



NMSC Feature

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Safer Boating with an ABP On Board

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

National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC) CEO Maurene Horder explained that the main aim of the ABP is to provide information to boat users on a boat's capability and capacity to encourage safer boating.

"According to our figures, approximately 31 000 recreational boats, registered each year will be impacted by the ABP," she said.

"There are no compulsory building standards or laws covering the construction of recreational boats in Australia.

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

The ABP, which applies to all new recreational boats including those imported into Australia, 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.

As a result of recent industry consultation, the NMSC has made some amendments to the ABP standard, which will come into effect on 1 January 2006. These amendments are detailed on the NMSC website www.nmsc.gov.au and include:

- The name of the standard used to determine the information on the plate is shown on the plate eg "Information determined - AS 1799"
- Further optional warning statements can be included. For example, a warning statement can be included to detail the maximum passenger numbers to be carried on the flybridge.
- The maximum load definition now includes persons, maximum outboard engine weight (including auxiliary engines), as well as carry-on equipment such as personal equipment, personal safety equipment, spare parts, tools, dry provisions, fishing tackle, portable tanks and their contents. It does not include the mass of the contents of fixed fuel and water tanks when full.
- The symbols for maximum load have also been expanded
- If displayed, the build date specified details the year of production only. (This will allow manufacturers to pre-purchase a quantity of plates for the whole year, rather than month by month.)

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The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) commissioned by the NMSC into the need for an Australian Builders Plate 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.

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

“For the consumer, the ABP will make it easier for them to choose the boat that best suits their requirements – from the number of people they want the boat to carry to the horsepower that they need,” Ms Horder explained.

“They will be better able to compare new boats since plates will detail standard information about each boat’s capacity and flotation.”

Ms Horder went on to assure the boating public that the Australian Builders Plate would provide accurate safety information.

“A builder, importer or competent person, are the only ones who can supply and approve information on an ABP, and they need to be a legal entity in Australia,” she said.

“All new boats will have accurate plates; even if the boat has been customised prior to sale,” she added.

“This is because dealers who modify a new boat before it’s sold will have to make sure that the information on the plate is still correct and may need to organise with the builder to update the plate if necessary.

Mr Alan Steber, Managing Director of boat builder Steber International, who has played a role in educating the industry on the ABP, was asked for his comments on the introduction of the ABP.

“Every reputable boat builder conducts practical tests on new models for flotation, handling, speed, trim etc. prior to full production,” he said.

“However, the Australian Builders Plate is the means by which the boating public can clearly see the limits placed on the boat.”

Ms Horder agreed with Mr Steber’s comments and added that to better inform industry, the NMSC was commissioning a naval architect to compare information attained for an ABP using AS 1799, ABYC and ISO standards for a 5.5 metre outboard power vessel and 7.5 metre vessel.

Ms Horder stressed that the ABP was being progressively introduced, with state governments and the Northern Territory aiming to introduce legislation to fully implement the ABP by 1 July 2006.

“The NMSC, with the Australian Marine Safety Authority as well as all state and the Northern Territory marine safety agencies, are promoting and monitoring the introduction of the ABP,” she said

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; and 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 include a buoyancy statement.

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 hold 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.

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 57% of all vessels involved in fatal incidents over the period of the study.”

According to the report, inadequate buoyancy was a contributing factor in 12% of fatal accidents involving vessels less than 6 metres in length compared to 6% when they were 6 metres or more.

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

Ms Horder confirmed that boat manufacturers across the country were already affixing plates to new boats.

Queensland based boat builder Cruise Craft Boats have included basic buoyancy as a feature in all their boats, ranging from 4.75 to 6.85 metres

“We introduced ABP’s for our boats in January this year,” Director, Nathan Nichols said.

“I think it does give us an indirect marketing advantage.”

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). Plates are supplied with customised details already printed, including buoyancy levels, maximum HP and loads.

For more information on the Australian Builders Plate for recreational boats, log onto the NMSC web site at 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 (02) 9247 2124 or 0412 813 056.