

YOU AND YOUR BOAT TRAILER

What you need to know



Government of South Australia
Department for Transport,
Energy and Infrastructure

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Introduction

This booklet has been designed to provide helpful tips on using, maintaining and towing your boat trailer. It also summarises some of the regulations that apply when you tow your boat trailer on the road.

To ensure that you operate your boat trailer safely, you will need to read, understand and follow the advice in this booklet, and comply with the regulations detailed in it.

You must also comply with any warnings or information provided by the manufacturer about the make and model of your boat trailer.

Before you travel on the roads in South Australia, you must make sure that you understand the legal and registration requirements and any load limitations that apply. A Department for Transport, Energy & Infrastructure (DTEI) or Service SA, Customer Service Centre can provide you with more information. Alternatively, you can visit the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure website at:

www.dtei.sa.gov.au

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PART 1 – CARE

Selecting your boat trailer



Three types of trailer - the multi-roller type (above), a combination of rollers and skids (below) or one fitted only with skids



Supporting the boat

When you purchase a new or second-hand boat trailer, you must choose the right trailer for your boat. Poorly adjusted or maintained boat trailers can cause major damage to boats, and can be dangerous when they are towed on the road. Most new trailer boats are purchased together with a trailer but you should inquire about trailer options and make sure that you get the trailer best suited to your needs.

The hull of a boat is designed to be supported by water so it is important when your boat is being transported on a trailer, that it should be supported as evenly as possible across the hull to minimise the possibility of damage caused by road travel.

Heavy duty trailers

The trailer should be long enough to support the whole length of the hull, but short enough to allow unrestricted movement of any outboard motor leg fitted to the boat.

If you intend to tow your trailer long distances with a heavy load, a heavy duty trailer with a higher weight capacity would be a better choice than a regular trailer loaded right to its limit.



A typical dual-axle heavy duty trailer

Matching your boat to your trailer

Weight

When choosing a suitable trailer, the weight of your boat and the width and length of the hull need to be considered.

When you calculate the gross weight of the trailer, you need to include the weight of the boat, trailer, engine and fuel (around 1 kilogram per litre), as well as any equipment you intend to carry.

Check the compliance plate to make sure that the gross weight limit specified for the trailer is not exceeded. It is better to have a safety margin than overload the trailer because this will minimise the risk of any structural or bearings problems.



A typical compliance plate

Length

If you choose a long trailer, the extra distance between the tow hitch and the trailer wheels will make it easier to reverse and to tow.

Support skids/rollers

You should ask about the dealer's or boat manufacturer's recommendation regarding rollers, support skids or a combination of the two. Generally, trailers with rollers do not have to be reversed as far into the water in order to launch. Skids, however, need to be wetted for smooth launching and to minimise the possibility of hull damage.

On most trailers, the support skids, rollers, winch post and axle(s) can be adjusted to accommodate different types of boats.

Finish and materials

Painted trailers are generally suitable only for use in freshwater. If you intend to launch your boat into salt water, a galvanised trailer would be a more suitable choice for your long-term needs.

Trailer equipment

Lights

To minimise the amount of time spent rigging and de-rigging your trailer, consider fitting your trailer with submersible trailer lights. These must operate simultaneously with all the lights of the towing vehicle.

Wheels

The wheels on your trailer should be fitted with bearing 'buddies' or similar wheel bearing protectors. Carry a pair of wheel chocks to place behind the trailer wheels when launching or retrieving.

If you are travelling in remote areas, carry spare wheel nuts as these can be stolen or lost during road travel.

Always carry a spare wheel with a correctly-inflated tyre and a suitable jack and wheel brace. Your car jack may not be suitable for changing the tyre on your trailer, so you will need to check this before travelling.

In order to support the front of the trailer when you are disconnecting it from the towing vehicle, you should make sure a suitable jockey wheel is fitted. A jockey wheel with an inflatable tyre will enable easier manoeuvring. Some feature a hand-cranking mechanism to enable manual manoeuvring in restricted areas.

Heavy duty tyres should be fitted to your trailer wheels. Larger boat trailers should be equipped with light truck tyres to minimise the possibility of blow-outs. The stiffer side walls will also help to resist any tendency to fishtail while towing.



A jockey wheel fitted to a trailer

Safety Chains

Suitable safety chains must be fitted to the trailer draw bar and connected to the towing vehicle. These are designed to prevent the trailer breaking away if the coupling fails. If two safety chains are fitted, they should be crossed over underneath the main coupling to prevent the trailer drawbar from hitting the ground.



Safety chains in place and correctly fitted

Brakes

You must comply with all trailer brake requirements detailed in this booklet (See Page 11). Suitable trailer brake systems, i.e. vacuum-assisted hydraulic or hydraulic override brakes and hand brakes, must be fitted to most boat trailers.



Submersible lights fitted to a boat trailer



Examples of braking systems. Above, a vacuum-assisted hydraulic system. Below, a ratchet handbrake system (left) and the cable connection to the wheel (right)



Tie-Downs

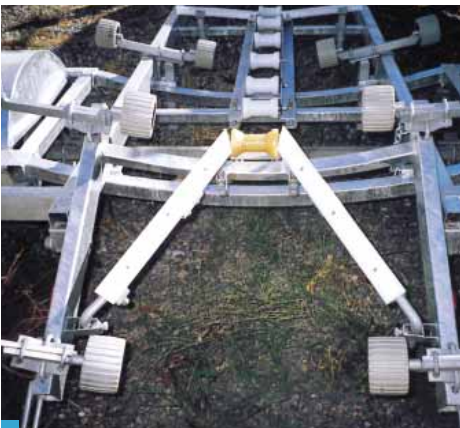
To prevent vertical or horizontal movement during road travel and braking, boat tie-downs should be used at the bow and transom to secure the boat to the trailer. Failure to do this could result in the boat moving forwards into the back of the towing vehicle during hard braking or cause the boat to bounce or slide off the trailer on rough roads or during cornering.



A tie-down holds the boat in place

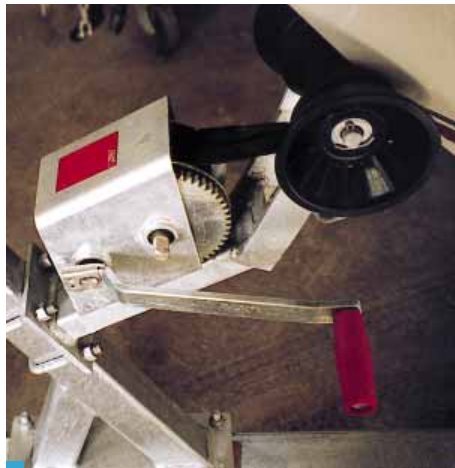
General

To assist you to centre your boat during retrieval and make retrieval quick and hassle-free, you can fit your trailer with a bow location system.



A bow location system makes retrieval easier

Your trailer will need to be fitted with a retrieval winch. Basically, you have a choice between a manual or electric winch with either a cable or webbing strap. Whatever you decide, ensure that the winch is adequate for the job because winching a heavy boat onto a trailer by hand can be tiring and time consuming. It is important to keep the winch in a safe operating condition and replace the cable or webbing if frayed.



A typical two-speed hand winch



An electric winch

Pre-travel checklist

Before travelling with your boat trailer, be sure to check that :

- Tyres are in good order and correctly inflated.



- Tow coupling between the trailer and car is the correct size (usually 50mm diameter balls), properly adjusted and securely connected.



- Electrical plug is connected to the vehicle and all lights are operating correctly.
- Safety chains are attached correctly.



Pre-launch checklist

- Wheel bearings are full of waterproof grease.
- Wheel studs are present and correctly tensioned.
- Boat is correctly secured to the boat trailer.
- Any accumulated water is drained away from inside the boat, as this adds extra weight and could cause fishtailing as the water sloshes from side to side during travel.



- Boat trailer is loaded evenly from front to rear and side to side and all loose objects are either secured or stored away.



- Your brakes are working and properly adjusted, and the master cylinder fluid level is checked.
- Your braking system has no air or hydraulic fluid leaks.



- Side mirrors are properly adjusted and large enough to provide a clear view to the rear.



- You have attached a white or bright coloured flag to the outboard motor leg (if fitted).
- You have a red light attached to the outboard leg (if fitted) for travel at night.

- When you launch your boat, always consider others and follow correct ramp etiquette.
- Choose either a quiet area in the car park away from the ramp, or an area set aside for rigging/de-rigging, to load your gear and prepare your boat for launching.
- Check your boat to make sure that no damage was caused by the trip.
- Load all your equipment, fishing gear etc. on board at this time.
- If you are not familiar with the launch ramp, plan your launch strategy and take the time to inspect the ramp for general condition, gradient, depth, mooring cleats and other features.
- Make a note of the wind direction, strength and water current and determine how this will effect your boat during launching.
- Remove the stern tie-downs but make sure that the winch cable is properly attached to the boat bow eye and locked in position.
- Loosen the bow tie-down so that it can be easily removed but leave it connected to the bow eye. If the boat starts to move backwards on the trailer too soon, the tie-down will prevent the boat from launching onto the ramp.
- Raise the motor outboard leg (unless an inboard motor) to make sure that it does not hit the bottom while launching.
- Ensure that the drain plug or plugs are in place and tightened correctly.
- Disconnect the trailer lights, unless they are the submersible type.
- Attach bow and stern lines to your boat to enable your boat to be easily manoeuvred once it is floated off the trailer.
- When you take your towing vehicle back to the car park, spray the brake callipers (if fitted) with a dewatering lubricant - this will help to prevent corrosion in the brake mechanism.

Security

Security Devices



Invest in a safety lock for your boat trailer

Your boat and boat trailer are expensive investments and could be a target for thieves. To minimise the possibility of theft, your boat and boat trailer should be secured away undercover when they are not being used.

Cars and boat trailers left unattended at remote boat ramps are vulnerable. You should fit a trailer coupling lock, which is available from some trailer manufacturers and retail outlets. A coupling lock will make it difficult for a thief to hook up your boat trailer to their vehicle and drive off. This device can be used to secure the trailer to your towing vehicle and/or prevent the trailer coupling from being removed from the tow ball of your vehicle. A trailer coupling lock can also prevent the trailer coupling mechanism from operating when it is not connected to your car.

Alternatively, you can make your own coupling lock by using a section of heavy duty chain or cable and a padlock. Wheels can also be fitted with lockable wheel studs to prevent removal.

Make a note of your trailer serial number. This number should be welded or engraved onto the trailer frame because the specification plate and registration number plate can be stolen.

BoatCode

A Hull Identification Number (HIN) system, designed to deter vessel theft, was introduced in South Australia in September 2001.

Information about the system, known as BoatCode, can be obtained from your nearest DTEI or Service SA, Customer Service Centre, or by visiting the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure website at:

www.dtei.sa.gov.au

Maintenance and storage checklist

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for regular maintenance. If you do not feel confident with some aspects of trailer maintenance, or if you do not have the time, you should have your trailer serviced periodically by a recognised manufacturer or service outlet.

- If wash-down facilities were not provided at the boat ramp, thoroughly wash your boat and trailer at home, or wherever it is normally stored.
- Check and make sure that the wheel bearings are full of grease and that there is no evidence of free play in the bearings.
- Pump grease into any grease nipples in the springs (if fitted), but do not overfill the wheel bearings as this could blow out the 'O' ring seals.
- Use fish oil to coat springs, axles and other metal components that come into contact with water – galvanisation does not necessarily stop rust.
- Check the tow bar assembly regularly for wear and tear, and keep the ball and coupling lubricated with grease or a dewatering agent.
- Check the trailer for stress cracks and corrosion, remove any corrosion with a wire brush and paint with re-galvanising paint and fish oil.
- Inspect tyres regularly for signs of wear, ensure that wheel studs are correctly tensioned and that correct tyre pressure is maintained.
- Keep the brakes serviced, callipers sprayed with a dewatering agent and cables and rollers lubricated.
- Keep the trailer clean and remove any dirt and road grime from the springs and frame.
- Spray the winch with a dewatering agent and lubricate all shackles.
- Check all nuts and bolts on the trailer and immediately replace frayed cables and/or webbing.
- Replace any deteriorated rollers or skids and make sure that they are adjusted to the correct height, and the securing nuts and bolts are protected from corrosion.
- Where possible, keep the boat and trailer parked on a paved area, under cover.
- If you do not intend to use your boat and trailer for a long period of time, you can avoid flat spots on the tyres and also relieve the load on springs by jacking the trailer frame up onto blocks.

Travelling with your boat trailer

Preparation

Before you make your first trip with your boat trailer, familiarise yourself with the feel of towing a boat and trailer and the different handling characteristics involved. Make sure that everything is working correctly.

Practise reversing, turning and braking in a quiet, secluded area. It is generally better to do this without the distractions at a crowded boat ramp.

Speed

There is much less strain on your boat, boat trailer, car and you when you drive at slow to moderate speeds.

Use a lower gear when travelling up or down hills and avoid using overdrive, if fitted. This will reduce the load on your brakes and make stopping quicker and safer.

Always allow more time to brake, accelerate, overtake and stop when you are towing your trailer.

Braking

Try to avoid any sudden braking and turns. Even though your trailer may be fitted with brakes, your towing vehicle not only has to slow itself, but also the several hundred kilograms of boat and trailer it is towing.

To ensure the safety of yourself and other motorists when you are travelling, leave plenty of room in front of you, behind you and beside your vehicle and trailer.

If your car is fitted with a trailer brake hand control, it is recommended that you adjust it so that when you brake, your trailer brakes activate just before your car brakes do. This will minimise the chance of jack-knifing your trailer and assist to obtain controlled straight-line braking.

General

When you are towing a boat trailer, the turning circle is greater and the inside wheels of the trailer will turn in closer than your towing vehicle wheels. Allow more room, therefore, when you turn corners to avoid colliding with objects or damaging the sidewalls of your tyres on kerbs, which could result in a blow-out.

Buffeting caused by back drafts from semi-trailers or strong side winds can make towing your boat trailer more challenging. Be aware of the conditions, and adjust your driving to suit.

Launching your boat

Before turning or changing lanes, signal your intentions to other drivers well in advance and always check your rear view mirrors.

Whenever practicable, keep as close to the left-hand side of the road as you can and allow any faster moving vehicles to pass you wherever you can. Be prepared to slow down to allow vehicles passing you sufficient time and room to return to the correct side of the road.

Any sudden bumping or fishtailing may be the result of a flat tyre. It is best not to brake hard or accelerate quickly but to apply gentle braking pressure and stop in as straight a line as possible. If any problems do occur, make sure that you stay calm and try to avoid any sudden braking or steering corrections.

Overhead dangers

When raising the mast of a yacht while it is still on the trailer, or manoeuvring your boat with the mast up, you must take special care not to allow the mast to come anywhere near overhead power lines because this could cause an electrical charge to surge down the mast to the boat and trailer, causing the danger of electrocution.

You should also take care not to allow the mast to tangle any other overhead lines, such as telephone wires and cables.

Car parks near boat ramps or marinas, your front yard, or outside the front of your home are danger spots for boat masts coming near overhead power lines as well as roadways and intersections, so always check the craft and height of the masts before you begin to tow or prepare your boat for launching.

If you notice that a power line appears to be too close to the ground, please contact ETSA Utilities on 13 12 61 so that the situation can be checked and rectified.

In emergency, contact 13 13 66



Before launching

Before you start reversing down the boat ramp, seek help from a passenger or bystander to make sure that it's safe to launch. If your helper stands where you are able to see them and where they are able to see directly behind your boat, the chance of injury or damage to your boat or someone else's property will be minimised. After a few launchings, you may be able to manage this alone.

If you reverse your trailer slowly, you will easily be able to correct it as you back down the ramp. A popular technique to use when you are reversing, and this can be practised in your driveway, is to put your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel, use your mirrors, and turn the wheel slowly in the direction you want the trailer to go. Putting your hazard lights on to alert others when you reverse is a safe practice to adopt.

Launching

Keep gentle pressure on the footbrake as you ease the rig down the ramp. When you have determined where you need to stop, gently increase the braking pressure until you have stopped. Any sudden braking pressure could cause a lock-up, and on a slippery ramp, may cause the whole rig to slide towards the water.

Stop so that the rear wheels of your towing vehicle are clear of the water and this will usually be far enough. If the exhaust pipes are immersed, you have backed too far down the ramp and your engine may stall.

Reverse the trailer only as far as you need to so that the boat can roll or float off the trailer without striking the bottom. The gradient of the ramp and design of the trailer and boat will determine how far this needs to be. Generally, multi-roller trailers do not need to be reversed as far into the water as trailers that are fitted with support skids. Support skids should be wetted to enable smooth friction-free launching.



Retrieving your boat

If you are driving an automatic towing vehicle, select park and engage the handbrake. Put chocks behind the rear wheels of your vehicle as an added precaution to keep your rig safely on the ramp. Do not just rely on a vehicle handbrake to hold several tonnes of vehicle, boat and trailer on the steep gradient of a boat ramp. If you are driving a manual towing vehicle, put the handbrake on, turn the engine off and leave the vehicle in first gear.

Release the winch and then remove the winch cable hook and bow tie-down from the bow eye. If the boat doesn't start moving off the trailer, you can give it a gentle push to help it along.

When easing the boat off the trailer, make sure that you or your helper/s are holding the bow and stern lines. If you are having difficulty moving the boat off the trailer, you will need to have the settings and condition of your rollers or skids checked for correct adjustment.



After launching

After you have launched your boat, and before you secure it, manoeuvre the boat further down the jetty or pontoon (if provided), so that the mooring area immediately next to the ramp is kept clear. This will allow others to use the ramp while you park your towing vehicle. If there is no jetty or pontoon, simply manoeuvre your boat clear of the immediate launching area so that other people are not held up.

As soon as you can, clear your empty trailer away from the launch ramp and secure it in the designated vehicle and trailer park. Pull the winch cable and hook down to the back of the trailer ready for retrieval.

Approaching the ramp

To retrieve your boat from the water, simply reverse the launch procedure. Be aware, however, that some conditions may have changed since you launched your boat.

As you approach the ramp area, note any:

- change in the wind direction and strength;
- change in the current, tide or depth of water;
- slime on the ramp that may make it slippery;
- increase in boating traffic.

Securing your boat

Manoeuvre your boat back on to the trailer making sure that the boat is in the middle of the trailer. Secure the winch cable and bow tie-down to the bow eye of your boat, then accelerate your towing vehicle gently up the ramp. If the wheels spin, you have lost traction. It may be difficult to remove the trailer from the ramp, but if this happens, adding more weight over the drive axle(s) of the towing vehicle may solve this problem.

When you are back at the rigging/de-rigging area, prepare your boat and trailer for the road by following the pre-travel checklist on pages 9 and 10.

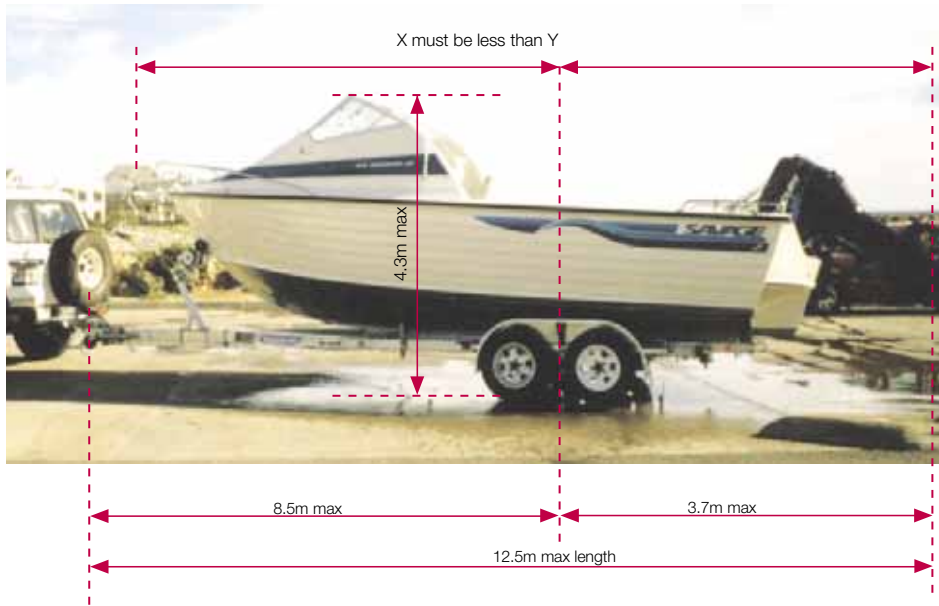
After the retrieval

Where washing facilities are provided, take the time to wash your boat and trailer with fresh water. Ensure that all salt water is washed from the brakes, brake callipers, wheel bearings and springs. Salt water often collects in this area and causes corrosion. As an extra precaution, spray these areas with a dewatering agent.

To dry the brakes of any residual moisture, periodically apply gentle pressure as you drive away. Your brakes need to be dry to operate safely and efficiently when you travel.

PART 3 – LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Vehicle dimensions



Dimension limits apply to all vehicles that use the road system in South Australia. For general unrestricted travel, your boat and trailer and towing vehicle combination must not exceed the following dimensions:

Height

When the boat is on the trailer the overall height from the ground to the highest point on the boat must not be more than 4.3 metres.

Rear overhang

The rear overhang, measured from the centre of the axle or axle group to the rear most part of the boat, must not exceed the lesser of the length of the load carrying area ahead of the axle group, or 3.7 metres.

Length

The overall length of the towing vehicle and boat and trailer combination must not be more than 19 metres.

The overall length of the boat trailer must not be more than 12.5 metres.

The distance between the centre of the coupling pivot on the drawbar and the centre line of the axle or axle group must not be more than 8.5 metres.

Width

The overall width of the trailer including the boat must not be more than 2.5 metres. The boat must not project more than 150mm over the sides of the trailer.

Ground clearance

The ground clearance of a trailer measured from the horizontal road surface of any point on the underside of the trailer except the tyres, wheel and wheel hubs must, when located to the Aggregate Trailer Mass (ATM), be not less than 100mm for any point in the width of the vehicle which is within one metre for and aft of any axle.

Permits

If your vehicle and boat combination exceeds any of the specified dimension limits, it can only be driven on the road if DTEI Permits Office issues an individual exemption (permit). You can apply for a permit at DTEI Permits Office, Kateena Street, Regency Park.

It should also be noted that restrictions on vehicle configurations, routes and times of travel may apply. For more information, telephone DTEI on 1300 882 249.



A trailer with correctly-fitted submersible lights and one side reflector

Lighting and rear vision requirements

Lights

Your boat trailer needs to be fitted with the following lights:

- number plate light which may be combined with the tail lights;
- one pair of brake lights;
- a pair of tail lights;
- one pair of direction indicator lights that can also be used as hazard lights;
- one pair of red reflectors at the rear;
- for night travel – a red light must be fitted to the rear most part of the boat if it overhangs the trailer by more than 1.2 metres, for example, outboard motor legs;
- side marker lights – if your trailer is more than 2.2 metres wide or more than 7.5 metres in length;
- clearance lights – if your trailer is more than 2.2 metres wide.

Reflectors

If your trailer was manufactured prior to 1989, and is more than 2.2 metres wide, it must be fitted with white reflectors that are mounted symmetrically to the front of the trailer and within 400mm of the sides.

If your trailer was manufactured on or after 1 January 1989, it must be fitted with white reflectors that are mounted symmetrically to the front of the trailer and within 150mm of the sides, regardless of the trailer's width.

Wiring

All trailers must have an earth wire connected through the wiring back to the towing vehicle, with the wiring secured at least every 600mm. Wiring must comply with AS2513 – 1982 Electrical Connections for Trailer Vehicles.

Light Board

A light board correctly positioned on the trailer can be used as an alternative to permanently fixed lights.

Fixed Rear Vision Mirrors

Fixed external rear vision mirrors must not project more than 150mm beyond the widest part of the vehicle and boat trailer combination.

Extendible Rear Vision Mirrors

Extendible rear vision mirrors can project up to 230mm beyond the widest part of the vehicle and boat trailer combination provided that when they have been retracted, they do not project more than 150mm.

Boat trailer brakes

Correctly installed trailer brakes are important to ensure safe vehicle braking under all normal driving conditions.

The following braking requirements apply:

- if the Gross Trailer Mass (GTM) of your boat trailer does not exceed 750kg, trailer brakes are not required. The GTM may be found on the "Trailer Plate" or may be specified on the trailer's registration certificate;
- if the GTM is between 750kg and 2 tonnes, it must be fitted with brakes to at least one axle;
- if your boat trailer was manufactured prior to 1989, and has a GTM greater than 2 tonnes, it must be fitted with brakes to at least one axle.
- if your boat trailer was manufactured on or after 1 January 1989, and has a GTM greater than 2 tonnes, it must be fitted with brakes to the wheels of all axles.
- Where the GTM of the trailer is greater than 2 tonnes, the trailer brakes must:
 - engage immediately the brakes on the towing vehicle are activated; and
 - be able to be engaged independently from the towing vehicle foot brake; and
 - be automatically activated if the trailer breaks away from the towing vehicle;

GTM is the total mass (weight) of the boat and trailer (including any equipment) transmitted to the ground by the axle(s) and wheels, when the trailer is connected to the towing vehicle.

Special Purpose Boat Trailer

A braking exemption applies to boat trailers that only travel very short distances to launch and retrieve boats i.e. from the storage yard or holiday home to the boat ramp.

This exemption is subject to mass and speed restrictions and is valid until 30 June 2007.

Vehicle manufacturer's requirements

As well as complying with the above requirements, you must also comply with any towing mass and trailer brake requirements specified by the towing vehicle manufacturer.

Vehicle mass

Towing Capacity

Your vehicle must be capable of towing the combined mass of the trailer and boat plus any equipment that is carried. The tow bar fitted to your vehicle must have the correct load rating, which is specified by the vehicle and tow bar manufacturer.

The towing capacity for most vehicles is found in the vehicle's handbook. You must not exceed the towing limits specified by the vehicle manufacturer. Also, the total mass of the boat and trailer, including any equipment, must not exceed the total mass of the towing vehicle.

If, however, the vehicle manufacturer has not specified a towing capacity, you must comply with the following regulations:

- where your boat trailer is fitted with brakes that are directly operated by the driver, the mass of the trailer and boat (including any equipment) must not be more than 1.5 times the unladen mass of the towing vehicle;
- where your boat trailer is fitted with over-ride or over-run brakes that are not directly operated by the driver, the mass of the trailer and boat (including any equipment) must not be more than the unladen mass of the towing vehicle;
- if your boat trailer is not fitted with brakes, the total mass of the trailer and boat (including any equipment) transmitted to the ground by the axle(s) and wheels must not be more than 750 kg.



An over-ride braking system as part of trailer coupling



Trailer coupled to vehicle

Registration

Registering your boat trailer

As a vehicle, your boat trailer must be registered with DTEI or a Service SA, Customer Service Centre and the label must be clearly displayed on the trailer.

You must not use the trailer without current registration.



A correctly-displayed registration label

NOTE: This booklet is not intended to be used as a legal document. Its aim is to provide helpful tips on using, maintaining and towing your boat trailer together with a summary of the regulations that apply when you tow your boat on the road. The statements in this booklet should not be taken as precise legal interpretations of the road traffic laws. If you require a more detailed statement of the law you are advised to seek independent advice.

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