Diving recommendation

Although the regulations do not require a diving signal to be displayed when a diver is not using a vessel and not diving in a harbour, or when a person is snorkelling, you should assess the risks to your safety posed by vessels operating in the vicinity.

At a minimum you should consider displaying the diver below flag, particularly when diving or snorkelling from the shore or in areas of high boating traffic. The rigid replica may be displayed on a float and either attached to a weighted line enabling you to pull it along with you or anchored close by.

Accidents and incidents

If your vessel is involved in an incident or you witness an incident you have a legal obligation to stop and provide assistance.

If you are involved in an accident that results in a death, or injury requiring medical attention to any person, or any damage exceeding $300, you must report the matter to a Police Officer nearest to the place of incident or a Marine Safety Officer on 8260 0220 within 48 hours of the event.

Reporting incidents

If you observe or experience careless or dangerous operation of a vessel or other offences you can report the matter to the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, Marine Operations and Response Section on 8260 0220 or email the Boating Safety Unit at dpti.recreationalboatingunit@sa.gov.au

Further information

The South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook has more detailed information regarding boating safety, safe operation and collision regulations.

To obtain a free copy of the handbook contact the Customer Service Centre on 13 10 84 or the Boating Safety Unit on 1300 183 046.

Safety information is also available at sa.gov.au/boatingmarine

The Harbors and Navigation Act 1993 and the Harbors and Navigation Regulations 2009 provides for the safe operation of all vessels operating in South Australian waters.

Government of South Australia
Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure

sa.gov.au/boatingmarine

All boats must slow to 4 knots within 50 metres

Be safe. Be diver aware.
Caution diver below

Rules are in place to protect the safety of divers in the water by regulating the operation of other vessels in the vicinity.

A vessel with divers working from it must display the appropriate day or night signals.

It is important that vessel operators know what warning signals may be displayed when divers are in the water and the rules that apply to vessels operating in the vicinity.

Penalties apply for failure to obey the rules.

Recreational vessel operators are sometimes subject to complaints about operating their vessel at a dangerous speed and in close proximity to divers.

This brochure has been developed to remind vessel operators of the rules that apply to operating vessels near divers – and the diving signal(s) that may be displayed from a vessel, float or buoy indicating that a diver is below.

Safe operation

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

This includes obligations to observe and follow the rules. Whether you are boating in a familiar or unfamiliar area, you must keep a proper lookout (by sight and hearing) for potential hazards and travel at a safe speed so that you are able to take appropriate action to avoid collisions.

Be aware that while some commercial divers may operate in specific areas, commercial and recreational divers may operate in any waters during the day or night. Further, some diving may involve operating from small vessels using a hookah – that is a long hose delivering air to the diver from a deck-mounted compressor.

Vessels to keep clear

The operator of a vessel navigating in the vicinity of a vessel, float or buoy displaying a signal indicating the presence of a diver below, must navigate to avoid injury to the diver or interference with the vessel, float or buoy.

Further, in South Australia, the operator of a vessel must slow to 4 knots within 50 metres of a vessel or buoy which is displaying a flag indicating that there is a diver below.

When operating in this area keep a lookout for persons or equipment in the water and proceed with due caution until well clear.

A person who fails to obey the rules is guilty of an offence with a maximum penalty of $1,250, or may be considered as operating carelessly or dangerously which incurs far higher penalties.

It is recommended, however, that you stay well clear of the area as a diver may be operating quite some distance from the vessel, float or buoy that is displaying the diving signal.

Careless operation

A person who operates a vessel without due care for the safety of any person or property is guilty of an offence. The maximum penalty is one year imprisonment (aggravated offence).

For any other offence, the maximum penalty is $5,000.

Dangerous operation

A person who operates a vessel at a dangerous speed or in a dangerous manner is guilty of an offence with a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment.

Diving signals

During daylight hours, the signal displayed to indicate that a diver is in the water is the International Code Flag A. It means ‘I have a diver below – keep well clear at slow speed’.

At night, a vessel (depending on its size) must display its required navigation light indicating at anchor, and in addition, either three all-round lights in a vertical line (top and bottom red and the middle white), or an illuminated rigid replica of the flag visible all-round.

The diver below signals may be a combination of:

When a diver is operating from a vessel:

- If the vessel is over 10 metres in length it must display, in a conspicuous position on the vessel, the International Code Flag A.
- If the vessel is 10 metres in length or less, it must display in a conspicuous position on the vessel a rigid replica of this flag, at least 750mm by 600mm in size.

When a diver is operating in a harbour independently of a vessel, a rigid replica of this flag, at least 300mm by 200mm in size, must be displayed at all times, from a buoy or float which is moored within 30m of the diver or is attached to a line and towed by the diver.

Persons involved in diving operations are reminded that a maximum penalty of $1,250 applies for failure to display the required diving signals.