

**DEPARTMENT OF BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND ATTRACTIONS REPORT**

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PROPOSAL           | Installation of a floating pontoon with sauna and its ongoing operation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| LOCATION           | Swan Yacht Club - River reserve - Lot 300 on Plan 47450 (Reserve 48325) - Riverside Road, East Fremantle                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| COST               | \$50,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| APPLICANT          | Swan Yacht Club                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| LANDOWNER          | Swan River Trust                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| LOCAL GOVERNMENT   | Town of East Fremantle                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| MRS CLASSIFICATION | Waterways                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| DECISION TYPE      | Part 5, <i>Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006</i> , Ministerial Determination                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| ATTACHMENTS        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Swan Yacht Club Part 5 application (23 pages)</li> <li>2. External referral responses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Town of East Fremantle (2 pages)</li> <li>b) Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure (2 pages)</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Swan Yacht Club River reserve lease area (1 page)</li> </ol> |
| RECOMMENDATION     | <b>APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) has received an application from the Swan Yacht Club (the Club) for the installation and ongoing operation of a sauna facility (the sauna) within the Club's River reserve lease area at Riverside Road, East Fremantle. The proposed sauna is to be publicly accessible and positioned on a floating pontoon moored to the Club's Jetty No. 3 (refer to Attachment 1, and Figures 1 and 2).
- 1.2 The subject land is reserved as Waterways under the Metropolitan Region Scheme. Jetty 3 attaches to land reserved as Regional Open Space that forms part of the Club's land lease area.
- 1.3 The proposed development is on land entirely within the Swan Canning development control area (DCA) and therefore requires approval from the Minister for the Environment in accordance with Part 5 of the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM Act).
- 1.4 This report has been prepared in accordance with section 76 of the SCRM Act.
- 1.5 The proposal is to establish a sauna as a commercial enterprise to be available for public use.
- 1.6 The sauna was installed at the Club in August 2025 as part of a six-month trial approved under Regulation 13 of the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Regulations 2007 for temporary structures. The trial period has been extended for an additional six months to allow for the consideration of this development application. The most recent extension expires on 6 August 2026.



**Figure 1:** Aerial view of the sauna within the Club's River reserve lease



**Figure 2:** Sauna (circled in red) within the Club's River reserve lease

## **2. CONSULTATION**

2.1 In accordance with section 73 of the SCRM Act, the application was referred to relevant stakeholders for a period of 42 days commencing on 26 November 2025 with an invitation to make a submission.

2.2 The following submissions were received:

### **Town of East Fremantle**

2.3 The Town of East Fremantle (the Town) gives in-principle support for the ongoing operation of the sauna and recommends the water generated from the sauna's external rinse-off showers be contained or piped off the pontoon to the local sewer network.

2.4 DBCA considers the shower water generated by the very short (30 seconds) 'rinse-off' does not pose any water quality issues for the river.

2.5 The Town's comments are provided in Attachment 2a.

### **Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure – Navigational Safety**

2.6 The Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure (DTMI) has advised it has no objections to the sauna subject to the inclusion of appropriate standard conditions requiring that all on-water operations and activities must be conducted in accordance with the relevant marine legislative provisions.

2.7 Three other standard DTMI conditions concerning the construction (installation) of the floating pontoon and sauna are no longer considered relevant as the structure is in place and no further in-river works are required.

2.8 DTMI's comments are provided in Attachment 2b.

### **Public consultation – submissions on application**

2.9 In accordance with section 74 of the SCRM Act, the Club's application was advertised on the DBCA website for a period of 14 days commencing on 27 November 2025 until 11 December 2025 with an invitation to make a submission.

2.10 No submissions were received.

### **Submissions on draft report**

2.11 In accordance with the requirements of section 75 of the SCRM Act, a draft report and proposed recommendations were provided to the applicant and the relevant stakeholders being the Town and DTMI, as well as anyone who made a submission under section 74 of the SCRM Act (noting that, for this application, there were no submissions).

2.12 The draft report and proposed recommendations were also published on DBCA's website between 2 April 2026 and 20 April 2026 with an invitation for public submissions.

2.13 No submissions were received.

## **3. RELEVANT POLICIES AND PLANS**

- State Planning Policy 2.9 – Water (SPP 2.9)
- Corporate Policy Statement No. 42 – Planning for Land Use, Development and Permitting Affecting the Swan Canning Development Control Area (Policy 42)

- Corporate Policy Statement No. 43 – Planning for Marinas, Yacht Clubs and Aquatic Clubs in the Swan Canning Development Control Area (Policy 43)
- Corporate Policy Statement No. 44 – Planning for Jetties in the Swan Canning Development Control Area (Policy 44)
- River Protection Strategy for Derbal Yirragan Djarlgarro (Draft)

#### 4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- Environmental protection
- Public access and community benefit
- Visual amenity
- Materials and use of plastics
- River reserve lease
- Signage and lighting
- Navigational safety

#### 5. BACKGROUND

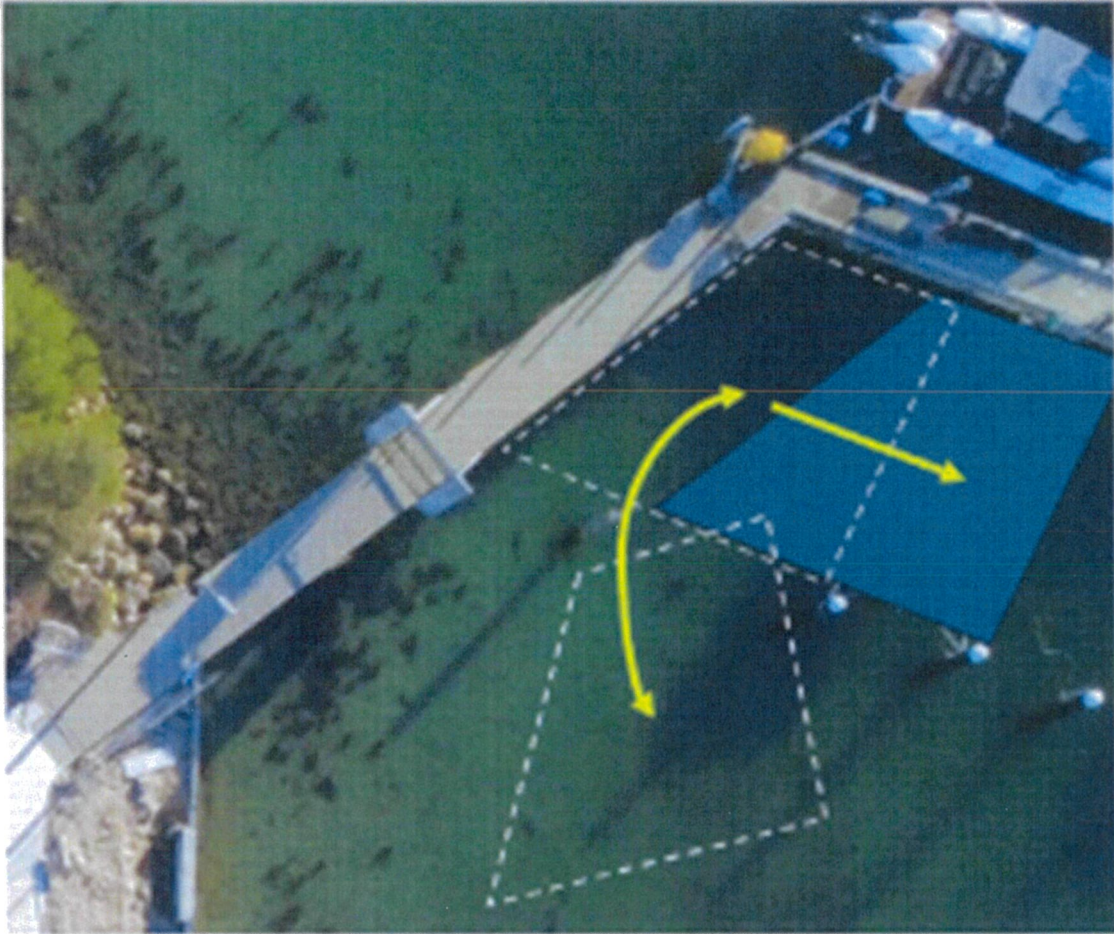
- 5.1 The sauna can accommodate up to 10 people at a time and can be booked online, via the operator's (Drift Saunas) webpage [www.driftsaunas.com.au](http://www.driftsaunas.com.au), by Club members or anyone from the broader community.
- 5.2 The sauna is owned and operated by a private company, Drift Saunas. The Club is encouraged by the popularity of the sauna and its use by both Club members and the broader community. In addition, patrons have included visitors from interstate and overseas, demonstrating the potential for such facilities to attract and encourage tourism (Table 1). Accordingly, the Club is seeking approval for the installation and ongoing operation of the sauna.

|                                      | TOTALS (at 16 January 2026)       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Bookings</b>                      | 1896                              |
| <b>First time users</b>              | 1157                              |
| <b>Highest individual attendance</b> | 24 visits (by one customer)       |
| <b>Swan Yacht Club members</b>       | used 110 times by 44 club members |
| <b>Average weekly sessions</b>       | 115                               |

**Table 1** – Sauna patronage figures between 6 August 2025 and 16 January 2026

- 5.3 The Club has re-purposed three vacant boat pens at the landward end of Jetty No. 3 to accommodate the floating pontoon with sauna. These pens were chosen as their location allows access to the sauna from the jetty gangway, does not interfere with the day-to-day movements of other watercraft and allows the pontoon to be moved out of position should the need arise (refer to **Figure 3**).
- 5.4 Proposed opening hours for the sauna are 5:30am to 7:30pm.
- 5.5 Access to the pontoon and sauna is via Jetty No. 3's pedestrian gangway with entry controlled through the jetty's security gate. Drift Saunas has staff on-site during opening hours to assist customers and provide access through the jetty security gate.
- 5.6 As the facility is already in situ and operational, no further installation or in-river work is required.
- 5.7 DBCA has previously approved a sauna on land within the DCA at Point Walter. Wellness activities such as saunas, cold plunges and spas are gaining in popularity nationally, particularly in and around natural areas such as rivers, lakes and foreshore land.

- 5.8 This sauna proposal is the first on-water commercial activity of its kind within an existing River reserve lease area to be considered by DBCA. The proposal is likely to require amendments to the Club's River reserve lease to accommodate the location and operation of the sauna, however, these amendments to the lease can only be progressed if development approval is granted.



**Figure 3:** Pathway for removal of the floating pontoon on Jetty No. 3

## 6. DISCUSSION

### Environmental protection

- 6.1 Policy 42 aims to ensure that land use and development on and adjacent to the river system maintains and enhances the quality and amenity of the river environment. It is considered the operation of the sauna facility and short shower rinses will have no discernable short or long-term detrimental impact on the foreshore and waterway, including no riverbed disturbance, no water quality or foreshore degradation, no noise impacts on wildlife or disruption to public access and safety.
- 6.2 The sauna includes two external shower heads (refer to **Figure 4**), attached to the sauna structure, for very short (up to 30 seconds) showers using water supplied via the jetty's potable water outlets connected to the Club's scheme water. Consistent with conditions of the temporary permit approval, the sauna prohibits the use of soaps, shampoos or other chemicals during showering, preventing any risk of water quality contamination. No shower drainage infrastructure (to the sewer network for example) is considered necessary as the flows are minimal and the shower water should be free from any contaminants.
- 6.3 Cleaning of the sauna is by hand with a spray bottle and wipe and will not be flushed or washed in any way that may enter the river.



**Figure 4:** Shower facilities attached to the sauna

#### **Public access and community benefit**

- 6.4 Policy 43 recognises that yacht clubs, marinas and other aquatic clubs have long been established on the Swan Canning river system and provide safe on-water pen moorings and opportunities for recreational boating and water sports. The policy encourages clubs to conduct activities that, where practical enhance and support public access to and use of the foreshore.
- 6.5 Policy 43 also provides for a diversity of recreational uses, including low-cost and low-impact aquatic activities and provides guidance for decision making authorities to ensure that Club facilities or uses do not adversely affect the river system or unnecessarily exclude or restrict other acceptable public uses.
- 6.6 Policy 45 requires that proposed development enhance public access to, and enjoyment of the river environment. The floating sauna is considered consistent with Policy 45 as it provides a recreational experience accessible to the broader community, not only boat owners, and contributes to activation of the foreshore. Public access along the foreshore has not been impeded, noting the sauna is located on an existing jetty that is within a designated River reserve lease boundary.
- 6.7 The draft River Protection Strategy (RPS) for Derbal Yirragan Djarlgarro (Swan Canning river system) provides a coordinated approach to protect and enhance the ecological and community benefits and amenity of the Swan and Canning rivers. The RPS acknowledges the river system as an integral part of the Perth lifestyle and provides a multitude of benefits to the social, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing of the community.
- 6.8 Strategies 16 and 17 of the RPS seek, in part, to improve community access, enjoyment and connectivity through provision and management of strategically located facilities, (and public spaces and assets), and support commercial operations and riverside events that enhance the community's use and enjoyment of the river.

- 6.9 It is recognised that the positioning of the sauna over water, with views out to the river and yacht club boats, and surrounding foreshore, creates a unique experience that adds to the enjoyment of the sauna facility. Overall, the operational sauna facility has been and continues to be a popular activity, increasing visitation to the foreshore and introducing, at a local scale, a new low-impact recreational activity to the foreshore.

### Visual amenity

- 6.10 Policy 42 and SPP 2.9 require that development proposals protect and enhance the visual character of the Swan Canning River system with emphasis on the importance of maintaining views to and from the river and preserving the natural landscape character and sense of place.
- 6.11 The sauna itself is a small structure 5m long, 2.5m wide and approximately 2.7m tall. The sauna is no bigger than one of the larger vessels moored in the Club. The chosen location on Jetty 3 (the western-most jetty) does not significantly impact any views through to the river and does not detract from the existing amenity values of the Club or the river at this location (refer to **Figure 5**).



*Figure 5: Location of the sauna with the backdrop of moored boats behind*

### Materials and use of plastics

- 6.12 Policy 44 states that applications for jetties need to demonstrate they are minimising and managing adverse impacts on the ecological health of the Swan Canning River system.
- 6.13 DBCA is considering the potential long-term and cumulative environmental impacts of using plastic materials on the ecological health of the Riverpark. All plastic products are known to break down over time and can release microplastic particles into the environment.
- 6.14 The pontoon surface is comprised of NewTechWood, a composite decking material being 95 per cent recycled materials, including reclaimed wood fibres (combination of hard and soft wood fibres) and recycled high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic. Individual decking boards (including their inter-connecting groves) are fully capped with a polymer shell for added durability which aids in reducing and preventing degradation of the decking via mechanical wear or environmental influences.

- 6.15 In addition, the product advertising material notes the pontoon decking has UV protection and resistance elements to prevent fading and degradation, has low maintenance requirements (no requirements for sealing, staining, or painting) and a manufacturer's warranty of 10 to 15 years.
- 6.16 The sauna module is comprised of wood material. Specifically, it comprises thermally modified 'Shou Sugi Ban Jarrah Black' external cladding. This is a traditional Japanese method of charring timber with fire which results in a striking black carbon layer producing a protected material that requires less maintenance. The sauna's internal walls comprise fine sawn cladding, and natural vacoa pine wood material fixed to the walls and ceiling. The external roof is Colorbond® steel (colour 'Monument') with a guttering system.
- 6.17 As the pontoon decking comprises a wood-fibre and HDPE composite material, the applicant will be required to monitor, maintain and remove the structures or materials prior to it becoming a source of microplastics. A condition of approval, including an annual maintenance and inspection plan, is included.

#### **River reserve lease**

- 6.18 The proposed sauna is located within a current River reserve lease to the Club (total lease area 30,804m<sup>2</sup>) which is shown in Attachment 3. Leases provide a mechanism to ensure such facilities or uses do not adversely affect the river system or unnecessarily exclude or restrict other acceptable public uses. The purpose of the current lease is for *The operation of a yacht club, including the provision of jetty facilities, service facilities and the mooring of private vessels.*
- 6.19 Due to the commercial nature of the sauna, and the external ownership of the facility, the Club's River reserve lease will need to be amended to accommodate the commercial use of the sauna. Amendments may include changes to the lease wording relating to the purpose of the lease, the specific inclusion of a commercial operation within the Club's lease area, and/or any re-calculation of rent for the area occupied by the sauna facility.
- 6.20 A condition is therefore included to require the necessary amendments to the lease to accommodate the operation of the sauna.

#### **Signage and lighting**

- 6.21 Policy 45 requires approval for any signage installed within the Swan Canning DCA. The application seeks approval for:
- a) the placement of the name 'Drift Saunas' on the eastern wall of the sauna structure with soft backlighting; and
  - b) use of one (1) mobile A-frame sign positioned within proximity of the sauna with dimensions of 800 mm (H) × 400 mm (W) advertising the sauna's activity.
- 6.22 The signage design and sizing is minimal, low impact and is therefore considered acceptable.
- 6.23 No additional lighting is required as the sauna facility will only operate during daylight hours, and the jetties have existing lighting in place.

#### **Navigational safety**

- 6.24 The sauna has been positioned at the landward end of Jetty No. 3 to avoid interference with the safe movement of vessels in nearby pens and to ensure an adequate fairway distance is maintained for watercraft movements.

- 6.25 The positioning is consistent with DTMI's requirement that all on water operations and activities must be conducted in accordance with the relevant marine legislative provisions.

## **7. SWAN RIVER TRUST**

- 7.1 In accordance with section 75(3A) of the SCRM Act, the Swan River Trust considered DBCA's draft report at its meeting of 10 February 2026. The Trust resolved to advise the Director General of DBCA that it supports the recommendation to approve the application subject to the conditions outlined in DBCA's draft report.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 It is recognised that saunas and other wellness facilities are gaining in popularity, particularly in nature-based locations. The connection to water with an in-river experience is appealing, as well as views over the river and a more relaxed setting.
- 8.2 The sauna is considered to be low-impact, avoids any ground disturbance and can be removed if and when required. Further, the sauna has the potential to enhance public interaction with the Swan River and support healthy, nature-based recreational opportunities.
- 8.3 For these reasons, the sauna has been given temporary approval for a trial. The sauna has been successful and operational since August 2025 without any complaints or issues. Therefore, the proposal is recommended for ongoing approval on the condition that the River reserve lease is amended to accommodate the use prior to commencement of operations under this approval, and subject to other appropriate conditions and advice.

## **9. RECOMMENDATION – APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS**

That the Director General of DBCA recommends that the Minister for the Environment approves the proposal for a floating sauna at the Swan Yacht Club in the Swan River, Lot 300 on Plan 47450 (Reserve 48325) as described in the application received on 18 November 2025, subject to the following:

### **CONDITIONS**

1. The applicant shall conduct the sauna facility in accordance with the submitted plans.
2. Prior to commencement of operations under this approval, the existing River reserve lease is to be amended to allow for the approved use of the sauna facility (**Advice Note 2**).
3. No soaps, shampoos or chemicals are permitted to be used within the sauna or shower facility.
4. Monitoring and maintenance of the approved pontoon structure shall be undertaken in accordance with a maintenance and inspection plan which is to be submitted to and approved by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (**Advice Note 3**).
5. Appropriate measures are to be taken to ensure no permanent damage to the foreshore, riverbank or waterway (including vegetation and infrastructure) occurs beyond the scope of the authorised works. Should any inadvertent damage occur, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is to be notified immediately, and the area remediated at the applicant's expense (**Advice Note 4**).
6. All users of the sauna facility shall have access to the Swan Yacht Club's parking area(s) whilst using the sauna or other services offered by the Swan Yacht Club.

## ADVICE NOTES

1. Notifications and documents required as a condition of this approval can be emailed to [rivers.planning@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:rivers.planning@dbca.wa.gov.au).
2. Regarding **Condition 2**, the applicant is advised to consult with the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure, as the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' agent, at [tplps.leasing@transport.wa.gov.au](mailto:tplps.leasing@transport.wa.gov.au) regarding the necessary amendments to the Swan Yacht Club River reserve lease to accommodate the sauna.
3. Regarding **Condition 4**, the pontoon maintenance and inspection plan shall:
  - a) commit to corrective action for repair and replacement of damaged or degraded materials;
  - b) commit to examination of all products used within the approved works; and
  - c) be undertaken every six months.
4. Regarding **Condition 5**, In case of damage or pollution events, contact the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions on 9278 0981 or the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure on 9480 9924 (Maritime Emergency Response).
5. This approval does not negate the need for the applicant to obtain any further approvals associated with the lawful installation and operation of the facility. The applicant shall liaise with the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure - Maritime Licensing (13 11 56) in relation to the Club's Jetty and Mooring Licence requirements for the pontoon.
6. All on water operations and activities must be conducted in accordance with the relevant marine legislative provisions.

### FINAL REPORT ENDORSED

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 26/5/26

Stuart Smith

Director General, Chief Executive Officer