



South Australian

# Recreational Boating Safety Strategy

Priority Areas



Government of South Australia  
Department for Infrastructure  
and Transport

Build. Move. Connect.

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# Overview

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## Vision

The *draft Recreational Boating Safety Strategy – Priority Areas* has been developed to help us improve safety for recreational boaters and others who share our State’s coastal and inland waters, and achieve our vision of zero fatalities for recreational boaters.

## Recreational boating safety priority areas

Feedback from the community and interested organisations, along with supporting evidence, has identified five priority areas and measures for recreational boating safety to guide us through to 2030.



### Safer boating through education

Increasing education opportunities on boating safety for young people, boaters and retailers.



### Safer boating through technology

Using technology to improve boating safety.



### Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review

Reviewing requirements for lifejacket wear and safety equipment to make it simpler and safer for all.



### Safer boating operation and knowledge

Boat licence reform to encourage safer operation and knowledge.



### Safer waterway management

Supporting and enforcing safer boating behaviours to help users share the water safely.





## Safer boating through education

Increasing education opportunities on boating safety for young people, boaters and retailers.





# Safer boating through education

Efforts have concentrated on an annual boating safety education campaign focusing on wearing and maintaining lifejackets, and understanding essential safety equipment requirements.

The campaign also focuses on practicing safe boating behaviours including operating at safe speeds, using emergency communications, checking the weather conditions, letting someone know before you head out on the water and maintaining your vessel.

Key information is available through Marine Safety SA's website, Facebook page, Marine Safety SA online store and regular online newsletters.

Additionally, Marine Safety Officers engage with the public at community events and boat ramps to educate them on safe boating practices.

While these educational activities have been effective the Department for Infrastructure and Transport (the Department) aims to expand educational opportunities further to reach more boaters and water users with the safe boating message.



## What we know



Using the right safety equipment correctly is vital in education to boaters to help prevent drownings and responding to emergency situations.



Education helps foster safe boating practices at an early age helping to influence boating families to adopt safe practices.



There have been deaths interstate through poorly maintained inflatable lifejackets which are commonly used by South Australian boaters.



Some Australian states have a range of boating safety education programs and packages aimed at school children delivered in-line with the Australian Curriculum.



Other states across Australia have effectively conducted education sessions at popular boating spots like boat ramps, emphasising lifejacket maintenance with practical care and instruction.



Across Australia, there have been successful retail programs, where they provide education to retailers about selling boating safety equipment, and the importance of providing the right information to boaters.

## Lifejackets

### Inflatable lifejackets inflate by:

- pulling a cord (non-automatic inflatables), or
- contact with water (automatic inflatable).

### All boaters should know how to:

- check their lifejackets and ensure they are in working order before heading out, and
- service and maintain their lifejackets in line with manufacturer's instructions (generally once a year).



Lifejacket before inflation



Lifejacket after inflation

## What we heard

- 49%** are concerned that public awareness of boating safety is lacking.
- 85%** strongly supported an increase in education of school aged children.
- 82%** strongly supported an increase in education about lifejackets.
- 80%** strongly supported an increase in education around boat maintenance requirements.
- 79%** supported an increase in education to the public generally about boating safety including safety equipment requirements.
- 74%** supported an increase in education to retailers who sell boating safety equipment.

There was less confidence by those surveyed in using emergency communications such as flares, emergency positioning indicator radio beacons (EPIRB's) and marine radio compared to other boating safety measures:

- 91%** were confident about what lifejackets are required.
- 88%** were confident about the types of safety equipment required when operating a vessel.
- 89%** were confident about the rules to operate a vessel safely on the water.
- 87%** were confident about judging safe speeds on the water and the range of speed limits.
- 65%** were confident on how to use flares.
- 63%** were confident on how to use EPIRB's.







## What we propose

Users	Proposed actions
Schools	<p>Development of a primary school lesson package in line with the Australian Curriculum for upper primary years (years 4 - 6) with theory and/ or practical components.</p> <p>Delivering boating safety education to senior years students by linking with high school water safety programs.</p>
Boaters	<p><b>Lifejackets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lifejacket servicing clinics held at boat ramps and key marine locations and events.</li> </ul> <p><b>Safety Equipment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flare and EPIRB use clinics held at boat ramps.</li> <li>Increase education on marine radio use.</li> </ul> <p><b>Boat maintenance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide boat maintenance tips for boat owners.</li> </ul>
Retailers	<p>Develop a retailer package to help educate those who sell boating safety equipment, ensuring advice given to the South Australian public is current and correct.</p>





## Safer boating through technology

Using technology to improve boating safety.



# Safer boating through technology

As technology continues to advance, it can be used to facilitate safety improvements for recreational boaters. Tools such as web cameras, digital signage and boating safety apps make it much easier for boaters to prepare for a day on the water.

## What we know



### Web cameras

Provide high quality real-time images for boaters to view a snapshot of the current weather conditions and how busy a boat ramp is before leaving home.

Number of Department web cameras in South Australia:

4

Metropolitan

4

Regional



### Novel vessels

- There is an increasing number of novel vessels that do not fit the standard vessel types and sit outside of existing safety requirements.
- The Department is working with other marine safety agencies across Australia to develop a common definition for novelty craft so consistent legislation can be applied around the safety equipment needed.
- Examples of novel vessels include powered surf boards and hydrofoils.



### Boating safety apps

- Boating safety apps have proven to be a useful tool to help promote boating safety in other Australian states (WA, TAS and NSW).
- They allow boaters to stay up to date with essential information, log trips with family, friends and marine rescue agencies and receive geo-targeted safety messages when out on the water.
- This also offers the general public an effective way to remain up to date with safety requirements and alerts.
- The apps can be used to assist marine rescue agencies track and ensure the safety of those users who log trips.
- Are a support tool to other emergency communications (flares, emergency position radio indicator beacons (EPIRB's)) while on the water.





## Digital signage

The use of digital signs and portable variable message boards at boat ramps and key boating locations provides real-time updates and boating safety reminders for boaters before heading out.

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Marine Safety SA Digital message boards at boat ramps across the state



## What we heard

- 67%** supported more web cameras at boat ramps to help boaters assess conditions.
- 86%** supported consistent signage at boat ramp reminding users about safe speed and safety equipment requirements.
- 34%** highlighted enforcement of regulations as a priority.
- 80%** supported the Department partnering with a boating safety app to provide simple, easy, relevant safety information to boaters.

## What we propose

Technology	Proposed actions
Web cameras	More web cameras at boat ramps to help users assess weather conditions and traffic density prior to leaving home.
Signage	Signage at boat ramps with real time weather updates and relevant safety messaging utilising digital technology and mobile phone devices.
Digital app	Partner with/ or develop a digital app for boaters to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>key safety information</li> <li>log on and off with volunteer marine rescue agencies</li> <li>maps of restricted areas (digitalisation)</li> <li>real time notifications on weather and navigational hazards</li> <li>collection of usage data to enhance policy and operational insights.</li> </ul>



## Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review

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Reviewing requirements for lifejacket wear and safety equipment to make it simpler and safer for all.





# Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review

Lifejackets are the most important piece of safety equipment to prevent boaters drowning.

Over the 20-year period to June 2022, Royal Life Saving Society data shows there were 69 drownings related to boating.

During this period only one person that drowned was known to be wearing a lifejacket.

Having the proper safety equipment on board is also essential for alerting search and rescue authorities in emergencies.

However, approximately 40% of vessels checked by the Department's Marine Safety Officers in the past three years were non-compliant.

Simplifying the requirements for carrying safety equipment and introducing newer technologies will help to provide greater clarity and understanding for all boaters.



## What we know

- There are State laws and Australian standards that recognise the importance of having safety equipment on board your vessel including the wearing of lifejackets to help in prevent boating related drownings.
- These laws are supported by ongoing campaigns to promote lifejacket wear, maintenance, and servicing to ensure you are carrying the right safety equipment.
- Vessel inspections conducted by the Department's Marine Safety Officers further support following these laws.
- Laws can be complex, and the Department aims to create consistency to help to promote better safety outcomes for boaters.

## Emergency position indicator radio beacons (EPIRB's) and personal location beacons (PLB's)

A key piece of safety equipment in case of an emergency and you require rescue is an EPIRB or PLB.



### EPIRB

- Must be registered online with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).
- When activated it sends a continuous radio distress signal for at least 48 hours.
- The signal from an EPIRB helps search and rescue authorities find people in distress.



### PLB

- Designed to be attached to your lifejacket or clothing and are especially useful if you fall overboard and can't get to your EPIRB.
- PLB's are smaller and light weight than EPIRB's
- Many paddlers or people that boat alone use a PLB.
- Current laws in South Australia do not recognise a PLB as an option instead of an EPIRB.

## In South Australia, you must carry a registered EPIRB:

### SA Gulf waters

More than 5 nautical miles  
(approximately 9.3 km) from shore.

### All other coastal waters

More than 3 nautical miles  
(approximately 5.5 km) from shore.

Most Australian states require an EPIRB to be carried more than 2 nautical miles from shore.





## Lifejacket wear

- There are inconsistencies around lifejacket wear on unpowered paddle craft on inland waters versus coastal waters. (i.e. a lifejacket is required on a stand-up paddleboard on the River Murray but is not required if using a stand-up paddleboard on coastal waters).
  - Surf Life Saving SA reports 50% of their rescues are of stand-up paddleboarders being blown offshore on coastal waters requiring rescue.
- Lifejacket rules have also caused confusion.
  - Currently anyone 13 years of age or above can wear a level 50 lifejacket on coastal waters within 2 nautical miles (3.7 km) off shore but are still required to carry a level 100 lifejacket on board their vessel.

## Flares

- Pyrotechnic distress flares are required if boating on coastal waters.
  - They expire every three years and are costly to replace and dispose of.
- Electronic distress flares last many hours, emit a high intensity light over many kilometres and offer an alternative to pyrotechnic flares.
  - Some states now accept electronic distress flares as an alternative to pyrotechnic distress flares as part of their regulations. This is not the case in South Australia.



## Jet skis

- On coastal waters jet skis are not able to operate in unprotected waters (more than 2 nautical miles / 3.7 km) from the shore.
- Safety equipment requirements would need to be met if operating in unprotected waters.

## What we heard

**58%** supported a review of safety equipment requirements for different vessels.

**67%** of those that feel recreational boating is unsafe supported a review of safety equipment requirements for vessels.

## What we propose

Area	Potential actions
Safety equipment	<p>Review the carriage of safety equipment in coastal waters and the key items needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce consistency with the requirement for all motorised vessels to carry an EPIRB in unprotected waters when further than 2 nautical miles (3.7 km) from the shore.</li> <li>• Introduce the option to carry a Personal Location Beacon (PBL) instead of an EPIRB for non-powered craft if operating in unprotected waters.</li> <li>• Introduce the option of carrying electronic distress flares instead of pyrotechnic flares if extra safety equipment is carried (i.e. VHF marine radio, EPIRB / PLB).</li> <li>• Extend the distance a jet ski can travel offshore subject to safety equipment carriage requirements being met.</li> </ul>
Lifejackets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review current lifejacket requirements for stand-up paddleboards on coastal waters to include level 50 lifejacket wear.</li> <li>• Review carriage and wear requirements for lifejackets. (i.e. Currently, only required to wear a level 50 lifejacket in semi-protected coastal waters less than 2 nautical miles from shore but must carry a level 100 lifejacket).</li> </ul>





## Safer boating operation and knowledge

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Boat licence reform to encourage safer operation and knowledge.



# Safer boating operation and knowledge

Improving boat operators' knowledge and skills can contribute to safer waterways for all. Offering online refresher courses and practical experiences provides boaters the opportunity to further their skills, knowledge and confidence to operate safely.

As the popularity of jet skis grow in South Australia, there is an opportunity to align with many other Australian states that mandate theory testing and/or practical training for licencing. This can improve the safe operation of this type of craft.

## What we know



### Boat licence (16+ years)

- In South Australia recreational boaters can obtain a lifetime boat licence by passing a theory examination.
- This boat licence allows you to operate a recreational motorised vessel including a jet ski.
- No practical experience or testing is required to gain a boat licence in SA.
- Many other states mandate the extra requirement for practical training for gaining a boat licence
  - NSW, QLD, WA and TAS require theory testing and practical courses to gain a boat licence.





## Jet Ski licence

- There is no separate jet ski and boat licences in South Australia.
- Many other states mandate the extra requirement for theory testing and practical training for gaining a jet ski licence.
  - QLD and TAS require completion of a course through a registered training provider to gain your jet ski licence.
  - In NSW and VIC you must have a boat licence and pass a jet ski knowledge test to gain a jet ski licence.

## Special Permit licence (12 to 15 years)

- After passing a theory test young people aged 12-15 years can obtain a Special Permit to operate a vessel when supervised by a boat licence holder (16 + years).
- To operate alone young people must also pass a practical on water test with an authorised officer. There is currently no formal requirement to gain any practical experience to operate alone outside of passing a practical test.
- Several conditions are in place to help make operating alone safer for Special Permit holders who have passed the theory and practical tests:
  - wearing an appropriate level lifejacket and carrying the required safety equipment
  - not operating at night
  - not operating a vessel that is greater than 4 metres in length
  - not operating higher-powered vessel that can reach speeds greater than 10-knots
  - not operating jet skis
  - not towing skiers.



**Special Permit holders who have passed the theory and practical tests currently have no restrictions on how far from shore they can operate, meaning individuals as young as 12 can take a boat out alone and travel any distance.**



## What we heard

**49%** are concerned that public awareness of boat safety is lacking.

**44%** said there was a lack of boating safety knowledge for boaters.

## Boat licensing

**58%** supported online refresher courses around safe vessel operation.

**68%** supported practical courses for operating a boat.

**57%** supported development of digital boat licence testing with associated training modules to help increase knowledge of safe vessel operation.

## There was support for additional boat licensing courses and education:

**33%** of people who have held their licence for less than one year wanted specialised courses for different types of boats.

**23%** of people under 40 and those holding a boat licence for 4 to 6 years (21%) wanted to see free and optional courses for boat licence holders.

**59%** of people who have held their boat licences for 7 to 10 years wanted ongoing education.



## Jet ski licensing

<b>79%</b>	supported practical courses for safely operating a jet ski.
<b>78%</b>	supported theory courses and testing for jet skis.
<b>57%</b>	supported development of digital boat licence testing with associated training modules to help increase knowledge of safe vessel operation.
<b>56%</b>	would favour practical-based jet ski courses.
<b>53%</b>	would favour theory-based jet ski courses.

## Special Permit licencing

<b>45%</b>	believe Special Permit holders aged 12 to 15 years should have shoreline restrictions operating no further than 2 nautical miles (approximately 3.7 km) from shore.
<b>50%</b>	of those operating boats less than 4.8 metres in length supported shoreline restrictions for Special Permit holders.
<b>51%</b>	supported supervised operation for boaters aged 12 to 15 years.
<b>29%</b>	supported allowing 12- to 15-year-olds to operate unsupervised with restrictions and skill development for operators.

## Marine Safety vessel checks

Approximately 12,000 vessels were checked between March 2020 and March 2023. Approximately 40% were non-compliant showing there is room for improvement in boating operation and knowledge.

## What we propose

Users	Proposed actions
Existing boat licence holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a compulsory online refresher course for all boat licence holders to help maintain boating knowledge.</li> </ul>
New boat licences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement practical experience (i.e. Logbook) as a requirement for all new boat licence holders.</li> </ul>
Special Permit licence (aged 12 to 15 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requirement to gain practical on water experience before young operators can undertake the practical test and boat alone.</li> <li>Review the minimum age a Special Permit holder can operate on their own.</li> <li>Implement restrictions on operating closer to shore in coastal waters when unsupervised.</li> </ul>
Jet ski licence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pass a theory test to gain a jet ski licence.</li> </ul> <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pass a theory test and practical course to gain your jet ski licence.</li> </ul>



## Safer waterway management

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Supporting and enforcing safer boating behaviours to help users share the water safely.





## Safer waterway management

To improve safety on South Australian waters, all motorised vessel operators must safely share the water responsibly with each other, swimmers and users of non-powered vessels like kayaks and canoes.

Safer waterway management involves reduced speed limits in certain areas, establishing speed zones, and moving higher-risk activities to safer locations.

There is need for more consistency, clarity and understanding regarding speed limits and restricted areas on coastal and inland waters including the River Murray.

A key focus for the Department is to promote safe vessel operation and reduce non-compliance with speed limits and restrictions on South Australian waters.

Department Marine Safety and Compliance staff carry out education and compliance activities to encourage and enforce safe boating operation on South Australian waters.

The Department also encourages reporting of marine safety concerns via an online portal for follow up by Department staff.

Reducing speeds on the water can help lower the number of trauma-related fatalities and serious injuries, which often result from boats colliding with people in the water or with infrastructure and other vessels.

The existing laws around safe speeds near people and vessels remain the same:

- 4 knots within 50 metres of any swimmer or unpowered craft in the water
- 4 knots within 30 metres of any vessel adversely impacted by your wash.



## What we know

### Marine Safety Concerns

Between March 2023 and June 2024, speeding related marine safety concerns were the most reported to the Department, including:



#### Jet skis

- Operating in exclusion zones
- Operating faster than 4 knots along coastal waters within 200 metres of shore.
- Exceeding the number of persons being towed.
- Speeding in 4 and 7 knot speed zones.
- Operating without due care – speeding.
- Speeding near swimmers and non-powered craft.
- Speeding in marinas.
- Speeding near other vessels.
- Speeding near marine wildlife.
- Jet skis operating or speeding within exclusion zones along coastal waters.



#### Boats

- Speeding in marinas and harbors and along the River Murray.
- Speeding near recreational water users.
- Speeding on the River Murray (wake and ski boats).
- Speeding on the Port River.
- Speeding near marine wildlife.

### Marine Safety Officers

- The Department has 10 Marine Safety Officers operating across the state to ensure that vessel owner and operators comply with safety equipment requirements and are safe on the water.
- There are frequent requests for Marine Safety Officer attendance across state waters, highlighting the importance of continued targeted compliance activities that focus on reducing risks to human life and enhancing boater safety.
- Common safety issues in non-complaint vessels include not wearing or carrying lifejackets, expired flares, missing one or two items of safety equipment and speeding.

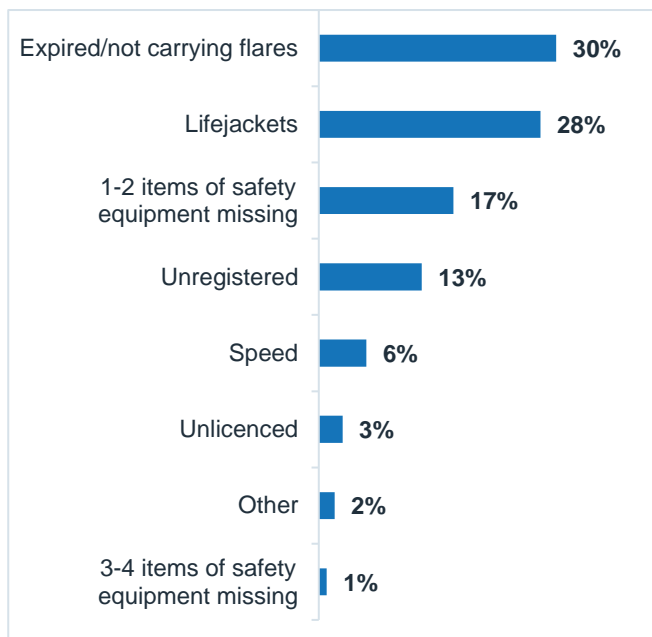


Figure: expiations/not carrying issued by Marine Safety Officers (March 2020 to March 2023)





## Speed limits

- Greater consistency, clarity and understanding of speed limits on coastal and inland waters are needed to prevent confusion and encourage safe speeds on the water.
- There are inconsistencies in the current restricted areas and controls in the *Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2023*.
  - Some local Councils with existing restricted areas and controls within the *Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2023* have requested speed limit reviews and designated swimming areas to improve safety for all water users.
  - Currently, there is a 4-knot restriction for jet skis within 200 metres of the coast between Outer Harbor and Sellicks Beach. This also includes the backwaters of the River Murray unless zoned otherwise. However, these speed limits do not currently apply to motorised boats or along the whole coastline. On coastal waters most people swim and operate human powered vessels including kayaks, canoes and paddleboards within 200 metres of the shoreline.
  - There is inconsistency around speed limits near bridges across South Australian waterways.
  - There are currently no speed limits in place for powered boats at night on the River Murray.

## Jet skis

- There are no current restrictions on where irregular jet ski riding can take place (i.e. driving in a circle, weaving or jumping) which can put jet ski operators and those around them at risk of harm.
- Inconsistencies on operating hours and days for jet skis:
  - Monday to Saturday they can operate from 8 am till sunset or 8 pm
  - Sunday they can operate from 9 am till sunset or 8 pm.

## What we heard

<b>43%</b>	supported a speed limit review for coastal and river waters in SA. Those that operate daily (73%) and those living along / near waterways (53%) had a higher demand for speed limit reviews.
<b>59%</b>	of people who feel recreational boating is unsafe showed stronger support for speed limit reviews.
<b>61%</b>	supported prioritising compliance activities to reduce risk and promote safer waterways.
<b>76%</b>	of people that feel recreational boating is unsafe showed stronger support than other groups for compliance enforcement.
<b>34%</b>	of people provided additional comments about enforcement of safety regulations when asked to provide additional feedback.



## What we propose

Area	Proposed actions
Sharing the water safely	<p><b>Separating non-powered vessels and swimmers from powered vessels:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate swimming areas (where powered vessels are excluded) on the River Murray.</li> </ul> <p><b>Safer speeds near infrastructure in water:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4-knot speed limit within 200 metres of a bridge and 200 metres of a lock.</li> </ul> <p><b>Consistency of speed limits for safety:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4-knot speed limit for all vessels within 200 metres of the South Australian Coast, excluding the River Murray.</li> <li>Investigate all motorised vessels following a 7-knot speed limit in the backwaters of the River Murray to increase safe operation in shallow water.</li> <li>Currently motorised boats can operate at night on the River Murray at any speed. Investigate a 7-knot speed limit on the River Murray from sunset to sunrise for boats.</li> </ul> <p><b>Safer jet ski operation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate jet ski irregular riding (e.g. driving in a circle, weaving or jumping) to take place 200 metres away from infrastructure (including properties, landing places and moored vessels) to help protect jet ski operators and those around them.</li> <li>Introduce consistent times for jet ski operation (between sunrise and sunset on all days) to prevent confusion.</li> </ul>



