

# **IDENTIFYING BOATING INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES FOR NSW WATERWAYS**

## **The role of the Maritime Management Centre**

The Maritime Management Centre (MMC) leads the strategic policy direction for maritime issues in NSW and directs initiatives that support the Government's objectives for boating safety, maritime property and waterways management.

MMC (formerly known as the Office of Boating Safety and Maritime Affairs) sits within the Policy and Regulation Division of Transport for NSW (TfNSW). This arrangement arose from a restructure of the entire transport cluster in 2011, whereby the previous agencies NSW Maritime and Roads and Traffic Authority were replaced by RMS, with components of both former agencies being transferred to TfNSW.

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) is responsible for policy implementation and delivery. Both agencies play an important role in developing project plans for policy implementation and in developing related procedures and business rules.

## **The Maritime Policy Agenda**

The Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon Duncan Gay MLC, released the NSW Government's Maritime Policy Agenda at the Sydney International Boat Show in August 2012. The Policy Agenda includes a range of initiatives designed to improve boating safety, improve boat storage and waterway access and reduce red tape for maritime customers and stakeholders.

The Maritime Policy Agenda arose from the outcomes of a Maritime Stakeholder Forum held in 2012. The forum provided an opportunity for boating industry representatives and other boating stakeholders to put forward ideas for reducing 'red tape' affecting the boating industry. The forum called on Government to help facilitate development of boating infrastructure and reduce administrative burdens on industry and the community.

In establishing a modern and responsive regulatory and policy framework, the Maritime Policy Agenda also supports the Boat Storage and Safe Waterways Access Strategy (discussed in detail below) in addition to enhancing the capacity and efficiency of existing maritime property and infrastructure.

The Maritime Policy Agenda includes a commitment to develop boating safety plans and boat storage strategies for major waterways within NSW. MMC has recently developed boating safety plans for Sydney Harbour and the Georges River and a boat storage strategy for Sydney Harbour. A range of other boating infrastructure and safety plans exist for various waterways across the State, primarily prepared by Councils. These plans vary in their level of detail and in the time elapsed since they were developed.

## **The Boat Storage and Safe Waterways Access Strategy**

Recreational boat ownership in NSW is forecast to continue to increase at approximately 2.9% per annum, creating a significant challenge in accommodating demand for both on-water and off-water boat storage facilities. By 2021, there are likely to be around 280,000 vessels in the state, compared with 217,500 in 2012 – a predicted overall increase of nearly 30%. Growing boat ownership will also increase the demand for boating services and facilities, including the infrastructure which

provides access to waterways – such as boat ramps, pontoons, marinas, mooring areas and dinghy storage racks.

The Boat Storage and Safe Waterways Strategy includes actions designed to increase the availability of boat storage, waterways access and related facilities.

### ***The Boating Infrastructure Partnership Program***

One of the key actions in the Maritime Policy Agenda is to develop a new Boating Infrastructure Partnership Program (BBIP) to replace the existing Better Boating Program (BBP) which expires in 2014. Since 1998, the BBP has delivered more than \$40 million in funding to support more than 670 projects across the state including boat ramps, public wharves and pontoons, dinghy storage and sewage pump-out facilities.

The new BBIP will build on the success of the BBP by facilitating more innovative partnerships with Councils and boating organisations to renew and expand public boating infrastructure.

To coincide with the introduction of the BBIP, MMC will be working with Councils to undertake an audit of the infrastructure and access requirements of each major waterway in order to meet the expected future growth in vessel numbers. A draft Boat Storage Strategy for Sydney Harbour has recently been released highlighting the growth required in boat storage facilities in and around the Harbour to keep pace with demand over the next decade. Similar strategies will be developed for each of the other major waterways, with a focus on identifying the priority public infrastructure projects required to facilitate safe access for all boaters.

The Regional Boating Plans will help inform projects to be funded under the new BBIP by identifying infrastructure priorities for each region and across the state. While the BBP has historically been based on a 50/50 contribution between RMS and councils, the BBIP will provide the capacity to boost RMS' contribution for projects identified in the Regional Boating Plans as being of regional or state significance but beyond the capacity of councils making a 50% contribution.

### ***Regional Boating Plans***

The NSW Government is seeking to improve the experience of recreational boating across NSW by developing 5-year Regional Boating Plans that identify the safety, access and infrastructure priorities for each major waterway.

Development of the Regional Boating Plans will be led by MMC, which is engaging a suitably qualified firm to develop the Regional Boating Plans. Each plan will be developed following a comprehensive audit of boating safety, access and infrastructure issues on each major waterway, including extensive consultation with boating stakeholders at the local, regional and statewide level. The key boating stakeholders include government agencies, local councils, peak bodies (such as the Boating Industry Association of NSW) and local recreational clubs and sporting groups.

In developing each Regional Boating Plan the contractor will be expected to undertake a review of all existing boating safety, infrastructure and access plans prepared by MMC, RMS and councils. Existing plans vary in their level of detail and age. For some waterways there may be no existing plans. However, all waterways do at least have some form of risk mitigation through navigation aids and speed restrictions, and all have a range of land/water interfaces.

Each Regional Boating Plans will be supported by:

- an analysis of existing boating-related demand and expected future growth;

- an assessment of existing boat storage capacity and its ability to accommodate anticipated growth;
- an assessment of the appropriateness and condition of existing boating facilities and water access infrastructure;
- the identification of key safety risks and issues, along with a review of current mitigation measures and potential improvements; and
- the identification of priority infrastructure projects and other changes over the next five years.

### *Boater safety*

A key component of Regional Boating Plans will be boating safety at the local waterway level. These plans will give MMC the opportunity to deliver its safety program by highlighting 'high risk' areas and activities.

While long-term trends in boating safety have been positive, a high fatality rate in 2012-13 underscores the need for further effort in reducing safety risk. Statistical data shows that recreational boating fatality rates have essentially levelled out, after large reductions between the late 1970s and early 1990s. Challenges lay ahead in relation to a range of areas including:

- small boat safety;
- people boating alone;
- people boating to the prevailing weather and sea conditions;
- communications;
- Personal Watercraft behaviour in certain areas;
- towing activities;
- paddle craft safety; and
- lifejacket wear

While many of these challenges apply at the statewide rather than local level, Regional Boating Plans will help address specific local risks such as boating traffic 'pinch-points' (where collisions may be more likely) and areas of potential conflict between passive vessels and motorised high speed vessels. The plans will also help highlight locations (such as key launch areas) that would be most appropriate for educative efforts in relation to general safety issues like lifejacket wear, weather and communications.

Lifejacket wear is a fundamental and overarching factor in determining the outcome of a vessel incident, especially where persons end up in the water. Boating accident statistics suggest that around 2/3rds of boating fatalities relate to persons being forced into the water, generally as a result of a vessel capsize or falling overboard incident. However, the statistics also show that 9 out of 10 people who drowned in boating accidents in recent years were not wearing a lifejacket. Lifejacket laws were tightened in 2010 to address high risk situations such as boating in small vessels, boating alone and young children.

Long-term statistics gathered by MMC show that bar crossing fatality incidents have more than halved since the compulsory wearing of lifejackets when crossing ocean bars was introduced in NSW in October 2003. This large reduction has occurred even though overall incident numbers have remained almost the same. Studies completed by the former National Marine Safety Committee have found that wearing a lifejacket doubles one's chances of surviving a serious boating accident.

## **Other Maritime policy developments**

### ***Moorings review***

MMS is currently preparing an issues paper consider the scope of a review of the management of moorings in NSW. The review aims to ensure that the rules and regulations related to moorings are modern and flexible enough to be able to respond to the growing demand for boat storage. The review also seeks to minimise the administrative burden for customers and to improve the efficiency of moorings administration.

The Moorings Review Issues Paper will examine issues around 'mooring minders', mooring maintenance, options for increasing mooring capacity, mooring fees and environmental issues related to moorings. A draft issues paper will be released for public comment by the end of 2013. Feedback from stakeholders and the community will be collated and will help inform the issues to be considered during the next stage of the review.

### ***Planning reforms and Maritime property policies***

Feedback from stakeholders has identified constraints within the planning system as the greatest challenge to responding to increased boat storage demands. MMC is working closely with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to reduce 'red tape' for maritime stakeholders as part of the Government's broader planning reforms. This will reduce the administrative burden for property owners and proponents of maritime infrastructure proposals. A set of planning principles will be developed to promote development of facilities that improve waterway access and boat storage.

RMS has a range of existing policies and procedures governing the administration of agreements relating to the use and occupation of RMS owned land, which includes the seabed of Sydney Harbour. Stakeholders have raised concerns about a lack of consistency and transparency across the various policies and principles, as well as a need to minimise 'red tape' and thereby help reduce administrative costs and promote investment. There is also current lack of an overall strategic framework setting out clear objectives and principles in a way that is easily understood by stakeholders.

MMC is therefore reviewing existing RMS property policies and procedures to improve consistency and transparency and also minimise administrative burdens. MMC has been working with property management experts in conducting this review, and has been working closely with the Crown Lands Division of NSW Trade and Investment to identify opportunities for harmonising policies and procedures for the management of submerged lands across the state.