

# Safety Awareness Boating Alliance

## S.A.B.A.

**To: Members of Toronto City Council**

### **Agenda Item 2026.EX30.2 Toronto Personal Watercraft Safety Plan**

From: Safety Awareness Boating Alliance (S.A.B.A.)

Date: April 18, 2026

### **Subject: Strengthening Waterfront Safety Through Enforcement, Access Control, and Regulation of Unlicensed Charter Activity**

Dear Members of Council,

On behalf of the Safety Awareness Boating Alliance (S.A.B.A.) and the community of licensed, Transport Canada-compliant yacht charter operators, we strongly support the City's efforts to enhance waterfront safety through the Toronto Personal Watercraft Safety Plan.

We commend Council and staff for recognizing that Toronto's waterfront is a shared and increasingly congested public space—used by swimmers, paddlers, sailors, recreational boaters, and commercial passenger vessels alike. As highlighted in the City's own findings, unsafe operations, unpermitted commercial activity, and lack of enforcement coordination are creating escalating safety risks in nearshore and high-use areas.

While much of the current focus has been on personal watercraft (PWC), it is critical to recognize that **unlicensed charter boats carrying paying passengers represent a parallel and equally serious risk**—both from a life-safety and regulatory compliance perspective. During the previous 4 years, there have been at least 5 deaths related to these operators.

### **The Core Issue: Unlicensed Charter Boats Operating Outside the System**

The City's materials clearly identify that:

- Unpermitted commercial activity is already occurring on City parkland and beaches
- Enforcement actions have resulted in arrests, vessel seizures, and dozens of charges in a single weekend operation
- There is a multi-jurisdictional enforcement gap, requiring coordination between City, Toronto Police Marine Unit, Transport Canada, and the Toronto Port Authority

This environment allows illegal charter operators to:

- Board passengers from unauthorized public locations
- Avoid regulatory scrutiny
- Operate without proper licensing, training, insurance, or safety equipment

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These operators undermine safety, evade taxes and regulation, and create direct risk to human life.

### **What the City Can Do — Immediate, Practical Actions**

#### **1. Control and Regulate Boarding Access Points**

The most effective municipal lever is control of land-based access.

We strongly recommend:

- Strict prohibition and enforcement of commercial passenger boarding at all non-designated locations

Physical and operational control of:

- Public parks
- Beaches
- Informal docking areas

Clear designation of embarkation zones for authorized commercial use only.

Illegal operators depend on last-minute, informal boarding locations. Eliminating this access point is the single most effective deterrent.

#### **2. Install Clear, Prominent Signage at All Waterfront Access Points**

Consistent with City findings that education and signage support compliance, we recommend:

- Highly visible signage stating: “No Commercial Passenger Boarding”
- “Unlicensed Charter Activity Prohibited”
- Applicable fines and enforcement authority
- Fines that represent more than a license to operate

Placement at:

- Beaches
- Parks
- Boat launches
- Marina-adjacent public lands

Signage must be:

- Consistent
- Legally precise
- Supported by enforcement

#### **3. Increase and Sustain Enforcement (Land + Water)**

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Stakeholders overwhelmingly identified enforcement as the single most important factor in improving safety.

We strongly support:

### A. Increased Funding to Toronto Police Service Marine Unit

- Expand patrol capacity
- Increase proactive enforcement presence
- Support intelligence-led operations targeting illegal charters

### B. Continued and Expanded Joint Enforcement Operations

Building on successful initiatives (e.g., Project Sea-Doo Awareness & Response):

- Coordinate TPS Marine Unit + Municipal Licensing & Standards
- Focus on:
  - Illegal charter operators
  - Unauthorized boarding
  - Unsafe vessel operation

### C. Sustained, Visible Enforcement

A predictable and ongoing presence is required to change behavior. A well funded and staffed enforcement presence is required.

## 4. Strengthen Inter-Agency Coordination

The City has already recognized the need for a multi-jurisdictional approach.

We recommend formalizing:

- A standing enforcement coordination group including:
  - Toronto Police Marine Unit
  - Transport Canada
  - Toronto Port Authority
  - City of Toronto
  - S.A.B.A. (industry representation)

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This ensures:

- Real-time intelligence sharing
- Coordinated enforcement actions
- Consistent messaging to the public

### 5. Support Legal, Compliant Operators

Safety improves when:

- Legal operators are clearly identifiable
- Illegal operators are removed

We support the City's direction to:

- Explore designated, compliant launch sites for legitimate operators
- Provide clear regulatory pathways for compliant businesses

This creates:

- Accountability
- Traceability
- Higher safety standards

### About S.A.B.A.

The SAFETY AWARENESS BOATING ALLIANCE (**S.A.B.A.**) is an industry Not For Profit alliance representing licensed commercial vessel operators across Canada.

**S.A.B.A.** members:

- Operate under Transport Canada regulations
- Maintain commercial insurance and safety management systems
- Employ licensed, trained captains and crew
- Participate in industry best practices, safety training, and advocacy

**S.A.B.A.** leads maritime safety initiatives across Canada through a comprehensive strategy that combines community engagement, public education, and policy advocacy. Our work promotes national marine safety standards by raising awareness of illegal yacht charters and unlicensed operations that bypass critical requirements such as proper vessel certification, qualified crews, and emergency preparedness measures. Through our community programs, we operate in accordance with Canadian marine safety regulations while independently supporting accountability by documenting and reporting non-compliant operators. This balanced approach strengthens overall safety standards while preserving S.A.B.A.'s independent role as a public advocate for safer waterways

Its mandate is to:

- Promote safe, compliant passenger vessel operations
- Advocate for fair and enforceable regulations

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- Support public safety and industry integrity

### **Conclusion**

Toronto's waterfront is one of the City's most valuable public assets. It must be:

- Safe
- Fair
- Properly regulated

The City has already identified the key issues:

- Unpermitted commercial activity
- Unsafe vessel operations
- Need for stronger enforcement and coordination

The solution is clear:

- ✓ -Control access to boarding locations
- ✓ -Install clear signage
- ✓ -Fund and expand enforcement
- ✓ -Coordinate across agencies
- ✓ -Support compliant operators

By taking these steps, Council will:

- Protect public safety
- Restore fairness to the industry
- Strengthen confidence in Toronto's waterfront
- Encourage growth of an already vibrant economic zone on our waterfront.

We stand ready to work with Council, staff, and enforcement partners to support implementation.

Respectfully submitted,



**Safety Awareness Boating Alliance (S.A.B.A.)**

**Greg Swanson**

Chief Regulatory Officer

greg@saba.ngo

**Safety Awareness Boating Alliance**  
**S.A.B.A.**

416 270-7918