate the likely income that the vessel is able to realise to support its ongoing upkeep, be this operational revenue or funding sources.

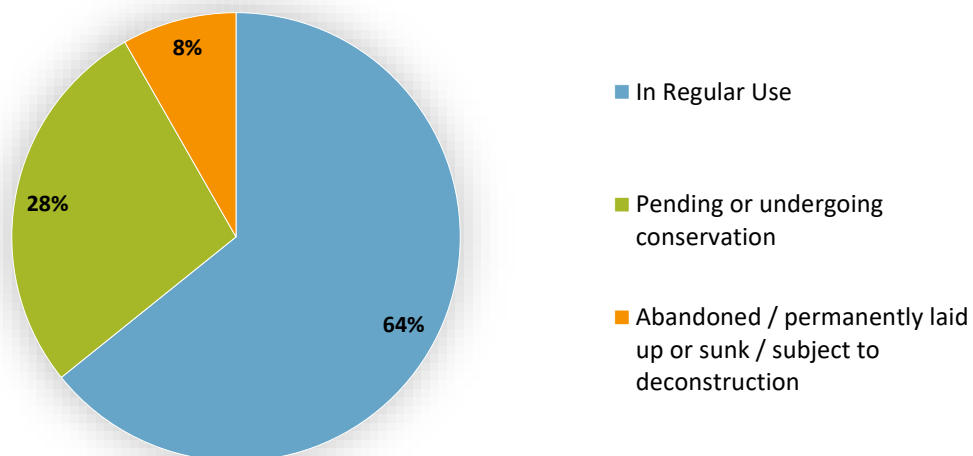
NHF Ownership Models



Vessel Status and Usage

Vessels were grouped as either operational or static craft. Three subcategories were used for each grouping to determine the vessel status and usage.

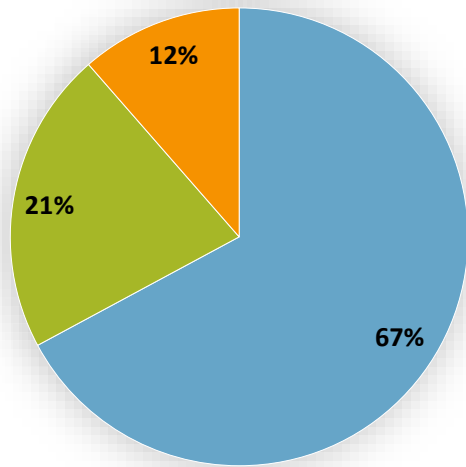
Operational - 109 vessels, 55% NHF



Of the 109 operational vessels, it was encouraging to see that over 64% are in regular use and that 28% are either undergoing conservation or have been stabilised waiting for work to commence.

A total of nine vessels were found to have been abandoned, permanently laid up or subject to deconstruction.

Static - 70 Vessels, 36% of NHF



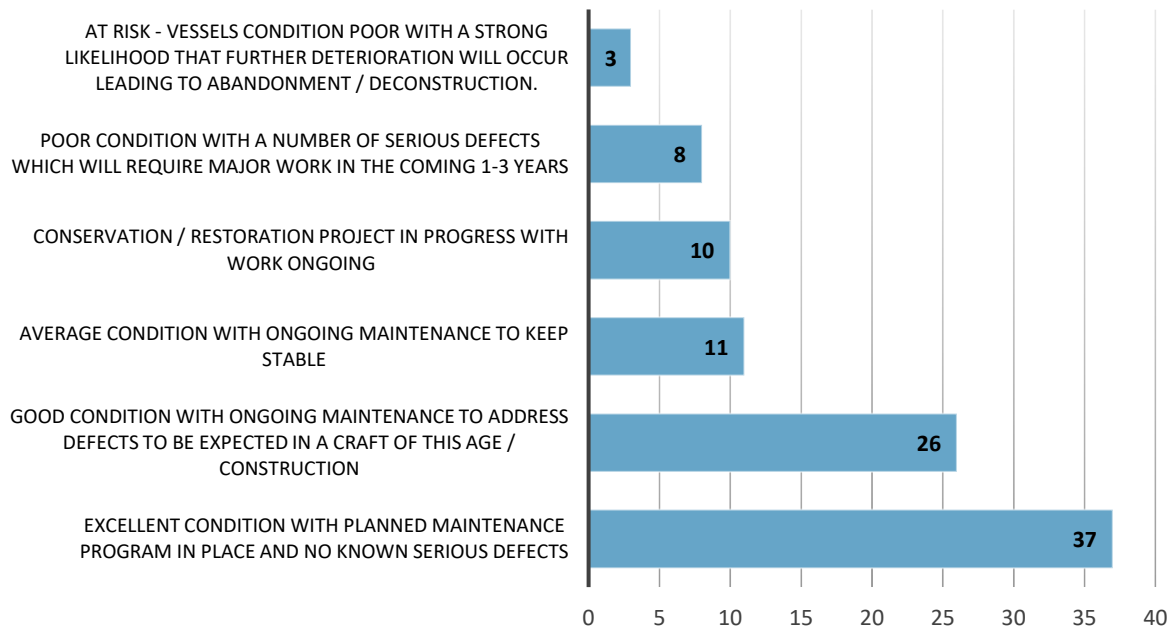
- In preservation with high level monitoring or environmental controls in place. Well supported structurally.
- Under cover / permanently located with limited controls in place / structural support issues identified
- Open to elements ashore or afloat with no monitoring in place / abandoned / subject to disposal or deconstruction / major structural issues

Of the 70 static vessels, 47 were considered as being stored or exhibited in controlled conditions that support their preservation. Eight were felt to be housed in conditions which made their continued deterioration likely, leading to probable eventual loss.

Reported Condition

The survey offered respondents six options to choose from which best described their vessel's condition.

REPORTED CONDITION



Whilst this only provides information for the 96 vessels whose owners answered the online survey, it is encouraging that greater than 66% of these believe their vessels to be in good to excellent condition.

Record Updates

46% of those who responded to the survey provided updates to the vessel's register entry. These updates were made along with validation of the owner's contact details for all survey respondents.

At Risk Assessment Conclusions

Using the data gathered, each vessel was scored on the first 9 criteria listed in the At Risk Matrix. Each criteria had a 'Green', 'Amber' or 'Red' outcome depending on the selection made. Based on the sum of these criteria an overall automated score was produced. A final category titled 'long-term viability' allowed for an override of the automated scoring if circumstances were such that a significant issue in one or more criteria put the future of the vessel in extreme doubt.



Panurgic

As an example, a vessel may score 'Green' and 'Amber' across most categories but, if its condition has deteriorated to an extreme state of decay, a 'Red' score in 'long-term viability' could be selected to override the automated result.

Following the data gathering and scoring exercise, our findings show a mixed picture across the fleet.

- 11.68% (23 vessels) were given a 'Red' designation and deemed **Marginal / Not Viable**.
- 12.18% (24 vessels) received an 'Amber' designation which lists them under **Some Challenges Highlighted**.
- 68.02% (134 vessels) were 'Green' indicating that they **Appear Secure – Not at Risk**.
- 8.12% (16 vessels) were not assessed due to lack of information and by default are considered 'Amber' until further information can be determined to correctly categorize them.

Whilst these results are encouraging in that over 68% of NHF vessels appear to have viable futures, it must be noted that the outlook for a vessel can change dramatically given changes in circumstances of owners or the unexpected finding of significant structural issues following a docking or survey.

Furthermore, the 197 vessels on NHF are considered the best representatives of their type which should be given the highest priority for conservation. That 32% of these vessels are now at risk, not possible to assess, or facing significant challenges should be seen as a 'Red' warning flag of national concern.

Next Steps

The outcomes of the At Risk Assessment will be principally for internal usage but provide valuable data which NHS-UK can draw on to target and prioritise the support offered to custodians, as well as inform advice given to funders and other key stakeholders.

In response to the findings from the At Risk Assessment, NHS-UK will:

- Implement a regular contact schedule for all vessels deemed at risk or marginal.
- Monitor craft which fall into the 'Amber' category where some challenges have been highlighted.
- Continue to pursue information on the 16 vessels that it was not possible to include in the assessment due to insufficient data.
- Seek ways to accelerate the Registers Review so that the National Historic Fleet remains current and updated.
- Publish further guidance and offer direct support to custodians who have concerns regarding the long-term viability of their historic vessels.

For more information on the At Risk Assessment, please email: info@nationalhistoricships.org.uk

Report compiled by Project Manager, Peter Green