



South Australia's

Recreational Boating Safety Strategy

2025–2030



Government of South Australia
Department for Infrastructure
and Transport

Build. Move. Connect.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country throughout South Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land and waters.

We pay our respects to the diversity of cultures, significance of contributions and to Elders past, present and emerging.



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This Strategy forms part of our overarching



Transport Strategy



- Road Safety Strategy
- Active Transport and Personal Mobility Strategy
- **Recreational Boating Safety Strategy**
- Freight and Supply Chain Strategy
- Public Transport Strategy (under development)
- Future Transport Technology Strategy (to be developed)



Foreword

Thank you to all South Australians and recreational boating stakeholders who provided feedback to help develop South Australia's first Recreational Boating Safety Strategy 2025–2030 (the Strategy).

South Australia is home to some of the most beautiful waterways in the world including more than 5,000 kilometres of coastline, 700 kilometres of the River Murray, plus a variety of other rivers, lakes and reservoirs.

These waters are used by many for activities such as boating, fishing, sailing and paddling, and offer enjoyment to those living in and visiting our State.

Recreational boating should be a positive and fun experience for everyone, but our waterways and boating activities can be unpredictable and dangerous. Over the past 20 years, tragically, an average of three people each year set out to enjoy activities on the water and never returned to their loved ones.

Our efforts over the next five years will focus on reducing fatalities and harm from recreational boating by enhancing education opportunities, modernising the boat licensing system, simplifying safety equipment regulations, supporting and enforcing safer boating behaviours and incorporating new technologies.

This Strategy contains five priority areas, identified from evidence and extensive consultation, to guide decisions and actions through to 2030 with the goal to deliver better safety outcomes for all into the future.

We look forward to continuing collaboration with the community and waterway users, recreational boating industry stakeholders and all tiers of government to help achieve the State Government's vision of fostering a culture of safety among recreational boaters who share our State's coastal and inland waters to achieve zero fatalities and zero harm to others.



Hon Tom Koutsantonis MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport



South Australia's Recreational Boating Safety Strategy

The Strategy sets out what we want to achieve over the next five years to improve safety on our waters.

More and more boaters, jet ski riders, waterskiers, paddle boarders and other watercraft users are making the most of our coastal and inland waters.

Unfortunately, incidents do occur.

Over the last 20 years, boating-related drowning incidents were the second leading cause of drowning deaths in South Australia with 65 lives lost through to June 2024*. We know that wearing a lifejacket is critical to preventing drownings. Of these 65 drowning deaths, only one person was known to be wearing a lifejacket*.

Over the last ten years, a further five people lost their life from trauma-related incidents on the water, which generally include collisions or other sudden impacts.

This Strategy recognises that a range of issues have contributed to fatalities on South Australian waters including the importance of:

- wearing properly maintained lifejackets
- operating safely around other water users
- understanding the rules of safe boating
- carrying the right safety equipment
- having a reliable method to make emergency contact when in distress on the water.

Vision

Foster a culture of safety among recreational boaters who share our State's coastal and inland waters to achieve:

- zero fatalities
- zero harm to others.

*Drowning data has been provided by the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia from the National Fatal Drowning Database.

Priority areas

We are committed to making recreational boating safer through five key priority areas:



1. Safer boating through education



2. Safer boating operation and knowledge



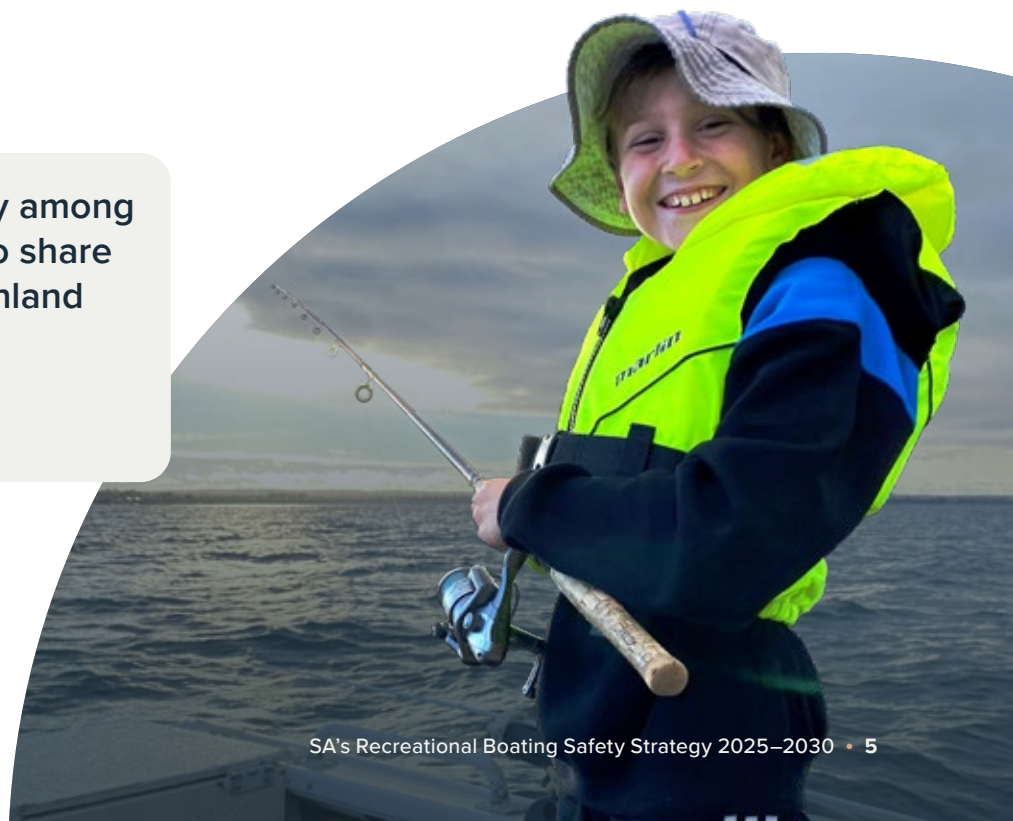
3. Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review



4. Safer waterway management



5. Safer boating through technology



Consultation

Two stages of public consultation helped to inform and develop this Strategy.

Stage one

Stage one helped to identify issues and offered an opportunity for the community, councils, government and non-government organisations and recreational boating associations to contribute to solutions that enhance safety across our coastline and waterways.

Public consultation



**10 November 2023 to
5 January 2024**



**Online surveys received:
1,635 respondents**

[The South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Strategy Background paper](#) was released outlining key recreational boating safety issues in South Australia.

Council consultation

27 South Australian councils have restricted areas and controls under the *Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2023*.



27

councils were **contacted** to gain feedback on these restricted areas and controls.



85%

of councils responded with general support for an increase in **compliance and education** activities, greater **signage** and **safer shared areas** on the water, such as keeping or extending 4-knot speed zone.

Key government and non-government forums

Key online survey findings and priority areas were presented to different government and non-government organisations and recreational boating associations.



14

organisations attended the forums held on 23 May, 24 May and 5 June 2024.

Stage two

Stage two helped to confirm the five priority areas and gauge support for recommended safety measures.

Public consultation



**2 August to
6 September 2024**



**Online surveys received:
1,172 respondents**

[The South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Strategy Priority Areas paper](#) was released outlining the five key priority areas and associated safety measures.

[The South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Strategy – What We Heard report](#) was shared to summarise stage one feedback.

All feedback from both stages of consultation was considered in the development of this Strategy.



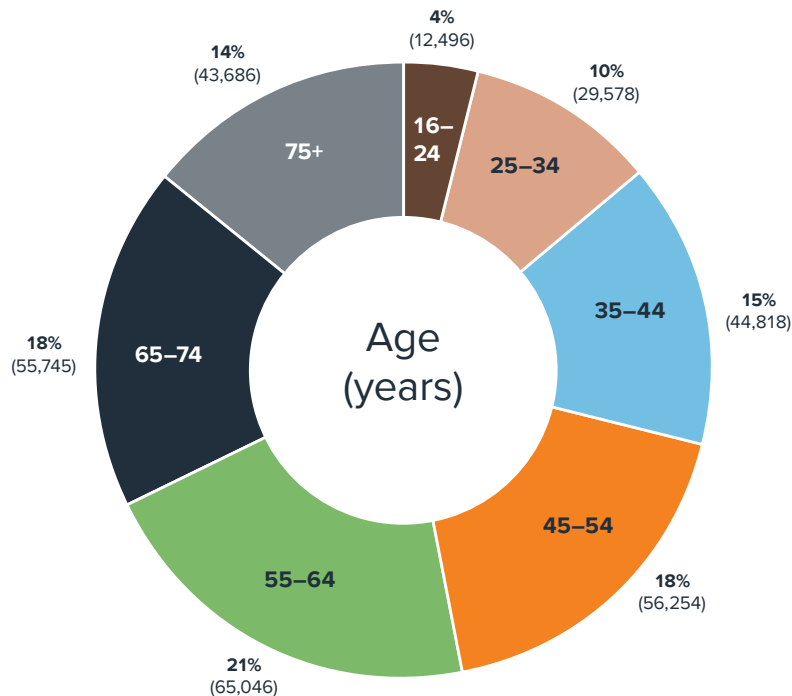
South Australian recreational boaters

Statistics below are correct as of 16 December 2024.

Boat licence holders

Total 307,623 boat licence holders:

Note, not all boat licence holders currently boat.



Registered vessels

More than 52,000 registered vessels*:

Length	Boats currently registered	% of boats currently registered
Up to 3.5 metres	3,337	6.38%
3.501 - 6 metres	36,069	69.01%
6.001 - 10 metres	7,261	13.89%
10.001 - 15 metres	1,123	2.15%
15.001 - 20 metres	479	0.92%
Over 20 metres	50	0.10%
Personal watercraft (PWC)	3,951	7.56%

*Note this does not include non-powered craft such as kayaks, canoes, surf skis and paddleboards.

Areas of operation



Boating rescues

Between 2019 and 2023:



1,200+

emergency call outs to the Volunteer Marine Rescue or State Emergency Services' coastal and inland water unit.

Boating compliance

Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2024:



18,110

vessels were checked.



38%

of vessels were found to be non-compliant.

Top five non-compliance issues

1. Failure to carry safety equipment
 2. Having expired safety equipment (i.e. flares)
 3. Failure to wear or carry lifejacket(s)
 4. Unregistered vessels
 5. Speed offences
-



Priority areas

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



1. Safer boating through education

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



2. Safer boating operation and knowledge

Introducing boat licence reforms to encourage safer operation and knowledge.



3. Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review

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



4. Safer waterway management

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



5. Safer boating through technology

Using technology to improve boating safety.





1. Safer boating through education

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

Fostering a positive boating safety culture means all recreational boaters prioritise safety before heading out and while they are on the water.

A significant amount of work has already been done in this area through regular boating safety campaigns, attendance at community events and providing a range of boating safety educational materials to boaters both online and in person.

We will continue to work with recreational boating stakeholders and the community to encourage safe boating behaviours.

Existing education and marketing activities will continue, with efforts also directed to expanding education in schools, at popular boating spots such as boat ramps and through retailers who are often the first point of contact for boaters purchasing safety gear.



Education around lifejacket maintenance is important

Inflatable lifejacket before inflation



Inflatable lifejacket after inflation



Support shown for education initiatives during consultation:

Education initiatives	Support	Oppose
More boating safety education for school-aged children	85%	3%
More lifejacket education for boat owners	82%	3%
More boat maintenance education for boat owners	80%	3%
More education for retailers who sell boating safety equipment	74%	3%
More boating safety education for the general public (including safety equipment requirements)	79%	4%
Practical education for school-aged children	80%	4%
Theory education for school-aged children	74%	5%
More education around marine radio use	73%	4%
More lifejacket servicing clinics at boat ramps and key marine recreational areas	67%	9%
Flare and emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) clinics at boat ramps	61%	10%

Actions

Schools

1. Develop online education resources in line with the Australian Curriculum (upper primary school year levels) to promote boating safety.
2. Incorporate boating safety education and practical skills development into secondary school water safety programs.

Boaters

3. Introduce boating safety education clinics at boat ramps across the State focusing on:
 - lifejacket maintenance
 - safety equipment requirements
 - marine radio use tips
 - boat maintenance tips.

Retailers

4. Distribute boating retailer education packages detailing key safety equipment requirements for boaters.



2. Safer boating operation and knowledge

Introducing boat licence reforms to encourage safer operation and knowledge.

Improving boat operators' knowledge and skills will contribute to safer waterways for all. Boat licence reform is one way to provide boaters the opportunity to further their skills, knowledge and confidence to operate safely.

Each state and territory across Australia impose different requirements to obtain a boat licence.

To obtain a boat licence in South Australia you must pass a paper-based theory exam at a Service SA centre or complete a course and the paper-based theory exam via a third-party training provider.

There is an opportunity to modernise and enhance the delivery of the traditional paper-based boat licence theory examination and Special Permit* licence for both Service SA and third-party training provider testing. A modernised and enhanced system will better align with national standards.

Future-proofing the third-party training provider system ensures licensing is more adaptive to evolving needs. Creating an engaging

environment facilitates high quality training on boating rules and safe boating behaviours.

In addition, operating a personal watercraft (PWC) in South Australia only requires a general boat licence. However, PWC's such as jet skis, are fast and powerful vessels. They are lighter and more manoeuvrable than traditional powerboats and can be dangerous to the driver and other water users if used improperly.

PWC education is required to increase safety knowledge of operators and reduce the risk to themselves and other water users.

PWC popularity continues to grow in South Australia. The number of registered PWC's has increased from 2,077 (4.09%) in 2019 to 3,951 (7.56%) in 2024.

*A Special Permit allows young people aged 12 to 15 years to:

- operate a vessel under supervision of a full boat licence holder (theory examination).
- operate solo (theory and practical examination).

Once operators are 16 years of age they must apply for a full boat licence.



Support shown for boat licence initiatives during consultation:

Boat licence (16+ years)	Support	Oppose
Development of digital boat licence testing with associated training modules to help increase knowledge of safe vessel operation	56%	17%
Online refresher courses around safe vessel operation	58%	17%

Special Permit (12–15 years)	Support	Oppose
Requirement for 12 to 15 year old Special Permit holders to gain practical on-water experience for a period of time before sitting a practical test	66%	13%
A shoreline restriction for Special Permit holders operating solo	81%	19%
A 1 kilometre shoreline restriction for Special Permit holders operating solo (preferred distance by those surveyed)	52%	-

PWC (jet ski) licence	Support	Oppose
PWC practical courses around safe operations	79%	8%
PWC theory courses around safe operations	78%	8%
Provision of a PWC licence only after passing a theory test	49%	31%

Actions

Boat licensing

1. Modernise the boat licensing system by introducing an online boating safety education course to complete in conjunction with a boat licence theory test (this could be similar to the online education course and theory test for obtaining a driver's licence).

Personal watercraft

2. Provide more information on how to safely use personal watercraft in the boating safety handbook, online and through targeted education campaigns.

Special Permit boat licensing (12–15 years)

3. Require Special Permit holders to gain a minimum of six months supervised on-water practical experience before being eligible for a practical test to operate solo.
4. Introduce a 1 kilometre shoreline restriction for Special Permit holder solo operation.

Third-party training providers

5. Introduce a modernised and strengthened third-party training provider system that better aligns with supporting safer vessel operators and safety outcomes.





3. Lifejacket wear and safety equipment review

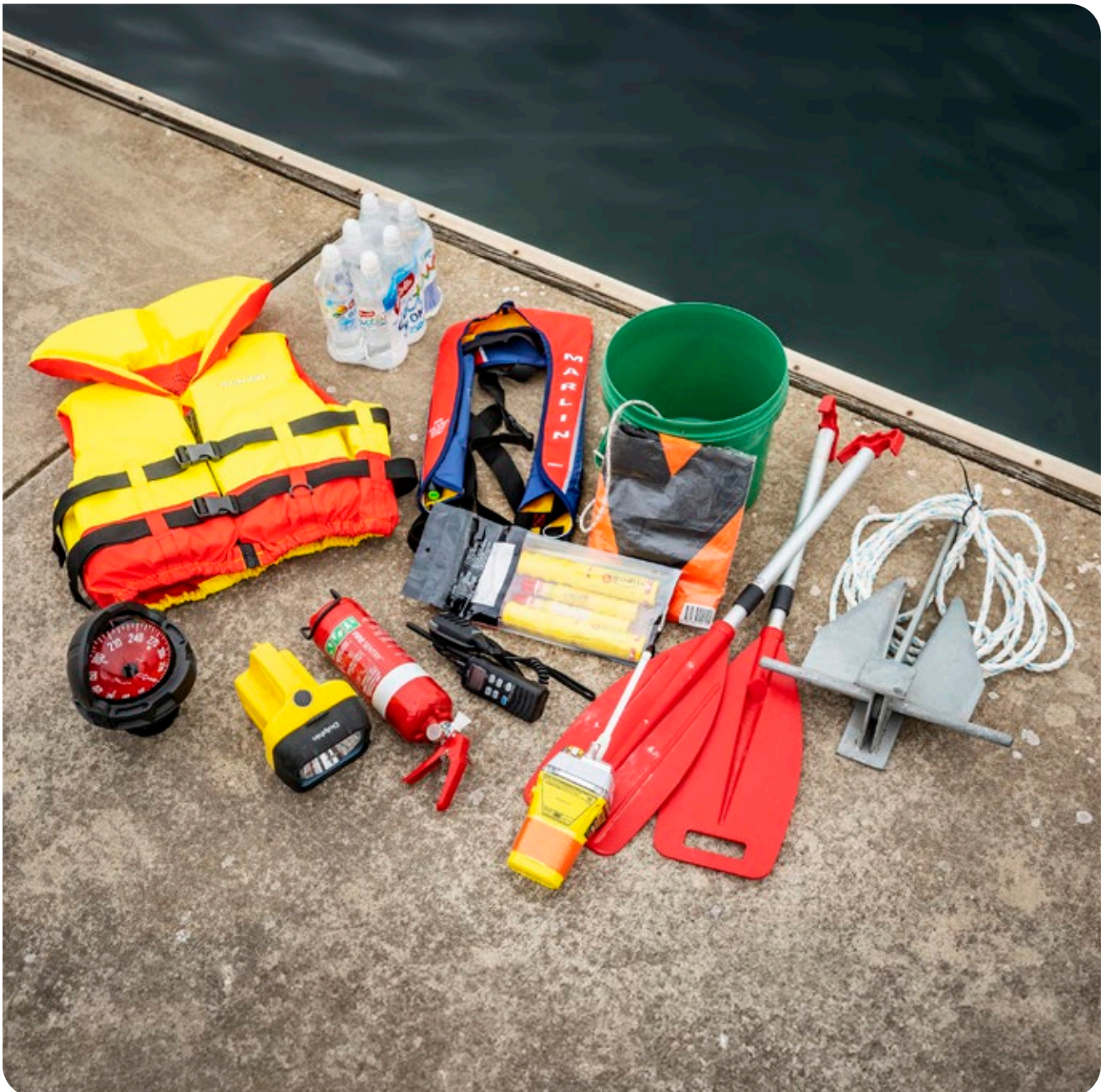
Reviewing requirements for lifejacket wear and safety equipment to make it simpler and safer for all.

Over the past four years, over one third of vessels checked by the Department for Infrastructure and Transport (the Department) were non-compliant. Many operators did not meet safety equipment and lifejacket requirements.

Simplifying these lifejacket and safety equipment requirements will make it easier for boaters to understand and comply with the current regulations.

Electronic visual distress signals (EVDS) are now available and being used by boaters across Australia.

EVDS are now regulated in some states as an alternative or support to traditional marine distress flares.





EPIRB

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



EVDS

- The signal can be detected by rescuers who are in the general vicinity while responding to an EPIRB or PLB activation.
- Water resistant, floating signalling device that is handheld.
- When activated it is capable to send a signal 3-5 times per minute for six hours and emits a white light.
- Longer signal duration compared to pyrotechnic flares that only last one minute.



Marine distress flares

- The signal from marine distress flares helps search and rescue authorities find people in distress.
- When activated, they emit a cloud of smoke for approximately 60 seconds.
- You must carry two red hand flares and two orange smoke flares when operating in semi-protected and unprotected waters.
- Once activated, red hand flares can be seen approximately 10 kilometres away and orange flares can be seen approximately 4 kilometres away (range can be less in windy conditions).
- Parachute flares are required if operating in unprotected waters more than 10 nautical miles from shore.
- Flares should be stored in a waterproof container and replaced before they expire (every three years).

Support shown for safety equipment initiatives during consultation:

Equipment initiatives	Support	Oppose
Review of safety equipment requirements	58%	8%
Introduce the option of carrying EVDS instead of pyrotechnic flares if extra safety equipment is carried	72%	5%
Require all motorised vessels to carry an EPIRB when more than two nautical miles from the shore	72%	12%
Require a level 50 lifejacket to be worn when using stand-up paddleboards on coastal waters	56%	21%
Extend the distance a PWC can go offshore, provided safety equipment requirements in unprotected waters are met*	42%	28%

*68% of jet ski owners who completed the survey were supportive.

Actions

Safety equipment

1. Introduce the requirement for all motorised vessels to carry an EPIRB in unprotected waters when more than two nautical miles (3.7 kilometres) from the shore. This brings the requirement for gulf waters in line with the remainder of the coast.
2. Introduce the option of carrying EVDS instead of marine distress flares in semi-protected waters if extra safety equipment is carried (e.g. VHF marine radio, EPIRB).
3. Investigate the distance a PWC can travel to include unprotected waters, provided safety equipment requirements are met.

Lifejackets

4. Review lifejacket requirements for powered and non-powered vessels ensuring regulations are clearer, more consistent and easier to follow.

4

KNOTS

4. Safer waterway management

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

South Australia's coastline and inland waters, such as the River Murray, provide ample space for various recreational boating activities.

To improve boating safety, speed limits can be reduced in areas where people and vessels frequently interact and where there is infrastructure, such as bridges and locks. Creating swim-only zones and relocating higher risk activities, such as PWC irregular riding, to safer locations can also contribute to making our waters safer for everyone.

Marine safety vessel checks over the last four years show over one third of operators were non-compliant with safety regulations, which included speeding offences, failure to carry safety equipment or having expired safety equipment, failing to wear or carry lifejacket(s) and vessels being unregistered.

The Department receives regular requests to increase education and compliance activities around speeding and unsafe operation throughout the State.

Motorised vessel operators must remain responsible and continue to safely share the water with others by following current regulations:

- 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 their wash
- 4-knots for PWC's within 200 metres of the shoreline along the metropolitan coast (between Outer Harbor and Sellicks Beach).

Speed is usually a factor in boating-related trauma fatalities, which typically involve boat collisions, collisions with infrastructure, and impacts between vessels and people in the water.

Establishing more consistent speed limits within 200 metres of the coastline for all motorised boats, in line with the current rules for PWC's, will increase clarity and enhance safety in these areas.

Speeding-related offences by PWC's and motorised boats are commonly reported via the online marine safety concerns portal.



Support shown for waterway management initiatives during consultation:

Waterway management initiatives	Support	Oppose
Conduct a speed limit review for coastal and river waters in South Australia	43%	23%
Jet ski irregular riding (e.g. driving in a circle, weaving or jumping) must take place 200 metres away from infrastructure, including properties, landing places and moored vessels	86%	7%
Consistent times for jet ski operation (e.g. between sunrise and sunset on all days)	72%	12%
A 4-knot speed limit for all powered vessels within 100 metres of all bridges and lock	65%	18%
A 7-knot speed limit at night on the River Murray	54%	24%
A 7-knot speed limit for all powered vessels on the backwaters of the River Murray to increase safe operation in shallow waters	49%	26%
A 4-knot speed limit for all powered vessels within 200 metres of the whole coastline	49%	35%

Additional comments were also provided around the need for stronger enforcement of existing regulations. This includes increased patrols, drone surveillance and random checks to deter unsafe activities.

Actions

Swimming areas

1. Work with local government and, where appropriate, introduce swimming and unpowered watercraft only areas where powered vessels are restricted.

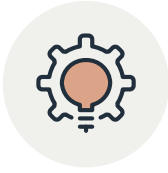
Speed limits

2. Introduce a 4-knot speed limit for all powered vessels within 100 metres of all bridges and locks.
3. Introduce a 7-knot speed limit for all powered vessels on the backwaters of the River Murray. Measures to be in place to allow exemptions for specified aquatic activities and events.
4. Introduce a 4-knot speed limit for all vessels within 200 metres of the South Australian coastline.
5. Introduce a 7-knot speed limit at night on the River Murray.

Personal watercraft

6. Introduce PWC irregular riding restrictions near dwellings and moored vessels. Irregular riding means driving a PWC in a circle or pattern, weaving or diverting, surfing down or jumping over or across any swell, wave or wash.
7. Introduce consistent operating times for PWC's (e.g. between sunrise and sunset on all days) to reduce confusion and improve community understanding. Currently PWC's can operate between 8am and sunset (or 8pm) on Monday to Saturday, and between 9am and sunset (or 8pm) on Sunday.





5. Safer boating through technology

Using technology to improve boating safety.

Technology advancements can be used to facilitate safety improvements for recreational boaters by allowing them to plan, predict and respond to potential safety risks.

For example, web cameras provide a snapshot of the current boating conditions, including the weather. Digital signage can provide up-to-date safety information to boaters to help inform their trip planning.

As mobile phone coverage expands in Australia, boating safety apps are becoming more common with the boating community. Other states, including Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, currently use the same boating safety app to provide key information to boaters. Boating safety apps provide essential safety information, real time weather updates, navigational hazard reporting, trip logging, planning and mapping. These apps are becoming a popular support tool in addition to traditional emergency communications to help protect and save lives on our waterways.

Novel vessels such as powered surfboards and hydrofoils are increasing in number. It is important for us to manage the safety of these smaller vessels.

As new technologies continue to emerge over the next five years, appropriate reform is required to help improve safety for boaters.



Support shown for technology initiatives during consultation:

Technology initiatives	Support	Oppose
Consistent signage for coastal and protected waters at boat ramps, reminding users about safe speed and safety equipment requirements	86%	2%
Partnering with a boating safety app to provide simple, easy and relevant safety information to boaters	80%	4%
More web cameras across the State at boat ramps to help assess boating conditions	67%	8%

Actions

Web cameras

1. Expand the web camera network to provide vision of the weather conditions and boat ramp traffic density.

Signage

2. Update signage with key safety messaging at boat ramps across the State (coastal and River Murray locations).
3. Utilise digital technology with QR codes, electronic virtual message boards and permanent digital signage at selected locations to promote key boating safety messaging.

Digital boating app

4. Investigate implementation of a digital app provider for boaters to access:
 - key safety information
 - opportunities to log on and log off with emergency services
 - maps of restricted areas
 - real time notifications on weather and navigational hazards.

Novel craft

5. Work with other jurisdictions to develop consistent legislation across Australia for the emergence of novel craft.

Implementation

Implementation of the Strategy will occur over the next five years through to 2030.

Some of the changes proposed require further consultation or amendments to the *Harbors and Navigation Act 1993* and the *Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2023*.

The Department will continue to collaborate with marine safety partners and the community to shape and progress the actions from the Strategy between 2025 and 2030.

Stay safe on the water

Visit the [Marine Safety SA website](#) for all boating safety information.

Subscribe to the [Marine Safety SA monthly newsletter](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) to stay up to date.

Visit the [Marine Safety SA online store](#) to order boating safety stickers.

Use our interactive online checking tools to make sure you have what you need:

- [Which lifejacket do you need?](#)
- [What safety equipment do you need?](#)

Have you seen unsafe behaviours or hazards on the water?
[Report incidents & hazards online](#)





Disclaimer

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More information

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