

Transport Response to the Independent Review of Boating Now

On 23 May 2023, a motion was passed and supported by the NSW Government requiring NSW Maritime in Transport for NSW to conduct an independent review of the Boating Now Program to ensure its effectiveness. The review was conducted in accordance with the agreed scope as outlined in the Boating Now Review Terms of Reference. While showing an overall strong level of compliance against the review themes, the report proposes 10 opportunities for future improvement to be considered.

The Safety, Environment and Regulation Division in Transport for NSW, which is responsible for the Boating Now Program development, has responded to these opportunities in consultation with the Maritime Infrastructure Delivery Office which is responsible for delivering the program. Details are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Transport response to opportunities identified in the independent review of the Boating Now Program

Opportunities for improvement	Response
1. Explore the cost / benefit of other delivery options to complement the current grant-based approach, to help deliver high priority infrastructure that other stakeholders or the market currently has no appetite to deliver under a grant funding arrangement.	Supported Transport recognises that there are a number of high priority infrastructure projects identified in the Maritime Infrastructure Plan (MIP) that have not been delivered under the Boating Now program due to delivery partners not applying for funding for these projects (e.g. sewage pump-outs). Transport will consider alternate maritime infrastructure delivery options as part of the current Review of the MIP. Alternate delivery options to grant programs, such as direct delivery / Design-Build-Operate by the Maritime Infrastructure Delivery Office, have previously been identified as necessary for future maritime infrastructure investment programs to ensure certain projects that are difficult to fund through a grants program can be delivered.
2. Conduct a desktop review of current state and future demand analysis for recreational boating facilities across NSW. It is noted that a similar review was conducted in Queensland in 2017.	Not supported The 2017 Queensland Recreational Boating Facilities Demand Forecasting Study sought to establish current and future demand for recreational boating facilities throughout Queensland. This state-wide report complements individual reports for each local government area which identifies existing capacity, current and future demand, and potential opportunities for boating infrastructure within each Local Government Area. In 2018, Transport for NSW commissioned a desktop analysis to inform the development of the Maritime Infrastructure Plan and it was useful to identify priority waterways for investment. However, this did not include analysis of current state of assets (both in terms of capacity and or condition) which would have required an audit of boating infrastructure at significant additional cost. Transport does not propose to repeat the desktop analysis to inform funding investment decisions on specific projects.

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	The asset ownership structure in NSW is very different to Queensland. The Queensland Government owns approximately 80% of assets that were considered for investment and therefore there was no need to rely on a third party to apply for and contribute funding. In NSW the significant majority of boating access infrastructure is owned by third parties and therefore the grant model is the primary mechanism to invest in these facilities. Based on previous experience with delivering the Boating Now Program, while the MIP does provide incentives for asset owners in Key Investment Locations to apply for funding, investment in boating infrastructure is more influenced by the willingness of an asset owner to apply for grant funding rather than the investment priorities that are detailed in the MIP. It is expected that future demand analysis would have less influence on investment decisions in NSW compared to Queensland and therefore has less relative value. While a statewide audit of boating infrastructure to establish capacities and standards is not supported at this time, Transport will continue to explore opportunities to improve data on asset capacities, conditions and use over time as part of commitments in the Maritime Safety Plan 2026. This includes the use of technology to improve data of the use of maritime infrastructure by boating customers. Transport will also continue with the NSW Recreational Boater Survey which does provide general insights into boating infrastructure use and condition.
3. Ensure alignment between a revised Maritime Infrastructure plan, and other strategic government priorities such as the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan and the NSW Six Cities Model. For Boating Now, this will help to ensure future boating investment is aligned to broader state-based priorities and needs.	Supported The review of the MIP will and continues to prioritise alignment with the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan and other relevant plans.
4. Consider amending the Boating Now assessment criteria to consider environmental and sustainability outcomes of projects to complement the existing criteria.	Supported - noting that the current assessment criteria already considers environmentally sustainable outcomes under the criteria for strategic alignment with the MIP The Boating Now Assessment Plan, which details the process for assessing Boating Now applications, already takes into account how a project enables “environmentally sustainable access, use and navigation of NSW waterways” as part of the assessment criteria on how a project supports the strategic outcomes of the MIP. This assessment criteria was previously weighted 25%. The

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	Assessment Plan also provides instruction on how the assessment panel should review applications against each assessment criteria. The assessment criteria will be reconsidered for any future grants program, and options to strengthen environmentally sustainable outcomes will be considered consistent with the outcomes of the MIP review. In doing so, it is necessary to ensure that the assessment process places appropriate weight on the broad range of benefits that boating infrastructure provides including improved access, safety and value for money. Environmental and sustainability outcomes are not the primary purpose or drivers of the Boating Now Program and therefore had not previously been considered as stronger determinants in the assessment criteria. However they are key factors for consideration during the planning, design and construction process of the projects, and are significant considerations throughout the project lifecycle. The Boating Now Program has also worked closely with delivery partners throughout the project lifecycle to better share project experience and best practice from across NSW to deliver positive value-for-money, economic, social and environmental outcomes. In addition to the above, the MIP review is currently considering alternate approaches to improve environmental outcomes associated with maritime infrastructure investment.
5. Consideration should be given to transitioning Boating Now from a series of large block funding arrangements to smaller ongoing funding provisions. This will help to: - o Build a constant pipeline of projects. - o Give delivery partners confidence and allow them to plan around Boating Now. - o Improve cashflow management. - o Provide greater flexibility to adjust funding allocations to address the most relevant needs of the business and boating community. - o Provide opportunity to rebrand the program.	Supported for consideration during development of future programs The costs and benefits of running more frequent grants programs will be considered when developing future boating infrastructure investment programs beyond the program currently being developed. This will also take into account the outcomes of the MIP review and the availability of funding for smaller and more frequent grant programs.

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6. Transition future Boating Now programs to the Whole of Government Grant Management System to provide increased consistency between the Boating Now program and other government grant-based programs and ensure ongoing compliance with the NSW grants management processes.	Supported Transport is committed to aligning future rounds of the program with the NSW Government Grant Management System.
7. Strengthen requirements for ongoing maintenance of projects delivered under Boating Now. Consideration could be given to: - o Requesting that all applicants lodge asset maintenance plans as part of forming a complete Boating Now submission. - o Modifying the terms of grants in future rounds to allow for the conducting of random audits to assess if appropriate maintenance is being completed. Local asset owners who fail to meet ongoing asset maintenance requirements could be disadvantaged or excluded from securing grant funding in the future.	Partially Supported Transport recognises that maintenance of boating infrastructure delivered through the Boating Now Program is important to ensure standards are maintained and boaters can continue to use this infrastructure for many years after the project is completed. However, Transport does not own these assets and it is also recognised that many delivery partners have competing priorities for their limited maintenance budgets and the program should not rule out applicants that are in this situation from applying for funding. This would also unfairly disadvantage boaters that rely on access to these facilities and does not recognise the significant financial contribution delivery partners already make when delivering Boating Now projects. The Boating Now Conditions of Grant document requires at Section 5.1(n) that the delivery partner must be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the Project works during and following completion of the Project(s) in accordance with any manufacturers' recommendations and / or accepted standard industry practice. While the onus is on asset owners to maintain their assets, Transport cannot force an asset owner to maintain its infrastructure and Transport does not support recouping Boating Now funding if assets are not maintained. Transport does and will continue to take into account whether delivery partners maintain their assets as part of grant application assessment processes. Transport's current position is that the best way to encourage and support maintenance of projects delivered under boating now is to: • Continue to provide funding under the Boating Asset Maintenance program, or equivalent program, which was introduced to assist delivery partners maintain their boating assets. • Continue to provide funding under the Boating Infrastructure Emergency Repair Pool (BIERP), or equivalent program, which was introduced to repair

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	assets that are damaged by flood and other severe weather events. - Continue to ask that asset maintenance plans be included in boating now applications which is taken into account when scoring an application against the assessment criteria on delivery confidence. This assessment criteria can be broadened for future programs to also consider internal Transport knowledge of the standard of assets owned by delivery partners. The review of the MIP which is currently underway will consider whether this is the most suitable approach to ensure boating assets are maintained to minimum standards while not disadvantaging delivery partners and boaters that use those facilities. While consideration can be given to strengthening maintenance requirement in the future, there is also the risk to consider that being too prescriptive could impact on an applicant's decision to apply for funding. In response to the specific suggestions under this recommendation: - While subject to further consideration as part of the MIP review, Transport will continue to request that asset maintenance plans be lodged with their applications. If an asset maintenance plan is not submitted this will be taken into account when scoring the assessment criteria on delivery confidence. The provision of an asset maintenance plan is not a mandatory condition of funding for the reasons described above. - Random audits are not supported as this will create additional administrative burden on Maritime to deliver. It is considered much more cost effective to seek general advice from regional staff on the extent to which delivery partners maintain their assets rather than introducing a new random audit system to inform the scoring of future applications.
8. The Boating Asset Maintenance program should be run again in the next round of Boating Now, to establish a more accurate understanding of the industry demand for this program.	Supported Transport for NSW is committed to continuing the Boating Asset Maintenance program, or an equivalent program, with improved advertising to attract more applicants subject to funding being confirmed.
9. Assess opportunities to improve data capture of maintenance issues. This could include elements such as:	Partially Supported – with respect to assessing to improve data capture of maintenance issues. Not supported – re centralised portal

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o Development of centralised portal for customers to report and track boating asset issues. o Assessment of the cost / benefit of installing usage sensors as part of future boat ramp upgrades. This could also provide enhanced safety benefits by providing access to real time usage data and facilitate better deployment and utilisation of operational resources.	Transport does not support providing a centralised portal for customers to report and track boating asset issues. It is the responsibility of the asset owner to monitor asset condition and maintain assets. Transport does not have a role in requiring or requesting that asset owners maintain their assets. Establishing a central portal for the public to report asset issues is not supported as the value does not justify the cost and time required to establish and monitor the portal. Providing a Transport centralised portal may also create an unrealistic expectation for boaters that registering an issue with the condition of an asset will result in assets being improved. Customers can already report maintenance issues through council or Transport. Providing a specific portal will only raise expectation that maintenance issues will be promptly dealt with even though Transport does not own the majority of assets and there is limited funding to address maintenance issues. Supported – re sensors subject to funding The Maritime Safety Plan 2026 includes a commitment to explore potential opportunities from low-cost sensor and other technologies to monitor boating infrastructure assets and to provide improved data on infrastructure condition, performance and uses. A decision on the viability of such technologies will depend on their costs and benefits and the availability of funding to deliver such technologies.
10. Improve communications around projects delivered by Boating Now to help build awareness and benefits of project, ensuring communication descriptions accurately reflect projects being delivered.	Supported Transport is committed to improving communications and details on successful Boating Now project benefits and outcomes through future programs.