



Government Affairs

880 South Pickett Street, Alexandria, VA 22304
Phone: (703) 461-2878 x8363 Fax: (703) 461-2855
Website: www.BoatUS.com/gov
Email: govtaffairs@BoatUS.com

**Written Comments of the
Boat Owners Association of The United States**

**BoatU.S.
880 S. Pickett Street
Alexandria, VA 22304
703-823-9550 x8355**

Before the

**Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee of the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

United States House of Representatives

- regarding -

The Future of Federal Aids to Navigation

February 4, 2014

Written Comments of the Boat Owners Association of The United States
The Future of Federal Aids to Navigation
February 4, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the over 500,000 members of the Boat Owners Association of The United States (BoatU.S.) we respectfully ask that the following comments regarding the future of federal aids to navigation (ATONs) be included in the record.

While the U.S. Coast Guard's ATON mission is understandably primarily focused on supporting commercial shipping and fishing, we ask that the needs of more than 12 million registered recreational boats also be considered as the Committee reviews these programs. Unlike commercial vessels, recreational boats are much less likely to have sophisticated electronics needed to access some of the newer proposed systems such as virtual buoys projected on electronic charts. There is still a significant need for the tried and true physical ATONs in areas such as shallow draft harbors and channels where boaters operate.

Recreational boaters rely on a number of devices and aids to navigation to safely carryout their voyages. Paper charts, GPS, buoys, range markers and sound signals all contribute to their situational awareness on the water. Using multiple sources of information is one of the basic tenants of safe navigation. In fact, most nautical charts published by NOAA contain the warning **"The prudent mariner will not rely solely on any single aid to navigation."**

Physical Aids to Navigation

An act approved on August 7, 1789 by the 1st Congress was entitled "An ACT for the establishment and support of Light-Houses, Beacons, Buoys, and Public Piers."ⁱ As one of the oldest functions of the federal government, the need for physical aids continues today and requires Congressional support.

Recently we have seen proposals to remove some ATONs, often with little notice. For example, the Coast Guard recently proposed to no longer maintain Santa Barbara Island Light, Santa Catalina Island West End Light, Ship Rock Light, Catalina Harbor Light, Long Point Light, Santa Catalina Island East End Light and San Nicolas Island East End Light, replacing them with chart notations of preferred points of approach. For even a skilled, prudent California mariner familiar with these areas, this raises great concern. No longer will there be a warning light. Should they experience failure of the boat's electronics or battery system, they will be adrift without much to guide them to safe harbor.

Nautical Charts

The availability of accurate nautical charts with recent survey data is very important to our members. While the primarily focus of charting efforts is to support commercial operations, there is a backlog of need to survey areas with active recreational

boating populations. We consider NOAA's charting mission a core function and urge its continued support.

As an active participant in the NOAA's Hydrographic Services Review Panel, BoatU.S. advocates for continued innovation in the development of charting products. We have found the NOAA's Office of Coast Survey's (OCS) to be responsive to our input in these matters. For example, a recent proposal to no longer show the route or so-called "magenta line" on charts of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway was modified following comments from the boating community. OCS now plans to retain the "magenta line" while using verifiable crowd source information in conjunction with survey data to improve its depiction on charts.

We have also carefully reviewed the proposal for NOAA to change the way it prints nautical charts in favor of making them available through private "print on demand" services. While we are cautious regarding any potential reduction in service, we do not believe this change will detract from boating safety. Print on demand should provide charts with the latest updates. It is essential that NOAA continue to make nautical charts freely available online via PDF chart booklets, Electronic Navigation Charts (ENC) format and Raster Navigational Charts (RNC) format.

GPS and eLoran

There has been no technology more important to boaters over the past half century, than the development of GPS. The provision of precision navigation signals allows for many of the ground-breaking navigation devices we see today. Much like physical ATONs, we consider these electronic signals a crucial governmental function, deserving of Congressional support.

We also urge the Committee to remain vigilant in protecting the radio spectrum on which GPS relies. A recent effort to develop a new cellular telephone system that could have interfered with GPS signals posed a significant threat. It also highlighted the need to consider back-up systems. With the discontinuance of the United States Loran system in 2009, the country's mariners are highly dependent on the GPS signal. Development of systems such as eLoran should be explored.

Conclusion

A wide range aids to navigation, whether they are physical assets, electronic signals or chart data are crucial to boating safety. The federal government, through agencies such as the Coast Guard and NOAA, has a key role in ensuring the availability and consistency of these aids. We urge the Committee and Congress to provide these programs the resources required to meet the needs of the full range of maritime users, including recreational boaters. Although we understand the need for funding discipline, we want to emphasize that the removal of many of these ATONs could lead to a higher

Written Comments of the Boat Owners Association of The United States
The Future of Federal Aids to Navigation
February 4, 2014

numbers of boaters in distress, loss of property and a greater number of search and rescue operations. If, in fact, there is a reduction planned in ATONS, we'd suggest that BoatU.S. and our members nationwide might be able to help prioritize those most important in shallow, recreational areas.

On behalf of our members at BoatU.S., thank you for your consideration of our views. We welcome follow-up questions or inquiries regarding this or any other issues affecting recreational boating.

ⁱ "Acts passed at the first session of the Congress of the United States of America: begun and held at the city of New York, on Wednesday the fourth of March, in the year of 1789", page 78