

The one that didn't get away

A boat-owner from Ashford in Middlesex has been convicted of failing to register the craft for use on the River Thames, in spite of warnings he could face legal action.

The Environment Agency discovered Leighton Lewis had no legal registration for his 18-foot long cruiser, The One That Got Away, during routine checks at Walton-on-Thames last summer.

Navigation officers attached a warning notice to the boat in July 2019, requiring Lewis to comply with the law within 14 days.

It is a criminal offence to keep, use or let for hire an unregistered vessel on a waterway.

Guildford magistrates' court was told riverside inspections by officers revealed Lewis had skipped the annual £186.39 fee, determined by the length and width of the boat.

A month after the first visit, in August last year, the Environment Agency wrote to Lewis after officers found the boat still unregistered and moored in the same place. The letter warned Lewis to register the boat inside a week, or enforcement proceedings would begin.

Despite this second warning, Lewis, of Doris Road, Ashford, still failed to log the vessel with the Environment Agency.

Similar to excise duty for road vehicles, boat registration fees allow the Environment Agency to manage and maintain more than 600 miles of inland waterways across England, keeping them open and safe for thousands of river-lovers.

Nick McKie-Smith, waterways enforcement manager for the Environment Agency, said:

You can't escape vehicle duty on the road. Why on the river? Boat registration fees go towards the upkeep of our waterways, providing enjoyment for river-users and support for boating businesses.

Lewis had a number of opportunities to register The One That Got Away, which, in the end, proved an inaccurate name because he didn't.

Tried in absentia at Guildford magistrates' court on 9 March 2020, Leighton Lewis was found guilty of breaching the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010. He was fined £400, and ordered to pay costs of £85 and his

outstanding boat registration fee of £186.39 for 1 January to 31 December 2019.