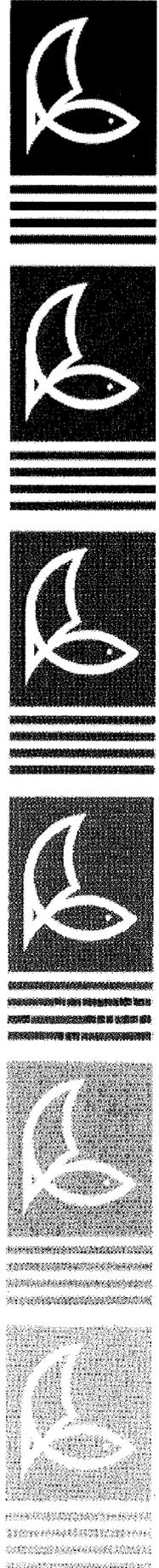




SWAN RIVER TRUST

COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOAT POLICY - DISCUSSION PAPER

November, 1997



SWAN RIVER TRUST

3rd Floor, Hyatt Centre
87 Adelaide Terrace
EAST PERTH WA 6004

Telephone: (08) 9278 0400
Fax: (08) 9278 0401

Web: <http://www.wrc.wa.gov.au/srt/index.htm>

Printed on recycled paper.

ISBN 0-7309-7366-2
ISSN 1037-3918



PUBLIC CONSULTATION.....	1
MAKING COMMENTS.....	1
SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	2
COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOATS.....	3
COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOAT OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS.....	3
ISSUES.....	4
VESSEL SAFETY.....	4
OPERATIONAL SAFETY.....	4
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.....	4
VISUAL AMENITY.....	5
RESIDENTIAL AMENITY.....	5
RECREATIONAL AMENITY.....	5
MOORING.....	6
INFRASTRUCTURE.....	6
REGULATION OF COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOAT OPERATIONS.....	6
SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS ENVIRONS.....	7
FREMANTLE TRAFFIC BRIDGE TO BLACKWALL REACH.....	7
MOSMAN & FRESHWATER BAYS.....	7
MELVILLE WATER.....	7
PERTH WATER.....	8
SWAN RIVER UPSTREAM OF THE CAUSEWAY.....	8
CANNING RIVER.....	8
PROPOSAL.....	9



PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Making comments

The Swan River Trust would like to know what you think about the use of commercial houseboats on the Swan and Canning Rivers and on the proposal to seek Expressions of Interest for a commercial houseboat operation. This is an opportunity to provide information, express an opinion, suggest alternatives and propose other management requirements.

All comments must be made in writing.

To ensure your comments are as effective as possible:

- make them clear and concise
- list your points according to the sections of the Discussion Paper
- say whether you agree or disagree, saying why and giving a source for information you are using
- suggest alternatives or what you would like done
- be specific where your comments relate to a particular location.

Deadline

Comments need to be provided by Friday 14 March, 1998 to:

Manager
Swan River Trust
PO Box 6740, Hay Street East
EAST PERTH WA 6892

Attention: Project Officer
Commercial Houseboat Discussion Paper

Comments may also be made by email to the following address:

srt_houseboat_paper@wrc.wa.gov.au



SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

The Swan and Canning Rivers and the adjacent shoreline parklands are an important environmental system, the centre piece of the city and a focus for much of its recreational activity. The Swan River Trust has a responsibility for the protection and management of the rivers and their adjacent shoreline parklands and for ensuring an appropriate level of public access.

The development of tourism, increasing interest in alternative recreational experiences and an increasing number of shoreline dining, recreational and tourist opportunities have raised the level of interest in commercial houseboat operations on the rivers. Current regulations and Swan River Trust policy preclude such operations.

The diversity of the Swan and Canning Rivers and their environs, the siting of established uses and residential developments have a significant bearing on the potential for the waterway to be used for commercial houseboat operations.

Successful operation of commercial houseboats will require the management of their operation to be matched to the physical and social environment, the infrastructure needs and impacts of the operation.

The commercial operation of houseboats is classified as development under Part 5 of the Swan River Trust Act 1988 and requires the approval of the Minister for Water Resources. Department of Transport approval is also required.

The Swan River Trust is seeking public comment to assist in the review of its houseboat policy and in its consideration of a proposal to seek Expressions of Interest for the commercial operation of approximately five commercial houseboats between the Causeway and Middle Swan Bridge on the Swan River for a period of five years.

INTRODUCTION

The Swan River Trust Act gives the Swan River Trust the responsibility of ensuring that the environment, amenity and public use of the waterway and foreshores of the Swan and Canning Rivers is protected and managed, while also being responsive to the community's desires.

Currently, regulations under the Swan River Trust Act prevent people from living on boats in the Swan and Canning Rivers for more than 6 days at a time or more than 10 days in any 30 day period. The objective of the regulation is to provide for overnight and short stay accommodation as part of the recreational use of the waterway while preventing its general use for permanent accommodation. It recognises there is a high demand for river usage from a wide range of recreational activities and the potential for pollution from permanent waterway accommodation.

The Department of Transport (DoT), under legislation it administers, is responsible for navigational safety, for ensuring commercial vessels are safe and for managing the siting



and use of jetties, wharves, marinas and moorings. As part of its work to ensure navigational safety DoT designates areas of the waterway for particular uses.

The development of tourism, increasing interest in alternative recreational experiences and increasing number of shoreline dining, recreational and tourist opportunities have raised the level of interest in commercial houseboat operations on the rivers. This, together with increased public interest in the river environment and its use, has prompted the Trust to seek informed comment and public discussion on the potential for commercial houseboat operations on the Swan and Canning Rivers.

The Trust is seeking views on whether, where and how commercial houseboats could operate, what infrastructure and services are required to service them and how they might relate to issues of environmental protection and amenity, public safety, existing uses of the rivers and shorelines and the amenity of shoreline residents.

These comments will be considered by the Trust in its review of the existing houseboat policy.

COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOATS

In Australia a houseboat is generally thought of as a vessel with a catamaran or barge hull designed primarily for residential accommodation, with poor manoeuvrability and suited primarily to calm inland waters. Elsewhere converted river barges and conventional vessels fitted out for accommodation serve the same purpose. In either case the vessel may be permanently moored or mobile and moored periodically.

For the purposes of discussion a commercial houseboat is any vessel that is available for short term lease or hire for a purpose that includes accommodation whether or not the vessel is permanently moored. A commercial houseboat is also characterised as being a low speed vessel, emanating low noise and producing little or no wash.

COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOAT OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Living on board a houseboat requires the same services as living in shore based accommodation, including fresh water, power for domestic purposes, food and domestic consumables, toilets and washing facilities. An additional requirement is fuel for the houseboat. The general practice is for fuel and water to be provided at the point of hire.

Disposal arrangements need to be made for liquid wastes from toilets (sewage) and other domestic activities (sullage) and for domestic refuse. On board storage and periodic discharge to shore based facilities is required to deal with these wastes. Shore based facilities are also needed for operational maintenance and refitting of houseboats and for routine cleaning of houseboats between periods of use. Mooring space is needed for any periods houseboats are not in hire. These may or may not be co-located with point of hire facilities.

Moorings at suitable locations in the waterway, for overnight or longer stays, need to be provided. They can be swing moorings or fixed moorings in pens or alongside jetties



and wharves. Mooring opportunities are also required if houseboats are intended to be used to visit recreational and tourist locations adjacent to the waterway.

Except in the case of permanently moored houseboats an operational area is needed that matches the navigational requirements of the houseboat and provides access to recreational and tourist opportunities. The operational area also needs to be one that is appropriate for the navigational competence of those hiring the houseboat.

ISSUES

In various parts of the world commercial houseboats operate in a wide range of situations, from broad isolated waterbodies in sparsely populated areas where shore based access and accommodation is not available, to rivers and canals in rural and urban settings where houseboats provide an alternative to conventional shore based accommodation, recreation and tourist experiences. The environmental sensitivity of the areas in which houseboats operate also varies widely.

The potential for commercial houseboat operations on the Swan and Canning Rivers is similarly dependant on the interaction of such factors as infrastructure needs and localised impacts of their operation.

Vessel safety

A commercial houseboat would need to be surveyed and meet Department of Transport safety and seaworthiness requirements.

Operational safety

Responsibility for ensuring the operational safety of the vessel, the safety of other users of the waterway, property and waterway structures is determined by the Department of Transport. Provided an operator is over the age of 18 years, there is no requirement for a houseboat operator to have any boat handling skills or knowledge of navigation regulations. In some areas of the waterway and at particular times recreational usage and commercial usage are heavy and a reasonable level of competence is required to avoid collisions. Certain types of houseboats are also difficult to manoeuvre, particularly in windy or rough conditions and in flood flows and areas of strong tidal flow.

The Trust recommends that operational safety can be enhanced by limiting the area, times and weather conditions in which the houseboats can operate. Restrictions on houseboat size and design, engine power and speed capability can also be imposed.

Environmental protection

The Swan and Canning Rivers are an inherently sensitive environment that have already undergone significant modification. However their environmental values are still considerable and activities in the waterway need to be managed to ensure they do not have an adverse impact either generally or on specific areas of high environmental sensitivity. In considering the potential environmental impact of commercial houseboat



operations the level and impact of similar existing waterway activities need to be borne in mind.

Whether commercial houseboat operations have an adverse impact will depend on the effectiveness of the management of a variety of issues. In considering such an operation the Trust will have regard to the following issues:

- refuelling;
- sewage and sullage;
- solid waste;
- bilge water;
- maintenance facilities;
- anchoring and shoreline mooring;
- grounding and disturbance of the riverbed;
- shoreline damage;
- sensitive environments and wildlife protection;
- level of activity.

Visual amenity

The visual character of the waterway and its environs is a matter of considerable concern to those using the Swan and Canning Rivers, to adjacent residents and to the community generally. Consideration of how proposals affect visual amenity is a significant part of the Trust's assessment of applications for development approval.

Whether houseboats enhance or degrade visual amenity depends on their design, location, numbers and relationship to existing vessel use of the waterway. It will also be a matter of individual opinion.

Residential amenity

Residents adjacent to the waterway are likely to be concerned about the potential for commercial houseboat operations to affect them. As well as visual amenity there are likely to be concerns about damage to property, unauthorised use of jetties and moorings, noise and reduced security. These concerns would need to be addressed in the instructions provided to those hiring houseboats, in the selection of operational locations and mooring sites and in the management of the commercial houseboat operation.

Recreational amenity

Several areas of the waterway are currently designated for particular recreational activities, including power boating, water skiing, rowing, sail boarding, jet skiing and swimming. Other areas between Matilda Bay and East Fremantle, are heavily used for competitive yachting. Canoeing occurs extensively on the upper reaches of both the Swan and Canning Rivers.



The pattern of recreational use of the waterway depends on the time of day, period of the week and season. There is a potential for large, slow, poorly manoeuvrable houseboats to conflict with recreational activities during periods of heavy use. A combination of defining operational areas and times for houseboats, and establishing procedures for houseboats when transiting areas used for particular recreational purposes could be used to address this issue.

Mooring

The availability of suitable mooring locations for overnight or longer stays and berthing opportunities alongside shoreline tourist and recreation facilities or to enable replenishment will need to be assessed. A preliminary review of existing facilities indicates that existing marinas may be able to provide mooring spaces. However berthing space at shoreline tourist and recreation facilities, particularly upstream of the Causeway, is largely taken up by commercial ferries. Additional facilities at these locations and swing moorings are likely to be required.

Infrastructure

Maintenance, refuelling, routine cleaning facilities and mooring of houseboats not in use as well as business administration could be undertaken using existing facilities or a new facility developed with adequate car parking. However activities for which a shoreline location is not essential, such as administration and point of hire facilities, including client parking do not necessarily require a foreshore location.

REGULATION OF COMMERCIAL HOUSEBOAT OPERATIONS

The commercial operation of houseboats is a development under Part 5 of *the Swan River Trust Act 1988* and requires the approval of the Minister for Water Resources. Applications for approval are assessed by the Trust after consultation with relevant government authorities and local governments. The Trust may also advertise an application for public comment if it considers the matter is of significant public interest. The Trust's assessment is used as the basis for the Minister's decision. If the application is approved it can be subject to conditions that must be met in carrying out the activity that has been approved.

DoT also has a role in regulating the commercial operation of houseboats and would require the houseboats to be licensed and would control moorings and berthing facilities under legislation it administers. Houseboats would also be required to comply with DoT regulations concerning use of the waterway.

The conditions that would apply would be designed to ensure the issues identified above were satisfactorily dealt with.

Both the Trust and DoT would also have a continuing role in overseeing commercial houseboat operations to ensure compliance with approval and licensing conditions and with regulations governing their use of the waterway.



Local Government approval is also required where any of the operation occurs within their municipality. This would particularly apply to the development of shore based infrastructure.

SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS ENVIRONS

The Swan and Canning river system consists of a tidal estuary fed by two rivers that are tidal for much of their navigable length. The system has been highly modified by removal of the rock bar from the mouth of the estuary, dredging of sections of the waterway, filling of shoreline wetlands and the development of Perth and its suburban areas. However the waterway, and the adjacent shoreline parklands, remains an important environmental system, the centre piece of the city and a focus for much of its recreational activity.

The diversity of the Swan and Canning Rivers and their environs and the siting of established uses have a significant bearing on the potential for the waterway to be used for commercial houseboat operations. Seasonal conditions, including high river flows and flooding, particularly in the upper reaches of the Swan and Canning Rivers, and wind and wave action in the estuary also affect the potential of the waterway to be used for commercial houseboat operations.

Fremantle Traffic Bridge to Blackwall Reach

The mouth of the estuary upstream of the Port of Fremantle is deeply incised through limestone resulting in sheer cliffs, narrow deep channels and rock ledges with some sandy coves and beaches. The narrow channel provides some shelter from high winds but strong southerly and south-westerly winds can make navigation in the narrow channel difficult. There is a strong tidal flow and heavy use of the waterway by ferries servicing Rottnest Island and by recreational vessels, particularly on weekends and during holiday periods. The narrow parklands on the south-eastern shore are flanked by residential development and similar residential development is occurring along the north-western shore. Several marinas and mooring areas with associated boat servicing facilities are located in this area.

Mosman & Freshwater Bays

Upstream of Blackwall Reach these bays have extensive shallow areas separated by a narrow circuitous channel heavily used by ferries and recreational vessels. They are bounded by residential development that in places extends to the shoreline. The bays include four designated waterski areas, mooring areas and are heavily used on weekends for sailing. Two rowing clubs are located on the shoreline. The open waters of the bays are exposed to strong winds.

Melville Water

Melville Water is the largest section of the estuary with extensive areas of shallow water along the south-eastern and eastern shorelines, a broad deep channel, treed headlands and escarpments. The Swan Estuary Marine Park covers parts of the shallow areas. There is a parkland fringe to most of Melville Water and public access to the foreshore is



generally unimpeded. Residential development abuts the narrow sections of parkland along approximately half of the shoreline. Yacht and rowing clubs, several restaurants and other aquatic facilities are located along the shoreline and two areas of the waterway are designated for waterskiing. Melville Water is heavily used for sailing on weekends, particularly during summer. It is exposed and strong winds, characteristic of summer afternoons and winter storms, raise waves up to a metre.

Perth Water

Apart from the dredged channel along the north-eastern shoreline and the commuter ferry channel Perth Water is extremely shallow. Its shoreline consists of limestone and concrete walling fronting a wide expanse of parkland. This is bounded on the north-eastern side by the central business district of Perth and on the south-western side by residential development. Barrack Square is the principal terminal for commercial ferry traffic downstream to Rottnest Island and upstream to wineries and tourist destinations. It is also the site of tourist facilities, restaurants and a rowing club. On the opposite shore another rowing club and a restaurant is situated on the shoreline at the foot of Coode Street. Waterskiing occurs adjacent to Heirisson Island and the waterway is used for rowing and catamaran sailing.

Swan River upstream of the Causeway

The Swan River narrows and meanders upstream of the Causeway with the viewshed becoming progressively confined by landform, vegetation and the built environment. Boat traffic becomes increasingly confined to the channel with moorings and jetties further restricting manoeuvrability. Bridges restrict the height of vessels that can use the river. Shoreline parks are narrow and discontinuous. Residential development flanks much of the waterway with rural activities becoming more pronounced in the upper section. In some areas residences are sited within 5 to 10 metres of the waterway. The shorelines are erodible sediments and clays, forming steep banks in some areas and sensitive wetlands in others. Several areas are designated for waterskiing and the narrow waterway provides sheltered conditions for rowing, paddling and dinghy sailing. Wineries and historic sites are popular tourist destinations and there is a boat slipyard at Maylands. The shoreline developments at Ascot Waters and Claisebrook Cove have the potential to provide mooring opportunities.

Canning River

Between Canning Bridge and Mount Henry Bridge the river is broad with a deep navigable channel. It is bounded on the east by a well vegetated shoreline and on the west by narrow parklands adjacent to residential development. Rowing clubs, sited by the bridge, use the waterway, which is also a designated waterski area. Upstream of Mount Henry Bridge to Riverton Bridge the waterway becomes shallower. The northern shoreline is mostly fringing wetlands, some of which is in private ownership. On the southern shoreline narrow parklands separate the waterway from adjacent residential development. Bull Creek inlet is an unusual area where historically boats have been moored on swing moorings, although the use of these moorings has been reduced. Upstream of Riverton Bridge the river becomes progressively narrower and is part of the Canning River Regional Park. The Kent Street Weir defines the upstream limit of



navigation. The upstream reaches of the Canning River are principally used for canoeing, rowing and dinghy sailing.

PROPOSAL

The physical character and existing uses of the waterway limit the areas suitable for the commercial operation of houseboats.

In Blackwall Reach this is due to the narrow wind intense channel, stronger tidal flows and high level of commercial and recreational vessel traffic.

Mosman and Freshwater Bays are heavily used for a variety of recreational activities and have committed mooring areas. Extensive shallows, the heavily circuitous navigation channel and exposure to strong winds further limit its suitability.

The suitability of Melville Water is limited due to its exposure and the shallowness, environmental sensitivity or proximity to residential areas of any sheltered sites. The high level of recreational usage also limits its suitability, particularly on summer weekends.

Perth Water, because of its shallowness and location adjacent to the central business district, is unsuitable for commercial houseboat operation.

The Canning River has extensive areas of environmentally sensitive shorelines and is either shallow, in close proximity to residential developments or has significant existing recreational use.

While the Swan River upstream of the Causeway narrows and carries low speed commercial and recreational traffic, it is sheltered. There are also significant sections that are not heavily used for recreation and are not in close proximity to residential development. It provides access to a variety of tourist and recreational opportunities. New developments along this section of the waterway are likely to provide additional opportunities and a boat servicing facility is already established.

The Trust is seeking comment generally on the use of the Swan and Canning Rivers for commercial houseboat operations to assist it in reviewing its current policy. Comment is also sought on a specific proposal for the Trust to seek Expressions of Interest for the commercial operation of approximately five commercial houseboats between the Causeway and Middle Swan Bridge on the Swan River for a period of five years.



SWAN RIVER TRUST

3rd Floor, Hyatt Centre
87 Adelaide Terrace
EAST PERTH WA 6004

Telephone: (08) 9278 0400
Fax: (08) 9278 0401

Web: <http://www.wrc.wa.gov.au/srt/index.htm>