
Legislative Update

By Rob Nixon, Statehouse Strategies

The MTA/NJ has served as the voice in Trenton of the recreational boating community and boating industry for many years. Lately, however, the scale and range of issues being debated at all levels of State government has led the Association into more advanced deliberations than ever before. Great strides are being made to enhance the industry and its impact on the State's tourism economy which hopefully will yield a number of benefits to Association members and the boating public.

The debate over the new public access regulations is a perfect example of the MTA/NJ's advanced role in shaping policy in the State. The Association has taken a lead role in the development of new Public Access rules since developing the law that placed a moratorium on the old public access regulations that were much maligned by marina owners. Led by Association Executive Director Danko, the MTA/NJ has been successful in crafting reasonable proposals for the DEP on public access at marinas. But most importantly, by proposing comprehensive and realistic reforms to the existing rules that recognize the unique character of marinas in New Jersey, the Association has stood out as an industry expert to the DEP and interested parties in and out of State government. Developing a reputation for serious policy making should benefit the Association and its members as other serious issues arise.

The Association has also maintained an active legislative agenda over the past few months. The establishment of a free saltwater fishing registry in February represented a success for an MTA/NJ supported bill. The Association is also engaged in talks with legislative leaders about revising the law regarding abandoned vessels. The recently passed abandoned vessel law contained language that requires a court order to remove a boat considered abandoned. This process takes significant time and resources and adds greater impediments to removing an abandoned vessel from the water. The Association has drafted and had introduced Senate Bill 2909 (Van Drew) that would eliminate this mandate and reestablish a clear standard run through the Motor Vehicle Commission. Moving this legislation is a major priority for the MTA/NJ.

The Association is also sharing policy proposals with the Lieutenant Governor about establishing an Office of Boating and Waterways as a way to reduce conflicting government oversight of boating, to enhance incentives to promoting boating in New Jersey and to preserve key programs like I BOAT NJ from raids to take its funding. Meetings are expected to continue on this matter into the summer.

The State Legislature has until June 30th to pass the State Budget. The budget proposed by Governor Christie contains no new business taxes. The Legislature must introduce and adopt a Budget bill but isn't expected to do so until the last two weeks of June. The Association will analyze the proposal for its impact on boating and small business and will alert members on any items of concern.