

How to choose a marine service and marine surveyor

What a pre-purchase survey, a haul-out and an outboard service should cost, and how to tell a real surveyor from a report that says nothing

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A boat is a hole in the water you pour money into, and the trades that keep it afloat are almost entirely unlicensed - which puts all the weight on you to check qualifications, insurance and method. The two decisions that matter most are who surveys the boat before you buy it, and who looks after it afterwards.

What it should cost

A pre-purchase or insurance marine survey costs roughly \$600 to \$1,500 plus haul-out depending on vessel length, hull material and how far the surveyor travels; a smaller trailer boat under about 6 metres may be a flat \$500 to \$900. Outboard and sterndrive servicing is commonly \$400 to \$900 for a standard annual service, and more for a large four-stroke or a twin install. A haul-out and antifoul for a 10-metre yacht typically lands at \$2,500 to \$5,000 all-in, covering the lift, hardstand days, paint and labour.

Breaking the annual cost down helps: a trailer boat that lives on its trailer may need only \$1,200 to \$2,000 a year including trailer and engine servicing and no antifoul at all, while a moored boat adds antifoul, mooring fees and a haul-out every 12 to 18 months. Ask every yard for a written quote that separates the lift, the storage days, the materials and the labour, because hardstand days quietly accrue while you wait for parts.

What the law requires

Recreational marine trades are largely unregulated in Tasmania, so there is no single "licensed boat mechanic" - which makes checking trade memberships, qualifications and insurance your job.

Surveyors who inspect commercial (domestic commercial vessel) boats operate under the AMSA framework, but the surveyor inspecting your recreational boat is providing a professional service, not a regulated government inspection, so the report is only as good as the person who wrote it.

Two things are genuinely regulated and worth knowing. Registering and using a mooring in Tasmanian waters is a MAST matter - mooring permits are registered with Marine and Safety Tasmania, run on a calendar year ending 30 June, and before you buy an existing mooring you should confirm with MAST that it is registered and suitable for your vessel's length and design. Vessel registration and motor boat licences are also MAST functions, and MAST does the on-water enforcement, so a "survey" that is really just a safety check is not the same as a pre-purchase condition survey.

Red flags

A survey report that describes the boat but names no faults, no moisture readings and no recommendations.

A yard that services your engine but cannot name the technician's qualifications.

A mooring sold as is without a MAST registration check against your vessel's size.

A haul-out quote that does not separate hardstand day rates from materials and labour.

No public liability insurance for the yard, the surveyor or the contractor.

Pressure to buy on the strength of the seller's own survey rather than your own independent surveyor.

What good looks like

Gives you a sample survey report before you commission one.

Separates a pre-purchase condition survey from a valuation and a safety check.

Names the technician, the yard's insurance and the parts policy in writing.

Puts the lift, the hardstand days, the materials and the labour on separate lines.

Confirms a mooring's MAST registration and rating against your vessel before money changes hands.

What to ask

- "What qualifications and industry memberships does the surveyor hold, and can I see a sample report?"
- "What will the survey actually inspect - hull, rig, machinery, electrics - and is the engine run under load or just started?"
- "Is the report written for insurance, for pre-purchase, or as a valuation, and does it include a value?"
- "For servicing, what is the fixed price for an annual service, and what parts are extra?"
- "Can the yard show me the technician's qualifications and the business's public liability insurance?"
- "For a mooring, is it registered with MAST, and is it rated for my vessel's length and design?"
- "What does the haul-out quote include - lift, hardstand days, materials, labour - and what accrues daily?"

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