

What was the reason for increased boating activity in April and May 2020?

The recent increase in boating activity seen along the Queensland east coast since the beginning of April 2020 could be attributed to various factors. Preliminary analysis of trailer counts¹ recorded at 42 Queensland boat ramps (Figure 1) and correlating weather, season, day of the week factors help explain why we saw an increase.

A quarter of the boat ramps surveyed had trailer counts that were significantly higher than expected ($p < 0.05$) and may have been attributed to the Home Confinement Directive and subsequent easing of restrictions ('COVID effect').

Ten boat ramps (Yorkeys Knob, Mourilyan, Bowen Boat Harbour, Whisper Bay, Seaforth, Mackay Harbour, Gladstone Marina, Mooloolaba Coast Guard, Wellington Point and Raby Bay) had trailer counts higher than could be explained by the alignment of weekend, school holiday and good weather conditions. Trailer counts at nine boat ramps were the highest recorded since the surveys began.



Figure 1: Map of surveyed boat ramps

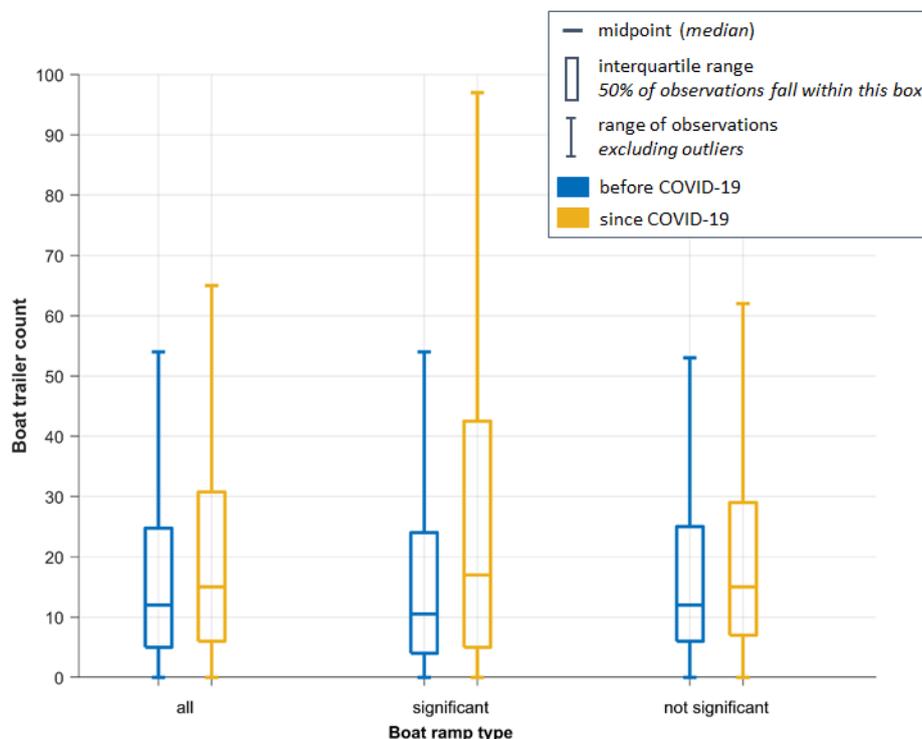


Figure 2: The distribution of trailer counts before and since COVID-19 restrictions. The first pair of boxplots represents all ramps, the second pair represents the 10 ramps that showed significant change due to the COVID effect, and the third pair represents the remaining ramps that showed no significant change.

¹ Fisheries Queensland (2019) Boat ramp survey program, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Brisbane. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/monitoring-compliance/monitoring-reporting/recreational-fishing/boat-ramp-survey-program>

How did we analyse this?

- Numbers of trailers vary between boat ramps and time of year.
- Activity is higher during good fishing conditions such as weekends, school holidays, and good weather (no rain and light winds). All these good conditions converged on several days following the Home Confinement Directive.
- Fisheries Queensland monitors boat ramp activity by counting boat trailers at 12 pm on survey days.
- Trailer counts analysed came from 42 key boats ramps across the state. Counts commenced in 2015 or 2016 depending on the ramp.
- Daily rainfall and wind speed data from the Bureau of Meteorology, the time of year, school holidays and weekends were factors modelled to determine effect on trailer counts.
- A term called the 'COVID' effect was included in a statistical analysis. The COVID term is defined by the period after 30th March 2020 which is when:
 - Queensland's COVID-19 Home Confinement Directive came into effect.
 - Boat users were advised to only go out on the water for essential reasons like fishing for food.
 - Public gatherings such as fishing were limited to two people (other than your household).
- Fisheries Queensland examined their monitoring data, to assess if boat ramp activity had increased, above normal levels, since the Home Confinement Directive.

Contact: Eddie Jebreen, Director, Assessment and Monitoring, Fisheries Queensland