

## BOOSTING BC'S MARINE POTENTIAL THROUGH SAFETY AND ACCESS

### Issue

Inconsistent safety standards, limited enforcement, and infrastructure investment gaps are constraining safe, equitable access to British Columbia's multi-use waterways.

Without coordinated action across jurisdictions, overlapping industrial, commercial, and recreational activities will perpetuate human safety risks, stifle economic growth, and jeopardize BC's marine and waterfront businesses.

A unified provincial strategy for safety protocols and waterfront access is essential to sustain our marine economy long-term.

### Background

British Columbia is Canada's Pacific gateway — a maritime province where ocean and lakeside waterfronts drive trade, tourism, and community vitality. From major ports and shipyards providing high value industrial employment, to coastal tourism, fisheries, and recreation, the marine economy contributes billions annually to BC's GDP and sustains thousands of small businesses.

Waterfront access also supports community well being. Local boat launches, fishing areas, and Indigenous community hatcheries strengthen social cohesion and cultural connection to the water. Yet many communities face aging docks, unsafe congestion zones, or limited access to launch facilities, particularly for small craft and non motorized users.

Marine safety and access in BC are shaped by shared jurisdiction. The Federal Government, through Transport Canada and Port Authorities, regulates marine navigation, vessel operation, and commercial shipping lanes. However, the Province of British Columbia holds primary responsibility for community-level infrastructure, including public docks, ramps, and access points, as well as for coordinating emergency management and supporting recreation and tourism sectors. These overlapping responsibilities create gaps in enforcement, infrastructure funding, and consistent safety standards across waterways where industrial and recreational activity intersect.

A strong provincial leadership role is therefore critical. The Provincial Government can coordinate municipal, Indigenous, and federal partners to develop shared standards and direct capital investment. The Federal Government, in turn, can focus on enforcement consistency and regulatory alignment to reduce risk in heavily trafficked or mixed-use areas.

## Safety provides Opportunity

In June 2025, a tragic collision near Cates Park (Whey ah Wichen) in North Vancouver, between a speedboat and a recreational tow tube, resulted in the death of a child and serious injury to another<sup>1</sup>.

In November 2025, the container vessel Ever Sigma and a pleasure craft collided in English Bay near Vancouver<sup>2</sup>. Although the pleasure craft began to take on water, both vessels were operational, and fortunately no injuries were reported.

These incidents typify the challenges of shared waterways: commercial traffic, tidal currents, and heavy small craft recreation all converging in narrow inshore zones. Similar challenges are faced around lakeside communities across the province where marine operators and recreation users converge.

Transport Canada regulates navigation safety, but consistent slow zone enforcement, effective hazard signage, and shoreline safety planning vary widely across jurisdictions. A coordinated provincial framework, working with federal and local partners, can close these gaps and help prevent further tragedies.

Beyond the immediate human tragedy, these events pose wider risks to the community. They can lead to serious economic impacts for both large and small marine operators, major insurance liabilities, and reputational damage to British Columbia's tourism industry.

## Waterfront Access provides Opportunity

Operational reviews and academic studies on BC waterways (e.g., Okanagan Lake, Fraser River, and BC Hydro managed reservoirs) have identified boat launches operating at or near capacity during peak periods, with limited parking, staging space, and amenities constraining safe access for users.

- Okanagan (Kelowna, Okanagan Lake)<sup>3</sup>: A City of Kelowna operational review of municipal boating facilities describes high demand, queueing, and limited parking at key launches (e.g., Water Street and Cook Road), noting that queue spillover and parking constraints affect safety and access. The report documents peak hour launch counts in the 20+ boats per hour range at some sites, with limited space for staging and queueing, which effectively makes these launches operate at or near capacity in busy periods.
- Fraser River (Lower Mainland)<sup>4</sup>: A UBC study on recreational boat launching on the Fraser River found that many surveyed sites have only a single lane, minimal amenities, and very limited formal trailer parking, with parking availability identified as one of the main constraints on launch capacity. The study notes that at busy locations, demand can exceed practical capacity at peak times (e.g., during large

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://rcmp.ca/en/bc/north-vancouver/news/2025/06/north-vancouver-rcmp-investigate-fatal-boating-incident>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marinetraffic.com/zh/maritime-news/14/accidents/2025/12488/container-vessel-collides-with-recreational-vessel-in-englis>

<sup>3</sup> <https://kelownapublishing.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=43430>

<sup>4</sup> <https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/stream/pdf/52966/1.0075682/1>

salmon runs), and that users reported a desire for more access points in mid river reaches where launch options are sparse.

- Reservoirs and interior lakes (BC Hydro boat ramp studies)<sup>5</sup>: BC Hydro monitoring of public boat ramp use at reservoirs such as Kinbasket (Columbia/Southern Interior) shows that user satisfaction increased significantly after improvements to ramps and parking, implying that previous conditions (before upgrades) were inadequate for demand. These studies also highlight that water level fluctuations can render some ramps unusable for part of the season, effectively reducing available capacity and access.

Equitable access to safe marine infrastructure ensures all British Columbians — regardless of income, location, or ability — can benefit from the province’s coastal and inland waterways. Strategic investment in community boat launches, docks, and storage facilities will enable more small businesses, tourism operators, and local programs to participate in marine-based economic activity. It also strengthens Indigenous and community connections to cultural and subsistence fisheries.

Investing in safety and access together will unlock the full potential of BC’s waterfront economy, reinforce community resilience and expand local opportunity across the province.

## **THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS**

That the Provincial Government of British Columbia, in collaboration with the Federal Government, Port Authorities, Municipalities, and Indigenous Governments:

1. Establish a BC Marine Safety and Access Strategy to coordinate interjurisdictional action on multi use waterway safety, infrastructure planning, and regulatory clarity.
2. Create a dedicated provincial capital funding stream for community waterfront projects, including public ramps, docks, and storage, with priority for high traffic or underserved regions.
3. Work with Transport Canada and Port Authorities to ensure consistent slow zone enforcement, improved hazard signage, and clear safety protocols in mixed use and high-risk areas.
4. Review provincial support programs for small craft and recreation users to promote inclusive, safe, and sustainable marine access across BC.

Submitted by the *North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce*

Supported by TBD

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.bchydro.com/content/dam/BCHydro/customer-portal/documents/corporate/environment-sustainability/water-use-planning/southern-interior/CLBMON-14\\_Yr8\\_2019-7-22\\_.pdf](https://www.bchydro.com/content/dam/BCHydro/customer-portal/documents/corporate/environment-sustainability/water-use-planning/southern-interior/CLBMON-14_Yr8_2019-7-22_.pdf)