

The Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW "Promoting Sustainable Fishing"

NEWS BULLETIN 42
26th July 2008



NSW Maritime proposed new boating licence procedure.

As from 1 October 2008 NSW Maritime requires all general boat and personal watercraft (PWC) licence applicants to have some practical boating experience before gaining an unrestricted general boat or PWC licence. There are a number of ways to obtain this experience so please visit the NSW Maritime web site www.maritime.nsw.gov.au for full details.

In brief applicants for a general boat licence will need to complete a Boating Safety Course (BSC) and satisfy the boat licence test before being issued with a restricted general boat licence. (This can be achieved in a number of ways). It will be necessary to demonstrate on water experience prior to sitting for a boat licence. To achieve this it will be necessary to fill in a NSW Maritime Logbook which will be available free initially.

A total of 10 hours on-water experience in a registered powered vessel, under the supervision of an experienced skipper (current licence holder with at least 3 years boating experience), is required. At least one trip is to be undertaken between sunset and sunrise. Options are available to attend a practical tuition course conducted by a Registered Training Provider or satisfactorily undertake a course from a number of approved organisations.

Web Cams on Coastal Bars.

More on line web cameras are being installed by NSW Maritime to enable those proposing to cross bars the option of checking them out before leaving home. Currently there are five cameras installed at Narooma, Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Tweed Heads.

For details log on to www.maritime.nsw.gov.au and go to Web Camera Trial.

Cameras are to be located at: Manning River, Harrington; Swansea; Sussex Inlet; Moruya Heads; Merimbula Lake; Bermagui; Brunswick River; Richmond River, Ballina; Clarence River, Yamba; and Nobby's Beach, Newcastle and will be online over the coming months.

Wader warning.

Following representations from the RFA, NSW Maritime is preparing a media campaign informing the community of the dangers in wearing waders in boats, particularly in alpine freshwater impoundments, dams and lakes.

Dangerous Water Levels of Freshwater Dams/Impoundments.

Following requests from the RFA NSW Maritime will develop trial contour plans at various depths of the more popular freshwater dams and impoundments. This will provide some indication to boat users of dangerous shallow areas, rock outcrops and sunken trees which are all potentially hazards particularly when water levels are consistently changing.

Boat Ramps – Sydney Harbour

NSW Maritime has introduced a 100% funding program in Sydney Harbour for boat ramp upgrades including infrastructure such as pontoons and vehicle parking. As a result there are a number of Councils who have been attracted to the increased funding opportunity. Work is currently in progress at Tunks Park (Middle Harbour) and funding has also been approved for Wharf Road, Davidson Park, Tamplin Park, Blaxland Road and Bayview (Canada Bay Council).

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Sydney Harbour Bridge Area – speed and fishing restrictions

Following a number of incidents around the Harbour Bridge area there has been a number of maritime restrictions put in place in recent times. Due to the amount of boating traffic, particularly ferries and the restricted waterways under the bridge, the frequent turbulent water and busy vessel traffic, additional restrictions have been put in place. Boating speed has been reduced to 15 knots and fishing from drifting boats is not permitted.

EPIRB (Distress Beacons) Changes

Distress beacons are also known as Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRB's). From 1 February 2009, the outdated 121.5 MHz signal will no longer be monitored by aircraft or satellite. The new beacons operate on a 406 MHz signal – registered to an individual person and their craft – carries a unique identification code, transmitted when the beacons is activated. The unique code provides vital information about the registered boat and its owner – ensuring a faster and more effective search and rescue response appropriate to vessel size. Outdated analogue beacons provided only a position to rescuers. Boaters – including recreational vessels 8m or larger required by law to carry a distress beacon – must make the switch for safety's sake.

For more information go to <http://beacons.amsa.gov.au/index.asp> and <http://www.cospas-sarsat.org/MainPages/indexEnglish.htm>

Marine safety rules and practices to be overhauled

NSW Maritime has announced major reforms to marine safety laws. The reforms include the introduction of new penalties for dangerous behaviour and a compulsory practical component for aspiring boat skippers. They give NSW Maritime and Water Police officer's new powers to direct skippers and enforce boating safety laws.

New penalties, including jail terms and fines, will apply for dangerous navigation, overloading a vessel, endangering public safety and driving while disqualified. NSW Maritime and Water Police officers will have new powers to enforce the law and direct boaters to act safely. Boat licence requirements will be strengthened by requiring practical boating experience before a licence is issued and increasing penalties for operating a vessel while disqualified. NSW Maritime night-time patrols will also increase, with blitzes on vessel lights. New powers will give NSW Maritime and Water Police the mandate to immediately suspend registration when vessels are found operating outside the law. This includes vessels operating at night with insufficient lighting. These new measures will strengthen the culture of safe boating in NSW.

NSW Maritime will renew its focus on boating education, targeting lifejackets, skipper responsibility, offshore sailing training, boating near electrical crossings and behaviour in dangerous conditions such as crossing bars. The education programme will continue to build awareness of the safety precautions everyone should take while enjoying our waterways.

The above information has been provided by Max Castle, Vice President of the RFA who is a committee member of the Maritime Recreational Advisory Committee (RVAC).