

10 February 2026

To: The Premier of South Australia, the Hon. Peter Malinauskus MP

Email: premier@sa.gov.au

From: Boating Industry Association Ltd

Issue: River Murray & Boating Safety Infrastructure

Subject: The critical deficit of essential marine infrastructure

Submission

This submission aims to raise industry concern regarding the perilous state of essential boating infrastructure along the River Murray.

1. Purpose

The Boating Industry Association Ltd (BIA)¹ which incorporates the Houseboat Hirers Association (HHA), is writing to draw your urgent attention to the critical deficit of essential marine infrastructure along the River Murray. We seek the South Australian Government's leadership and support for new and improved slipway, and haul-out facilities at strategic locations — specifically Renmark and Murray Bridge — to support the safety and survival of commercial vessel operations, and ongoing safety of the recreational boating sector.

2. The Economic and Social Importance of Boating

Boating is a way of life for many South Australians and a key component of the tourism sector which delivers significant social and economic benefits to the State. According to the National Recreational Boating Statement 2025:

- **Economic Contribution:** The Australian boating industry generates more than \$10 billion in direct annual turnover and supports 35,000 jobs. Nationally, the public spends roughly \$15 billion per year on water-related activities.
- **The Marina Sector:** Marinas and slipways are essential infrastructure hubs that support thousands of jobs nationally and contribute \$2.24 billion to the economy.
- **Social Wellbeing:** Over 90 per cent of boaters report boating significantly improves their mental and physical health. The "Blue Mind" effect of being on the water is a key contributor to community resilience.²

¹ More details on BIA at Appendix A

² National Recreational Boating Statement (2025)

Tourism Synergy: With nearly 75 per cent of Australia's 4.2 million recreational fishers also being boaters, this sector contributes \$11 billion annually to the economy, driving high-yield regional tourism to South Australia. Meanwhile, the iconic River Murray Houseboat sector in South Australia generates a significant economic boost to South Australia, particularly within the Murray River regions (Riverland and Murray River, Lakes & Coorong), serving as a core component of the regional tourism industry and a key driver of local employment.

- **Support for Local Businesses:** Houseboat tourists support local businesses such as retail, food, beverage, and tourist attractions in small river towns.
- **Job Creation:** The industry supports hundreds of jobs in manufacturing, service, repair and maintenance, and tourism, with 75 per cent of the wider SA boating industry consisting of small, family-owned businesses.
- **"Staycation" and Tourism Boost:** The sector has seen high levels of interest, especially during "staycation" periods, with initiatives like the River Revival Voucher program injecting millions into the economy.
- **High-Value Tourism:** Houseboat holidays are a high-value, multi-day experiences that bring visitors who frequently spend significant amounts per trip, promoting regional economic growth.

The industry also faces challenges, such as the need for improved infrastructure to support increased demand and the impact of environmental events such as floods resulting from extreme weather.

3. The Current Crisis in River Murray Infrastructure

Following the 2022-23 floods, the availability of operational slipways has reached a critical bottleneck threatening these economic and social benefits:

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Key facilities, such as the Liba-Liba slipway in Renmark, is non-operational post-flood and has been dismantled, as has the slipway adjacent to Kia Marina upstream from Mannum, which was de-commissioned when the property was sold for a tourism development.
- **Imminent Closures:** The anticipated closure of the Murray Bridge Marina slipway opposite Long Island, and the uncertain future of Mannum Slipway & Moorings at Mannum, which is currently on the market, risks losing critical maritime capability in the Murraylands.
- **Operational Bottlenecks:** Operators are facing extreme wait times and travel distances. Current facilities (like the Berri slipway) controlled by SA Water, principally operates to maintain government vessels. The facility does have limited access permitted for houseboats when they have spare capacity, however it is not fit for purpose for houseboats with restrictive work practices, leaving commercial and private owners with no recourse and major issues in emergency situations.

4. Impact on Public Safety and Business Confidence

The lack of haul-out facilities is no longer just an inconvenience; it is a safety and regulatory crisis:

- **Mandatory Surveys:** commercial houseboats must undergo regular out-of-water inspections to maintain Certificates of Survey under Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) mandatory standards. Without local slipways, these vessels cannot meet safety obligations, forcing them out of service and off the water.

- **Vessel Attrition:** We are already seeing some commercial operators ceasing operations due to the challenges and costs associated with keeping and maintaining their vessels in survey. The result, vessel owners often take them out of survey, rendering them suitable for private use only and out of the tourism economy.
- **Private Fleet Risk:** With the aging nature of the private fleet, insurance providers are now demanding out-of-water inspections by AMSA accredited marine surveyors. A lack of infrastructure leads to un-surveyed, uninsured and potentially unseaworthy vessels remaining on the river. This sector relies on slipways or haul-out facilities to address service, maintenance and repair works to keep vessels fit for purpose.
- **Unseaworthy/ unregistered vessels on illegal moorings** are exacerbating this problem. As witnessed in other Australian States, there is a high probability that the Government will have to fund and undertake the inevitable costly exercise of salvage and disposal of such vessels to land fill.

The diminishing availability of haul-out facilities is serious and equivalent in many ways to having insufficient servicing facilities/ workshops for motor vehicles, which would lead to unsafe and shortened lifespans of vehicles, and increased risk on the roads.

5. Strategic Recommendations and Investment

To safeguard the "Blue Economy" of the River Murray, the BIA recommends the SA Government support the following:

1. **Private Investment:** Support private commercial applications to create modern, EPA-compliant facilities capable of servicing and enhancing the Murraylands fleet.
2. **Regional Infrastructure:** Collaboration with the Renmark Paringa Council and their development partner Wel.Co on the proposed Jane Eliza Project. This significant housing project includes an off-stream marina, slipway/ haul-out facility and boat yard development. Whilst completion could still be some time away, it is important to plan for a sustainable future and provide confidence long-term solutions and opportunities for waterways users and businesses are on the horizon.

This project would provide areas for the servicing and maintenance of vessels, renovating and updating older vessels, the construction of new vessels to replace old vessels, and the ability to recover unsafe, unseaworthy or abandoned vessels. Delivering economic activity, jobs and wide-reaching benefits to surrounding communities.

3. **Regulatory Support:** Implement a "Whole of Murray" South Australia approach to ensure all permanently moored craft are registered and regularly inspected for compliance and seaworthiness. This action would provide public confidence in waterway safety and contribute greatly to the future health of the river.

Conclusion

The River Murray is an iconic tourism experience of national and international significance for South Australia, delivering social and economic benefits. However, the industry is at a breaking point. Investment in slipway infrastructure is the only way to restore business confidence, incentivise private investment in on-water tourism, and ensure the continued operation of houseboats, which must be kept in safe condition for all those people who enjoy and experience the river.

The BIA would welcome the opportunity to meet with you on this critical issue for commercial and recreational vessels on the River Murray, and to discuss solutions to this urgent matter for South Australia. Please do not hesitate to have your office contact BIA General Manager Advocacy & Public Relations Neil Patchett on e. neil@bia.org.au or m. 0418 279 465 to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Fielding', with a long, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the word.

Andrew Fielding
Chief Executive Office
Boating Industry Association Ltd.

cc: Minister for Climate, Environment and Water, the Hon. Lucy Hood MP, e.,
Minister.Hood@sa.gov.au;

cc: Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon. Emily Bourke MLC, e.,
Minister.Bourke@sa.gov.au

cc: Minister for Tourism and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Zoe Bettison MP, e.,
MinisterBettison@sa.gov.au

cc: Manager Business Support (SA & NT), George Bolton, george@bia.org.au

About BIA

The Boating Industry Association Ltd (BIA) is the peak industry body in Australia representing the interests of boating which includes designers, manufacturers, importers, brokers, insurers, retailers, charters, yacht and boat clubs, marinas, events, surveyors and trades from boat builders to riggers, and more. BIA is an advocate for boaters and the boating lifestyle and supports safe, responsible, and enjoyable boating. BIA has members in all States and Territories.

The BIA reported national industry turnover last year of more than \$10.2 billion with around 35,000 people employed across more than 2,000 businesses. Seventy-five per cent of BIA members are in small family businesses, employing local workers and supporting local communities.

BIA is also now in a collaboration with the Australian Fishing Trade Association due to the close relationship of boating and fishing, and in total the two organisations represent \$21 billion in annual industry turnover and 135,000 people employed.

In Australia, more than 85 per cent of the population live within 50km of the coast, so it is little wonder that almost 1 in 5 households can have a boat or watercraft and more than 5 million go boating each year. People of all ages, gender and ability participate in boating across paddle, sail and power for leisure and sport.