



THE OFFALY BRANCH OF THE  
**Inland Waterways  
Association of Ireland**  
[www.offaly.iwai.ie](http://www.offaly.iwai.ie)

PRO: John Dolan 087 2252772

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Offaly IWAI Float to the Fleadh 2009 launched by RTE Broadcaster**

The Offaly Branch of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland **Float to the Fleadh 2009** was launched on Monday night in Tullamore by well known **RTE Broadcaster Paddy O Gorman**.

Paddy and guests were welcomed on Board the “Saoirse ar an Uisce” Barge by Cllr Tommy McKeigue, Cathaoirleach, Tullamore Town Council who commented on the appropriateness of the venue for the launch and thanked the Sisters of Charity and crew of Michael Hanlon and Michael Ryan for use of the Barge. The barge has chosen Tullamore as its hire base for short cruises on the canal and this adds to the potential of the canal. Having witnessed the fine flotilla of cruisers and heritage barges that were in Tullamore for the past two years Cllr McKeigue advised that he was looking forward to the fine display of boats this year not to mention the boost to the local economy, he added that the safety record of boats in the town is very good and that the potential of the canal is appreciated by the Town Council. On behalf of the Town Council and the people of Tullamore he welcomed Paddy O Gorman to Tullamore.

Paddy O Gorman, himself a lover of the waterways, said that he was delighted to be in Tullamore in such a splendid setting on the Grand Canal.

He recounted how his experience of boating started in Tullamore when he hired a Celtic Canal barge from the late Heather Thomas. He was very taken by the beauty and attractiveness of the canal and has since travelled on the Royal, the Shannon and the Barrow. He commented that the slow pace of the canal allows one to appreciate not only the industrial archaeology and heritage but also the potential of the canal in job creation and tourism. Paddy observed that the Float to the Fleadh brings two great traditions together in the town of Tullamore and in launching the Float to the Fleadh he wished all concerned the best of luck.

Offaly IWAI Chairperson Bernadette Quinn highlighted that the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) is a voluntary organisation. The Offaly Branch was formed in 1964 and has developed a positive working relationship with the local business and community groups. The IWAI is not just about boaters - the organisation has extended its activities to encompass history and heritage, business and tourism development, walking & nature appreciation, water sports and other such related areas.

Offaly IWAI is aware of the potential tourism value of the Grand Canal to Tullamore and County Offaly and the financial spin off potential that boaters can bring to the towns they visit as they stock up on provisions and savour the town's hospitality.

Proper redevelopment of the Grand Canal Harbour could lead to a fantastic opportunity to copper fasten the future of the Harbour and its environs in Tullamore. The Harbour is both a national and local asset, which has in the past and hopefully will continue to present in the future a significant income stream for the town of Tullamore.

The Harbour contains only one of two dry docks on the Grand Canal which have waiting lists and it is imperative that the dry dock is maintained as a working dry dock.

The IWAI would welcome the appropriate development of the harbour area that builds from a central reference point of waterways use. The town has fine mooring facilities and is seen as a safe place to moor boats, this could be significantly enhanced if a pay as you go showering and toilet block facility similar to those in many of the towns and villages on the river Shannon was provided. This facility could also be of benefit to other waterways users in the town like the canoe club and fishermen.

A great opportunity exists for the potential of the Grand Canal to be championed by Tullamore Town Council with Offaly County Council, waterways groups and local businesses so that its potential is reached and its demise does not occur.

It was also noted with thanks that while Waterways Ireland staff based in Tullamore do a fine job in maintaining the canal and harbour areas, a long term maintenance and dredging plan for the Grand Canal is vital to abate the reduction in the water depth of the canal, as without adequate water depth, boats will not be able to travel.

Bernadette also noted that the availability of the Shannon based hire cruiser companies Silver line, Emerald Star and Carrick Craft for hire to travel on the canal to Tullamore for the Fleadh will give people the double benefit of a lovely relaxing holiday on the water and also provide accommodation in the heart of Tullamore.

During the week of the Fleadh in 2007 approximately 40 cruisers and barges moored in Tullamore, in 2008 there were 82 vessels and it is anticipated that the 100 mark can be reached this year.

***Offaly Branch of IWAI - encouraging use and promotion of the  
Grand Canal, combined with attending the Fleadh***

**IWAI PRO:** John Dolan 087 2252772  
27 July 2009