

To RNLI Supporters only



Dear Supporter

Future funding of the RNLI

I'd like to share some thoughts with you. I am sure you are aware that the RNLI is funded totally by voluntary contributions and that legacies are our largest source of income. We are concerned about future legacy income and it seems sensible to talk about our concerns with our regular RNLI supporters as early, and with as much candour, as possible.

You probably know that we have always been able to rely, more than most charities, on the fact that RNLI supporters remember our organisation in their wills. In some years legacy income has amounted to 60 per cent of our total income, with more than 2,500 supporters making a bequest to the RNLI. This generosity has enabled the RNLI to run more than 200 lifeboat stations, to equip our fleet of lifeboats so that our volunteer crews can continue our mission to save life at sea, and to build up much-needed reserves. Indeed, it is fair to say that the magnificent service that the RNLI provides has largely been created because of this tradition of legacy-giving, alongside fundraising and subscriptions from committed supporters.

There are signs that this tradition may be in decline. Our legacy income for 1994 fell by nearly five per cent and the early months of 1995 seem to suggest a greater drop. There are all sorts of reasons why legacy income could be falling and we are trying to understand these reasons as I write. We don't yet know whether this is a 'blip', or whether it is a long-term trend. This is why I am writing to you.

If it is a 'blip', then our reserves are probably sufficient to carry us through. But, if it is a long-term trend then we may have a major problem on our hands in two to three years. We may have to dip into our current reserves – probably on some scale. We might also have to devote more resources to other kinds of fundraising, inevitably increasing the cost of raising money from the low levels of which we are currently so proud. What we must do is minimise the risk of being unable to continue the constant improvement and upgrading of our lifeboats and stations that we are planning in the second half of the decade and into the next century.

Hence our concern and hence this message to you. We are asking whether you intend to leave the RNLI a legacy. If enough of our committed supporters can give us an answer to that question – whether positive or negative – we will be in a better position to plan for the future. Let me make it quite clear that this is research and not a sales tactic, which is why I am asking the question in general and not in detail. Whether you leave the RNLI money by a pecuniary, residuary, or even a reversionary bequest, how much you leave us in your will, whether you are leaving money to other charities... all these are matters private to you, your family and your professional adviser. But we do have an obvious and urgent interest in asking the broad questions below. I hope you will understand our need for the information.

The more answers we receive, the better informed we will be about our financial future. We shall be better placed to run the RNLI at its historic level of cost-effectiveness. That is why I urge you to complete this small questionnaire. It goes without saying that your answers will be treated in complete anonymity at this office – as you will see, we are not asking for your name and address on this form. We will, of course, keep you informed about the situation as it unfolds, with regular information in our journal, *The Lifeboat*.

I do thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Ian Ventham
Head of Fundraising

PS. If you have already indicated your intention to leave the RNLI a bequest, please accept my apology and ignore this letter.