

More People take to the Water

New research shows that 3.5 million people (6.7 per cent of UK adults) participated in one or more of 12 core boating activities in 2016, the highest volume recorded since 2009 (3.534 million). An additional 668,828 (1.3 per cent of UK adults) took part in growing watersports activities, a rise of approximately 95,000 more participants. Overall, a total of 4.16 million people (7.9 per cent of UK adults) enjoyed boating and watersports in 2016.

The Watersports Participation Survey 2016 shows a total of over 14.3 million people (27.3 per cent of UK adults) participated in any water-based leisure activities. With an increase of 2 million more participants in 2016, it is the highest volume of participants recorded since pre-recession (14.4 million in 2007). It includes participants of the 12 core boating activities and growing watersports activities, as well as activities such as sea angling and coastal walking.

The research also found a substantial increase in the number of younger people (aged 16-34) classed as boating 'enthusiasts'. All participants were looking for opportunities to get active on the water throughout the year, with increasingly popular pursuits including small sailboat activities, yacht cruising and stand up paddleboarding. This appetite for manageable and flexible pursuits is reflected in boat ownership trends with households across the socio-economic landscape downsizing or taking up ownership of smaller boats or watersports craft.

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, Tracey Crouch MP said: "With our glorious coastline, rivers and canals, the UK is one of the best places in the world to get out on the water.

"Activities such as rowing, windsurfing and canoeing are great ways to keep fit and have fun.

"Our marine organisations and businesses are helping to drive up participation rates and I am particularly pleased that so many young people are getting involved and taking part in watersports."

The Watersports Participation Survey is conducted annually by a consortium including British Marine, RYA, MCA, RNLi), British Canoeing and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas).

Key findings:

Growth of younger enthusiasts:

Across all boating activities, there has been a big increase in the number of younger people participating on a regular basis. In 2016, over 1.54 million people aged 16-34 took part in boating activities (compared to 1.43 million in 2015), with 69,500 more UK adults participating between 6-12 times and 57,000 more going boating over 13 times throughout the year. A corresponding decrease in those aged 16-34 participating in a boating activity 2-5 times during the year (-59,500 people) suggests a growing

progression from 'casual' to 'enthusiast' participants within this younger age demographic.

Shift away from seasonal participation:

The proportion of participation in any boating activity across the spring, autumn and winter months all significantly increased in 2016 (+5 per cent, +4 per cent and +1 per cent respectively). With a quarter in 2016 compared to 20 per cent in 2015, of boating participation now taking place in spring (March-May), despite experiencing a lower average seasonal temperature in 2016 (-0.17c) and a decline in the rate of participation across the historically popular months of summer (-14 per cent in 2016), it appears that more people are looking for opportunities to get out on the water throughout the year.

Popularity of physical pursuits:

In 2016, canoeing remained the most popular boating activity with 1.5 million UK participants. Similar activities, including small sailboat activities, yacht cruising and small sailboat racing also saw an increase in participation in 2016 (500,000, 362,000 and 166,000 participants respectively). Motor boating remains one of the top three most popular boating activities in 2016 (495,000 participants), although motorised sports such as canal boating and power boating faced tougher times, with a decline in the percentage of UK adults participating in these activities (of -0.2 per cent and -0.1 per cent, respectively).

Across watersports activities, the biggest growth in the percentage of UK adults taking part in a boating or watersports activity was in the ever-growing trends of kitesurfing, stand up paddleboarding, bodyboarding and surfing (+0.4 percentage points across these activities or an increase of 275,000 participants). Stand up paddleboarding enjoyed the greatest increase within this segment (with growth of +0.3 percentage points or 176,000 participants).

Rise of owning manageable craft:

Across all socio-economic groups, there has been a shift towards ownership of more manageable and flexible vessels. In 2016, the biggest increase in boat ownership within the AB social group was in small sailing boats and personal watercraft (1.17 per cent and 0.19 per cent of AB ownership respectively). Corresponding declines in ownership of sailing yachts, power boats and canal boats (0.49 per cent, 0.27 per cent and 0.11 per cent of ownership respectively), suggests a trend in downsizing craft for a smaller, more mobile vessel. Likewise, increases in ownership within the C1 and C2DE social groups were seen in canoes/kayaks and windsurfers (1.45 per cent and 0.22 per cent of C1 ownership and 0.66 per cent and 0.07 per cent C2DE ownership respectively), whilst there were noticeable declines in ownership of powerboats (0.22 per cent of C1 ownership and 0.07 per cent of C2DE ownership). This also reflects a desire for greater flexibility in boat ownership.

Demand for domestic boating tourism:

There is already an upward trend in UK adults choosing to participate in boating activities in the UK rather than abroad across all water-based activities, which continued to rise in 2016. For the first time in recent years, we have seen a higher proportion of UK adults participating in water skiing and using personal watercraft in the UK than abroad (+18.3 per cent and +27/9 per cent in the UK against -19.2 per cent and -20.8 per cent abroad respectively).

As Howard Pridding, Chief Executive Officer at British Marine, explained: “It is great to see young people being inspired by boating and watersports and taking up opportunities to get out on the water throughout the year. Whether it is the ever-growing enthusiasm for stand up paddleboarding or the continually popular sport of canoeing, these activities are proving an enticing way to get more people exploring the world of boating.

“We are confident that many people will continue to turn to the array of boating and watersports pastimes right on their doorstep as a great way to keep active and have fun with family and friends. We already see more UK adults participating in watersports activities at home, here in Britain, than we do abroad, and in the last year alone we have seen a significant shift in the majority of water-skiers and users of personal watercraft choosing to participate in the UK than overseas.”