



Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

8401 73rd Ave. N Suite 71, Minneapolis, MN 55428

Phone: 763-315-8043

April 30, 2020

Chairman Rick Hansen
House Environment and Natural Resources
Finance Division
407 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Ranking Member Dan Fabian
House Environment and Natural Resources
Finance Division
287 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 4554 Sec. 68 “Recommendations for Safety Program for Watercraft Operators”

Chairman Hansen, Ranking Member Fabian and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas (MRAA), I write to you with recreational boat dealer concerns with DE1 of HF4554 regarding Sec. 68 “Recommendations for Safety Program for Watercraft Operators.”

By way of background, MRAA is the leading trade association of North American small businesses that sell and service new and pre-owned recreational boats, operate marinas, boat-yards, or accessory stores.

Recreational boating is a significant economic generator in Minnesota, accounting for \$3 billion and 11,000 jobs across the state. Additionally, there are over 825,000 registered boats in Minnesota—nearly 1 boat for every 6 people. There is more to boating than just this though. Boating is a part of everyday life here, with many families across the state using their boats to enjoy our 10,000+ lakes.

While we don’t oppose the good intent of these additions, the language in DE1 of HF4554 appears to only target a single segment of the boating market, instead of suggesting uniform boater education for all vessels. This could be fixed by amending the language the following ways:

- **Aquatic Invasive Species education for all boaters:** If the Minnesota Legislature decides to adopt a more aggressive aquatic invasive species (AIS) education effort, then these classes or materials should be available to as many boaters as possible. AIS education is important for all boaters, to ensure proper maintenance and protection of our natural resources. This education should be applied to all boaters, like current Minnesota AIS rules, rather than just a subset of the industry. Failing to do this causes unneeded confusion, and inequity in our market.
- **Boating safety education for all boaters:** Safe boating education and practices benefit all users on the water. While it is encouraging to see that boating, fatalities are at the lowest point in nearly a decade, we agree that more can be done to address the rise in non-fatal boating accidents. This is why MRAA recommends that a boater education course in Minnesota should be designed in consultation with the expertise of National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), instead of a course simply determined by the commissioner. NASBLA is the leading national nonprofit in recreational boating safety,

comprised of boating law administrators in each state and U.S. territory, and has set the standard for boating safety across the country.

- **Make boating safety consistent with other industries:** MRAA recommends that boating safety operator requirements be consistent with other recreational products, such as ATVs and snowmobiles, which are managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This can be done in consultation with Minnesota’s Outdoor Recreation Task Force, to ensure equity across markets.
- **Studies should be department-led:** We recommend that the DNR be the lead investigator on any studies required to support the well-founded benefits of boater safety education. The department’s staff are experts in their fields and have specific knowledge of boaters in the state, and state waters. The department provides a neutral forum for inquiries and public input.
- **Provide clarity by using industry vocabulary:** MRAA encourages legislative language for our industry to be clearly defined or widely used by the marine industry for clarity. The language in question, “wake watercraft,” is not a well-defined term in current statute, nor in the marine industry. If this is to target water sports boats or tow boats, then this represents a regrettable imbalance in the focus of this action.

We urge you to consider the implications Sec. 68 “Recommendations for Safety Program for Watercraft Operators” as written and **encourage you to consider amending the language to educate all boaters in Minnesota, regardless of size or type of watercraft.** It is vital to consider a boater education/watercraft operator safety for all users, not simply a select group.

Again, we are greatly encouraged by the interest in boater safety, but encourage the legislature and Department of Natural Resources to bring all stakeholders to the table so that we may all work together to provide a well-thought-out, widely supported, and nationally recognized boater safety program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Gruhn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matt Gruhn
President
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas