



Entente des Canaux du Centre Minutes of AGM held by Zoom, 27 February 2021

17 participants and 5 apologies

1] The President, Dominique Ourseau, thanked all those participating, and also the mayor and community of Nevers and the VNF for their cooperation. A virtual meeting was not really satisfactory, but was necessary in these difficult times.

2] The registered office of the *Entente* has moved to Nevers, which is at the centre of the territory which we cover. This was approved unanimously.

3] Report of activities: The year 2020 was difficult, as the pandemic forced the cancellation of most of our activities. In the period when navigation was again permitted, there were fears of a new lockdown, and also that water shortages might make it impossible to return to one's home port. The latter fear was mainly based on unfounded rumours: the VNF had ensured that there were sufficient reserves to allow navigation until the end of the season, despite low water levels, and arranged information meetings every fortnight during the summer period. For the third consecutive year we faced a period of drought, and the scarce water supply was subject to attack on a number of fronts. For that reason the *Entente* gave its backing to our affiliate *Les Amis du Cher Canalisé*, who initiated a legal challenge to the inadequate enforcement of the law on water supplies, first at the *Agence de l'Eau Loire-Bretagne* and subsequently at the administrative court. Water quality has been deteriorating since 2007, despite the expenditure of billions. In the name of environmental sustainability, the law prescribes the destruction of dams, which contradicts the need to build reserves of water in the winter to draw on in periods of drought.

While we have been unable to organise events, the *Entente* has tried to increase its visibility through our web site and the work of Jean, our webmaster. We have disseminated as much information as possible from our affiliates, which I hope you have found interesting.

Three new members have joined in 2020. It is always a pleasure to welcome new affiliates, though we have been unable to do as much for them as normal. For this reason, we propose continuing their 'new member' status during 2021.

Despite everything, the *Entente* has undertaken a number of activities

- sending our traditional greetings to some hundred official bodies
- preparing for the beginning of the cruising season, though unfortunately this was cancelled
- participating in national waterways and heritage days
- taking part in numerous online VNF meetings
- publishing more than a hundred articles on the web site
- issuing a quarterly newsletter
- distributing information to members
- promoting the book on environmental transition by JP Pestie
- strengthening our communications and our visibility.

So despite the pandemic, the *Entente* has sustained its links with its interlocutors and its visibility towards all relevant actors. In 2021 it will be necessary to continue these efforts in the face of difficult conditions.

At the beginning of 2020, we initiated the creation of a travelling exhibition to promote the waterways heritage in Centre-Bourgogne in towns rather more distant from the rivers and canals. This project has been delayed but not forgotten. We must resume our requests for subsidies to complete this project as soon as circumstances permit.

4] The secretary, Madeleine Thonniet, gave a detailed report on activities undertaken in 2020 (mainly meetings attended and events that had to be cancelled). There had been various preparatory activities for the current meeting, and further meetings were planned for the opening of the new season.

5] Financial report, presented by the treasurer Gilles Blanchet. Income in 2020 was €1080 and expenditure €1155.51, but this included one-off payments of €250 for stickers and €115 for copies of the book by JP Pestie. The DBA contributes €250 a year towards the costs of the web site.

6] Aims for 2021:

- increase the use of our web site by members and enthusiasts. The number of visitors to the site continues to increase: between 600 and 1000 visits a month. We could make it more attractive and informative if you provide the information: we do not receive enough news of your activities and your successes.
- strengthen further our visibility and presence with our interlocutors. Though our presence within the official institutions locally and our exchanges with the various actors we gain recognition and credibility.
- develop a common organisational image. In 2020 we produced our stickers (available on request) and are planning to produce pennants (€18 each) and fisherman-style waistcoats (quotation still awaited).
- obtain external funding, for which we must have projects. One such was the travelling exhibition. The stimulus was the move of our official office, which has now taken place. We will be able to proceed to more concrete activities, of which this exhibition is the first, which will help us to put figures to the costs involved. It is essential that each affiliate contributes.
- take part in our members' events whenever possible. Most of our events in 2020 were cancelled; we must become visible once again. When our officers travel they will give a brief report on their return.
- respond if possible to every official invitation. Only VNF has arranged virtual meetings; we have been present at almost all of these, and will continue to do so. This should be possible with help from our vice-presidents, who will report back to the office.
- plan officers' meetings. Four have been planned, of which two have taken place. With our subscription to Zoom, we hope to maintain a cycle of quarterly or even monthly meetings. The next will be on 6 March.
- plan twice-yearly meetings of the CA (*conseil d'administration*). In 2020 the first was cancelled and the second replaced by a virtual meeting and by exchange of email. For 2021 we plan meetings, either physical or virtual, in June and September.

7] AOB

i) Regional exhibition. This is our main project in the coming years, and it requires members' active participation. The content will be initiated by each member association and coordinated centrally. We will be able to provide the general guidelines and help with implementation. The aim is to widen knowledge of the canals and encourage interest, so that our heritage is valued and tourism stimulated. Our aim is to support a collective initiative. Without your commitment and participation, we cannot proceed. It would be ideal to have contact details for a coordinator of each initiative.

ii) New cruising season. It seems to us more than ever necessary to organise the re-opening in order to renew interest in the waterways heritage, if Covid allows this. Adequate preparation is important, and will be worthwhile whatever the date of re-opening.

In the context of the change in headquarters, to show what we can contribute, I proposed to the Nevers tourist office that they should host a large-scale re-opening event as in Briare in 2015. Of course this is ambitious. But the city and greater Nevers are enthusiastic. We will need to mobilise all our forces and I invite the assistance of Dorothée Maas, who was so successful in Briare in 2015. VNF has agreed in principle, but this depends on the Covid situation. Provisionally this will take place on 7-8 May. If the Covid restrictions require, the event will be reduced to one day or else postponed to 2022. Note: our volunteers in the main are not young, which may restrict their participation.

- iii) Contact list for the Newsletter. Only two affiliates have provided their lists, which is a pity since this is a good medium for disseminating our activities, so I hope that the others will follow suit. Some affiliates have indicated that they first wish to obtain the agreement of their members at their 2021 AGM.
- iv) Should we circulate our Newsletter to local elected officials? If so, which?
- v) Affiliates are asked to inform us of the date of their 2021 AGM.
- vi) Affiliation of 'Ici et Là'. This association is active on the Canal de Bourgogne. Though their approach is different from ours, it is not incompatible, and we have invited them to join the *Entente*.
- vii) Affiliation of IWI (Inland Waterways International). Its president, David Edwards-May, has expressed a wish to join the *Entente*.
- viii) Affiliation of ACC (*Amis du Cher Canalisé*) and VNA (*Villeneuve Nautique Ass.*) This has been discussed a number of times, but because of Covid we have been unable to take this further.
- ix) Jean-Pierre Pestie, former president of the Cher Valley, is leading a campaign to defend our waterways. The Entente supports his challenge to the non-implementation of the waterways legislation, and we have bought 10 copies of his book *Vision humaniste de la transition écologique*. These are available for €15 as against the cover price of €20.
- x) We published an article about the *Entente* in the December issue of the ANPEI journal *Musard'eau*.
- xi) Multilingual version of the web site. Our webmaster, Jean Bouguereau, has been asked to proceed with this. We hope to reach a wider audience and to attract new affiliates. Our friends from the DBA find our site interesting and are offering to help with translation.
- xii) The CNERH (*Coordination nationale des eaux et rivières humaines*) has asked us to sign their Charter. Agreed unanimously.
- xiii) Requests to affiliates. We ask each affiliate to inform us of the number of stickers (€3), pennants (€18) and waistcoats (€25-30) they wish to order, as well as the number of books by JP Pestie (€15). Also a contact person for the development of the exhibition, the date of your 2021 AGM, and a list of members to receive the newsletter.

8] Election of officers and members of the CA

The meeting ended by confirming the election of the *conseil d'administration* and the following officers:

President: Dominique Ourseau (FCB, *Fluvial Club de Briare*)

Vice-Presidents: André Barre (ARECABE, *Association pour la réouverture du canal de Berry*) and Dorothee Maas (DBA)

Secretary: Madeleine Thonniet (Entente)

Treasurer: Gilles Blanchet (ARECABE)