VICTORIA’S BOATING SAFETY ACTION PLAN

2015-2018

MARITIME SAFETY VICTORIA AND VICTORIA POLICE: A PARTNERSHIP IN MARINE SAFETY
Maritime Safety Victoria (MSV) and Victoria Police are committed to a constructive and co-operative relationship in the common pursuit of enhancing marine safety in Victoria.

Both organisations acknowledge that to achieve zero fatalities a collaborative approach from all in our community is required. MSV and Victoria Police are committed to zero fatalities on Victorian waters and this plan is a first step to achieving it.
ROLE OF MSV

MSV is a branch of Transport Safety Victoria, Victoria’s integrated safety regulator for maritime operations, bus and rail transport.

MSV’s approach recognises that both education and enforcement tools are necessary to maximise understanding and compliance with obligations and to bring about a positive safety culture among boaters. In most cases the approach will focus on providing information, guidance and education in the first instance and use the least interventionist tool to achieve the desired regulatory outcome. This maximises public value by encouraging compliance while minimising burden on regulatory resources.

ROLE OF VICTORIA POLICE – WATER POLICE SQUAD

The Water Police Squad within Victoria Police provides specialist support by coordinating all marine search and rescue incidents and law enforcement of the marine environment. It also has overarching responsibility for port security operations and marine counter-terrorism capabilities.

BENEFITS OF SAFER BOATING

Boating contributes significant benefits to Victoria’s recreational and community life.

The marine industry:
- contributes an estimated $4.5 billion per annum to the State’s economy
- employs more than 7,000 people
- provides hundreds of thousands of Victorians with water based recreation.

Recreational fishing:
- is enjoyed by nearly one million people in Victoria, many in boats
- contributes more than $800 million per annum and employs 5,000 people.

The continuation of these benefits relies on a safe and accessible marine environment, managed and regulated to allow equity for all users.

There are almost 190,000 registered vessels and more than 380,000 licensed masters. In addition, it is estimated that there are approximately 300,000 passive craft including canoes, kayaks and off-the-beach yachts.
ACHIEVING A SAFE MARINE ENVIRONMENT
MSV’S APPROACH IS BASED ON THE SAFE SYSTEM APPROACH SUCCESSFULLY ADOPTED IN THE ROAD ENVIRONMENT.

The aim is to reduce the number of serious incidents and, when incidents do occur, reduce the severity of injury by management of the incident within survivable levels.

A core principle of the safe system is that some level of human error is inevitable. Therefore the measures used are intended to minimise the consequences of error by appropriate design of infrastructure, management and regulatory systems. In applying this approach, MSV’s strategy is to employ interventions that are aimed at preventing a marine incident occurring or, where an incident cannot be prevented, ensure measures are in place that will minimise the consequences of such an event.
SAFE SYSTEM

PEOPLE

VESSELS

WATERWAYS
VICTORIA’S ANNUAL FATALITY RATES ARE NOW APPROXIMATELY 40 PER CENT LOWER THAN 12 YEARS AGO.

We currently experience almost seven boating related fatalities each year (five year average) compared with 2002, when the average was nine fatalities per annum.

The graph below shows yearly recreational boating fatalities and the trend line (black) from 1989 to 2015:
During this time:

- a marine licensing scheme for recreational boaters was introduced
- the wearing of lifejackets on recreational vessels became mandatory (in 2005)
- vessel design continued to improve
- the national Australian Builder’s Plate was established and increased user understanding of vessel capabilities, in particular buoyancy levels and load limits of new vessels
- advancements in technology have improved, including widely used boating accessories such as navigational systems, depth sounders, live weather reports and portable distress beacons.

Despite these advancements in marine safety, every year many Victorian boaters do not return from a day out on the water. In more recent years, we have also observed the annual decline in boating deaths reverse with the numbers of deaths actually beginning to rise again. In 2014-15, the lives of nine people were cut short, twenty-one people also suffered serious injuries with consequent loss of work time and the creation of unnecessary social and economic burden on family and friends.

MSV and Victoria Police share a common vision that every boater should return home safely from a day on the water.

We aim to reduce fatalities on Victorian waters by 30 per cent over the next five years. Achieving it will mean a reduction in boating deaths from a five-year average of 6.8 currently, and that two more people each year return from a boating trip compared with the previous five years.

This plan sets out how we intend to work together and with others within our community to achieve this goal.

THE COMMON CHARACTERISTIC OF BOATING RELATED FATALITIES IS THAT EVERY DEATH COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED.
VISIONS AND TARGETS

BY 2020 WE AIM TO REDUCE FATALITIES ON VICTORIAN WATERS BY 30%.
VISIONS AND TARGETS: PROBLEM 1

LIFEJACKET WEAR

BACKGROUND

It is ten years since the introduction of compulsory lifejacket wear laws, yet 65 per cent of boating related drowning victims in the past five years were not wearing lifejackets. Of those fatalities 50 per cent were males over 55 but this group represents only 30 per cent of licence holders.

Over the past five years, capsizing and person overboard incidents resulted in 25 of 33 fatalities. Of the 249 capsizing and person overboard incidents in that time, victims and rescue agencies have credited the survival of persons recovered from the water to the lifejackets they were wearing.

Fewer boaters have been wearing lifejackets since 2007 (TSV 2014 study) despite an initial peak in wear between then and 2005.

Lifejackets must be worn when in an open area of a vessel under way on all powerboats under 4.8 metres. On vessels over 4.8 metres and yachts, lifejackets must be worn at times of heightened risk. The concept of heightened risk is generally poorly understood.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Promote a positive safety culture in which wearing a lifejacket is a normal part of boating every time people go out on the water.

Reduce boating related drowning deaths due to not wearing a lifejacket by increasing lifejacket wear rates, particularly among older men.
WHAT WE’RE DOING

Public safety information campaigns on lifejacket wear:
• requirements
• types
• servicing.

Use of media:
• television
• web - www.wearalifejacket.vic.gov.au
• signs at prominent public locations
• Victorian Boating Safety Handbook and other publications.

Public presence at:
• seminars
• boat shows and public events
• boat ramps, launching facilities and other boating venues
• on water.

Enforcement activities on land and water, with a zero tolerance approach to lifejacket wear offences

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Wear a lifejacket as a habit when boating.
Ensure your crew and passengers wear lifejackets.
Inspect and service your lifejacket according to the manufacturer’s instructions and schedule.
BACKGROUND

**Popularity:** Kayak and other paddle craft sales have expanded dramatically over the past five years in line with the increasing popularity of these craft in fishing and family recreation. Some of these craft have a motor fitted which extends their range and has contributed to a rise in the number of paddlers represented in boating related deaths in recent years on Victorian waterways. Over the past five years, paddle craft were involved in 30 per cent of fatal incidents, with ten drowning deaths reported related to paddle craft.

**Lifejackets:** Despite laws requiring lifejackets to be worn, their use in paddle craft is known to be poor. In six of the ten paddler fatalities in the past five years the deceased were not wearing lifejackets.

**Knowledge and skills:** Paddle craft are being used in conditions beyond the capabilities of craft or occupant. Incident data shows lack of training, knowledge and experience in the use of safety equipment is preventing people from remaining in contact with, and being able to get back onto, their craft.

**Risk taking and perception of risk:** New paddlers are often not familiar with the vulnerability of their craft to conditions larger vessels may more easily withstand.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Improve the distribution of safety information at point of sale by direct partnership with paddle craft wholesalers and retailers.

Increase safety consciousness among the paddling community through education and enforcement.
WHAT WE'RE DOING

Training adventure retail staff in paddle craft safety equipment and how to use it.

Distributing
• paddle safety brochures and stickers to retail outlets
• safety messages through web and print media, and in partnership with Victoria Water Police and paddling retailers.

Educating and an enforcement presence at popular kayak sites, especially on waterways highlighted in incident reports.

Conducting behavioural research into the habits, attitudes and beliefs of people taking up paddling.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Always wear a lifejacket.

Fit a leash from your kayak to your paddle.

Get training to gain the right knowledge and skills to use your kayak and safety equipment.

Practice your skills in good conditions before setting out on open water. Know your limits.

Paddle in a group.

Have a method of raising the alarm if you get into trouble. Carry a distress beacon.
BACKGROUND

**Type and size:** Small boats less than 4.8 m were represented in more than half of the serious incidents on Victorian waters in the past five years. In that time 178 capsizing incidents led to 15 deaths on Victorian waters.

**Conditions:** Weather conditions exceeding the capability of craft or crew are usually a catalyst for serious incidents and fatalities. Craft involved in serious incidents on enclosed waterways are often too small for wave conditions which can rapidly change, particularly on the bays but also on inland waters. Boaters who do not get a forecast for their planned trip, or don’t understand what it means, are putting themselves and their passengers at risk.

**Modifications and maintenance:** Many serious incidents are caused by modifications or maintenance done by unqualified or inexperienced technicians. Holes drilled in hulls and bulkheads which are not resealed afterwards, for example, can allow water to enter underfloor spaces (which should remain watertight). These are invisible to the boater while on the water. By the time water ingress is noted it is too late to do anything about it.

**Low skill levels and poor judgement:** The absence of adequate skills or good judgement are common factors in most incidents. Operators of bigger boats, from 4.8 m to 8 m, are able to access higher risk waterways (offshore in particular) and meet situations in which incidents are more likely to occur. Search and Rescue services are further away and response times are longer. Of even greater concern is that on these boats occupants are only required to wear lifejackets at times of heightened risk. This concept appears to be poorly understood.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

**Enhance awareness in the boating community of the:**

- susceptibility of small boats to capsizing, swamping and man overboard situations
- dangers of modifying small craft without competent oversight
- availability and understanding of weather forecasts and warnings.

Encourage retailers to sell vessels fit for purpose to safely satisfy customers’ needs.

Promote knowledge of the concept of heightened risk and the changes, particularly to weather, wind and waves, that increase the risk.
WHAT WE’RE DOING

Educating the public and retailers around the concept of fit-for-purpose through promotion of:

• safe vessels
• use of safety equipment
• weather forecasting resources and the knowledge to understand them.

Providing safe boating seminars to clubs and being a presence at public events.

Inspecting vessels and trailers at boat ramps in coordination with Victoria Police.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make sure your boat is the right type and size for your voyage, and that you have the skills and knowledge to operate it safely.

Make sure your boat is seaworthy and in good working order before you go out.

Always wear a lifejacket.

Always get a weather forecast for the whole period on your trip, and use the Bureau of Meteorology’s five vital checks.

1. Warnings current for your boating area
2. Weather conditions affecting safe navigation and comfort
3. Wind conditions
4. Wave conditions
5. Tide times

Always have a means of raising the alarm.

Be prepared to not go out if conditions are not favourable.

Check the builder’s plate to identify maximum safe loading.

Fit buoyancy to your boat so that it will remain afloat even if swamped.
OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, CAPSIZING AND PERSON OVERBOARD INCIDENTS RESULTED IN 25 OF 33 FATALITIES.
Collisions: In the past five years there were ninety-two collisions, two fatalities and fourteen serious injuries reported to authorities. It is also believed that many collisions on the water go unreported to authorities, being represented later in hospital statistics and insurance claims. Collisions are the most common cause of serious injury and damage on Victorian waterways. They effect the community deeply and, for many, change the quality of life forever.

Objects most commonly collided with are:

- boats
- submerged objects, especially on inland waterways
- trees.

People being towed behind a vessel, usually on skis, boards or biscuits, are also victims of collisions.

Personal watercraft are overrepresented in collisions and are the fastest growing sub-category of vessel registrations.

Strategic Direction

Reduce on-water collisions by conducting joint operations on the water to extend our reach and enforce safe operating rules.

Improve awareness of rules aimed at preventing collisions on the water.
WHAT WE’RE DOING

Reviewing the marine licence test to increase the focus on speed and distance rules and collision avoidance.

Educating and an enforcement presence at events, boat ramps and on the water; targeting hot spots for congested waterway activity and taking a zero tolerance approach to speed and distance violations in our enforcement activities.

Supporting local waterway managers to improve signage and buoyage at key access points and on the water to improve understanding of special operating zones.

Partnering with industry to promote a code of conduct among PWC operators to improve behaviour regarding rules and courtesy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Know the waterway rules for speed and distance between boaters and others in the water.

Register your vessel and hold a current marine licence.

Maintain safe speed and distance from the shore, objects in the water and other waterway users.

Keep a lookout using all available resources including your passengers, crew and radio.
BACKGROUND

**Cold shock:** More than one third of boating trips occur in the winter months. Water temperatures in the bays can be as low as 11 degrees and can be much colder on inland waterways. Immersion at these temperatures reduces the chances of survival and has contributed to 15 deaths in the past five years. Water is generally regarded as cold at temperatures below 15 degrees, which is usual for most Victorian waters from May to November.

Upon immersion in cold water, the body’s response is to gasp, and breathing is uncontrollable. Heart rate also increases during this time and heart attack is possible. Dexterity, strength and coordination deteriorate within ten minutes. Useful consciousness lasts an hour. Hypothermia sets in when the body’s core temperature falls below 35 degrees. This progression is commonly known as the 1:10:1 principle.

Fatalities in the first few minutes of cold water immersion are frequently caused by drowning. If a lifejacket is not worn, it is difficult for a person who falls into cold water to keep their mouth and nose above the water while regaining control of their breathing.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Educate all boaters about cold water immersion and the risks associated with suddenly and unexpectedly entering the water.
WHAT WE’RE DOING

Educating people about:
• the risk and likelihood of cold water immersion, and how to avoid it
• ownership and use of distress beacons, radio, and waterproof mobile telephones
• letting someone know before you go and having a contingency plan.

Delivering safe boating seminars to clubs and presence at public events.

Maintaining a presence at boat ramps and on the water to enforce safety equipment requirements.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Train yourself for cold water immersion by trying it in a safe environment and learn how to gain control of your breathing.

Wear clothing appropriate for the conditions and a lifejacket type 1; and dress for immersion.

Carry an emergency distress beacon.

Leave a plan with a responsible person ashore to act on at an agreed time if you have not been in contact. Let them know if your plans change.
Eight fatalities occurred on Victorian coastal waters in the past five years. While only five per cent of boating in Victoria is undertaken on these waterways, they account for twenty-four per cent of fatalities.

**Crossing bars:** Crossing bars and operating close to shore on coastal waters are an ongoing source of capsizes/swamping/person overboard at the beginning of voyages. There have been fifteen serious incidents on bars in the past five years resulting in one death and three serious injuries, and many more narrow escapes.

**Anchoring:** Incorrect deployment of anchors has led to several incidents of boats capsizing, occupants entering the water and fatalities occurring.

**Know your limits:** Poor risk perception was identified as a contributing factor in the deaths of three people in the past five years on yachts in transit along the Victorian coast.

**Strategic direction:**
Reduce deaths on coastal waterways through promotion of risk perception and trip planning using inter-agency compliance presence at coastal locations focussing on enforcement of safety rules.
WHAT WE’RE DOING

Educating people about:
- craft, equipment and skills required for coastal waters
- usefulness of local knowledge and weather forecasting resources
- the risks and likelihood of cold water immersion
- ownership and use of EPIRBs, radio, and waterproof mobile telephones
- letting someone know before you go and having a contingency plan.

Maintaining an education and enforcement presence at coastal boat ramps and on the water. Taking a zero tolerance approach to safety equipment and lifejacket wear violations offshore and at times of heightened risk.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Get training in coastal boating for you and your crew.
Practise man overboard drills in safe conditions.
Have the right vessel and the right equipment, and know how to use it.
Learn about weather forecasts and what they mean.
Have a means of raising the alarm.
Always wear a lifejacket.
Don’t boat alone.
If in doubt, don’t go out.
TOGETHER WE CAN ACHIEVE SAFE BOATING IN VICTORIA.
MARITIME SAFETY VICTORIA IS UNDERTAKING OTHER PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES RELATED TO SAFER BOATS, PEOPLE AND WATERWAYS. YOU CAN KEEP UP TO DATE WITH HOW WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS BY VISITING WWW.TRANSPORTSAFETY.VIC.GOV.AU/MARITIME-SAFETY