

# 3. Safety on the water

*Having an enjoyable and safe day on the water goes well beyond avoiding an engine breakdown. There are lots of variables to consider and, as the boat operator, it's your responsibility to make sure things don't go sour.*

*This chapter outlines steps you can take to ensure a safe day on the water, including your duty of care; children aboard, stable loading, speed limits and the dangers of alcohol and drugs.*

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## Let someone know

Before you go boating, always tell someone where you are going, your point of departure, when you plan to return and the number of passengers with you.

Provide them with a description or photo of your vessel including its registration number and, if it sits on a trailer, that registration number also.

Also, log your journey with a volunteer marine rescue group such as Australian Volunteer Coast Guard or South Australian Sea Rescue Squadron, but remember to log-off when you return to avoid an unnecessary search being launched.



*Always let someone know*

## Your duty of care

As the vessel operator, you are responsible for the safety of the vessel and of your passengers.

This handbook lists the minimum safety equipment required. In deciding if you need more safety equipment, you should assess your vessel's - and your own - capabilities, the weather conditions, the area of operation, and the people who are coming on board.

Throughout the trip you should constantly:

- assess the weather forecast, including sea conditions, to decide if it is safe to continue
- ensure all hatches and doors are unlocked and clear of obstruction so that access is available in an emergency
- travel at a safe speed, particularly when visibility is reduced
- monitor your wellbeing and that of any passengers
- check your location/position by referring to charts, navigation markers and beacons (GPS can also be used as a guide, but it cannot be relied on solely)
- watch for potential emergencies or accidents
- observe other vessels nearby to determine right-of-way and to take evasive action if needed
- keep clear of larger vessels that cannot manoeuvre as quickly and easily as you
- follow navigation rules, including local area rules
- adjust the outboard leg trim to suit the direction of travel (generally, you trim the leg in—closer to the stern of the vessel—when heading into sea and out—away from the stern—when running with it)
- monitor the engine gauges
- ensure the vessel is not taking on water, and use your bailer or manual or electric pump if water does come on board
- assess and select safe anchorage sites
- ensure any rubbish is stowed and taken home for disposal.

## Care of passengers

As the boat operator, you must be aware of your responsibility to your passengers at all times—and passengers must be prepared to follow your directions, especially in emergencies. In emergencies, always keep your passengers informed about what is going on.

For safety, at least one other person on board should have at least a basic understanding of how to operate the vessel and the safety equipment, including the radio.

Many injuries occur because people fall overboard while the boat is moving. To minimise this risk, ask your passengers:

- to keep to the centre of the boat for stability
- to sit in particular places for better trim and stability
- not to sit on the bow—unless your boat's bow is specifically designed for this—or to dangle legs in the water while the boat is moving.

## When to wear a lifejacket

As the skipper, you are responsible for ensuring that passengers wear or put on a lifejacket according to the legislation.

A lifejacket must be of an appropriate size and properly adjusted for the person who is wearing or will be wearing the lifejacket.

New legislation relating to when a person must wear a lifejacket when boating in South Australia took effect in December 2017. It refers to vessel size as well as times of heightened risk during which a lifejacket must be worn on vessels up to 12 metres.

Times of heightened risk include the following:

- When operating alone
- Between the hours of sunset and sunrise
- When crossing a bar
- When operating in conditions of restricted visibility
- if the vessel is disabled so as to be incapable of making its way through the water
- When operating in an area subject to a gale, storm force, hurricane force or severe thunderstorm, severe weather warning from the Bureau of Meteorology

Refer also chapter 4, Safety equipment.



*The operator is responsible for passengers safety*

**NOTE: Children less than 12 years of age**, or weighing less than 40 kg **must not** wear an inflatable lifejacket.

CATEGORY OF WATERWAY AND VESSEL TYPE	LEVEL 100 OR ABOVE	LEVEL 50	LEVEL 50S
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Children of or under 12 years of age when:

- on vessels not more than 4.8 m fitted with engine when underway or anchored and
- when in an open area of a vessel not less than 4.8 but not more than 12 metres when underway or at anchor

PROTECTED WATERS – must wear		•	
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•		
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•		

Vessels not more than 4.8 metres fitted with engine when underway or anchored

PROTECTED WATERS – all persons must wear (other than children -see above)	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must be equipped with level 100 or above for all persons, but all persons must wear level 100 or above, level 50 or level 50S (see requirements above for children)	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – all must wear (see requirements above for children)	•		

Vessels not less than 4.8 metres but not more than 12 metres when underway or anchored

PROTECTED WATERS – children of or under 12 years on an open deck must wear	•	•	
All other persons when on an open deck or at times of heightened risk must wear (see requirements above for children)	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must be equipped with level 100 for all persons	•		
All persons when on an open deck and at times of heightened risk must wear (see requirements above for children)	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must be equipped with level 100 for all persons, (see requirements above for children)	•		
All other persons when on an open deck and at times of heightened risk must wear	•		

Personal Watercraft

PROTECTED WATERS – must wear		•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear		•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must wear		•	•

CATEGORY OF WATERWAY AND VESSEL TYPE	LEVEL 100 OR ABOVE	LEVEL 50	LEVEL 50S
<b>Paddle board or surf ski</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – all must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear when greater than 400 metres from shore	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – all must wear	•	•	
<b>Sailboards or kiteboards</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – when less than 400 metres from shore must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – when greater than 400 metres from shore must wear	•		
UNPROTECTED WATERS – all must wear	•		
<b>Surfboard</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – no requirement to wear			
UNPROTECTED WATERS – no requirement to wear			
<b>Canoe or kayak (including a motorised canoe or kayak)</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	
<b>Rowboats</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must be equipped with lifejacket for each person on board	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must be equipped with lifejacket for each person on board	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – all must wear	•	•	
<b>Dragon boats</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must wear		•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	
<b>Small sailing dinghy or multi hull sailing craft less than 6 metres</b>			
PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
SEMI PROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•	•	•
UNPROTECTED WATERS – must wear	•		

## Boating with children

Many children love boating and other water activities. You can improve their confidence—and your peace of mind—by investing some time in training and education before you hit the water.

- Show children around the vessel—especially where lifejackets, the first aid kit and other equipment are kept.
- Teach them emergency procedures, particularly that if the boat capsizes everyone should stay with it or an easily seen floating object.
- Teach them about stability, getting on and off the boat, and distributing the load evenly.
- If they are old enough, show children how to use safety equipment such as the radio, EPIRB and flares.
- Before you take them boating, encourage children to learn to swim, and practise emergency positions in the water, such as treading water, HELP (heat escape lessening posture) and Huddle (refer chapter 9, [Emergency action](#), [First aid afloat](#), [Hypothermia](#)).
- Look at ways of rigging lifelines in open areas to give children enough handholds.

- Children should wear a lifejacket at all times when out on deck. Make sure it is well-fitting and suitable for their size, that they can't slip out of it, and that it is not too tight to move. Check that the type of lifejacket is appropriate for the nature of activity (refer chapter 4, [Safety equipment, Standards and features](#)). As a further check, make sure they can put on a lifejacket in darkness and while in the water.
- Though very small lifejackets are available, if you can't provide a correctly fitted lifejacket, the child shouldn't go out on the water.



*Children of or under the age of 12 years must wear a lifejacket at all times when on deck*

## Speed limits

Travelling at a safe speed means that your vessel can be stopped in time to avoid a sudden danger. This depends on the circumstances and conditions at the time. It's up to you to keep a good lookout and continually assess your speed for safety.

Always drive slowly when visibility is low; that is, at night and in rain, fog, mist, smoke or glare.

Some SA waters have speed limits in areas where high-speed boats can be hazardous to other aquatic activities. These are often signposted near boat ramps. Make sure you know of any local restrictions, particularly if you plan to waterski or use a PWC (refer chapter 11, *Special activities*).

As well as local restrictions, the following general speed limits apply:

### 4 knots

- All vessels within 50 m of:
  - a person in the water;
  - a vessel or buoy displaying a blue and white flag—international flag A (refer chapter 7, *Buoys, marks, beacons, signals & signs, Daymarks*) indicating that there is a diver below; and
  - a person in or on a kayak, surfboard, sailboard or similar small unpowered recreational vessel.

- All vessels within marinas and other restricted areas.
- All vessels within 30 m of any other vessel (whether stationary or underway) that may be adversely affected by your wake or wash.
- All vessels within 100 m of a ferry crossing.
- All vessels within or passing through a mooring area or boat haven.
- All vessels within 30 m of a jetty, wharf or other place at which a boat is being launched or retrieved.
- All PWC operating within 200 m of the metropolitan shoreline (edge of water) between the Outer Harbor southern breakwater and the southern end of Sellicks Beach unless zoned otherwise; and the backwaters of the River Murray (excluding Lake Bonney at Barmera).

### 7 knots

Speed restrictions applied to specified areas, eg. sections of the Port Adelaide River. Refer to Schedule 10 of the Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2009 for details of these waters.

### 10 knots

The speed limit applied to vessels being operated by an unlicensed person under the direct supervision of a licensed person, or by a special permit holder without supervision. Unlicensed persons and special permit holders may not operate a PWC.

## Loading for stability

Overloaded and unevenly-loaded vessels or vessels with unsecured loads are unstable and dangerous.

To be safe, your boat must have adequate freeboard for all possible weather conditions.

Ensure that the total load, including the passengers, is within the boat's specifications. If your boat is not fitted with a manufacturer's compliance plate or ABP, use the following tables to calculate the number of people your vessel can legally carry.

The maximum number of adults you can carry safely in calm conditions, based on an average weight of 90 kilograms (75 kg and 15 kg of personal gear), is shown on the tables where the length and width measurements of your boat intersect. Reduce this number when boating in the open sea, in rougher conditions, or when carrying extra weight (eg. diving gear).

Generally, children aged less than 12 can be counted as half an adult when working out safe capacity.

For a vessel longer than 10 m, or where length or breadth are not shown on the tables, use the appropriate formula below to calculate the maximum safe capacity in calm conditions.

For single-deck vessels (no flybridge):

**Maximum capacity (nearest whole number) =  $0.75L\sqrt{B}$**

where **L** = length of vessel in metres,  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$  is the 'square root' symbol, and **B** = breadth (width) of vessel in metres.

		Length (m)										
		3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	7	8	9	10
Width (m)	1	2	3	3								
	1.5	3	3	4	4	5	5	6				
	2			4	5	5	6	6	7	8	10	11
	2.5					6	7	7	8	9	11	12
	3							8	9	10	12	13
	3.5									11	13	14
	4									12	14	15
	4.5											16

*Maximum safe capacity (adults) for conventional vessels without flybridges*

Example: A vessel that is 5.5 m long and 2 m wide has a capacity of six adults.



For flybridge vessels:

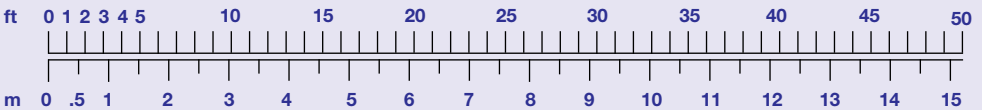
### Maximum capacity (nearest whole number) = $0.6L\sqrt{B}$

where **L** = length of vessel in metres,  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$  is the 'square root' symbol, and **B** = breadth (width) of vessel in metres. (No more than one quarter of the maximum number of passengers allowed on board should be on the flybridge at one time.)

		Length (m)								
		4	3.5	5	5.5	6	7	8	9	10
Width (m)	1.5	3	3	4	4	4				
	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8
	2.5			5	5	6	7	8	9	9
	3					6	7	8	9	10
	3.5							9	10	11
	4								11	12
	4.5									13

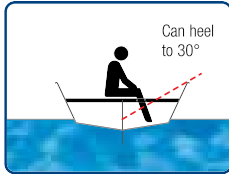
### Maximum safe capacity (adults) for conventional vessels with flybridges

Example: A flybridge vessel that is 8 m long and 2.5 m wide has a capacity of eight adults.



### Metric Conversion Chart (feet into metres)

*Light load  
Can resist  
waves 300 mm  
high*



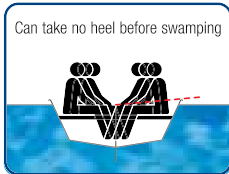
*Lightly loaded  
with 2 people*



*Loaded to  
maximum 4  
people*



*Overloaded  
Cannot resist  
any wave*



*Vessel stability example: Dinghy 1.5 m x 4 m*

To load your vessel for stability:

- stow all gear securely
- stow heavy items low
- distribute items evenly, so they won't affect the trim
- don't allow gear to shift; restrain any loose gear with straps or ropes
- advise passengers that their movements may affect stability, especially in smaller boats.

Water in the vessel will increase the total load and cause the 'free surface effect', where free-moving water affects stability out of all proportion to its quantity. To avoid this effect, you should monitor the level of any water on board the vessel and regularly bail water out.

## Australian Builders Plate (ABP)

The ABP has been introduced to inform purchasers of new recreational vessels as to the loading capacities for the vessel and states the maximum number of people allowed on a vessel, its maximum weight load capacity, and the engine's maximum power rating. This enables buyers to choose a boat which meets their needs.

For boats under six metres in length, the plate will also provide information on buoyancy performance.

For further information on ABP visit [www.sa.gov.au](http://www.sa.gov.au).

## Fuelling and fire prevention

Lack of maintenance, or inattention while refuelling, can cause damage to the environment and increase the risk of fire. Take the following maintenance steps to reduce fire risk.

### The engine

- Check the fuel lines for cracks and splits.
- Ensure engine bays are ventilated to reduce the chance of fuel vapour build-up and possible explosion.
- If your engine runs on petrol, ensure it is properly grounded to reduce static electricity build-up, particularly on hot days.
- Lift the cover before the first start-up of the day to clear fume build-up.

### The fuel system

- Don't fill the fuel tank to the brim—fuel expands as it warms up.
- Where practical, install an anti-surge valve in the fuel vent line to prevent fuel leaks.

## Bilge/s

- Keep bilges clean.
- If bilge contains oil or fuel use polypropylene bilge socks to absorb any fuel or oil.
- Dispose of used bilge socks and waste oil facility at a waste oil station, or contact your local council.

## Refuelling

### Before refuelling

- Check that the dispensing point has appropriate fire-fighting appliances.
- Ensure all passengers and crew are above deck and clear of any areas where fumes may build up.
- Clear any blockages or obstructions from in or around refuelling equipment.
- Turn off pilot lights to gas appliances, and electric power at main switch.
- Close all hatches and openings to prevent fumes entering the hull and bilge.
- Turn off mobile phones.
- Place a discharge bucket under the air/overflow pipe.

### During refuelling

- Don't start the dispenser until the outlet nozzle is in the tank.
- Operate the fuel dispenser by hand—don't lock it open. Make sure the hose nozzle is connected to the filler neck to prevent static sparks.
- Carefully monitor the tank as it fills, using your hand to check for air escaping from the vent—a distinct increase in airflow is the signal to stop filling.
- Have a cloth handy to clean up any spills.

### After refuelling

- Don't remove the filler hose until the fuel has stopped flowing.
- Lift the filler hose to drain all residual fuel into the tank.
- Check for any fuel which may have spilled into the bilges and clean up if necessary
- Leave boat wide open to ventilate and start the engine only once satisfied the boat is free of fumes.
- Allow the passengers aboard.

### Refuelling on water

You should only refuel on water if there is no other option. Ideally, fill up at a service station, where any spills are easier to contain.

If you must refuel on water, take extreme care; use a funnel and hose from the fuel can to the fuel tank, and make sure the area is well ventilated, to safeguard against fire, fumes and toxic spills.

For what you should do if a spill or other incident occurs during on-water refuelling refer [chapter 9. Emergency action](#).

## Alcohol and drugs

Drugs or alcohol and boating do not mix. A vessel operator with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05 has double the risk of collision compared with an operator who has not been drinking alcohol.

In South Australia, it's an offence for vessel operators, waterskiers or ski observers to have a BAC of .05 or more or to be under the influence of drugs, and severe penalties apply. Marine Safety Officers and South Australia Police can conduct random breath tests for alcohol on waterways and at launch sites.

If a person aged over 10 years is admitted to hospital after a boating accident, a blood test for alcohol and other drugs is compulsory.

If you are on prescription drugs, read the label or ask your doctor or pharmacist if they will affect your ability to operate a vessel or participate in water activities such as waterskiing.



*Drugs or alcohol and boating do not mix*

## Chapter 3. Self-check questions

**1) Below what level must the maximum Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) be for a person to legally operate a recreational boat?**

- A. There is no limit.
- B. Below 0.05.
- C. Below 0.08.

**2) In which of the following areas does a 4-knot speed limit apply in South Australian waters?**

- A. Within 100 m of a ferry crossing on the River Murray.
- B. For Personal Water Craft (PWC), within 200 m of the metropolitan coast and in backwaters of the River Murray.
- C. Within 50 m of a person in the water, or of a "Diver Below" flag.
- D. All of the above.

**3) At what maximum speed may an unlicensed person operate a recreational vessel (not a PWC) while under the direct supervision of a licence holder?**

- A. 20 knots.
- B. 10 knots.
- C. There is no speed limit.

**4) When out on the water, which of the following would be considered "safe boating behaviour"?**

- A. Six friends and a cooler full of beer in a small dinghy.
- B. Going boating in unfamiliar waters without telling anyone.
- C. Monitoring weather changes as you go, and preparing to return to shore if the weather starts to turn bad.
- D. Trusting your GPS alone for navigation.