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Committee Secretariat
Transport and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

ti.legislation@parliament.govt.nz

To Whom it may concern

Northland Regional Council is grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Life Jackets for Children and Young Persons Bill that has been presented to the House of Representatives. We recognise the importance of improving water safety outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi across Aotearoa, particularly given Northland's extensive coastline, harbours, and inland waterways.

Our region has a strong connection to the marine environment, and recreational boating is a significant activity for residents and visitors alike. Tragically, incidents on the water continue to occur, and the Council supports measures that enhance safety and reduce preventable harm.

This submission outlines Northland Regional Council's perspective on the proposed requirements for life jacket use, highlights practical considerations for implementation, and suggests ways to ensure the Bill achieves its intended safety outcomes while remaining workable for communities and enforcement agencies.

Summary of Submission Points

This submission highlights opportunities to strengthen the Bill and ensure consistency with existing safety frameworks:

1. The Bill, as currently drafted, does not align with existing regional navigational safety bylaws and sets a lower standard of safety. This will create inconsistencies with rules already in place.
2. The Bill introduces practical challenges in determining the age of persons onboard vessels.
3. The Bill does not adequately address the key safety concerns identified by national water safety bodies.

Submission Points

1. Consistency with Regional Bylaws

Northland Regional Council (NRC) has responsibility for navigation safety in Northland waters under the Maritime Transport Act 1994. This responsibility is managed through enforcement of National Maritime Safety Rules, including Part 91 and the establishment of bylaws, which align with maritime rules and reflect the latest safety advice.

The Navigation Safety Bylaw is limited in scope to navigational safety and covers activities such as boating, moorings, board sports, jet skis, diving, and other water-based activities across the region's harbours, inlets, estuaries, and coastal areas.

The NRC Navigation Safety Bylaw was last reviewed and adopted by councillors in September 2025. It continues to require the compulsory wearing of personal flotation devices (PFDs) for all persons in vessels of six metres or less while underway. Out of the 14 navigational safety bylaws across New Zealand, 10 stipulate the compulsory wearing of lifejackets in vessels under 6m, regardless of age. Out of the 4 exceptions 3 have signalled their intent to introduce a similar rule at their next bylaw review.

For many years, harbourmasters across New Zealand, along with other organisations, have sought an amendment to Maritime Rule Part 91 to extend this requirement nationally, making the wearing of PFDs compulsory for all persons in vessels of six metres or less while underway. There is substantial and consistent data, year on year, showing that most recreational boating fatalities occur in vessels of this size. The most at-risk group is males over 45 years of age.

In incidents where a vessel under six metres is swamped or capsized, outcomes are significantly improved when all persons onboard are wearing a PFD, regardless of age.

Relief sought:

- Northland Regional Council supports the intention of the Lifejackets for Children and Young Persons Bill as a step towards improving safety. However, we submit that the Bill does not go far enough. To achieve meaningful safety improvements, the requirement to wear PFDs should apply to all persons in vessels of six metres or less while underway.

2. Practical Considerations for Enforcement

The Bill proposes that all persons under the age of 15 to wear a lifejacket on vessels under six metres. While the intent is strongly supported, there are significant practical challenges in enforcing an age-based requirement set at 15 years of age.

Difficulty in Verifying Age

Children and young persons under 15 rarely carry photo identification. The most common forms of ID in New Zealand for young people are a driver licence and an 18+ card; however:

- A driver licence is only available from age 16.
- A Kiwi Access Card (previously known as 18+ card) is not available to those under 18 years of age.
- The remaining commonly available option is a passport, which is susceptible to water damage and regardless is highly unlikely to be carried on a small vessel.

This creates a scenario where enforcement officers have no reliable means to confirm age. Regional councils have limited options to determine age, and any enforcement action would rely heavily on verbal confirmation, which is not robust or enforceable.

The inability to verify age introduces uncertainty and inconsistency in enforcement, undermining the effectiveness of the rule and potentially creating conflict between enforcement officers and vessel operators.

Does Not address the key risk

Statistics consistently show that older males in vessels under 6m are the highest risk and most represented in fatalities. It would seem more sensible then to include all persons in vessels under 6m in the recommendation to wear lifejackets.

Relief Sought:

To address these challenges, Northland Regional Council recommends that the lifejacket requirement apply to **all persons on vessels under six metres**, regardless of age. This approach:

- Removes ambiguity and enforcement difficulties.
- Provides a clear, consistent rule that enhances safety for all.
- Aligns with the strong public interest in lifejacket use identified through previous bylaw submissions.
- Aligns with almost all of the regional navigational safety bylaws in place around the country.
- Sets a good role model example from those responsible persons in charge of the vessel.

Signed on Behalf of Northland Regional Council



Jonathan Gibbard
Chief Executive Officer