

# REVIEW OF SPEED LIMITS ON THE SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS

24th June 2000  
Environmental Resources Management Australia  
PO Box 7338  
Cloisters Square WA 6850

Dear Sir

RE: REVIEW OF SPEED LIMITS ON THE SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS

In response to the above Issues Paper, the following comment is offered on behalf of Boating Western Australia Inc. (BWA):-

## 2.1.1 Existing Legislation

Although not central to the issue, the fact that there are at least four regulatory authorities setting speed limits on the Swan and Canning Rivers is confusing to many mariners. Perhaps Transport as the overall regulator could produce a laminated card to be despatched to boat owners with the annual registration renewal and showing the diagram in Figure 1.1 of the Issues Paper. The diagram will fit on two sides of an envelope sized card with side 1 showing the area from Fremantle, east to the Riverton Bridge area and north to Burswood and side 2 to show the remainder of the river to Guildford. Some of the blank area could be used to give a diagrammatic outline of the restrictions under Regulation 48 of the Navigable Waters Regulations.

## 2.1.3 Conflicts

It is inevitable that with the widely divergent nature of aquatic activities conducted on the rivers that conflict will occur. The present management policies set out predominantly by Transport and, through The Yachting Association of WA, Swan River Racing and Aquatic Council appear to work very well and it is difficult to envisage how significant improvement could be effected.

It is acknowledged that in order to accommodate the needs of all river users, it has been necessary to adopt segregation either by location or timing and present allocations may need to be adjusted from time to time in accordance with popularity and demand.

Similarly, setting out a particular area for a specific short term use for a stipulated event (such as the Avon Descent) is a part of the management process.

## 3.2 Summary of Specific Needs and Issues

It is of interest to note that the main issues cited in the summary are speed, wash and noise. Although the three are not directly related there is nevertheless some correlation and they are attributes which perhaps, can reasonably be managed.

## 3.3 Boat Wash

## REVIEW OF SPEED LIMITS ON THE SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS

Contrary to your assertions, passenger ferries, in particular some of the Rottnest Island ferries, create a significant wash at normal operational speeds. These ferries are not exclusive and there are many recreational power yachts which create similar disturbances in the water.

### 3.4 Noise

Although noise from vessels can be controlled, silencing generally comes at a price in the form of reduced performance and greater fuel consumption. In particular, vessels powered with turbo charged diesel engines require a relatively open exhaust so as to maintain performance and to keep emission levels to a minimum. It may be possible to draw a balance with a small reduction in operating speed while maintaining the open exhaust aspect which should give some reduction in overall noise levels.

### 3.5 Safety/Speed

There is a perception held by some that safety and speed are directly proportional. This is not necessarily so although the factor of safety for a given vessel in the hands of the same operator will probably reduce with an increase in speed. Due to the contentious nature of the subject, speed per-se is probably an issue best left to the workshop discussion.

### 4.1 Suggested Management Options

It is with some disquiet to note the suggested option of creating designated passages for commercial craft to the exclusion of other river users. There are also overtures in similar vein in section 3.1 "Summary of Issues" where ferries and charter vessels cite right of passage and speed (to maintain schedules) as issues.

Understandably, commercial craft operating in the inner harbour have an absolute right of way due to their restricted visibility and scope to manoeuvre. To the extent that these restrictions may extend to some river craft, then a reduction in operating speed and not a right of way is the logical solution.

The existing right of way applying to certain commercial craft operating in the Rivers is also in need of review and in many respects, should be expunged. As an analogy, and save and except special escorts, no road vehicle including emergency services (police, fire and ambulance) has absolute right of way.

Similarly, special speed limits for special classes of vessel are inappropriate. Buses and taxis have schedules to maintain but must conform to the same rules which apply to other people using the roads.

### Other Matters

Further issues which BWA believes are pertinent to the review of speed limits are:-

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1. Broadly the existing speed limit zones are satisfactory subject to some small refinements.
1. Wash is a primary consideration but in different contexts. The creation of substantial wash by inconsiderate actions can cause discomfort and serious damage to vessels in mooring areas and marinas and damage to river verges in some extreme cases. There is no evidence, however, that recreational boats have caused any bank damage which is measurably greater than the normal process of erosion from wind and waves.
1. Low wash areas could be considered in areas of high potential damage such as marinas and launching ramps.
1. The enforcement of low wash regulations has been found to be very difficult in places where such regulations are, or have been in force. Identifying the culprit with the damaging wash and successfully prosecuting the case is not easy.
1. The present speed limit zone within 45 metres of a mooring area (or marina) should be extended to 100 metres and declared wash free. Buoying for identification may be desirable although the hazard associated with buoys is recognised. Declaration of wash free zones would also assist with the control of large, high wash vessels operating outside of zoned areas.
1. Education and peer pressure can be used to great effect on boat owners in encouraging a change of attitude towards observation of mutual courtesies, low wash and better silencing. Hopefully, commercial operators could be similarly encouraged towards the same attitudinal change.
1. Properly targeted publicity and education can be more successful than crude enforcement.
1. The review must accept current trends in the design of and demand for boats. This applies in particular to size of vessel, greater engine power from lighter engines and as a consequence, higher speeds with more safety. Similarly, yachts are achieving speeds which were unattainable in years gone by.

BWA is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this issues paper and trusts that the input offered will be of assistance in conducting the review.

I look forward to personal attendance at the workshop to be conducted on Wednesday 5th July 2000.

Yours faithfully,

Neville Foster  
Vice President