

Response to recommendation 19

19 A levy on boat registrations should be introduced to fund the direct costs of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Services.

Summary

In producing this report Treasury have demonstrated they are not the right department to make this recommendation. The report's extensive bibliography contains not one single marine reference. They clearly do not understand the organizations they are writing about.

1. *Funding target is not the funding user*

The notion that only registered boats use VMR services is a fallacy born out of ignorance. People who make direct use of VMR services include rock fishers, swimmers, kayakers, surfers and windsurfers. None of these people are using registered boats for their activities. They are overrepresented in marine incident statistics (see bibliography below). Under the proposal to fund VMR services through an increase in registration fees, these groups of boaters would not pay anything. They usually keep their boats in garages, so a property-based levy would be appropriate if the user-pays mantra is to be applied.

2. *Impact on non-ESL funding sources*

I can find no acknowledgement that VMR groups already receive income from boaters through donations, let alone the proportion of total VMR funding from donations. If boaters are required to pay for VMR services through an increase in registration fee, why would they even consider paying twice by donating? Donations would dry up as a source of funding, leaving the VMR groups under-resourced.

3. *Funding rationale*

The user-pays principle was shown to be fundamentally flawed many years ago. If I do not have children why should I contribute to education? If I walk on a footpath, should toll gates be set up where I pay per kilometre? Under the user-pays principle, if I choose to use the democratic process by voting, should I pay a tax at the poll both? (a poll tax: didn't somebody try that once?!).

If somebody falls off a cliff into the water, should the rescue services check their databases to see if the victim is the owner of a registered boat before deciding whether to call the VMR group to the rescue? The user-pays principle is so facile it beggars belief that in the 21st century a government department could even consider it as a rationale for their recommendations.

4. *Funding target demographic*

"The volunteer marine rescue service is used by a small segment of the community" p6

There are about 100,000 registered boats in WA, used by about 250,000 – 350,000 owners plus their family and friends. That amounts to more than 10% of the WA population. When you add the kayakers, surfers, windsurfers, rock fishers etc. nearly a quarter of the entire

WA population benefits from VMR services. Treasury calls that “a small segment of the community”; I don’t.

There is an assumption behind the Treasury’s approach, that boat-owning households are wealthier than the median WA household. Even a cursory review of the DoT boat register will reveal that most registered boats are small open boats with outboard motors, costing less than the average second-hand car. It is the traditional Aussie battler who will be most disadvantaged by this new tax (Treasury might call it a levy; everyone paying it will call it a tax).

Conclusion

Recommendation 19 of this report needs to be revisited following further research and analysis, driven by the organizations and departments with a sound understanding of the activities of VMR groups.

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