



Environmental Impacts of Recreational Boating

A recent report on the environmental impacts of recreational boating shows that the major issue is the management of waste water. Further research appears necessary on how to equip all boats with on-board water treatment systems.

Marine ecosystems, which contain 90% of the biosphere, are subjected to ever-increasing pressures from human activities. Maritime transport is the 3rd source of pollution of these ecosystems, in particular via fuel combustion, waste release and noise emission.

In this context, a European team of consultants recently published a report on the environmental impacts of recreational nautical activities. They indicate that the main impacts are of 7 types:

- Hydrocarbon releases and other substances: their release into the environment by the engines of recreational and commercial small crafts (e.g. fishing, shipping and passenger small vessels) represent only a small share (2%) of overall hydrocarbon releases from land-based activities, maritime transport and other sea-based activities, and natural deposition.
- Oily and bilge water: unburnt or incompletely burnt fuel, particulates and traces of oil are released into the environment. If, globally, the quantity of these pollutants is small, they might accumulate locally, especially when boats are stationary, which results in an oil film on the surrounding water.
- Noise disturbance: in accordance with standards, the authorised level of noise emitted by new engines has been limited since 2006. However, when operated at speed close to the shore, engine noise is perceived as a nuisance in sensitive areas such as beaches or natural protected areas.
- Sewage and grey water: grey water (washing waters) from recreational craft contains a wide range of chemicals and fats and is often released into the sea. The systematic use on board and in ports of 100% biodegradable cleaning products (which are available on the market) would solve the problem of chemical pollution from grey water.
- Antifouling paints: they are used to prevent marine organisms developing on the surface of the hull. The biocide agents they contain might be toxic for the environment but their use is regulated.
- Physical damage to the environment: anchorages might be harmful where the seabed is sensitive. Public authorities are responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure (such as buoys) and guiding visitors, they should also prevent anchoring in sensitive areas.
- Depletion in fish stocks: the authors note that compared to overexploitation and illegal, unregulated and unreported commercial fishing, recreational fishing activities have no significant impact on fish stocks.

The authors highlight that for most of these impacts (hydrocarbon release, noise), increasing users' consciousness and awareness about the appropriate behaviours is key for minimizing the environmental impact. However, for waste water management, sustainable technologies have to be developed, taking into account the fact that equipping smaller boats with sewage tanks and on-board treatment systems is faced with challenging power and space constraints. The consultants point out that this issue is included in the EU Waterborne Technology Platform's Strategic Research Agenda.

Overall, they note that research is still necessary to continue assessing environmental impacts of boating and to identify solutions for the protection of the marine environment. They also call for a harmonisation of European and American regulations, as the boating market is international.

For more information: www.ecni.org/fichiers/0709%20ImpactNautisme_EN.pdf (2007, p.34)

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Additional information: Successful LIFE projects aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of boating and maritime transport include the Greek ICZM project (LIFE00 ENV/GR/000751). The project marked out restricted sailing areas with buoys and gradually improved the control of recreation and visitor boats within the national marine park of Zakynthos, in order to help reduce the threats to turtles (see [project summary](#), [website](#) and [layman report](#)). The e-COPOINT project (LIFE00 ENV/F/000630) designed an Internet-based tool to ease communications between those involved in the control and management of ship-generated waste (see [project summary](#), [website](#) and [layman report](#)).

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