

New boaties join the queue for pens

News: 15-March-07 by Julie-anne Sprague

The Royal Perth Yacht Club may have won a lengthy battle with the Swan River Trust to develop more boat pens at its Crawley annexe, but its general manager Stuart Walton says the additional capacity will do little to solve a severe shortage of berths in Perth.

The RPYC will start work on a 50-pen extension in two to three months, extending the number of pens under its management to 500.

The club had wanted to develop 100 pens but its application was rejected by the trust. RPYC recently won an appeal against that decision by the Department of Environment and Conservation but it has been restricted to developing an extra 50 pens.

But Mr Walton said he was still considering cutting off the club's waiting list because RPYC could not keep up with demand.

"We are getting three to four phone calls [for pens] per day at the moment," Mr Walton said. "We are finding that we get people in their 40s and 50s who have some spare cash and want to realise that dream of owning a boat, but now they can't because they have nowhere to put it."

He said people with bigger yachts could be waiting between five and 10 years to secure a pen at RPYC.

In three to four months, RPYC will move some boats from Crawley to its Fremantle annex and start the construction process.

Other yachting clubs contacted by WA Business News said Perth's pen shortage had hit a crisis point, and they too were considering cutting off waiting lists despite their own expansion plans and the development of 300 pens at Port Coogee.

In a bid to secure pens, boat owners and prospective boat owners are offering cash upfront to buy pens or are attempting to buy a boat in an existing pen.

However, those efforts are largely coming unstuck at a club level because the majority of yacht clubs lease the pens to registered boat owners and stipulate that any change of boat ownership requires club approval. This often means the newcomer is stripped of the pen and dropped to the bottom of the waiting list.

Most clubs also only allow paid-up members of the club to join the waiting list.

Several clubs said pen fees had only been increasing in line with inflation because they were interested in serving existing members and not profiting from surging demand.



UPHILL BATTLE: Royal Perth Yacht Club general manager Stuart Walton says the club's plan to develop 50 new boat pens will do little to soak up the serious demand for berths. *Photo: Jemma Howard*



However, a small private pen market has been operating at The Fremantle Sailing Club after it sold 550 of its 657 pens in the 1980s following a restructure of the club's finances.

"The prices of those pens have been rising dramatically," FSC chief executive officer Dennis Allison said. "They have been going up like house prices."

He said that, while the FSC was in the midst of planning significant extensions to its facilities, it too was considering cutting off its waiting list.

"People who are serious about wanting a pen should get on the list sooner rather than later," Mr Allison told WA Business News.

The Flying Squadron Yacht Club in Dalkeith is also planning to increase the number of pens it has on offer, but, as of a few weeks ago, it closed its waiting list to the general public.

FSYC general manager Damian O'Donnell said planned pen increases by some of Perth's yacht clubs was not enough to soak up current and projected demand.

"In my investigations it was suggested to me that that if hundreds of pens were available right now they would be taken up within a week of being advertised," he said.

Mr O'Donnell said he had received interest from boat brokers prepared to pay "millions of dollars" to fund pen development at FSYC in order to gain first rights to the pens.

Mr O'Donnell said the club would put a development plan to a member vote within months, with the intention of constructing new pens by early next year.

Several Perth yacht clubs contacted by WA Business News said they were averse to large-scale developments merely to accommodate the needs of people with big boats looking for storage space.

Several operators said the solution to the pen shortage could be found in a privately backed marina development.

The City of Nedlands is currently considering a proposal to develop a marina at Swanbourne.

A spokesman for Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan did not respond to questions from WA Business News.