

June 2026

Newsletter

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Welcome to the latest edition of the Safer Boating Forum newsletter.

As we move into winter, I'd like to take a moment to thank Forum members for the enormous effort and commitment shown over the summer months. Across the motu, you have delivered an impressive range of initiatives – from education and course delivery to campaigns, compliance activity, partnerships, and local advocacy – all contributing to safer boating outcomes during the busiest time of the year. This newsletter is one of the ways we share our achievements and learnings with the wider sector.

This summer also marked the conclusion of our 2023–25 Recreational Craft Strategy, and together we should be proud of what we have achieved. Through your collective leadership, collaboration and on the ground action, we have strengthened alignment across the sector, sharpened our focus on key risks, and continued to build a shared evidence base to guide our work. These achievements provide a strong foundation for what comes next.

I'd also like to acknowledge the significant contribution Forum members have made to shaping the new Recreational Craft Strategy, which will be launched in Wellington on 23 June. Your insights and practical experience have been critical in ensuring the Strategy is focused on where we can make the greatest difference in reducing harm. A priority is to ensure the principles are brought to life through the work of the Forum. The Strategy encourages us to continue exploring how we can work together better and integrate community voices, so those that experience the greatest or disproportionate harm are part of the solution. An new exciting element of the Strategy is innovation. The Forum now has the opportunity to run small pilot programmes to either improve the effectiveness of existing interventions or develop something new to test and try – this is likely to be something we will explore at the upcoming Forum.



Thank you again for the commitment you bring to the Forum and saving lives on the water. Please read on to learn more about the work underway and what's coming up. I look forward to continuing this important journey with you.

Ngā mihi nui,

Sharyn Forsyth
Chair - Safer Boating Forum



Buoy Boy campaign making waves this summer

After launching Buoy Boy during [Safer Boating Week](#), we expanded the campaign over summer to reach recreational boaties where it matters most – on the water.

Buoy Boy turned the ocean into a media channel by creating a floating safety reminder positioned near boat ramps, marinas, and popular close to shore areas. Designed to stand out, he balances a light, playful tone with clear safety messages. He's not just an ad; he's something people notice, photograph, and talk about.

Buoy Boy has quickly become a visible and engaging presence. He starts conversations, prompts people to think about their own safety habits, and feels like a natural part of boating culture.

Each Buoy Boy reminds boaties to:

- check the marine weather forecast
- wear a lifejacket
- carry two waterproof ways to call for help.

We deployed 11 Buoy Boys nationwide in partnership with harbourmasters and supported by a wider campaign across video, radio, outdoor, social, and digital channels. Anecdotally, we've heard people stopped to look, take photos, and share their experiences. Our targeted digital approach also helped us reach audiences at the right time – focusing spend when weather conditions were favourable and boating activity was highest. This type of forecast-based trigger will continue to be used in future campaigns. Just as importantly, the campaign has strengthened local ownership. Harbourmasters played a key role in bringing Buoy Boy to life in their regions and ensuring he was placed where he would have the greatest impact.

Buoy Boy shows that a simple, well-placed idea can make a real difference in keeping safety front of mind when and where it matters most. Check it out here. A full summary of our overall summer campaign will be provided at the SBF hui in June.



Harm Prevention across Aotearoa

Earlier this year, Maritime Officer Kelsey Walker presented at a free Kayaking Safety Workshop in Days Bay, Lower Hutt, as part of Maritime NZ's commitment to helping prevent harm on the water. The one-day workshop was hosted by Wildfinder, run by the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers and supported by the family of Jack Skellet. Jack sadly lost his life in a kayaking incident in Wellington Harbour in December 2021.

Aimed at participants of all ages, from beginner to intermediate level, the workshop covered all aspects of kayaking safety, with a strong focus on theory, awareness-building, and practical skill development. Among other safety messages, Kelsey stressed the importance of taking two forms of communication when out on the water, wearing a properly fitted lifejacket, and always checking the marine conditions before going out.



Maritime Officer Kelsey Walker

Maritime NZ Investment Advisor Jayshree Ranchhod said the workshop was well received. "Despite the less than ideal weather, there was a good turn-out – mainly beginners looking to buy a kayak. I think they took away a few really important messages," Jayshree said.

As part of our commitment to preventing harm on the water, Maritime NZ supported Taranaki Outrigger Canoe Club with its Ngā Tai e Whā o Taranaki event on 7 March. Ngā Tai e Whā o Taranaki gives paddlers an opportunity to paddle in open sea with support from safety boats and trained personnel.

Taranaki Outrigger Canoe Club Funding Officer Mary Brewster said the club was delighted to welcome 12 teams and seven singles paddlers to this year's event. "The weather was ideal, with light swells and wind, although still a challenge for those not familiar with paddling in the open sea," Mary said. "All teams and single paddlers completed the course without incident, and feedback was extremely positive."

Drowning Prevention Auckland's 'Safer on the Water' Programme

Over the summer, our DPA team was out and about at popular boat ramps in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, talking with the boating community and sharing tips on how to stay safe on the water. A big thank you to everyone who gave our team such a warm welcome. There's nothing better than seeing people enjoying the water safely.

Our visits are part of our 'Safer on the Water' programme designed to help our recreational boating community enjoy the water safely and reduce preventable drowning deaths. We are very grateful to Maritime NZ for funding this vital programme.

Five Boating Safety Code tips

1. Lifejackets: Wear one that fits properly.
2. Communicate: Carry two waterproof forms of communication.
3. Weather: Always check the marine forecast before you go.
4. Stay Sharp: Avoid alcohol while boating.
5. Responsibility: Be a responsible skipper.

Access free lifejackets at our DPA Lifejacket Hubs

Our boat ramp visits are also a chance to promote DPA's Lifejacket Hubs. Our Lifejacket Hubs in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Waikato and Glenorchy give access to free, properly-fitted lifejackets to anyone who needs them, helping to keep people safe on and in the water.

Wear a lifejacket that fits

We love hearing feedback from our community. At Te Toro boat ramp, one father shared how our Lifejacket Hub helped him. "While boating with my family, I had lifejackets for everyone else on board, but none that fitted me properly. I borrowed a DPA lifejacket and it fitted me perfectly."

Find out more about borrowing a lifejacket from a DPA Lifejacket Hub, and a full list of locations, [here](#).



DPA team member Bella enjoying a day spent connecting with boaties to promote water safety.

Development of the refreshed Recreational Craft Strategy

The development of the refreshed Recreational Craft Strategy took an important step forward on 23 February, with the Recreational Craft Strategy Development Engagement Hui held at the Auckland office of Coastguard Tautiaki Moana. The day brought together Māori, Pacific and Asian staff and members within the Forum and the wider community. The hui, facilitated by a Māori and Tongan duo from TheirShare, created a welcoming space for open dialogue, shared experiences and thoughtful reflection. Participants offered valuable insights, drawing on their knowledge, indigenous world views and lived experience to highlight both challenges and opportunities within the current system.

Throughout the day, there was a strong sense of collaboration and shared purpose.

Discussions focused on what's working well, where improvements are needed, and how governance, communication and community engagement can be strengthened. The willingness of participants to speak openly and contribute constructively played a key role in making the hui a success.

A key outcome from the day was a shared desire to stay connected. There was enthusiasm to continue building relationships, sharing knowledge and supporting one another as the Strategy develops. This reflects a commitment not just to a document, but an ongoing process of partnership and improvement. The insights gathered have been compiled into a summary report, which has been shared with participants and the Safer Boating Forum Leadership Group. These insights will directly inform the next draft of the Recreational Craft Strategy, ensuring it is grounded in community voices and real-world experience. The hui marked not just a milestone in the Strategy's development, but the beginning of a deeper and ongoing collaboration with the communities it aims to serve. Above all, the day highlighted the value of bringing people together. The generosity, insight and commitment shown by everyone involved will help shape a safer future for all who enjoy time on the water.

Looking ahead, the Strategy is on track to be launched at the Safer Boating Forum on 23 June 2026 in Wellington. It will include an overarching approach of how organisations and communities can work together to support the recreational craft sector, supported by a one-year action plan. Forum members have had several opportunities to share their planned work for the coming year, helping to shape the key workstreams for the next financial year. The Recreational Craft Strategy is intended to be a living document— one that continues to evolve and adapt over time to reflect the needs of communities and the sector.



Celebrating the Career of NZ Marine Executive Director Peter Busfield

One hundred and fifty sector representatives gathered in Auckland on Thursday, 19 March to recognise the 30-year contribution of NZ Marine Executive Director Peter Busfield. Peter retired after a distinguished career as Chief Executive of NZ Marine, having made a lasting contribution to New Zealand's recreational boating sector.

Peter worked closely with Maritime NZ as a member of the Safer Boating Forum Leadership Group and co-chaired the Safer Boating Forum's retail engagement work group with Principal Advisor Recreational Craft Matt Wood, playing a pivotal role in strengthening collaboration between industry, regulators, and boating communities.

Peter's influence helped us to develop various national recreational boating strategies and Safer Boating Forum position statements on critical issues, such as wearing lifejackets and carrying two forms of communications. A clear and compelling advocate, he consistently represented the members of NZ Marine and the wider sector with credibility and purpose.

Peter's leadership helped deliver tangible initiatives, including trailer craft safety equipment guidance, retailer safety engagement pilots and progress towards aligning safety standards between New Zealand and Australia.

The Safer Boating Forum was represented at the celebration by Matt Wood, who was also one of the speakers.

Peter leaves a strong legacy in safer boating, with the respect, gratitude, and best wishes of the sector.



Key step for lifejacket culture change: Water Safety NZ and Coastguard NZ

Strong feedback from many SBF members and the wider boating and water safety sector helped prompt Parliament's Transport and Infrastructure Select Committee to re-open public submissions on proposed national lifejacket legislation in early March.

The Committee received more than 160 written submissions in October 2025. Oral submissions shared in February left little room for doubt on the expert views from each submitter that the Bill didn't go far enough. A further round of submissions (closing 15 April) then sought views on expanding the Bill beyond its original focus on mandatory lifejackets for people aged under 15, to include people of all ages.

For many in the sector, this is a potentially once-in-a-generation shift that could help strengthen lifejacket wear as a social norm and reduce preventable drownings. In support of submissions, Coastguard Tautiaki Moana and Water Safety NZ shared evidence, considerations and FAQs with SBF members and other submitters.

Forum members were asked to build on earlier submissions and focus on:

- support for extending proposed requirements to all ages, not only those aged under 15
- comment on whether a 6-metre waterline-length threshold would create confusion and leave some people unprotected.

Coastguard Chief Executive Carl McOnie says the sector has advocated for many years to strengthen New Zealand's lifejacket rules. "We welcome the move to extend lifejacket requirements to all ages. But a six-metre cutoff doesn't make sense from a safety perspective. Vessel length isn't a reliable indicator of risk – people unexpectedly end up in the water or drown from larger recreational vessels, and both children and adults are equally vulnerable. It's difficult to justify a rule where a child must wear a lifejacket on a 5.9-metre boat, but not a 6.1-metre one."

With submissions now closed, SBF members and the wider sector will be watching closely for the next steps from the Transport and [Infrastructure Select Committee](#).



KayakSafe 2025-2026

A recent news article about a kayaker rescued off the Ōtaki coast highlights that many people are still unprepared or unaware of basic boating safety requirements. The incident reflects a failure to follow core safety messages promoted through KASK's (Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers) KayakSafe workshops. Fortunately, the kayaker was rescued, but only after several critical safety principles were ignored.

The paddler went out in offshore winds, without wearing a lifejacket or PFD, had no means of communication, and was using a craft unsuitable for the conditions. That is at least four of the five basic safety considerations that could have prevented the situation. The individual was extremely fortunate a member of the public noticed things going wrong and contacted emergency services, who safely recovered the paddler after they became cold and tired and their craft sank.

While it is easy to criticise individual decisions, these incidents reinforce the importance of education and awareness so people can better understand risks, prepare appropriately, and reduce the need for emergency responses by Police and Coastguard.

Over the summer period, KASK continued to deliver its successful KayakSafe programme, offering both in-person workshops and online presentations. Although 11 workshops were initially planned, 14 in-person workshops were delivered from Whangārei to Wānaka, along with four online sessions. Additional workshops were run at the request of local paddling communities and businesses seeking paddler-focused safety guidance. KASK and the Wellington Sea Kayaking Network also supported an additional privately-funded safety workshop in Wellington.

Workshops are delivered by experienced local paddlers, using a strong safety-based curriculum built around the WET framework: Wind, weather, waves and water temperature; Equipment; and Tell. Funded through Maritime NZ's Community Grants and the Safer Boating Forum, the programme reached over 400 participants this season – a nearly 20% increase on last year.

KASK continues to provide accessible safety information through its website to support safer paddling nationwide.



Christchurch KayakSafe workshop, Cass Bay in Lyttelton.

Building Safer Boating Skills Across Hawke's Bay

Hawke's Bay Regional Council is proud to deliver a one-day Harbourmaster's Safe Boating Course, supported by Community Grant funding, to help improve boating safety and strengthen safe boating culture across our region.

The course has been extremely well-received by the community. We run it at locations across Hawke's Bay and typically welcome 20–25 participants per course, ranging from first-time boat users to experienced skippers looking to refresh their knowledge. This strong uptake highlights the value locals place on practical, regionally-relevant boating education.

The course is delivered by the Harbourmaster or Deputy Harbourmaster and focuses on the fundamentals of safe boating. Participants are provided with a comprehensive boating booklet containing key regional information, local rules, and essential safety guidance. The course notes complement the *Boating in Hawke's Bay* booklet and expand on each module to ensure participants leave with a solid understanding of what safe boating looks like in our waters.

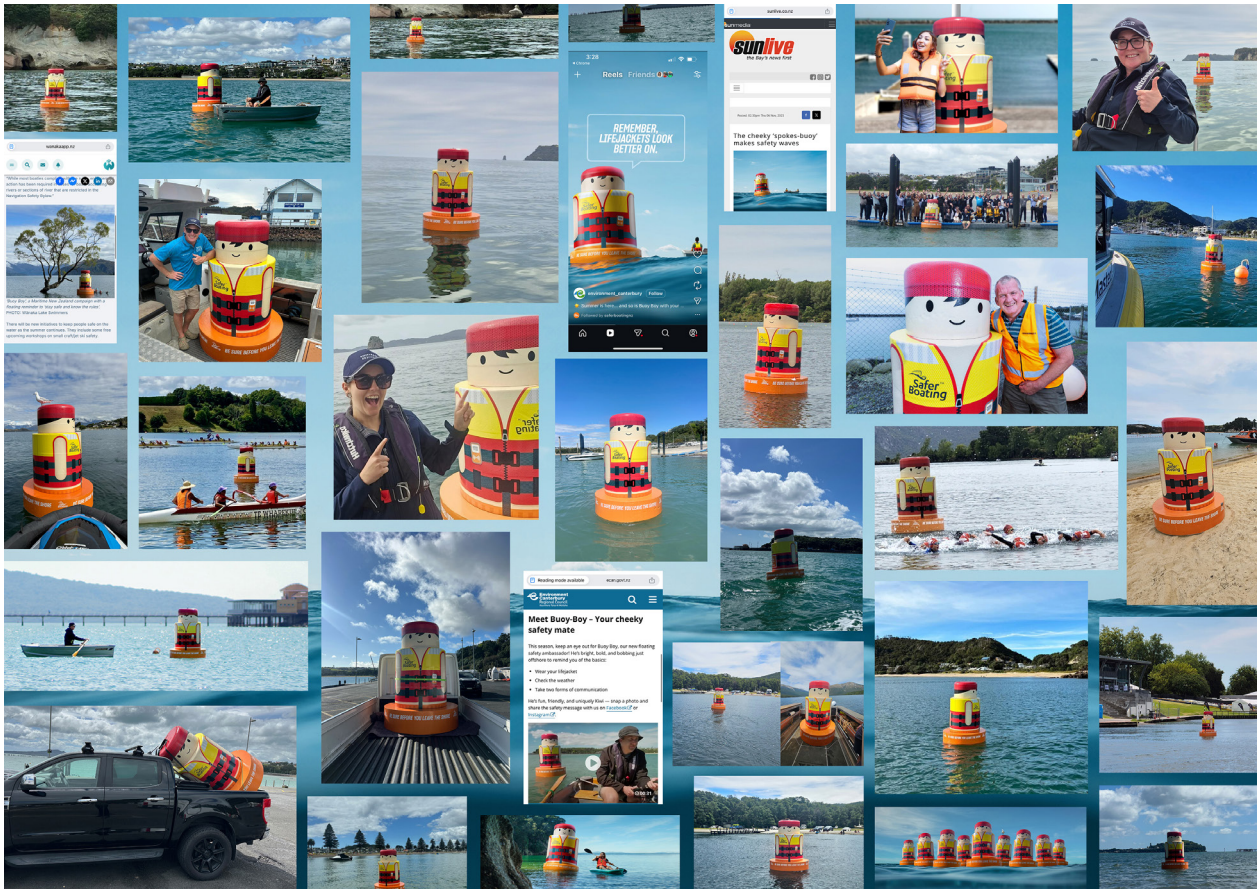


To support learning, each module includes “Key Concepts” at the beginning and “Knowledge Checks” at the end, giving participants clear take-home messages and opportunities to ask questions and clarify understanding. The course blends theory with practical exercises and concludes with a written assessment to reinforce learning outcomes.

This Harbourmaster's course is designed as an accessible entry point to boating safety. Those wanting to progress further are encouraged to explore additional qualifications through Coastguard Boating Education.



By investing in targeted, locally delivered education, Hawke's Bay Regional Council is helping to reduce risk on the water and ensure more people can enjoy boating safely and responsibly.



Boy Buoy in various places across Aotearoa



Peter Busfield and his wife Rachael with a remote control “Zepher” yacht presented by the NZ Marine Industry Association.



Recreational Craft Strategy Development Engagement Hui held at the Auckland office of Coastguard Tautiaki Moana.



Do you have something you'd like to share with the Forum?

Are there things you'd like to see in the Forum newsletter?

Please feel free to get in touch with any feedback or suggestions - we'd love to hear from you.

Alternatively, if you have an article or information you'd like to feature in the next edition of the newsletter, please email us at safersaferboating@maritimenz.govt.nz.

