



## The DECIBEL COALITION

### BACKGROUND PAPER FOR MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS AND STAFF

The Decibel Coalition was established by Safe Quiet Lakes (“SQL”) in November 2019 with the objective to have the Small Vessel Regulation SOR-2010-91 enhanced by the Federal Government/ Transport Canada to include decibel limits on the amount of noise from boat motors and provisions for effective and easy enforcement procedures. The Coalition operates under the umbrella and with administrative and website support of SQL. A committee of 8 including 2 from outside Ontario runs the Coalition on behalf of its members.

Safe Quiet Lakes (SQL) is a volunteer organization in Muskoka. Their objective is to make the Muskoka lakes safer and quieter to ensure the sustainable enjoyment of a treasured shared resource through education and advocacy. [www.safequiet.ca](http://www.safequiet.ca)

Excessive boat noise is a persistent, pervasive and growing problem on Canadian waterways. From Lake Memphremagog in Quebec through cottage country in Ontario and out to lakes Okanagan, Salmon Arm and Shuswap in BC the increase in the number of high performance boats with little or no mufflers is spoiling the cottage experience.

SQL has done two extensive surveys of cottager’s attitudes regarding various issues. The most recent was done in 2017. It found that support for stronger enforcement of muffler regulations (67%) and enacting decibel limits through legislation (61%) were two of the top 4 issues to enjoying the boating experience.

Jurisdiction of Canadian waterways is with the Federal government. Provincial and Municipalities are without means to address issues that affect many of their constituents. Interestingly enough a number of municipalities in western Canada have passed bylaws out of frustration from excessive boat motor noise. These include Regional District of Central, Okanagan, City of Vernon, City of Penticton and Cowichan Valley Regional District. Others have taken an approach based on awareness and communication recognizing their jurisdictional limits.

The Small Vessel Regulation requires most boats to have a working muffler. But the definition of muffler is difficult to enforce and police agencies have, for the most part, stopped enforcing it. The regulations do require muffler diverters to be visibly disengaged so that they cannot be used while operating the boat. Sanctioned races, boats built before Jan 1 1960 and boats operating 5 NM or more from shore are exempt from having mufflers.

In the United States, over 27 states have laws that set limits on the amount of noise from boat motors. Those limits are set in decibels and are usually accompanied by efficient and effective enforcement procedures. Many are based on the Model Noise Act which was established by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and is supported by National Marine Manufacturers Association.

There are two internationally accepted standards for measuring boat motor noise on the water: SAE J1970 Shoreline Sound Level Measurement Procedure for Recreational Motorboats and SAE J2005 Stationary Sound Level Measurement Procedure for Recreational Motorboats. Both of these standards are included in the Model Noise Act and used extensively in the USA. The Decibel Coalition believes that enhancement to the existing Transport Canada Regulations should include the basic elements of the Model Noise act using measurement procedures defined in SAE J1970 and J2005.

The European Union has detailed legislation for construction and assembly standards to ensure that the noise emission remain within defined limits. The tests are defined by the standard ISO 14509. Importantly, the decibel limits in both the USA and the EU are essentially the same with some minor variation by state in the USA.

To date the Decibel Coalition has 20 lake associations in three provinces: Ontario, BC and Quebec. These represent over 10,000 families. The Coalition, with the support of SQL, has close relationships with the Ontario Provincial Police, the NMMA, various municipal councils in Muskoka, active contacts in Boating BC, Boating Ontario, Canadian Safe Boating Council and contacts in Transport Canada. The committee meets every 2 weeks and has done so since inception. The committee has two strong members in each of BC and Quebec. The BC member is responsible for the provinces west of the Ontario boarder.

In November 2020 Transport Canada made a presentation at the Canadian Marine Advisory Council (run by Transport Canada) where they opened up “the opportunity discuss and receive comments on possible options for the future” with regard to the Small Vessel Regulations relating to recreational boat motor muffler and sound. They recognize that “Noise emissions from pleasure craft have been a growing concern since the 1990s” and “Complaints from communities and the public about noise have continued over the years.” This is very encouraging news as it means the opportunity is ripe to move forward.

The Coalition believes that participation and support by municipalities is an important factor in convincing Transport Canada and ultimately the Federal Government to enhance the regulations. Municipal support will give significant strength to the importance of this initiative. Decibel limits for boat motor noise with efficient and effective enforcement processes will give enforcement agencies efficient and effective tools to address those outliers who currently operate boats with excessive noise without check.

The Decibel Coalition and SQL would like to request that your municipality join the Decibel Coalition and help in the goal to make the waterways in Canada a better experience for all.