

Australian Builders Plate Targets Safer Boating

After much debate, widespread discussion and community involvement, the introduction of the Australian Builders Plate program by the National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC) is getting underway by boatbuilders across Australia.

The Australian Builders Plate for recreational boats - to be progressively introduced on a national level from 1 July this year - has provoked much discussion amongst boat builders, designers, dealers and boat owners.

Better known as the ABP, it has been developed by the National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC) after five years of consultation with industry. It provides safe boating information to boat users and as a flow on effect will encourage more boat builders to apply safety standards to the design of recreational boats.

NMSC CEO Maureen Horder said the reason the ABP has been developed is to reduce boating injuries and fatalities.

"The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) commissioned by the NMSC into the need for an Australian Builders Plate stated that there are 45 deaths and 109 serious injuries associated with recreational boating each year," she said.

"Fatal and serious injuries associated with recreational boating costs Australians about \$52 million each year."

She added that buoyancy was a key safety issue, particularly in relation to smaller boats.

"For example, the

National Assessment of Boating Fatalities in Australia 1992 - 1998 Report identified a relationship between vessel length and buoyancy for dinghies, other open motorboats and half cabin motorboats," she said.

"Together they made up 57% of all vessels involved in fatal incidents over the period of the study," she said.

According to the report, inadequate buoyancy was a contributing factor in 12% of fatal accidents involving vessels less than 6 metres in length compared to 6% when they were 6 metres or more.

The ABP details vital information about the capacity of boats, including the maximum number of people and load allowed, engine rating and weight and, for boats less than 6 metres, buoyancy performance.

All new recreational vessels will need to have a plate permanently fixed and readily visible in the cockpit or near the steering position. Exceptions include:

amphibious vessels; canoes, kayaks, or surf skis; pedal powered boats; second hand vessels; rowing shells; sailboards or sail kites; surf row boats; hydrofoils or hovercraft; sailing vessels; submersibles; aquatic toys; and personal watercraft; and

inflatable boats in certain conditions.

The ABP is being introduced for all new recreational boats built from 1 July 2005, with all states and the Northern Territory aiming to enshrine the plate into legislation by 1 July 2006. The 12 month transition phase will allow for industry and government to work together to develop the systems needed to legislate the ABP by 1 July 2006.

Ms Horder said that industry have increased their support since the NMSC commenced consultation five years ago, and they will have had a direct input into the development of the ABP standard.

"Surveys initially conducted by ourselves and the Boating Industry Association showed strong support for safety, as 93% of boat owners and 91% of boat builders supported standards for recreational boats," she said.

"Buoyancy and stability were ranked as the most important standards required and loading and engine rating as the most important items to be included on an Australian Builders Plate.

"Now we have boat manufacturers across the country already affixing plates to new boats."

Queensland based boat builder Cruise Craft Boats

introduced ABP's for their boats in January this year.

"We use the CE standard and have included basic buoyancy as a feature in all our boats, ranging from 4.75 to 6.85 metres," Director, Nathan Nichols said.

"We use two pack foam flotation through all our models."

And after months of testing, Plaka Boats have announced that they will fit an ABPs to all new boats manufactured from 1st July 2005.

According to Sales and Marketing Manager Troy Coulthard, Plaka Boats have complied with all Australian Standards required under the ABP program and, in the case of buoyancy, have used double the amount that the standard specifies.

Ms Horder stressed that a key benefit to builders is that the ABP creates a more level playing field, with all boats being built to safety standards, including imported boats.

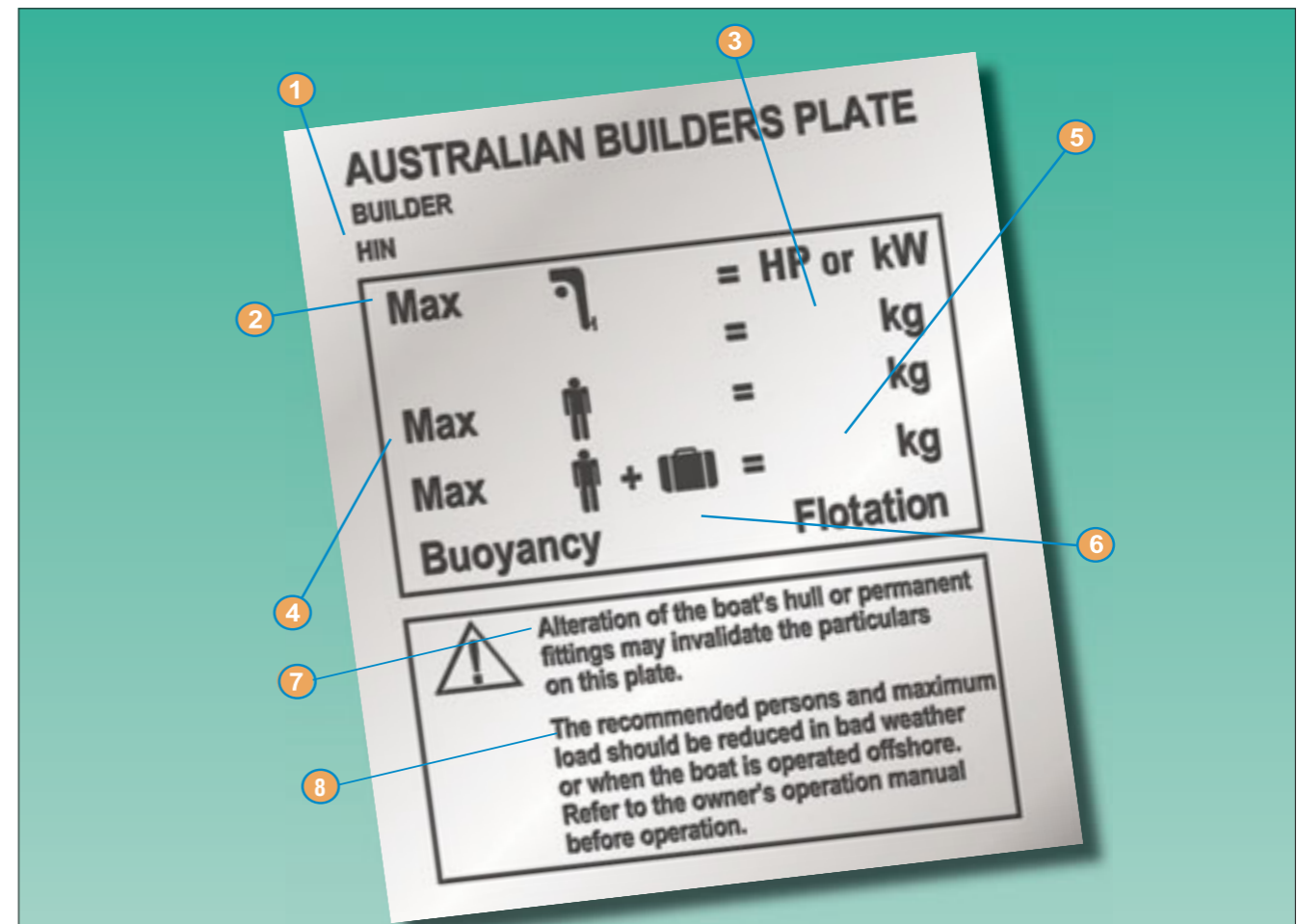
"The ABP will also make it easier for consumers to choose a boat that best suits their needs - and they will be better able to compare new boats since plates will detail standard information about each boat's capacity and flotation."

"The ABP is really a declaration by the builder or importer that the boat meets the requirements of relevant national or international standards to the extent specified within the National Standard for the Australian Builders Plate for Recreational Boats."

Two types of ABP have been developed, one for boats under 6 metres, which includes a buoyancy statement, and one for boats 6 metres or more, which does not include a buoyancy statement.

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This is a sample of an ABP plate for a boat less than 6 metres in length as of 22nd August 2005. For further details, please refer to the National Standard for the Australian Builders Plate for Recreational Boats.

- 1 Name of the person approving information on the plate, normally the builder or importer, and either the Hull Identification (HIN) or the date built
- 2 Maximum outboard engine power rating for which the boat has been designed and tested, expressed in kilowatts or horsepower
- 3 Maximum outboard engine weight for which the boat has been designed and tested, expressed in kilograms, including the weight of any auxiliary outboard that might be mounted on the transom.
- 4 Maximum number of persons on the boat, expressed in a whole number and in kilograms
- 5 Maximum load for the boat, expressed in kilograms
- 6 For boats less than 6 metres in length, there will be a buoyancy statement. Up until July 2006, the terms used may be either 'level flotation', 'basic flotation' or 'inadequate flotation'. After 1 July 2006, the term 'inadequate flotation' will no longer be permitted for use.
- 7 A warning statement that if alterations make the boat different to the builder's specifications, the particulars on the Australian Builders Plate may be invalidated.
- 8 The person approving information on the plate, normally the builder or importer, may also add a person/load capacity warning statement or other safety information.