

30 May 2022

The Chief Executive Officer  
The Rural City of Murray Bridge  
PO Box 421  
Murray Bridge SA 5253

### **The Rural City of Murray Bridge - Draft Annual Business Plan & Budget 2022-2023**

Dear Sir,

We thank The Rural City of Murray Bridge for affording us the opportunity to make comments on The Rural City of Murray Bridge's Draft Annual Business Plan & Budget 2022-2023, with our focus being on the current situation with houseboat moorings.

The Boating Industry Association (BIA) is the peak industry body for the recreational and light commercial marine industry in Australia. In South Australia, we support our industry member-base including boat builders, marine dealerships, marine mechanical, electrical and electronic services, shipwrights, other marine trades, manufacturers, importers/wholesalers, retailers, chandlers, brokers, designers, surveyors, insurers, tourism charter operators, houseboat hirers, marinas and mooring operators. The BIA is an advocate for boaters and the boating lifestyle and supports safe, responsible and enjoyable boating.

Boating is an extremely popular recreational lifestyle in South Australia, with more than 200,000 boat licences issued, 59,000 registered recreational boats, and a host of non-motorised craft (paddle and sail craft) which do not require registration or licensing. Boating has proven to be a stand-out choice in leisure activity throughout the pandemic, with significant increases in participation levels.

The Houseboat Hirers Association (HHA) merged as a division within the BIA in 2016, so our comments are directed from a houseboating/tourism, point of view.

#### ***Houseboating:***

The significance of houseboating at Murray Bridge and the tourism dollar it generates into the local economy cannot be underestimated, in particular the bed nights generated, which includes visitors from intrastate, interstate and overseas. Houseboat holidays boomed through COVID-19 with our enquiry rate through [www.houseboatbookings.com](http://www.houseboatbookings.com) having doubled consistently each month, compared to pre-pandemic enquiries, with a very consistent booking conversion rate.

Many new people particularly South Australians, have experienced houseboating for the first time and discovered this marvelous natural asset being the River Murray on their back door, who then tell their friends and family, as it is a fabulous way for families to connect. The HHA have been consistently running television commercial campaigns on both the Seven and Nine Networks promoting houseboat holidays, as well as the SATC including houseboat vision in promoting the regions.

Estimates based on a conservative level with 17 hire houseboats, operated by Oz Houseboats (Peter and Sonia Sommers) at the Murray Bridge Marina Camping and Caravan Park, would equate to 72,100 total bed nights and with an estimated 65% occupancy per year, this would equal 46,865 bed nights which generates in excess of \$3.5M into the local economy to hire, provision and service the houseboats.

The industry drives tourism dollars into the local economy and generates significant employment, as these vessels have to be re-fuelled, pumped out, cleaned, provisioned, serviced and maintained, utilising local businesses and labour. Additionally, being under commercial survey with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) these vessels have to be slipped once every five years with an in-water inspection in between, by an AMSA accredited marine surveyor.

In the later part of last year through SABFAC funding, all the missing kilometre markers and navigational directional signage on the river, were replaced from Pomanda Point to the border, which is vital for the hirers in knowing where they are should an emergency arise, and in locating safe mooring areas. Where practical many existing marker buoys were replaced with posts to minimise future loss.

**Facilities:**

With these significant numbers of visitors to the Murray Bridge region, the houseboat industry and the local economy, would benefit from any improved mooring facilities at the following destinations, where we have added comments.

**Riverglen Marina:**

Has houseboat mooring capacity for up to six houseboats with mooring posts, upstream from the marina entrance.

**White Sands:**

Has no houseboat access – private use only.

**Bells Landing Reserve:**

Has houseboat mooring capacity for up to two houseboats but no mooring posts.

**Swanport Reserve and Aquatic Centre:**

Did have houseboat mooring capacity, for up to four houseboats, but is now very shallow with substantial weed infestation denying access with no mooring posts, but has trees to tie up too.

**Sturt Reserve:**

Has outstanding houseboat mooring capacity for up to twenty vessels with five power bollards provided, each bollard powering four vessels, which eliminates noisy generators being run, particularly at night with proximity to the town, and attracts tourism dollars to the local businesses. With the recent upgrades ten extra mooring positions have now been lost.

**Thiele Reserve:**

This boat launching facility has been upgraded recently and has houseboat mooring capacity for up to three houseboats with mooring posts and an additional mooring space just downstream for another houseboat, but has no usable mooring posts and has become overgrown with vegetation.

**Avoca Dell:**

This boat launching facility has also been greatly enhanced recently and has houseboat mooring capacity for up to ten houseboats, with mooring posts both upstream and downstream from the boat ramp. With the recent upgrades six extra mooring positions have now been lost.

**Toora Reserve**

In 2018 the Council developed the Toora Reserve Masterplan and Concept Plan which was a great initiative but required more boat trailer parking and adjustments to accessing the proposed boat ramp. However, this facility could also provide an ideal houseboat mooring area as well as relieving boating congestion elsewhere. We would encourage the Council to seriously consider funding and advancing this project.

**Wood Lane**

Has existing houseboat mooring capacity for up to four houseboats with mooring posts downstream from the boat ramp and is an important destination point between Murray Bridge and Mannum. This boat launching facility needs tidying up due to overgrown vegetation. Another three mooring positions upstream have been lost, due to slumping.

From Wood Lane to Mannum, there has been a noticeable aggressive growth of Willows which has diminished access to some previous houseboat mooring sites, particularly around Caloote.

**Summary:**

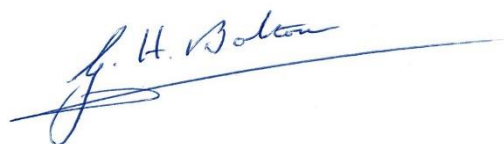
Whether cruising downstream towards Wellington or upstream towards Mannum, improved houseboat mooring destinations and facilities are extremely important. We believe more houseboats should be able to be being hired from Mannum venturing downstream towards Murray Bridge, rather than heading upstream as they currently do. An example being Unforgettable Houseboats and Kia Marina Houseboat Hire near Mannum, who have a large fleet of hire houseboats which are extensively promoted.

All boat operators need to share and respect each other on the river and Murray Bridge is a prime example, where you have such a diversity of vessels and water activities. This ranges from rowing boats, canoes, tinnies, sail boats, PWC, ski boats, wake boats, river boats to houseboats.

Any additional houseboat mooring facilities or enhancements are relatively low cost, and can deliver significant safety, amenity and economic benefits to the region, with increased tourism dollars being generated into the local Murray Bridge economy.

With the ongoing staycation and the continuing high levels of interest in boating, there is a clear opportunity to invest in infrastructure to support safe, convenient access to our waterways for the social and economic benefit of SA.

Yours faithfully,  
**BOATING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION LTD**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. H. Bolton', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

George Bolton  
Manager Member Services, SA & NT