For Immediate Release

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RBOC Sponsoring California Vessel Operator Certification Bill

Sacramento [February 24] - the boater advocacy group Recreational Boaters of California [RBOC] is sponsoring AB 1458 [Villines], legislation introduced on February 23 that would phase-in a requirement that all vessel operators pass a test and obtain a certificate that is valid for the life of the boater.

RBOC President Lenora Clark explains that the intent of the legislation is “to ensure that vessel operators have the necessary knowledge on the laws and regulations that apply to the operation of vessels, through certification, in order to reduce accidents, injuries and fatalities.”

Added Clark: “We are very pleased that Assembly Member Villines has introduced this bill. Our dialogue with the boating community is showing that most boaters would appreciate a program that is balanced, that does not create a bloated new government bureaucracy, that provides a lifetime certificate as opposed to a license, that minimizes any costs to be borne by boaters, and that provides some measure of assurance that the other person on the waterway will have the necessary knowledge regarding the laws and regulations that apply to boat operation.”

RBOC is working in a leadership role together with several boating stakeholder groups and interests. These include organizations comprised of boat manufacturers and dealers, public and private marinas, harbor masters and port captains, boating law enforcement, coast guard providers, and others. This effort also carries forward the discussions that the Department of Boating and Waterways [DBW] initiated in 2006. The text of the legislation as introduced incorporates all of those discussions, and it is RBOC’s intent to continue this productive process as the bill moves forward in the State Legislature.

AB 1458 would enact a new Section 670 in the Harbors and Navigation Code, requiring persons operating vessels to have in their possession a vessel operator certificate issued by the California Department of Boating and Waterways. The department would issue certificates to persons who provide the department with proof that the person has passed a vessel operator test approved by the department. The certificate would be valid for the life of the individual.

The requirement would be phased-in as follows:

January 1, 2011 - All vessel operators twenty years old and younger.
January 1, 2012 - All vessel operators twenty-five years old and younger.

continued
January 1, 2013 - All vessel operators thirty years old and younger.
January 1, 2014 - All vessel operators forty years old and younger.
January 1, 2015 - All vessel operators forty-five years old and younger.
January 1, 2016 - All vessel operators fifty years old and younger.
January 1, 2017 - All vessel operators sixty years old and younger.
January 1, 2018 - All vessel operators.

The legislation also contains provisions providing for on-line testing, specific requirements for operators renting vessels, the operation of boats by minors under adult supervision, funding for the certificate program, an infraction penalty for violators accompanied by increasing fines for subsequent conviction, and an annual report on the total number of certificates issued as well as the correlation between certificates and the number of accidents, injuries and fatalities.

Recreational Boaters of California [RBOC] is the nonprofit governmental advocacy organization that works to protect and enhance the interests of the state’s recreational boaters before the legislative and executive branches of state and local government.

RBOC was formed as a statewide organization in 1968 and from that date forward has continued its commitment to promoting the enjoyment, protection, and responsible use of our waterways.

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