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Senators Barbara Boxer and Bill Nelson Committed to Fixing Ballast Water Permitting Issue for Boaters *Support from Senate Leaders a Victory for Nation's Boaters*

WASHINGTON — The nation's 73 million boaters gained a tremendous victory yesterday in the U.S. Senate in their fight against complex, costly and unnecessary permitting as a result of a court decision last fall. During a Senate vote on ballast water legislation Thursday afternoon, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) unequivocally committed themselves to resolve the issue before the September 2008 permitting deadline and protect the U.S. recreational boating industry, boaters and anglers across the country.

“A recent court ruling has cast doubt on whether recreational boaters—people going out for a day of fishing, or waterskiing—can continue to operate without a permit from the EPA,” said Senator Bill Nelson. “They've never been required to have such a permit, and there's no reason for that to change. You shouldn't have to ask the EPA before you take your boat out on the water.”

Environmental groups and several state Attorney Generals successfully argued in a U.S. District Court case last fall that ballast water should not be exempted from government regulation as a pollutant because it introduces harmful invasive species into U.S. waters. Large ocean-going ships use ballast water for stability, taking on water to weigh the vessel down.

Unfortunately for the nation's 73 million boaters, the court's ruling also includes boat engine cooling water, bilge water, gray water and common deck runoff—none of which was considered by the court, as the case focused solely on commercial ship ballast water. The court has directed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to develop a new, complex and costly permitting scheme for the nation's estimated 18 million boats by September 2008.

“I don't think they should have to get these permits,” said Senator Boxer, Chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

“I agree (with Senator Nelson) and will support that recreational boating and sport fishing should be allowed to continue as they always have—without individual NPDES permits,” Boxer said, referring to national pollutant discharge elimination system (NPDES) historically associated with large industrial and municipal sites. “So we've decided that our offices will begin work immediately to find a legislative solution that accomplishes both of these goals as soon as possible, and no later than next September.”

“Florida has almost a million boaters...it's vitally important to them, and to me, that we continue a reasonable, commonsense exemption for recreational boating and sport fishing,” Senator Nelson said.

“The clock is running out for the nation’s boaters; without congressional action boaters will be trapped in this unprecedented and costly ballast water permitting scheme,” said Thom Dammrich, president of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), the nation’s largest trade association representing the \$39.5 billion U.S. recreational boating industry. “We welcome and applaud the strong resolve of Senators Boxer and Nelson to solve the issue before the September 2008 deadline.”

NMMA, leading a collation of boating and outdoor recreation partners, has created a grassroots website to mobilize the boating community on the ballast water permitting issue. It’s estimated spending by recreational boaters is responsible for some 855,000 U.S. jobs.

“I’d urge every boater and everyone employed in the boating industry to visit www.BoatBlue.org to learn more about this issue, and to make their voices heard with their Senators and Representative,” Dammrich said.

“I’ve committed with Senator Nelson to make sure we fix this before that time,” Senator Boxer said, referring to the court ordered September 2008 permitting scheme deadline. “We are going to make sure that individual boaters do not need permits—that’s as simple as it gets. That’s my commitment, and it will happen.”

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