



Statewide Policy No. 7

Houseboats

June 2001

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Contents

Summary	4
Introduction	4
Background	4
Position	4
Justification	4
Intent	5
Policy Statements	5
General Provisions	5
Operating Areas	5
Wastewater, Sewage & Rubbish	5
Mooring	6
Refuelling	6
Boat Repairs	6
Private Houseboats	7
Permanent Residency	7
Commercial Houseboats	7
Approvals and Licensing	7
Policy Implementation	7
Regulation and Enforcement	8
Town Planning Schemes	8
Provision of Facilities	8
Use of Facilities	8
Roles & Responsibilities	8
Water and Rivers Commission	8
Waterways Management Bodies	9
Department of Transport	9
Local Government	9
Health Department	9
Glossary	10
Further inquiries	11



Summary

The Water and Rivers Commission (the Commission) supports recreational use of houseboats on waterways in Western Australia. Permanent houseboat residency is not consistent with the Commission's objectives for protection and management of waterway values and public access.

This policy defines the Commission's position for managing houseboat use in a sustainable manner.

The policy addresses key issues relating to houseboat use. These issues include:

- recreational waterway use;
- preservation of aquatic & riparian habitat;
- waste and sewage water discharge;
- mooring areas;
- operational areas;
- refuelling; and
- residential amenity and viewscales.

The key policy objectives are to:

- support the use of houseboats for short term accommodation;
- discourage permanent residency on houseboats;
- encourage identification of suitable operational and mooring areas and optimum houseboat numbers for a waterway by relevant authorities, when required;
- encourage strategies for wastewater, sewage and rubbish storage and disposal, to ensure protection of waterway values;
- encourage refuelling and repair facilities and practices that comply with relevant Australian Standards; and
- consult with private, commercial and Government agency stakeholders on the implementation of policy provisions.

Introduction

Waterways in Western Australia are under increasing pressure from water based recreational pursuits. The Commission recognises that an increase in houseboat numbers may have a detrimental effect on waterway values and adjacent residential amenity, unless their usage is managed.

Background

Traditionally houseboat usage in Western Australia has been centred on major inlets like the Peel-Harvey, Leschenault and Walpole-Nornalup. Recently houseboat operations have been proposed for a number of other waterways around the State.

The majority of houseboats are used for short term, recreational accommodation. However many houseboats are used as permanent residences. Increasing community awareness of the impact of houseboats on waterways and the need to actively manage these impacts has seen the need for this policy statement.

Position

The Commission supports the use of houseboats as temporary recreational accommodation. This is consistent with the Commission's objective of managing Western Australia's waterways for sustainable recreational pursuits.

Justification

Western Australia has a limited number of rivers suitable for houseboat use. Aggregation of large numbers of houseboats would alienate large areas of waterways from public access.

Houseboat activities may also have a deleterious effect on waterway values and adjacent residential amenity. Houseboat activities may also damage fragile waterbird habitats, obstruct public access along



foreshores and impact on the social values of waterways, such as fishing and recreation.

Intent

This policy clarifies the Commission's position on houseboat use and provides guidance to decision-makers, community groups, private owners and other relevant stakeholders when considering proposals for houseboat use on the State's waterways.

It aims to:

- protect waterway values;
- preserve habitat and natural ecosystems;
- protect the feeding, breeding and habitats of migratory wading birds and resident waterbirds;
- promote safe use of waterways;
- recognise demand for commercial and recreational opportunities on waterways;
- encourage provision of infrastructure to protect waterways; and
- maintain adjacent residential amenity.

Policy Statements

General Provisions

These provisions apply to all houseboats operating on waterways in Western Australia other than on the Swan/Canning river system. Houseboat use in this system is subject to the Swan River Trust's Houseboat Policy. Specific provisions relating to the operation of private and commercial houseboats are outlined in subsequent sections.

Operating Areas

Areas for houseboat operation may be determined for certain waterways depending on the environmental significance of waterways and/or navigable waters regulations.

Policy Statement No.1:

All houseboats are encouraged to operate within defined houseboat operating areas, where they exist. Waterways managers are encouraged to identify optimum numbers of houseboats for a waterway.

Implementation

- i. Houseboat operating areas and optimum numbers of houseboats for a waterway may be identified in a local waterway management plan. These areas should be defined in accordance with this policy and determined in consultation with the Department of Transport (Transport) and other relevant stakeholders.
- ii. Where operating areas are defined, they will be chosen to maximise houseboat user enjoyment without impacting on waterway values.
- iii. These operating areas will be defined to include where possible, sufficient mooring areas, pump-out sites and refuelling facilities. These facilities should be identified on operating area maps and be readily available to private and commercial houseboat operators.

Wastewater, Sewage & Rubbish

Maintenance of waterway values, such as water quality and amenity may be achieved by ensuring wastewater, sewage and rubbish generated on houseboats is retained on board.

Policy Statement No.2:

Houseboat owners are encouraged to install an approved design waste and sewage water holding tank, in accordance with the relevant Australian Standard and retain all rubbish on board.



Implementation

- i. Houseboat waste and sewage water holding tanks should be emptied at approved pump out facilities, where available. When pump out facilities are not available, alternative arrangements, such as sewage disposal trucks should be explored.
- ii. Rubbish stored on board should be emptied in an approved rubbish disposal facility, in accordance with local government requirements.

Note: It is an offence under the *Waterways Conservation Act, 1976* and the *Environmental Protection Act, 1986* to discharge wastewater to waterways (without approval) or dispose of rubbish on foreshores.

Australian Standards

- i. AS 3542-1996
Toilet waste retention and transfer systems for pleasure vessels

Mooring

Mooring areas may be defined to protect areas of environmental significance or provide safe refuge for houseboats, in accordance with navigable waters regulations.

Policy Statement No.3:

Houseboats shall use approved moorings and/or mooring areas where they have been defined.

Implementation

- i. Transport, in consultation with the Commission, Local Government and the waterway manager will identify suitable mooring areas for houseboats when required.
- ii. Transport issues licences under the *Jetties Act 1926* for any permanent mooring structures such as jetties, boat pens and mooring piles.

Note: It is an offence under the *Waterways Conservation Act, 1976* to secure a houseboat to the bed or banks of a waterway in a way that causes damage to the bed or banks. This includes dragging anchors, tying up to trees or beaching houseboats on banks.

Refuelling

Storage of fuel and refuelling activities must be in accordance with approved best practice to ensure no polluting substances are allowed to discharge into waterways.

Policy Statement No.4:

Houseboat operators should use approved commercial refuelling facilities, when practicable and all refuelling practices must be in accordance with the relevant Australian Standards (as below) to prevent pollution of waterways.

Australian Standards

- i. AS 1692-1989
Tanks for flammable and combustible liquids
- ii. AS 1940-1993
The storage and handling of flammable and combustible liquids

Boat Repairs

Repair facilities and associated activities adjacent or on waterways may result in pollutants, such as oils, paints and anti-foul entering the waterway.

Policy Statement No.5:

*Houseboat repairs should be undertaken at licensed commercial boat slipping operations. Repair activities should be in accordance with current best practice for the prevention of waterway pollution and be in accordance with the *Environmental Protection Act, 1986* and regulations, 1996 (as amended).*



Polluter Pays

In the event of a polluting incident from wastewater discharge, fuel spillage or the result of maintenance activities, the cost of containment, abatement and rehabilitation will be born by the person(s) responsible for the pollution. When the polluter is not the owner of the vessel, the owner should assist in the identification of the polluter if necessary. The clean-up and rehabilitation efforts will be completed to the satisfaction of the local waterway managers, the Commission and other relevant stakeholders. People causing pollution may also be prosecuted under the Environmental Protection Act.

Private Houseboats

This section contains specific provisions that apply to private houseboats. These are in addition to those general provisions outlined previously.

Permanent Residency

Permanent houseboat residence on waterways may create an undesirable precedent. It may result in an increase in houseboat numbers, especially in popular areas, leading to possible alienation of significant areas of public waterways.

Policy Statement No.6:

The Commission supports the use of houseboats for short-term accommodation only.

Commercial Houseboats

This section contains specific provisions that apply to all commercial houseboats. They are in addition to those general provisions outlined previously.

Approvals and Licensing

Policy Statement No.7:

Transport liaises with the Commission, Local Government and other major stakeholders in considering the approval of all commercial houseboats operations.

Implementation

- i. Transport administers the licensing of all commercial houseboats in accordance with Hire and Drive, and Navigable Waters Regulations. They may consult with the Commission and other Government Departments for comment and advice on licence conditions during the approval process.
- ii. Proposals received by Transport for commercial houseboat operations may be submitted for advice to:
 - a. The Commission for advice and guidance on waterway protection.
 - b. The Waterway manager for compliance with any waterway management plans.
 - c. The Local Authority for approval of shore based facilities.
 - d. The Environmental Protection Authority for pollution and environmental concerns.
- iii. The proponent must demonstrate the environmental acceptability of their proposal.

Policy Implementation

Strategies for implementation should be developed in consultation with the relevant State and local government departments, community groups and houseboat owner /operators. The implementation strategy will:

- facilitate the identification of houseboat operating areas, when required;



- promote the development of waste-water disposal and refuelling facilities; and
- promote development of other on-shore facilities identified in this policy.

Regulation and Enforcement

Policy Statement No.8:

Current legislation, policies and licensing arrangements will be used to implement the provisions of this policy, wherever possible.

Implementation – Commercial Houseboats

- i. Commercial houseboat operations are licensed to ensure compliance with regulations pertaining to vessel and navigational safety.

Implementation – Private Houseboats

- ii. Guidelines based on policy provisions, will be produced by the Commission and distributed as part of an education package to all private houseboat owners.

Town Planning Schemes

Town Planning Schemes are statutory mechanisms that define acceptable land uses. These schemes can be used to define areas for infrastructure related to houseboat activities, such as potential refuelling, boat repairs and marinas.

Policy Statement No.9:

The Commission promotes the regulation of houseboat activities be linked to provisions that exist under relevant Local Government Town Planning Schemes.

Implementation

- i. The zones defined by local Town Planning Schemes may be used to manage the provision of related infrastructure, amenity, public facilities and other aspects relevant to this policy.
- ii. Transport issues licences under the *Jetties Act 1926* for the relevant infrastructure after consultation with the relevant Local Government Authority and Waterways Manager.

Provision of Facilities

The Commission encourages the installation of wastewater pump-out facilities, refuelling stations and other related infrastructure near waterways.

Use of Facilities

People using houseboats on waterways are encouraged to contribute to the cost of using and maintaining the infrastructure outlined in this policy.

Roles & Responsibilities

Water and Rivers Commission

The Commission's role, as defined by the *Water and Rivers Commission Act, 1995* is to protect, preserve and manage the waterways of Western Australia, with respect to maintaining water quality, protecting riparian and aquatic habitat and maintaining adjacent residential amenity. The Commission provides guidance and advice to houseboat owners/operators, stakeholders, community groups and other interested parties on issues defined by this policy and will liaise with other stakeholders and waterway managers to implement the provisions of the policy.



Waterways Management Bodies

The Waterway Management Bodies are:

1. Peel Inlet Management Authority
2. Leschenault Inlet Management Authority
3. Avon River Management Authority
4. Wilson Inlet Management Authority
5. Albany Waterways Management Authority
6. Geographie Catchment Council

They are statutory authorities (except for GeoCatch) established under the *Waterways Conservation Act, 1976* and supported by the Water and Rivers Commission. The management bodies are responsible for the conservation and management of the waterways and associated lands under their jurisdiction. In the context of this policy, the waterway managers may produce and implement management plans for waterways. These plans may delineate operating and mooring areas (in consultation with Transport) and formalise the provisions of the policy, as they are relevant to local issues.

Department of Transport

Transport is responsible for registering private houseboats and licensing commercial houseboat operations. It is also responsible for licensing individual commercial houseboats and ensuring they comply with current survey requirements, as defined by Transport and in accordance with Hire and Drive and Navigable Waters regulations. Defining mooring areas, in consultation with major stakeholders, suitable for houseboat use and licensing jetties and related structures and individual moorings is also a responsibility of Transport.

Local Government

Local Governments are responsible for enforcing the provisions of Town Planning Schemes for the region. These schemes are statutory mechanisms, defining acceptable land uses for land in the region. These schemes can be used to define areas for

infrastructure related to houseboat activities, such as potential refuelling, boat repairs and marinas.

Health Department

The Health Department provides advice and guidance on issues of health. In particular they provide advice to houseboat owners and Transport on the design and capacity of on-board wastewater holding tanks.



Glossary

The policy is based on clear definitions to avoid situations where ambiguities may cause difficulties in enforcing its provisions.

It is acknowledged that definitions may also exist under relevant legislation or by-laws, and such definitions should be used wherever appropriate to ensure consistency with State and Local Government requirements.

Camper-craft

A camper-craft is defined as any vessel capable of being towed behind a vehicle and used for the purpose of short-term accommodation on waterways. For the purpose of this policy a camper-craft shall be constrained by the same policy provisions as a private houseboat.

Commercial Houseboat

For the purpose of this policy, a commercial houseboat will have the same meaning as a “houseboat”. However in addition, a commercial houseboat may be used (or intended to be used) for short-term rental for economic gain or reward.

Houseboat

Means a floating structure or vessel that may or may not be capable of self-propelled navigation and is used for accommodation on waterways.

Holding Tank

Means any permanent container or receptacle on a houseboat, designed and constructed to receive and contain wastewater for disposal at a pump out facility.

Mooring

Means a berth in a marina or another anchorage, to which a houseboat may be attached. These moorings or mooring areas must be licensed and may include jetties, mooring buoys, berths and wharves. The definition excludes any other form of unauthorised mooring such as grounding, or any other means.

Waterway

Means the streams, rivers, inlets and estuaries, together with their beds, banks and associated lands, to which the *Waterways Conservation Act, 1976* and the *Water and Rivers Commission Act, 1995* applies. Includes all artificially improved, altered or diverted waterways.

Wastewater

Wastewater includes all domestic grey water (ie. bathtubs, showers, clothes-washers etc). It also includes all sewage and other water substances, liquid or solid, usually associated with human habitation.



Further inquiries

Any project where the proponent/operator is unable to comply with these Policies, or where site conditions prevent the application of these Policies, should be submitted to the Commission as early as possible in the development of the proposal so that the matter may be resolved.

Any inquiries relating to the content of this **Policy** should be directed to:

WATER AND RIVERS COMMISSION
 HYATT CENTRE
 3 PLAIN STREET
 EAST PERTH WA 6004
TELEPHONE (08) 9278 0300
FACSIMILE (08) 9278 0301

For further inquiries on any matter relating to the **management of water resources in the regions**, please contact the Water and Rivers Commission's regional offices.

Region	Telephone	Facsimile
Swan Goldfields Agric. Region 7 Ellam St, Victoria Park 6100	(08) 6250 8000	(08) 9472 1389
or 245 Fitzgerald Street, Northam, 6401	(08) 9622 7055	(08) 9622 7155
North West Region Chiratta Road, Karratha 6714	(08) 9144 2000	(08) 9144 2610
or Lot 225 Bandicoot Drive, Kununurra 6743	(08) 9168 1082	(08) 9168 3174
South West Region U2 Leschenault Quays, Austral Parade, Bunbury 6230	(08) 9721 0666	(08) 9721 0600
or 21 Sholl St, Mandurah 6210	(08) 9535 3411	(08) 9581 4560
South Coast Region 5 Bevan Street, Albany, 6330	(08) 9842 5760	(08) 9842 1204
or Suite 1, 55 Strickland Street, Denmark, 6333	(08) 9848 1866	(08) 9848 1733
Mid West – Gascoyne Region Pass Street, Geraldton 6530	(08) 9964 5978	(08) 9964 5983
or 82 Olivia Terrace, Carnarvon 6701	(08) 9941 4921	(08) 9941 4931

