

# Management of Boating Facilities in Regional Victoria

Summary Paper – May 2020



In March 2019, the Victorian Government established Better Boating Victoria to help make recreational boating cheaper and easier. This included a review of the management of boating infrastructure across Port Phillip and Western Port.

We're now expanding the review to see how we can improve boating infrastructure management across regional Victoria. As part of this process, we've interviewed 12 boating facility managers and stakeholders in northern and south west Victoria, and Gippsland to identify key themes relevant to regional Victorian boating facilities.

We know that facilities are diverse in regional Victoria and need to cater for different environments and needs. For example, inland waterways have varying water levels that provide a unique set of infrastructure challenges such as the Lake Eppalock Kimbolton #1 Boat Ramp that operates a concrete ramp over 110m in length to accommodate lake variation of 14m in height. We also have boat ramps in ocean environments that may have increased maintenance requirements such as the Lady Bay boat ramp in Warrnambool. Finally, while facilities in regional Victoria don't have the same congestion issues of Port Phillip and Western Port, some experience higher demand at certain times of year like Portland during the tuna run and Gippsland Lakes over summer. These factors present different challenges to managing boat ramps in Port Phillip and Western Port and therefore need to be considered further when looking at options to address boating facility management across Victoria.

Unfortunately, we're restricted from visiting facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we want to capture as much information as possible from the boating community, including managers and facility users and will be running a survey to help us do so.

We want to hear from you, and all passionate boaters, about how we can make boating facilities better across Victoria.

## Why are we reviewing boating infrastructure management in regional Victoria?

The majority of the state's boating infrastructure is in regional Victoria and we know the current arrangements result in varied standards across the state. In regional Victoria differences exist between managing facilities in marine environments, for example, Apollo Bay and Warrnambool, compared to inland facilities on rivers and reservoirs. We need to understand what the issues are in regional Victoria so we can find options to address them.

## How are you going to conduct the review?

The review started in 2019, and we prepared a discussion paper as part of the process that identified some of the current limitations with how boating facilities are managed in Port Phillip and Western Port. We sought feedback from the boating community about how these recreational boating facilities can be managed better. We will now be doing similar for facilities in regional Victoria and are conducting focused telephone interviews with asset managers and key stakeholders as well as surveying the broader boating community. This approach will help us understand how best to improve boating infrastructure management across regional Victoria.



## Why do we need your feedback about boating facilities in regional Victoria?

We started the review in Port Phillip and Western Port because most recreational boating in Victoria is concentrated around these bays and it made sense to focus here before expanding across the state. However, given most boating facilities are in regional Victoria and we will look at how we can improve them too.

We know we don't have all the answers. And while we're doing our own thinking about improving boating around the state, we also need boaters, anglers, facility managers, industry groups and anyone interested using our waterways to tell us how we can improve the way boating infrastructure is managed across Victoria.

The feedback we get will be used to change boating for the better in Victoria.

## What have we found out so far?

From our research and interviews with boating infrastructure managers we have found:

- 1** It's not clear what is and isn't a recreational boating facility. Some are small scale facilities with a boat ramp but without amenities whereas others can be multi-lane boat ramps, with toilet blocks, BBQs and fish cleaning tables. Defining what a boating facility is will help make it clearer who is responsible for looking after them.
- 2** Day to Day management of facilities varies a lot. As you've probably noticed, the way facilities are managed and the standard to which they are maintained differs significantly from one asset manager to another. This is also the case for the management of boat ramps located across the coast compared to those on inland waterways.
- 3** There is no plan to ensure consistency in the way recreational boating is managed across different locations. We've found out that there is no clear, consistent picture of the quality and condition of the facilities and what their longer-term needs are, or where the priority areas are for upgrades and maintenance. The Review will help address some of these limitations and improve the way infrastructure is managed in the future.
- 4** There are some gaps in funding, skills and experience for those required to manage facilities. The skills and experience of facility managers differ between locations and different funding levels impacts the kind of maintenance that can be undertaken.
- 5** There is currently no way for boaters to provide feedback and get information about the way boating infrastructure is managed across the state. We think we can do this better and this review will inform how to do things better.



These themes were also highlighted as part of the Port Phillip and Western Port Review.

**6 Cross border issues**

For facilities along the Murray River, stakeholder complexity presents challenges in relation to managing recreational boating infrastructure. It has been suggested that every time new legislation or policy is implemented, a 'Border Test' should be conducted.

**7 Congestion (ramp rage) not a problem**

While ramp rage was raised as an issue in the Port Phillip and Western Port review, it doesn't appear to be significant in regional Victoria.

**8 Local geographic and environmental constraints**

The high variability of water levels in inland water bodies impacts the useability of facilities, and the presence of fish habitat such as snags and root balls impacting waterway navigation,

were identified as issues affecting boating infrastructure in regional Victoria. Similarly, obtaining approvals to facilitate upgrades, such as cultural heritage, appear to be more challenging in regional Victoria.

**9 Water allocation**

In some parts of the state, water is not always available to support boating and fishing. Some asset managers have used fees to not only maintain their assets, but to purchase some water allocations. While the allocation of water is not directly relevant to how boating facilities are managed in the state, it should be noted that water allocations are important to regional communities for recreational purposes.



**How to take part in the regional Victorian boating infrastructure review and have your say:**

If you want to get involved and give us your feedback, then you can take part in the survey at:

[getinvolved.transport.vic.gov.au/  
boatingreview-regional](https://getinvolved.transport.vic.gov.au/boatingreview-regional)

**Next steps in the review process**

We'll review the feedback you provide and will release a summary of the findings mid-2020. Importantly, we'll be actively listening to what you have to say now and using your feedback to start working on options for how recreational boating facilities across regional Victoria can be improved into the future.