



# NMSC Feature

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## Owner Builders Get On Board with the ABP

You may have heard of the Australian Builders Plate for recreational boats (ABP) and wondered what it really means for the nation's owner builders.

In a move to make recreational vessels safer across the board, owner builders will now be required to affix ABPs onto the boats they build from 1 July 2006.

National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC) CEO Maurene Horder explained that this comes as a result of recent industry consultation.

"The boating industry have been keen supporters of the ABP initiative, and including owner builders will only make the industry safer," she said.

"At the end of the day, the ABP's objective is to protect lives irrespective of who the boat builder is."

She went on to say that there are no compulsory building standards or laws covering the construction of recreational boats in Australia.

"The ABP provides information to boat users on a boat's capability and capacity.

"This initiative will also require boat builders to apply minimum safety standards to some key elements in the design of recreational boats.

Ministers of the Australian Transport Council endorsed the latest amendments to the ABP Standard late last year, which included owner builders being required to affix an ABP.

"I acknowledge that these amendments come late in the game for owner builders, and we will be revving up an awareness campaign to address this, including contacting industry groups to organise information forums," Ms Horder added.

"We have had some feedback from owner builders, and the challenge will be to inform as many as possible on the ABP.

"Unfortunately, the timing is part of the nature of community consultation."

The ABP applies to most new recreational boats including those imported into Australia, and details vital information such as the maximum number of people and load allowed, engine rating and weight and, for boats less than 6 meters, buoyancy performance.

Development of the ABP follows extensive consultation over the last five years with the boating industry, including manufacturers, designers, dealers and the general public, through surveys, workshops, consultation meetings and boat shows.

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“We are not inventing something new here, boat capacity plates have been mandatory in the USA and the EU for many years.”

Ms Horder stressed that the ABP was being progressively introduced prior to it becoming mandatory from 1 July 2006. Most states and the Northern Territory will be amending their marine legislation to bring the ABP requirements into force with Tasmania and Western Australia also using their consumer legislation to introduce the standards.

Recreational boats that are excluded from having an ABP include: amphibious vehicles; canoes, kayaks, or surf skis; pedal powered boats; second hand vessels; rowing shells; sailboards or sail kites; surf row boats; hydrofoils or hovercraft; sailing vessels; submersibles; aquatic toys; personal watercraft; and inflatable boats in certain conditions.

Two types of ABP have been developed, one for boats under 6 metres, which includes a buoyancy statement, and one for boats 6 metres or more, which does not require a buoyancy statement.

“In order to ensure accurate information on all ABPs, only a builder, importer or competent person can supply and approve information and they need to be a resident or a registered corporation in Australia,” explained Ms Horder.

A “competent person” is defined as a person who has acquired, through training, qualification and/or experience, the knowledge to determine and approve information on an ABP.

From July 1 2006, new boats less than 6 metres must have either basic or level buoyancy, as inadequate buoyancy will no longer be acceptable.

- **Basic buoyancy** means that the boat will float in some form if swamped in calm water. This means the boat will remain afloat for occupants to cling on to the upturned hull.
- **Level buoyancy** means the boat will continue to float in an upright position if swamped in calm water. This may allow occupants to remain in the boat and bail the vessel to remove the water.

The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) commissioned by the NMSC into the need for an ABP estimated that fatal and serious injuries associated with recreational boating costs Australians about \$52 million each year. According to an NMSC commissioned study on boating fatalities, there are on average 80 deaths and nearly 1000 people admitted to hospital each year as a result of boating incidents in Australia.

Ms Horder emphasised that buoyancy was a key safety issue, particularly in relation to smaller boats.

“The National Assessment of Boating Fatalities in Australia 1992 – 1998 Report identified a relationship between vessel length and buoyancy for dinghies, other open motorboats and half cabin motorboats,” she said.

“Together they made up nearly 60% of all vessels involved in fatal incidents over the period of the study.”

“You can see the buoyancy capacity of smaller boats at a glance via the ABP and details such as the maximum number of people for the boat will also help prevent overloading.”

To make it easier for manufacturers to comply with the ABP standard, the Australian Marine Industries Federation (AMIF) provides on line facilities for ordering plates ([www.amif.asn.au](http://www.amif.asn.au)). Plates are supplied with customised details already printed, including buoyancy levels, maximum HP and loads.

For more information and for a copy of Edition 3 of the ABP Standard, visit NMSC web site at [www.nmsc.gov.au](http://www.nmsc.gov.au) and follow the links to the ABP page.

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For further information, please contact NMSC CEO Maurene Horder on (02) 9247 2124 or NMSC communications officer Ursula Bishop on 0412 813 056.