



NMSC Media Release

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Technical Advice Guides ABP

The National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC) has emphasised the need for manufacturers to comply with the Australian Builders Plate for Recreational Boats (ABP), as it is being progressively introduced around the country through legislation and as a registration requirement.

“This is particularly important for manufacturers who supply boats in multiple states,” explained NMSC CEO Maurene Horder.

The ABP is a national marine safety initiative and details: the maximum power outboard that can be safely used, the maximum number of people that can be carried on board, the total safe maximum load, and buoyancy performance for boats less than 6 metres.

A recent interpretation by the NMSC’s Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) aims to guide manufacturers and clarify technical aspects of the ABP standard. It advises that all boats relying on air chambers for buoyancy should be tested with the two largest air chambers opened up, regardless of which technical standard is being used for ABP purposes. In other words, a single air chamber is not deemed adequate.

“Boat manufacturers, faced with competitive and cost pressures, need some certainty as to what is a fair technical interpretation and that is where the TAP comes in.”

In 2007, NMSC was asked to provide guidance after several aluminium boat manufacturers in Western Australia had sought clarification of whether or not the need to fit buoyancy foam to boats under 6 metres in length could be avoided if the information on the ABP was stated as having been determined in accordance with ISO 12217-3, rather than the Australian Standard.

Ms Horder explained that the ABP information can be determined using the Australian Standard, AS 1799.1, or the technical standards used in Europe or America. Each of those standards allows for the use of air chambers as an alternative to foam buoyancy; however, any type of buoyancy has to take account of the risk of being compromised to ensure it will do the job in an emergency.

“Foam buoyancy needs to be protected against attack by fuels and this is addressed in the technical standards recognised by the ABP standard.

“For air chambers, the risk is that a slow leak will allow water into the chamber. The Australian and American technical standards address this possibility by requiring some redundancy and the opening up of the two largest chambers during testing of buoyancy performance.”

ISO 12217-3 is used in Europe to determine buoyancy performance and is one of the recognised technical standards for the ABP. However, the European regulatory system is much more complex than in Australia. ISO 12217-3 includes a range of different modes for assessing the stability and buoyancy performance of a boat, many of which are



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dependent on additional safety measures, required in Europe, but outside the scope of the ABP.

Ms Horder explained that in one very specific mode, ISO 12217-3 allows the buoyancy performance to be tested without any of the air chambers being left open.

“That is where the air tanks of every single boat produced have been individually pressure tested and then re-tested to an enhanced pressure test to ensure there are no leaks.”

Like the legal requirements in the USA and Canada, the ABP standard doesn't mandate pressure tests during production; it only requires that the boat be tested to determine basic or level flotation.

“Boats that rely solely on just one integral air compartment for their buoyancy could be particularly at risk of sinking in an emergency, such as was the case of the *Malu Sara* which sank in the Torres Strait in 2005, resulting in the loss of five lives,” added Ms Horder.

Tasmania, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and more recently South Australia, have all introduced the ABP either through legislation or as a registration requirement. The Northern Territory and Victoria will be introducing the ABP in the near future.

Please check your state ABP requirements with your local marine agency. More detailed information on this technical interpretation can be found in the Guidance Circular titled *Technical Interpretation of Buoyancy Performance of Recreational Boats in Relation to the ABP Standard*, now published on the NMSC website: www.nmsc.gov.au

The NMSC aims to achieve nationally uniform marine safety practices and is made up of the CEOs of Australia's marine safety agencies.

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