



Boating Industry Association

Media Release

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Boating is the antidote to pandemic blues

by Darren Vaux, BIA President

Being in, on or around water is good for the mind and good for the body. Wallace J Nicholl's best-selling book, *Blue Mind*, explored the measurable effects of proximity to, and activities involving, water on the human body and confirmed what all boaters intrinsically know. Boating reduces stress and invokes a sense of wellbeing. It creates connections between people and encourages immersion in nature. Boating is good for you.

We need access to boating now more than ever. The restrictions and stress associated with the pandemic over the last 18 months have created social isolation and frustration. We all need a relief valve but understandably governments around Australia, and the world, have had to take drastic action to limit the spread of the virus and save lives. Coupled with this heavy burden is the fundamental responsibility, in free societies, to minimise the nature and duration of restrictions to personal freedoms. As such, they also have a responsibility to permit activities that do not contribute to the transmission of the disease. This is fundamental to mental health and preservation of individual rights. Lockdowns can't last forever, and it is now very clear that as the Covid-19 virus mutates, elimination is not an option for the foreseeable future.

We will all have to live with restrictions and Covid Safe practices and actions that limit the spread of the virus. We need Covid Safe activities that restore our sense and rights of freedom and in that regard, boating is the standout choice and, on the water, the safest place to be.

Boating... paddleboards, kayaks, small sailing craft, tinnies, runabouts, fishing boats, yachts, tow-sports and cruisers, large and small. There is a boat for all ages and all budgets, and boating alone or with your immediate family is the very definition of social distancing. With the implementation of Covid Safe practices at the beach, the boat ramp or marina, families and friends can get out on the water, engage their Blue Mind and enjoy the magnificent waterways that Australia has to offer.

This is what the community wants and demands. With industry turnover up 11% and industry employment up 9% on last year the boating industry saw an increase in boat registrations to some 18,500 last year with many first-time boat owners. Over 2.5 million people in Australia now hold a boat licence and 20% of the population go boating each year. People have bought boats to escape the pandemic blues. The community want to go boating and boating must be one of the first activities that provides relief from any current or future lockdowns. In doing so, it will also provide a number of other benefits:

- It will relieve the pressure of overcrowding of greenspaces and beaches enabling people to access our magnificent and extensive blue spaces;
- It can be conducted safely on our waterways without unnecessary LGA or short distance limitations from home. Once you are on the water you are socially distanced and should be allowed the freedom to explore and find uncrowded blue spaces;

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- It can be managed with clear and consistent guidelines about guests onboard and limits and rules relating to raft ups or landing at beaches or jetties;
- It is a safe and enjoyable activity for many people in the broader Australian community; and
- It's a clear step toward feeling normal again.

It is imperative that boating be included in any initial easing of current and any future restrictions in jurisdictions across Australia. There are significant physical, mental and community benefits to be gained from encouraging people to responsibly go boating in all its forms as the antidote to pandemic blues.

With spring upon us and daylight saving just around the corner in many States, it is time for restrictions to be eased and for governments to take the proactive action to encourage people to go boating.

The 2021 BIA industry report infographic is at <https://www.bia.org.au/documents/item/1576>

The BIA Discover Boating website is at <https://discoverboating.com.au/>

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Editor's Note:

Boating images are available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/185964320@N02/>