

BOATOWNERS VIEWS & EXPECTATIONS ON GREY WATER MANAGEMENT

The Department of Environment Land Water & Planning [DELWP] have asked the Houseboat Owners Committee [HOC] to seek views and expectations regarding Greywater Management of Lake Eildon. This opens up the opportunity to let it be known to DELWP and G-M Water, the views and expectations of the boat owners. Please add to, dispute or object to the basic document below of expectations. It is important as many boat owners as possible provide their views, requirements, demands and expectations.

A major problem for boat owners is that they need to be convinced by DELWP that any grey water crisis is actually being caused by boat owners. The small amount of grey water caused by boat owners compared to soil runoff etc needs to be measured and shown as a proportion of the overall grey water contamination. It is imperative that DELWP make clear to all boat owners the level of grey water contamination their boats make to the lake.

All boats on the lake have been approved for registration and licencing by DELWP and/or GM-W and neither of these should have the right to retrospectively change this regulatory approval given by them. Many people have stated emphatically that they will not under any circumstance be installing a grey water treatment system [GWTS] into their boat. It has also been raised that some boat owners would be a party to get involved in a class action against retrospective fitting of GWTS systems if necessary. Others have adopted a more moderate approach. However, there was a universal response making it completely clear that a retrospective Regulation would not be accepted for installation onto all boats.

Historical examples were provided on:

The seat belt laws introduced in 1969 which was for the safety of drivers however these laws were not made retrospective and to this day still apply only to new vehicles being built. In 1979 Emission Control System on motor vehicles was introduced being for the improvement of public health and environmental purposes and were not made retrospective.

There was acceptance that if grey water treatment systems were regulated that they be fitted to all new boats being built and there was a level of agreement to have GWTS fitted to all boats doing major renovations or up-grading their category. Natural attrition of boats on the lake would have the vast number of remaining boats fitted with a GWTS in 20 years time. It was also stated that after a trial period of a number of years and if successful that consideration could be given to have grey water systems fitted to category 6 boats subject to the signing off by a marine engineer.

Fit for purpose: History shows us that systems approved by DELWP and GM-Water in the past were not fit for purpose. A lot of work is needed to gain the confidence of boat owners regarding any new introduction that may be made for inclusion into new boats. If any system introduced, that is not fit for purpose, owners will simply refuse to have them fitted. Before introducing any GWS, testing should be done over a period of time in a practicable mode on a number of houseboats before licensing of the product.

2.

Most lake users want to contribute to the welfare of the lake. One way that lake users can contribute to the water quality of the lake is to use cleaning products that cause the least harm to the water. These products should be available at every marina with the emphasis on the best products that are the least harmful to the lake. These products need to be promoted by each marina to members within that marina on a regular basis insisting that these products are used. It is something that should be under the control of GM Water to monitor. DELWP must come up with products that fit this purpose.

There are a series of other ways to address this issue without requiring the retrospective fitting of Grey Water Systems. DELWP describes its own responsibility as “We’re focused on creating a liveable, inclusive and sustainable Victoria with thriving natural environments - where the community is at the centre of everything we do.” However, the current stakeholder engagement regarding the issue of water quality at Lake Eildon seeks solely to address grey water management on houseboats. This reduces the responsibility to a small subset of the wider Lake community with little to no visibility as to how DELWP seeks to address other inputs of surfactants and nutrients to the lake. The current discussions have not explored other means to control blue green algae, which is the fundamental concern of the HOC that a small group of people are being held responsible for a lake wide issue, with little evidence of the baseline impact of houseboats and a focus on a solution which is not comparative to the direct impact of houseboats grey water management. Without addressing and identifying specifically what houseboats contribute to the lake, it will continue to be difficult to accept a costly technology solution where there is no means to measure the success of implementation.

Houseboat owners are committed to positive changes in behaviour which can address the input of nutrients to the lake including using appropriate cleaning and personal products and wiping dishes and BBQ’s into bins. Houseboat owners would like to see more activity from DELWP that addresses root causes of algal blooms beyond grey water. This could include the introduction of ultrasonic algal control devices at marinas and areas where blooms are concentrated.