



Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

Tuesday 9 November 2010

PUBLIC

Dear Mr Ellis

Petition No 96 – Reduction of Maximum Boat Speed in the Swan and Canning rivers

Thank you for inviting me to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in relation to this petition. The petition reflects community concern about riverbank erosion in the upper reaches of the Swan and Canning rivers. The waves generated by speeding boats are a major cause of riverbank erosion. The community is aware that sufficient evidence now exists to support the view that five knots is the optimal speed for boats travelling on the river. This is because at five knots, the waves generated by all boats are not capable of causing erosion – hence the view that there must be an immediate reduction of the maximum boat speed from eight to five knots (9.26kmh).

There is also the related issue of boat hull shapes and how this may impact on riverbank erosion; however, this petition does not address hull shape as an issue, only boat speed.

The State Labor Opposition shares the community's concerns about foreshore erosion and the community's expectation that the maximum boat speed must be reduced to five knots (9.26kmh) before the start of the 2010/11 boating season. As the Member for Maylands I have made it clear to my constituents that I will support them in their efforts to achieve this reduction in the maximum boat speed limit.

Two reports have now been completed with confirm that the maximum boat speed for the upper reaches should be reduced to five knots (9.26kmh).

In October 2009, the Swan River Trust released a desktop study conducted by the Australian Maritime College and Curtin University's Centre for Maritime Science and Technology, called "Investigation into the Effect of Wash of Boats and Wind Waves on the Swan River". The primary aim of the study was to compare the impact of wash from boat and wind waves. The report found that:

"For the upper river site (Ashfield Parade) it is clear that shoreline erosion is very likely as a result of vessel generated waves where a blanket speed limit of either 8 or 9 knots (or greater) is imposed as the energy and power of the maximum waves generated by all vessels far exceed that of the maximum wind waves over the entire range of lateral distances investigated. **It is also clear that a reduction in vessel speed, down to 6 or 5 knots, should dramatically reduce the potential for erosion.** For example, at a speed of 5 knots the energy and power of the maximum waves for all vessels are likely to be below that of the maximum wind waves, provided a minimum lateral distance of 20 metres is maintained between the vessel sailing line and the shore."¹

In May 2010, the Swan River Trust released the findings of full scale field trials of boat wash and wind waves on the Swan River. Boat wash and wind waves were measured at different locations on the Swan River including Ashfield Parade, in Ashfield. Nine different hull forms were tested across a range of boat speeds and distances from the shoreline.

¹ Executive summary, Australian Maritime College "Investigation into the effect of wash of boats and wind waves on the Swan River"; page 3.

According to the Swan River Trust's website: "The field trials confirmed that a reduction in boat speed limits in sections of the Swan River would dramatically reduce the potential for shoreline erosion, damage to wildlife habitats and disruption to other aquatic users."

The results of trials at Ashfield Parade showed that the current speed of eight knots roughly corresponded to the highest energy boat wake for most recreational vessels. Only at speeds less than six knots did all the vessels produce less wave energy than the extreme wind waves at Ashfield Parade. At five knots, all vessels produced minimal wash.

"The results from the dedicated trials at Ashfield Parade showed that the speed of 8 knots (the present speed limit) roughly corresponds to the highest-energy boat wakes for the Bayliner 27, Haines Hunter 680, Quintrex 570 and Quintrex 470. This unfortunate situation is partly due to the short length of these vessels, causing a hump speed at close to 8 knots, and partly due to the water depth in this region (2 – 4m) giving a detrimental shallow-water effect particularly at this speed. At higher speeds, each of these vessels is able to plane and produce less wave energy than at hump speed, but still higher than the extreme wind wave energy. **Only at speeds less than 6 knots did all of the vessels produce less wave energy than the extreme wind waves. At 5 knots, all vessels produced a tiny wake.**"²

The Government claims that the results of these two studies are being used as part of a review of aquatic usage on the Swan and Canning rivers, in conjunction with the Department of Transport. The review is expected to take about 18 months to complete.

The community rejects the Government's reasoning that reducing the maximum boat speed limit in the upper reaches of the river should be delayed until the aquatic usage study is completed. The community believes that the reduction in speeds could and should be actioned immediately – as do I.

Interestingly, in December 2009, Transport Minister Simon O'Brien wrote and informed me that in the event the field trials confirmed the results achieved in the desk top study, it was possible that changes to the boat speed limits could be made before the 2010/11 boating season. In his letter, the Minister said:

"If these field trials confirm the findings of the AMC study then, as already indicated to the Swan River Trust, it would favourably consider a formal request to further reduce the speed limits in the upper reaches of the Swan and Canning rivers. It is anticipated that the results of the field trials will be known in mid 2010 and any amendments to the speed limits could occur prior to the 2010/11 boating season."

Earlier this year I held a forum in my electorate – attended by about 70 people - concerning the health and future of the Swan River. Reducing the maximum boat speed limit was the second most strongly supported action proposed by people who attended the forum (increasing funding for the river was the number one action people supported); some 125 also signed the petition in question and a number of local groups, including Maylands Yacht Club, ANA Rowing Club, Environment House and Maylands Residents and Ratepayers Association, have indicated their support. There is definitely a view in the community that as well as causing foreshore erosion, 'boat hoons' threaten the safety of other river users. Maylands Yacht Club has described speeding boats as a "serious danger" because of the threat of collision that they pose; the noise pollution generated by speeding boats and jet skis (which go outside their gazetted area to enter upper reach areas illegally) is also a major disturbance to river users.

Thank you for your consideration of this serious issue. I would be pleased to provide further information to the Committee if required.

Yours sincerely


Lisa Baker MLA
Member for Maylands

² Executive Summary, Centre for Marine Science and Technology "Full-scale boat wake and wind wave trials on the Swan River"; page 1.

PUBLIC