

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 National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), the leading trade association for the recreational boating community, we urge you to consider our concerns in DE1 of HF4554 regarding Sec. 68 “Recommendations for Safety Program for Watercraft Operators.”

Minnesota ranks second in the nation for registered boats, with over 825,000 registered boats, which equates to nearly 1 boat for every 6 people. Boating is woven into the fabric of life in our great state, as many Minnesotan’s use their boats to enjoy our 11,842 lakes. Additionally, the recreational boating industry supports nearly 11,000 Minnesota jobs across 690 businesses.

We believe boater education is an important topic for all boaters in Minnesota. However, the language in DE1 of HF4554 appears to target a segment of the boating market and fails to put forth boater education that applies to all boaters. We would like to see language amended to consider the following:

- **AIS education for all:** We believe AIS (aquatic invasive species) education is important for all boaters and should be applied equally to operators, as do current Minnesota AIS statutes and rules. If Minnesota adopts a more aggressive AIS education effort to expand its existing media and public education program, we strongly recommend it be provided to as many boaters as possible.
- **Boater safety education for all:** We support boater education for every boat operator because safe boating practices benefit all users on the water. While boating fatalities vary year over year, they are at their lowest point in almost a decade. However, non-fatal boating accidents have increased significantly since 2010. We believe mandatory boater safety education for all users is an effective way to address this increase in nonfatal accidents.

Summary of Accidents – as of 12/31 each year

Accident Category and Year	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Boating Fatalities	10	14	12	18	18	14	12	15	16	12
Non-Fatal Boating Accidents	92	64	92	79	71	36	65	72	61	71
Non-Boating Drownings	35	40	31	40	35	29	30	40	50	34

Source: https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/safety/boatwater/accident_summary19.pdf

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NMMA

We recommend a boater education course in Minnesota should be designed in consultation with the expertise of National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), the leading national nonprofit in recreational boating safety, who has set the standard for boating safety across the country. NASBLA is comprised of boating law administrators from the 50 states, Washington DC, and the US territories.

- **Consistent:** We encourage any boating safety operator requirements to be consistent with other recreational products in Minnesota managed by the Department of Natural Resources such as ATV's and snowmobiles.
- **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 Minnesotans and state waters. The department provides a neutral forum for inquiries and public input.
- **Enhanced wake watercraft:** Enhanced wake watercraft is not a defined term within statute or the marine industry. We encourage legislative language to address terms that are either clearly defined in statute or widely used within the marine industry for clarity for users. Assuming enhanced wake watercraft is focused on wake boats or tow boats, this is an imbalanced focus. Of the 825,000 registered watercraft, wake boats make up less than 1% of the total number. In fact, last year there were 5,200 boats sold in Minnesota under 23 feet and only 550 were wake boats.

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 – from users, to manufacturers, to dealers, to marinas, to resorts, to rental groups and others alike. We look forward to working with the Department of Natural Resources and stakeholders to allow for a phased in approach, should this move forward. It is important we work together to provide a well thought out, widely supported, and nationally recognized boater safety program.

Sincerely,

Jill Sims
Great Lakes Policy and Engagement Manager
National Marine Manufacturers Association

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