



**Maritime**



# MURRAY RIVER SAFETY REVIEW

JANUARY 2011

# Introduction

Following a number of fatal boating accidents (4 fatalities and 7 serious injuries) on the Murray River between 1 December 2009 and 13 February 2010 the Minister approved a review of boating safety on the Murray River in March 2010.

NSW Maritime engaged an independent consultant to conduct the review, which commenced with Focus Group meetings to identify key safety issues. These formed the basis of a Discussion Paper exhibited on line.

The review reflects the information received at the Focus Group meetings, in submissions made in response to the Discussion Paper, from suggestions by the Recreational Vessel Advisory Group and expert advice provided by NSW Maritime, Maritime Safety Victoria and the NSW Police Force.

## Summary of consultation feedback

For the consideration of NSW Maritime, the following summarises key information and ideas:

- received at the Focus Group meetings
  - in submissions made in response to the Discussion Paper
  - from suggestions by the Recreational Vessel Advisory Council
  - expert advice provided by NSW Maritime and Maritime Safety Victoria, and
  - Boating Safety Officers and Police Officers.
- 1. More NSW Maritime Boating Safety Officers to be deployed along the Murray River:**
    - Additional BSO resources should be deployed along the Murray to enhance compliance and advisory coverage and to facilitate joint operations.
  - 2. Zoning for designated boating activities covering areas of intensive use with provision for seasonal speed and activity limits where required including:**
    - Dedicated wake board and PWC zones for the Albury/Mulwala and Echuca/Moama reaches of the river
    - Dedicated Passive Activity zones (for floating and fishing) be introduced in accessible areas of the river after further consultation and annually reviewed.
  - 3. Enhanced compliance targeting dangerous and anti-social behaviour including:**
    - More alcohol random breath test patrols with NSW Police
    - Anti-hoon enforcement provisions with vessel confiscation powers
    - Demerit point system for NSW boat licences
    - On-water speed cameras
    - Ski-tube ropes to be a maximum of 10m from the stern of the vessel
    - More joint operations, including safety campaigns, with Maritime Safety Victoria.
  - 4. Enhanced education and advisory material by NSW Maritime to promote:**
    - Ski ropes to comply with manufacturer's recommendations
    - Blowers and vents to be fitted to all in-board petrol engines
    - More signage on both sides of the river.
  - 5. Improved boat driver licensing standards in Victoria.**
    - More stringent boat licensing requirements in Victoria (to match NSW standards)
    - Increased boat and PWC driver education in Victoria
    - Demerit point system to apply across state borders.
  - 6. Increased boating opportunities.**
    - More off-river ski parks.

## Background and timing of the review

Following a number of fatal boating accidents (4 fatalities and 7 serious injuries) on the Murray River between 1 December 2009 and 13 February 2010 the Minister approved a review of boating safety on the Murray River on 8 March 2010, to be completed by the commencement of the boating season on 1 October 2010. The review was widely publicised and a DL flyer was distributed to user groups to facilitate discussion and encourage submissions.

## Focus group meetings

The review commenced with stakeholder Focus Group meetings at Albury/Mulwala 19 April (14), Moama/Echuca 20 April (40) and Mildura 21 April (22). These meetings identified key safety issues for each region which formed the basis of the Discussion Paper options.

## Discussion paper and online submissions

The Discussion Paper contained 40 options distilled from the focus group meetings and input from Boating Safety Officers and Maritime Safety Victoria. It was exhibited on line and 155 submissions were received. Ten submissions were from boating groups or organisations, and approximately 20 per cent of submissions supported the Boating Industry Association of Victoria position.

Many submissions called for increased compliance efforts, and there was significant support for more Boating Safety Officers to be deployed on the Murray River. A significant number of submissions complained about anti-social behaviour by PWC riders, and called for PWCs to be banned on the river. Many submissions complained about wakeboarding, and the negative impact of wakeboard boats on other users of the river.

## What next?

NSW Maritime has already acted on many issues and will progressively consider others during 2011.

## Analysis of submissions

The large number of options canvassed in the Discussion Paper ensured complex submissions. All submissions were reviewed against the options identified in the Discussion Paper and scored with respect to further potential for follow up support as either:

- “yes” or
- “qualified yes”
- “no” or
- “qualified no”.

Where an option was not mentioned it was not scored.

## Discussion paper options supported by submissions

CATEGORY	No	OPTION
Speed Limits	1	40 knot speed limit for the Murray River (official races and race training would be conducted under an aquatic licence)
	2	Speed limits during peak usage periods
	3	More seasonal 4 knot zones (e.g. 4 knot zone from Capri to the yacht club lagoon in Lake Mulwala from 1 December to 1 May; George Chaffrey Bridge to Charcoal Bend at Mildura)
Zoning	5	No swimming zones within 100 metres of any boat ramp
	7	Passive activity zones
	11	More off-river ski parks
	12	No wash zones
Towing	13	Limit tow rope lengths for ski tubes
	15	Maximum ski rope length < 18.5 metres
Compliance & Enforcement	22	Assistance from Marine Safety Victoria compliance officers, Anti-hoon legislation with vessel confiscation powers
	24	Compulsory lifejackets for all children
	25	Demerit points system for boat licences to apply in both states
	27	Alcohol related boating offences should affect motor vehicle driver licences
	28	On-water speed cameras
	29	More RBT patrols with Police
Licensing & Education	30	More stringent boat licence requirements in Victoria
	31	Increase boater education in Victoria
	32	Better education for PWC riders
	33	Use Tourist Centres for boater education
	34	“Boatsafe” volunteer program. Assist BSOs with education (modelled on Fishcare volunteers)
	35	Education campaign on the dangers of high speed tow “whipping” manoeuvres
Vessel Fires	37	Improved signage on both banks of the River
	38	Compulsory blowers and vents for inboard petrol powered boats
	39	Engine service reporting

## Comments on implementation

### More Boating Safety Officers

The provision of additional BSO resources for the Murray River should be the highest priority, to properly enforce the suite of compliance and education measures, and to deliver any changes flowing from this report.

### Zoning

Given the strong support for zoning, including passive use zones, further consultation is required to ensure the views of all affected groups are considered, and that local issues are properly addressed. Current zones should be maintained for the 2010-11 boating season while in-depth consultation with stakeholders, including the Recreational Vessel Advisory Group is undertaken by NSW Maritime.

Although imposing “No Swimming” zones within 100m of any boat ramp is considered desirable, it is outside the usual powers of NSW Maritime (except under special event orders). Control of swimming around boat ramps should be referred to local councils for action.

## Enhanced compliance

The potential for new speed zones for designated activities will require enforcement for effective compliance and deterrence. On-water speed cameras were proposed during the consultative process. NSW Maritime does not propose to pursue speed cameras or demerit points at this time.

NSW Police indicated a willingness to enhance Random Breath Testing of boaters. This might be formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding between NSW Maritime and NSW Police.

“Anti-hoon” provisions and a boat licence demerit system would require substantial legislative change. Given that the majority of boaters on the Murray come from Victoria, for the proposed demerit scheme to apply across the border would require complementary legislation in that state. The introduction of a boat licence demerit system should only be considered if complementary systems can be introduced in other states.

NSW Maritime had an initial meeting with Marine Safety Victoria (MSV) in November 2010 and MSV suggested that in regard to anti-hoon legislation, Maritime be guided by Victoria’s experience before it considers similar legislation.

An education campaign highlighting the dangers of excessively long ski-tube ropes and overcrowding of ski-tubes should be introduced. The effectiveness of this education campaign should be reviewed after 12 months.

## Education and advisory

Advice on the use of ski ropes according to the manufacturer’s recommendations should be included in NSW Maritime education and advisory material.

Education material should include advice that blowers and vents should be fitted to all in-board engines. Legislation may be considered if the education phase is not successful.

## Licensing standards in Victoria

Improving Victorian boat driver licensing and boater education will require government to government negotiations conducted through the normal channels. This could be addressed through a Cross Border Issues Committee with representatives from NSW Maritime and Marine Safety Victoria with a clear objective to harmonise licensing standards between the jurisdictions and improve education in Victoria.

A Memorandum of Understanding between NSW Maritime and Marine Safety Victoria is recommended to clarify the changes required and the timeframe for delivery of the new standards.

## Increased boating opportunities

Increasing off-river boating opportunities such as ski parks should be supported by government, in conjunction with the Murray Darling Basin Authority and local government.