

# Water Recreational Use, Background Paper

Prepared for the Stokes Inlet Steering Group March 2007  
by Mieke Bourne with information provided by the Department of  
Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) and the Department of  
Environment and Conservation (DEC)

## **Introduction**

A management plan is being prepared for Stokes Inlet to ensure that its high environmental, social and economic values are managed sustainably into the future.

The community identified recreation including many watersports as why they visit and value the Inlet.

This background paper has been prepared with information provided by both DPI and DEC.

## **Background**

The land surrounding the Inlet is part of the Stokes National Park and as such is managed by DEC. The Inlet itself is Unallocated Crown Land and the activities carried out on it are managed by DPI. As such, both departments have made comments relating to this background paper.

## **Issues**

Community and organisational views on the Inlet, scientific information and available literature were used to determine what the priority issues are for Stokes Inlet. Questions were then developed on each issue with the expectation that the answers would provide a better understanding of the issue.

Below in italics are the questions that were raised in reference to recreational water values at the Inlet. These questions are answered and recommendations listed where appropriate.

*What are the proposals for improvements to the boat ramp?*

Currently DEC has no plans for a boat ramp as the inlet is currently not managed by DEC. Given the fluctuations in the water levels which occur in the inlet, it would be extremely difficult to build an effective boat ramp.

*Is boat signage at the Inlet adequate?*

DEC believes that the signage is not adequate; this has been brought to the attention of DPI.

DPI indicated that as the Inlet had not been surveyed they could not put signs up as they do not know where the hazards are.

*What are the present boating restrictions? How are boating restrictions presently enforced?*

The boating restrictions that apply to Stokes Inlet are the same as those that apply to any other enclosed water body. These are that in waters less than 3m deep or within 45m of any object in the water they can not exceed 8 knots. Additionally, all operators of recreation boats will need to have a skippers ticket by April 2008. These restrictions are enforced on an as needs basis. The Esperance officer relies to some degree on the ranger at the National Park to inform him about the activities on the water and the need for enforcement.

For recreational vessels the only required safety equipment is a bucket and if they have an inboard motor a fire extinguisher. Commercial vessels require more safety equipment, they are aware of this and the DPI officer has met with the commercial fishermen at Stokes Inlet and inspected their vessels in the past.

*Is dredging a channel required for boating access?*

There are no plans to dredge a channel. The cost would be high and the inlet contains many obstacles and shallows. It is likely that dredging is both too costly and impractical to be considered at the inlet.

*Is there a proposal for a water ski area at the Inlet?*

DEC is not pursuing a water ski area, they believe the inlet contains many obstacles, shallows and safety hazards. DEC and DPI would need to consider and evaluate impact on waterbirds, impacts on other park users, visitor risk issues and infrastructure requirements.

DPI indicated that at present there are no proposals for a water ski area at the inlet but it has been mentioned in conversation.

*What is the process of establishing a ski area?*

A proponent, for example a local water ski group, must initiate the development of a water ski area. DPI will support the proponent through the application process and will gazette the area if the process is successful. The process involves consultation with all interested parties which in this case would include DEC, the Esperance Shire, Fisheries and the Traditional Owners amongst others. Environmental, noise pollution, commercial interests and vesting factors must be considered and assessed.

Once all consulted groups agree to the proposal and all other factors are considered, then a survey would have to be carried out at the cost of the proponent. Once all this was complete DPI would gazette the area and put up signage.

*What would the impacts be on the visitors to the park, safety, noise etc? And to the environment, clearing for parking bays, boat ramp, and wave erosion?*

DEC commented that the gazetting of a water ski area would likely result in a slight increase in visitor numbers but mostly would be utilised by locals. When considering safety, the inlet contains many obstacles / shallows / safety hazards- this will be a visitor risk issue. For noise (i) may detract from the peace and quiet of the natural environment. (ii) may have localised temporary impact on bird usage of the inlet. Wave erosion would need to be monitored,

but due to the large size of the inlet DEC suspects that there would be minimal wave erosion impact. The environmental impact through clearing for extra parking bays or a boat ramp will be addressed in the draft Esperance District Coastal Reserves Management Plan which DEC is preparing at present.

*Who is responsible for warning signs for underwater\_ structures?* DPI, but only if they are aware of them and a survey of the Inlet would need to be completed for this to be ascertained.

*Is there considered to be a conflict between different recreational users?* Dec commented that there is no conflict currently at Stokes Inlet; however at the Esperance Lakes Nature reserve there have been complaints received by DEC about boat motor noises associated with water skiing impacting upon the enjoyment of the natural environment via other reserve users. Jet skis at the Esperance Lakes have also become an issue regards increasing complaints by the public.

*What recommendations should be included in the management plan to ensure recreational facilities are maintained or improved?* Following the recent wildfires in Stokes NP DEC has set up a task review group comprising of DEC Esperance district staff, a DEC Planning Officer and DEC Recreation and Landscape Architects to look at the current and future recreational facilities needs on the western shore of the estuary. All proposed terrestrial based facilities recommendations should be forwarded to the DEC Planner engaged in the preparation of the Esperance District Coastal Reserves Management Plan (EDCRMP) – such recommendations are not seen as being appropriate in the Stokes Estuary strategic document.

DPI mentioned that the management plan should consider what to do in an event of an oil spill on the water. While the risk is low there should be some mention of it.

*Extra information:*

- Jet Ski's are classed as a normal waterboat with the same restrictions.
- Once a water ski area is gazetted, other vessels (except Jet Ski's) can pass through the area but can not stop in the area.
- Water ski areas require a minimum depth of 1.8m.
- DPI has a funding scheme called Recreational Boating Facilities Scheme, more information available on their website. Through this scheme funding can be obtained for a number of things such as boat ramps, parking bays and fish cleaning stations.

## **Suggested actions for Draft Management Plan**

There are very few recommendations resulting from this background paper. It would be valuable for the group to discuss if they feel that any should be added. Development of an oil spill procedure is one possibility and discussing whether some form of signage could be erected is another.

## **Recommendations for the draft management plan arising from the steering group (31/5/07) after considering this paper:**

- A water ski area should not be gazetted at the Inlet
- Future organised water-based recreational events such boat races are not supported
- Signage should be erected at the Inlet to alert users to the boating restrictions and submerged objects.
- Contact DPI about completing a hydrographical survey of the Inlet.

### Contact details:

Mieke Bourne  
Natural Resource Management Officer  
South Coast Region  
5 Bevan Street, P.O Box 525  
Albany 6330  
Telephone (08) 9841 0127  
Fax (08) 9842 1204  
Email [mieke.bourne@water.wa.gov.au](mailto:mieke.bourne@water.wa.gov.au)  
website: [www.water.wa.gov.au](http://www.water.wa.gov.au)

Ian Hughes  
Acting Parks & Visitor Services Coordinator  
Department of Environment & Conservation  
Esperance  
Telephone (08) 9083-2100

Garry Wilson  
Regional Transport Officer  
Department for Planning and Infrastructure  
Government of Western Australia  
Goldfields/Esperance Region  
PO Box 2255 Esperance 6450  
9071 6891(ph)  
9071 6892 (fax)  
0427 583 581 (mobile)