

Response to the emergency services report.

If an emergency sector is considered high risk or high cost, an initial reaction might be that a version of user pays is a fair way to apportion costs. Marine rescue service paid for by boating registrations, for example. However, if the argument is that non boat owners do not benefit from marine rescue service the same can be argued for city dwellers and a rural fire service.

Placing a charge on boat registrations according to size is no more than a revenue grab at what might be perceived as a soft target. After all, boats owners are all wealthy people.

An investigation of boating rescues will reveal not all boating types or activity are equal. Placing a surcharge on all boat licences is no more fair to the owner of a large cruising yacht over a small runabout than it is unfair to expect a home owner to pay for marine rescue. And no one will be happy that kite surfers or kayakers don't pay anything. Or indeed that bushwalkers or assailers rock climbers mountain bikers 4WD drivers don't contribute to terrestrial rescue services. Or tourists. Or that city folk are expected to fund a rural fire service.

While it is true that some home owners don't go boating, and some home owners also don't drive cars or go 4WDing or go bushwalking or rock climbing, there is no line between provision of emergency service. A simple consideration is that a marine rescue service might participate in a coastal search for missing bushwalkers, or fishermen. Or a 4WD rescue might be enacted to seek a boat washed onto the shore. Or a helicopter used by any and all and yet by the logic of the marine rescue being funded by boat owners helicopter rescue would be funded by aircraft owners.

The reality is that all of society benefits from an effective emergency services sector. It is not only because participants in these activities have friends and family who do not participate, but that the timely rescue actually reduces the overall cost to society. Having people not die is socially good, but getting them to hospital early actually saves money.

Provision of emergency services is a hallmark of a developed society. In as much as the current system of charging home owners is unfair the only reasonable change would be to remove that charge and fund these services from general tax revenue.