

20 January 2020

Mr Gary Gaffney
Chief Executive Officer
Better Boating Victoria
Department of Transport
1 Spring Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Via email - BBV.Communications@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Dear Gary

MAV Response to "Management of Port Phillip and Western Port Boating Facilities" Discussion Paper

The MAV welcomes the opportunity to provide input to Better Boating Victoria's discussion paper on the management of boating facilities in Port Phillip and Western Port. We note that this paper will be of primary interest to boat users and boating infrastructure managers in the Port Phillip and Westernport region, and that councils from this region will be providing their individual comments. We are also aware of the submission being provided on behalf of these councils through the Association of Bayside Municipalities (ABM).

This review is timely, given the increasing pressure on existing facilities from the increasing range of activities and people that are accessing these ports. As acknowledged in the discussion paper, four out of five Victorians visit these coastal waterways each year. The exponential population growth of 50% between now and 2050 in the greater Melbourne area will only exacerbate and make more urgent the need for properly managed boating infrastructure.

Delivery of the Victorian Government's election commitment to review boating infrastructure management in Port Phillip Bay and Western Port will enable opportunities for improvement to be identified and implemented by the many agencies involved in providing and managing boating facilities.

Provision and maintenance of boating infrastructure is also very important to other regions. Other coastal locations, inland rivers and lakes have important boating infrastructure assets and services which are highly valued by their local communities and which are essential to generating a vibrant visitor economy across the state. Any learnings and decisions for new management arrangements for the Port Phillip and Western Port region that might then be applied state-wide will also be of vital interest to these regions.

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With this state-wide perspective, our comments and recommendations in response to issues raised in the discussion paper are set out below.

Development of a state-wide vision and strategy:

(Discussion paper sections 'Issues with current management arrangements', 'Strategic Issues'):

- Development of a state-wide vision and strategy for boating infrastructure management would provide a useful framework to provide better clarity about which agencies are responsible for particular assets and services, including the activities to be funded from the Better Boating Fund. It would enable greater consistency to be achieved across the state to build common safety messages understood by boat users and the community, such as standard signage.
- Provision of central information about services levels and who to contact about particular boating infrastructure would also aid better user experiences.
- Any strategy components reliant on council resources being allocated would require discussion and agreement being reached with the affected councils. For example, if site utilisation increases resulted in more maintenance and associated costs needing to be incurred by the council without associated revenue streams, then councils need to be involved in the decisions taken by Better Boating Victoria. Otherwise there is potential for adverse outcomes for their resident communities if council funding for related infrastructure needed to be redirected from other local service provision. Strong engagement and collaboration between agencies before decisions are taken would assist in achieving fair outcomes for local communities and visitors.

Development of common definitions:

(Discussion paper section 'What is a recreational boating facility' refers)

- The definition of a boat-ramp will need to be explored with councils outside the Port Phillip and Western Port region if it is going to be used to inform the scope and type of infrastructure which will be funded through the Better Boating Fund. This issue is of particular sensitivity to those councils which have had to remove their boat ramp and parking fees to enable the Victorian Government deliver its election promise to abolish these fees.

Clarifying ongoing funding arrangements

(Discussion paper sections 'Strategic Management Arrangements', 'Feedback' refer)

- Ongoing funding arrangements for councils which have had to cease charging for parking and boat ramp infrastructure require urgent clarification beyond the current 12-month agreements. The extent of maintenance provided by Better Boating Victoria is particularly important for those councils which have had to remove fees that had been underpinning previous investment decisions. Future investments by councils in related local infrastructure will also be constrained pending clarity about future revenue sources.
- We urgently seek your advice about the arrangements being proposed for the period post 1 July 2020. This is particularly important given that councils are currently finalising their budgets for 2020-21.

Need for transparent and robust governance arrangements:

(Discussion paper sections 'Strategic Management Arrangements', 'Feedback' refer)

- We strongly encourage Better Boating Victoria to establish robust governance arrangements to guide the disbursement of the Better Boating Fund when it is established. Given the direct interest councils have as providers for boating infrastructure and maintaining and servicing adjacent public facilities, we recommend councils are represented in the governing arrangements.
- We strongly encourage the development of criteria to guide the allocation of funding from the Better Boating Fund for boating infrastructure, and that councils have the opportunity to inform their development.

The MAV looks forward to continuing to work with you on these important initiatives. The Victorian Government is to be congratulated for its commitment to establishing a Better Boating Fund so that all boating licence and registration revenue can be utilised for the purposes for which these are collected, namely to maintain and improve boating infrastructure and safety. The important issue now is how this funding can be used in a transparent and accountable way to meet the varied needs across the state.

Should you have any queries about this matter, please contact Rosemary Hancock, Manager Water and Public Health, telephone 9667 5520 or email rhancock@mav.asn.au.

Yours sincerely



TROY EDWARDS
A/Chief Executive Officer



ASSOCIATION OF BAYSIDE MUNICIPALITIES

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20 January 2020

To: Gary Gaffney
CEO, Better Boating Victoria
Via email: BBV.Communications@ecodev.vic.gov.au

RE: Response to Discussion Paper: Management of Port Phillip and Western Port Boating Facilities.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to Better Boating Victoria's discussion paper on the management of boating facilities in Port Phillip and Westernport Bays.

Our response has been prepared on behalf of the councils of Port Phillip and Western Port Bays – representing Greater Geelong City Council, Borough of Queenscliffe, Wyndham City Council, Hobsons Bay City Council, Melbourne City Council, Port Phillip City Council, Bayside City Council, Kingston City Council, Frankston City Council, Mornington Peninsula Shire, Cardinia Shire, Casey Shire and Bass Coast Shire.

The thirteen councils of Port Phillip and Western Port Bays play an active and integral role in the management and protection the environmental, social and economic values of Port Phillip Bay. As coastal councils, we are acutely aware of the value of safe accessible boating facilities to our communities, boat users, emergency services and visitors.

We recognise that effective management of boat ramp facilities requires collaboration and coordination across multiple agencies and organisations. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with Better Boating Victoria to understand the outcomes of this Discussion Paper and develop effective management arrangements for recreational boating users and local councils.

The following pages set out our feedback on the Discussion Paper. Any enquiries, please contact ABM Executive Officer, Jacquie White Ph. 9667 5536 or jwhite@mav.asn.au

Regards,

Councillor Tim Baxter
Port Phillip City Council
ABM President

Councillor Jonathon Marsden
Hobsons Bay City Council
ABM Vice President

On behalf of Councils from the Port Phillip and Westernport Region.

Council Feedback

Recreational Boating in Port Phillip and Western Port

(page 6 – questions 1&2)

Our association with recreational boating in Port Phillip and Western Port

The thirteen councils of Port Phillip and Western Port Bays play an active and integral role in the management and protection of the environmental, social and economic values of Port Phillip Bay. As coastal councils, we are acutely aware of the value of safe accessible boating facilities to our communities, boat users, emergency services and visitors.

Support:

- Councils support the need for a region-wide strategic approach to managing public recreational boating facilities in Port Phillip and Western Port, improving management arrangements, standards and functionality of infrastructure.
- Councils also acknowledge that a state-wide strategic plan will be necessary to guide the deployment of funding for boating infrastructure from the Better Boating Fund, and request establishment of a robust governance structure that involves local government.

Feedback:

- Request that the recommendations from the *Victorian Auditor-General's Report on Protecting Victoria's Coastal Assets (2018)* need to be considered in the development of future management options being funded through the Better Boating Fund.
- We understand the primary audience for the Discussion Paper is the recreational boating community ("all passionate boaters"). Councils are also passionate about improving the management of boating infrastructure across Port Phillip and Westernport – for our communities, the visitors to our municipalities and as the coastal Crown land manager. It is important that future BBV publications reflect this shared passion for improvement.
- Similarly, the Discussion Paper refers to the "frustration for boaters" with different facility managers "having different approaches to the upkeep and improvement of facilities". The variability across Port Phillip and Western Port is equally frustrating for councils as facility managers, constantly seeking ways to generate income on the coast to invest in upkeep and improvement, invariably drawing on general revenue to maintain coastal assets including boat ramps. The significance of this issue was highlighted in the *Victorian Auditor-General's Report on Protecting Victoria's Coastal Assets (2018)*. Development of future management options by BBV should take into considerations the recommendation from this report.

What is a Recreational Boating facility?

(page 8 – questions 4 &5)

Support:

- Councils support the need for a clear definition of a "recreational boating facility". The definition requires further consultation with councils and current boating infrastructure managers, to include items such as:

Councils suggest additional activities need to be included in the definition, such as:

- dredging
- essential safety infrastructure
- parking facilities associated with boat ramp access
- reversing and access lanes
- signage
- ESTA emergency markers
- adjacent toilet blocks
- rubbish bins
- lighting
- webcams
- weather stations

Feedback:

- Essential boating facility assets should include:
 - all-weather and all-tide ramps (which at some sites will require a dredging regime to maintain access.
 - Safety information that enables users to make informed decisions before launching their boat.
 - Investment in growth of the volunteer marine rescue or coastguard network
 - Development of engineering standards for the construction of boating facilities.

What are the issues associated with current management arrangements?

(page 9 – questions 7&8)

Support:

- Councils strongly support the need for a “comprehensive and consistent asset management strategy” to address the variability of asset condition across Port Phillip and Western Port.
- The strategy must address:
 - What is considered ‘good’ asset condition? What is the standard BBV / stakeholders are seeking to achieve? Councils suggest, boating facility investment should start with a review of the current condition, identifying opportunities for facility upgrades or improvements.
 - What is considered ‘good’ asset management/maintenance? What is the standard BBV / stakeholders are seeking to achieve? Council suggest a standardised approach to asset management and service levels for maintenance, renewal and upgrade. This would include consistent inspection, condition assessment and valuation practices across facilities, as well as consolidation/decommission.
 - What are the asset management responsibilities? Need to have shared understanding of what is expected to inform the future operational management arrangements.
 - What is the long-term sustainable funding model for ongoing asset assessment, maintenance, upgrade and renewal? Certainty of ongoing funding is important to enable Councils/responsible agencies to plan for future works. With no regular source of funding for boating facilities Councils do not have the income to maintain/upgrade these facilities in the future. With no insight into the availability of future capital funding, local planning for these works is not taking place.

Of concern:

- With regards to maintenance of boat facility infrastructure Councils have entered into funding agreements with BBV which set out responsibilities for managing boating related assets. Councils would like early clarity about future funding arrangements beyond the current funding agreements. It is vital councils have certainty of funding beyond current twelve-month agreements, particularly given Councils are currently budgeting for 2020-21 financial year.
- Identification of assets – there are several assets along the foreshore where management responsibility is unclear. In some instances, Councils have no record of the construction of these assets or their maintenance or inspection history. Responsibility for these assets needs to be clarified before any agreement can be reached in terms of management / maintenance.
- In some municipalities, boat ramps are located in areas known to be impacted by coastal inundation. It's unclear how known coastal climate change hazards will be addressed as boat ramp facilities (or upgrades) have the potential to accelerate the impacts of coastal erosion or be impacted by sea level rise.
 - How will the design, upgrade, maintenance of facilities be adapted in response to any known / future identified hazards?
 - How will the impacts on marine ecosystems of dredging regimes, existing facilities and facility upgrades be assessed and considered in project planning?
 - How will the impacts of potential increased boating numbers on marine ecosystems be monitored and addressed?

Feedback:

- Improvements / upgrades to boat ramp facilities must consider and address the offsite impacts. For example, changes to the usage of boat ramp facilities impacts on the surrounding traffic and congestion on nearby streets and coastal commercial precincts. This can cause significant congestion to boat users and surrounding business and residents during peak periods.
- Increased traffic has the potential to impact on the quality of stormwater entering the bay. How will this be monitored and addressed? The inclusion of water sensitive urban design at upgraded facilities should be a requirement.
- The abolition of ramp and parking fees makes boating more accessible to greater numbers of people, thus potentially increasing the demand for / usage of boating facilities. This increase must be supported by investment in monitoring and management of safety risks and compliance – at boat ramps and on the water.
- Significant increases in boats on water must be supported by an increase in resources to patrol / enforce / educate by the relevant agencies, in order to effectively managed the increased risks to all waterway users. Safety issues, and engagement with the relevant agencies, needs to be addressed as part of the strategy – recognised as critical to having accessible, safe boating facilities in Port Phillip and Western Port.
- Councils strongly suggest that boating facility management as part of a region-wide framework must have regard for safety issues. This includes management of issues such as :
 - Boat ramp access:

- road traffic management
- congestion (queues impacting on surrounding businesses/residents)
- ensuring safe pedestrian movement around boat ramps and carparks
- parking design and traffic flow
- Ramp safety:
 - Managing safety where there are multiple ramp users (boats, jetskis, kayaks, etc)
 - providing an all tide-ramp so that users can safely retrieve their boats, a dredging regime to maintain access and safety information to enable each user to make an informed decision before launching their boat.
 - Providing real time information regarding weather conditions, congestion and availability of parking on a centralised website
- Channel access:
 - Ensuring safe water access to the boat ramp.

We acknowledge that general marine safety issues are not within scope of Better Boating Victoria jurisdiction in the development of a recreational boating facility framework. The framework will need to have regard for the requirements of agencies responsible for safety including Councils, Parks Victoria, Coast Guard, etc. The strategic framework would benefit from clearly identifying what will be funded through the Better Boating Fund, and what is subject to local agency resources.

- The Discussion Paper Summary, item #2 (page 2) states “the way facilities are managed and the standard to which they are maintained differs significantly from one waterway manager to another”.

Correction: DELWP, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water are the designated waterway managers in Port Phillip and Western Port. Local government is not the waterway manager in this context. Rather, Councils’ role in the management of boating facilities is as the appointed coastal Crown Land manager.

Strategic issues

(page 10 – Questions 9-11)

In principle support:

- Councils strongly support the need for a “coordinated strategy and vision” for the management of recreational boating facilities and welcome the opportunity to work closely with BBV to create one.

Our ‘in principle’ support is based on our concern that a strategy must go further than a coordinated vision and the identification of priority areas for asset renewals, upgrades and maintenance.

As the Discussion Paper identifies, there are 43 public boating facilities across the region, managed by 24 different entities. A coordinated vision and strategy will not address the long-standing issue of varied management arrangements, blurred lines of accountability and responsibility across multiple asset managers. Management of recreational boating facilities is not the core business of many management agencies (ie. Councils), and often not an area of expertise.

We are calling for:

1. Establishment of a robust governance structure that involves local government, to (a) oversee development of the region-wide boating facilities framework; and (b) inform principles to guide prioritisation / investment through the Better Boating Fund.
2. Consideration of a one agency being responsible for overseeing the management of all recreational boating facilities in Port Phillip and Western Port.

- Designating responsibility for boating facility maintenance, management and upgrades with a one agency would assist in minimising bureaucracy and achieve greater consistency. For example, Parks Victoria – who are already the Port manager, have authorised offices and resources assigned to recreating boating education, enforcement and compliance and have a team of maritime engineers (the expertise).

This agency would provide:

- consistent standards for boating facility maintenance, management and upgrade;
- single point for funding, enabling clear financial reporting and accountability;
- hub of expertise beyond current (limited) capability dispersed across current agencies; and
- systematic prioritisation of expenditure outside the issue of municipal / agency boundaries.

We recommend further exploration of this proposal in consultation with boating infrastructure managers.

Of concern:

- Councils are concerned as to how the revenue from licencing and registration fees (the Better Boating Fund) can:
 - be distributed in an equitable manner
 - establish consistent management practices across 24 management entities
 - access the required level of expertise to meet expectations (or build the capability)
 - apply a strategic approach to asset management across the multiple asset managers
- A future strategic planning framework must consider the future demand for boat ramp facilities to service Melbourne’s growth suburbs. The discussion paper appears to focus on the maintenance and renewal of existing facilities. The development of new facilities needs to be considered, servicing the recreational boating community in growth areas such as Melbourne’s west.
- Previously, through annual memberships and casual launch fees Councils could obtain data on utilisation of boat ramps. Some councils were advised that counters would be installed, and they would have access to this information. Seeking confirmation this will be occurring?

Feedback:

- The Discussion Paper asks, “If a vision or strategy is developed, where should the State prioritise boating facility investment?”. Councils invite BBV to work with the sector and other key stakeholders to co-design a set of principles to guide how priorities are determined across the Port Phillip and Western Port. This work needs to be applicable across the state (coastal and inland waters) and therefore BBV will need to engage other coastal councils and facilities managers beyond Port Phillip and Western Port in this process.
- The Discussion paper has no reference to the legislative framework for boating facility

management. For example, a future strategy must align with:

- *Marine and Coastal Act 2018 and Draft Marine and Coastal Policy*, recognising marine ecosystems and the role they play in sustaining healthy fisheries;
- associated guidelines for the siting and design of structures on the coast; and
- assessments of coastal hazards for Port Phillip and Western Port.

User experience

(page 12 – Questions 14)

Support:

- Councils support the need to improve and centralise the mechanism(s) for gathering, analysing and responding to feedback regarding boating facilities. This includes feedback from and to boating users, general public and current boating facility managers.

For example:

- Councils have indicated they often get calls regarding issues associated with infrastructure (such as piers and fish cleaning stations) that are assets of other agencies. Future improvements might include a central point for lodging feedback enabling response from the responsible agency in a timely manner.

It has been suggested that the number 13 BOAT (13 2628) is available and could be acquired for this purpose.

- Feedback from some councils suggests that communications associated with boating facilities (or potentially boating licensing) needs to include a focus on education about the use of boat ramp facilities. Councils have indicated they often receive complaints about boats becoming marooned due to a lack of understanding of local conditions, or boaters taking far too long to launch and dock possibly due to a lack of experience.

Other feedback

(page 18 – Question 17)

The Discussion Paper Summary states (page 5 “Objective of this paper”) that “feedback will be used to develop options to improve management of public recreational boating facilities”. Council request further information from BBV on:

- Who are the options being developed for? Minister / boat users / stakeholders / facility managers?
- Who decides which option will be progressed?
- Will there be further engagement on these options? Councils request opportunity to have input to the options being considered.

Additional feedback provided by Councils:

- Comprehensive and ongoing educational programs promoting safe boating practices and the value of marine ecosystems
- Requirement for ecological sustainable design principles to be applied when facilities are upgraded.