



Thai government targets wealthy superyacht charter market

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From left: Puripat Teerakunpisut, Chief of Phuket Marine Office; Chula Sukmanop, Director-General, Thailand Marine Department; Gulu Lalvani, Chairman of Royal Phuket Marina. Infinity Communications

Thailand's marine industry is now on the national agenda, which lead to a public hearing yesterday at Phuket City Hall to discuss how to develop Phuket as the maritime hub in Asean. A large turnout from the Island's marine industry, local government departments and associated authorities together discussed a number of items and reached consensus on one: the need for a special charter license for superyachts.

On the back of a meeting in Phuket between Mr. Gulu Lalvani, Chairman of Royal Phuket Marina, and Mrs. Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, Minister of Tourism and Sports, in January earlier this year, suggestions were made to central government on how to make Thailand a leading marine hub in the region, and giving his support to this idea Thailand's Prime Minister Mr. Prayuth Chan-ocha has put marine tourism on the national agenda with Phuket set to become the testing ground.

“I met with Khun Kobkarn in January, and we discussed many ways in which to develop Thailand's marine industry. Among a series of ideas I proposed was to introduce a special charter licence for superyachts,” said Mr. Lalvani.

“There are many superyacht owners who would bring their superyachts to Phuket if they could charter them while here, but currently the regulations deter them. I know many people who charter superyachts around the world for in excess of USD100,000 per week, and this revenue could come to Phuket if some changes are made. Introducing a charter license for superyachts who wish to charter in Thailand will fix the current problem and will significantly increase charter revenue for the country,” added Mr. Lalvani.

With its stunning cruising grounds and some of the best marina facilities in the region, Thailand is the destination of choice for superyachts coming to Asia. On average 50 superyachts come to Phuket each year currently and with amendments to the current rules and regulations this number will likely increase dramatically as more superyachts are encouraged to visit Phuket and Thailand, delivering revenue direct to the local economy.

Yesterday's public meeting was the first step in making reforms. Led by Mr. Chula Sukmanop, Director-General, Thailand Marine Department together with Mr. Nisit Jansomwong, Governor of Phuket more than 150 members of the Island's marine industry and relevant authorities were present to hear Mr. Sukmanop explain the government's aim to position Phuket as the maritime hub in Asean, to improve the current legal framework for yachting in the country, and to develop a special charter license for superyachts.

“The superyacht charter license could be for one year. This would attract more superyachts to Phuket, and allowing them to charter while here will provide a lot of revenue to Phuket and Thailand. We hope to have this in place for the next High Season,” commented Mr. Sukmanop.

“There are still many details to discuss but I am very pleased to see my suggestions to Khun Kobkarn earlier this year are making progress. The potential superyacht charter revenue will be significant for Phuket and Thailand. The people who charter superyachts are wealthy individuals, exactly the type we need to encourage to visit Thailand more,' added Mr. Lalvani.