

BOAT DRIVER TRAINING

1286. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the minister please provide an update on compulsory boat driver training and boat owners' attitudes to such training?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge that the member has been corresponding with me on this matter after a young man in his electorate had a terrible accident on a waterway earlier this year. I understand that the young man passed on last week, and I extend my condolences.

As I have previously told the Parliament, Western Australia needs to introduce a system of compulsory boat driver training in line with not only commonsense, but also our national commitments under an Australian Transport Council agreement. Frankly, as you, Mr Speaker, would well know, it is unacceptable that 17-year-old schoolies without any training can - and do - take their parents' large and powerful boats to Rottnest Island and put their own lives in danger, as well as the lives of their passengers and, in many instances, other water users. Each year, 1 000 serious accidents occur around Australia. The statistics show that, on average, there are about five boating deaths in Western Australia each year. An increasing number of recreational craft is using our waterways. This is a problem to which we must attend.

Mr Speaker, in your capacity as the member for Burrup I have asked you to chair the State Boating Council, which you are doing very admirably. In particular, I have asked you to focus on how best to design and implement a system of training that would be low-cost, efficient and acceptable to the boating community. However, I am disappointed to note that among some of the peak boating industry groups are those who believe that the boating public should not be subjected to any form of compulsory training. They are working to get the Government to back down on this policy decision. I assure the House and the community that we will not back down on this commitment. Indeed, we believe that we have strong support from the boating community. Through the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, we recently undertook a survey of recreational boat owners. Interestingly, 85 per cent of those boat owners thought there should be a minimum standard of capability for recreational boaters. Anyone who thinks about this issue knows that it is nonsense to allow powerful boats to be used by people who have absolutely no training. We have tried the voluntary system. Although there has been some take-up of the BoatSmart course, far less than half of our recreational boat owners and users have done that course and the numbers of people going through the course have reduced quite dramatically. With the increasing number of craft on our waterways, it is clear that we need to act. The vast majority of recreational boat owners recognise there is a need. I urge all the boating industry groups to get behind this measure and to help come up with a scheme that is effective, efficient and low-cost to administer.