CHAPTER 2
SAFE OPERATION
CHAPTER 2: SAFE OPERATION
# Know the Collision Regulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rule 5</td>
<td>Keeping a proper lookout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 6</td>
<td>Every vessel shall proceed at a safe speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 7</td>
<td>Risk of collision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 8</td>
<td>Action to avoid a collision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 9</td>
<td>Narrow channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 12</td>
<td>Sailing vessels approaching one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 13</td>
<td>Overtaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 14</td>
<td>Head on situation - each vessel to steer to starboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 15</td>
<td>Power driven vessels crossing situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 18</td>
<td>Responsibilities between vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule 19</td>
<td>Restricted visibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Buoyage IALA System A

- IALA System A light rhythm types
- Direction of buoyage

# Buoyage Types

- Lateral marks
- Cardinal marks
- Special marks
- Isolated danger marks
- Safe water marks
- New danger mark

# Boating Zone Buoyage (Inland Waterways)

- Red mini buoy
- Green mini buoy
- Yellow mini buoy
- Red and yellow mini buoy

# Boating Zone Marks and Signage

# Navigation Lights

- Operating at night
- Vessel navigation lights to be displayed

# Day Shapes for Vessels

# Sound and Light Signals

- Definitions and classifications
- Sound signals for vessels in restricted visibility (day and night)
**BASIC BOAT HANDLING TIPS**
- Launching 100
- Berthing and unberthing 100
- Anchoring 101
- Mooring 102
- Retrieving 103

**TOWED WATER SPORTS**
- Observer 105
- Towing safely 105
- No wash zones 107
- Access lanes 107
- Hand signals 108
SPEED AND DISTANCE RULES

Speeding is a key risk factor on Victoria’s waterways. Speeds are limited by law in specific boating areas to address safety concerns arising from competing and/or conflicting use. Speed measuring devices can be used to detect speeding vessels. All speeds are measured in knots for the purpose of the Marine Safety Act 2010 (Vic) (MSA) and the Marine Safety Regulations 2012 (Vic) (MSR).

Five knots is considered to be a fast walking pace.

Note: The five knot speed limit does not apply to boat and PWC operators when:

i. within an exclusive area prescribed in a Schedule to a Notice which is set aside for a specific activity under Clause 13 of the Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules (VOZR) in which the width of water prevents the keeping of distance

ii. engaged in competition or training organised in accordance with the rules of a Victorian sporting organisation or that has been approved in writing by the Safety Director.

On ALL Victorian waters a 5 knot speed limit applies to boat operators and PWC operators within a distance of:

- 50 m of a person, vessel, fixed or floating structure and the shore on inland waters
- 50 m of a person, vessel, wharf, jetty, slipway, diving platform or boat ramp on coastal and enclosed waters
- 100 m of a dive flag
- 200 m of the shore on enclosed and coastal waters
- or as per the scheduled waterway rules

In addition, on all Victorian coastal and enclosed waters, or bays, a 5 knot speed limit applies to boat operators and PWC operators under the following conditions:

- within 200 m of the water’s edge unless specifically excluded by Notice or where designated for other purposes
- within 50 m of any wharf, jetty, slipway, diving platform or boat ramp

when passing through a recognized anchorage for small vessels.

In addition, on all Victorian inland waters a 5 knot speed limit applies to boat operators and PWC operators within:

- 50 m of the water’s edge unless the local authority specifically excludes those waters by Notice or they are designated for other purposes
- 50 m of any fixed or floating structure
HOON LAWS

A person must not operate a recreational vessel (including PWCs) or hire and drive vessel at a speed or in a manner which is dangerous to the public, birds and marine animals.

A member of the Victoria Police may seize, impound or immobilise a vessel, if they believe on reasonable grounds that a recreational vessel is being or has been used in the commission of a relevant offence.

In addition, Victoria Police and Transport Safety Victoria officers have the power to embargo and prohibit the use and operation of a vessel.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Alcohol affects your sensory abilities and decreases your reaction time. As with driving a car, alcohol and drugs may affect boaters’:

- depth perception and ability to see other boats and judge speed and direction
- peripheral, colour and night vision
- balance and coordination
- comprehension and concentration
- fatigue levels

Loss of judgment and coordination and increase in reaction time can lead to the inability to react appropriately to a dangerous boating situation.

Drink driving laws are strictly enforced for the safety of all.

Victoria Police officers are empowered to use breathalysers to help detect operators exceeding alcohol limits. Heavy penalties apply to offenders.

Alcohol increases body-heat loss, reducing your survival time if you fall overboard. It also increases the pulse rate, leading to rapid exhaustion in survival situations.

Prescribed medications and other drugs can also pose problems. Many preparations for seasickness, hay fever and other allergies can make you feel drowsy or easily confused.

Before you go boating, check with your doctor or chemist on the possible side effects of any drugs you take.

Persons under 21 who operate a vessel or who are in charge of a vessel, including one at anchor, must not have any alcohol present in their blood or breath, that is, a reading of 0.00%.

Persons over 21 operating or in charge of a vessel must not have a blood or breath alcohol reading over 0.05%. This is in line with the rules that apply to drivers.

It is an offence for any person to operate or be the master of a vessel, including one at anchor, who is under the influence of alcohol or any other drug to such an extent as to be incapable of having the proper control or directing the proper operation of a vessel. It is also an offence to operate or be the master of a vessel:

- while the prescribed concentration of drugs (which has the same meaning as in the Road Safety Act 1986 (Vic)) is in a person's blood or oral fluid; or
- while impaired by a drug.

Please refer to the Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988 (Vic) for details on alcohol and drug related offences.
TRANSIT ONLY ZONES AND CHANNELS

A transit only zone is a regulated area of water in the vicinity of a commercial shipping channel or fairway. Small boat operators must not anchor, moor, drift or engage in fishing activities within a transit only zone. The purpose of designating a transit only zone is:

- to avoid potential collisions between small boats and large commercial ships
- for the safety of small boat operators and their passengers.

A transit only zone in Port Phillip Bay extends from Point Gellibrand (Williamstown) south to an imaginary line at latitude 38° South.

Yellow ‘special mark’ light buoys are used to define the boundary zone (see map).

Shipping channels and their approaches are high shipping hazard areas. Small boat operators should exercise caution and steer well clear in these areas.
KNOW THE COLLISION REGULATIONS

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGS) is an International Maritime Organisation Convention and has been adopted worldwide as the rules of the road afloat.

All masters of a vessel must be aware of the COLREGS which are adopted in Victoria through the MSA and MSR.

It is the duty and responsibility of anyone in charge of a vessel to be able to correctly apply these rules in all circumstances including when at anchor.

Many collisions between vessels result from a lack of understanding of the rules of safe navigation, as well as carelessness. The information in this chapter is based on the requirements of COLREGS, MSA and MSR.

Everyone on the water has a legal and moral duty to maintain a proper look-out and travel at a safe speed at all times.

This duty includes handling a vessel and observing the rules, knowing the limitations of your vessel, being aware of potential hazards and allowing for the actions of others, both reasonable and unreasonable.

It pays to take care!

An operator can be deemed to be negligent if proper care was not taken subject to circumstances. ‘Reckless’ navigation occurs when someone handles a vessel in a way that causes an obvious or serious risk of physical injury to another using the same waters, or to property.

‘Dangerous navigation’ occurs when a vessel is propelled at speed or in a manner causing real or potential danger to any person or property and is a punishable offence. Any use of a vessel resulting in nuisance or causing obvious annoyance to any other person, deliberately or accidentally is also a punishable offence. The authorities and the courts take both recklessness and negligence most seriously.

Some of the COLREGS provisions that are relevant to recreational boaters are summarised below.

**RULE 5**
**KEEPING A PROPER LOOKOUT**

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

Safe navigation of a vessel requires you to:

- observe the rules including handling of a vessel
- know the limitations of your vessel
- be aware of potential hazards
- allow for the actions of others, both reasonable and unreasonable.
RULE 6
EVERY VESSEL SHALL PROCEED AT A SAFE SPEED

Every vessel must travel at a safe speed at all times so that it can take proper and effective action to avoid a collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions. A speed at which the master of a vessel can take proper and effective action to avoid a collision depends on:

- visibility
- sea state and weather
- vessel characteristics
- traffic
- background/ambient lights
- proximity to hazards
- draught of the vessel and the depth of water
- reliability of radar image in the prevailing conditions.

RULE 7
RISK OF COLLISION

Every vessel shall use all available means appropriate to determine if a risk of collision exists. If there is any doubt, such risk shall be deemed to exist.

RULE 8
ACTION TO AVOID A COLLISION

The giving-way vessel shall:

- take early and positive avoiding action
- make course/speed alterations obvious to the other vessel
- avoid crossing ahead of the vessel with right of way
- stop or reverse if necessary.

A series of five or more short and rapid blasts on a whistle or horn should be used to indicate that insufficient action is being taken to avoid collision.

The vessel with the right of way shall keep its course and speed. It should take avoiding action only if that taken by the giving-way vessel is insufficient. If necessary it should take whatever action is available to keep clear and avoid a collision.

If a power-driven vessel is taking action to avoid a collision with another power-driven vessel it shall, if possible, avoid altering course to port. This action does not relieve the vessel operator of handling obligations.

RULE 9
NARROW CHANNELS

All vessels in narrow channels shall keep, as far as practicable, to the starboard side of the channel.

A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.

A vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if such crossing impedes the passage of a vessel that can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway.

A sailing vessel and a vessel under 20 m in length shall not impede the passage of any vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.

Any vessel shall, if the circumstances of the case permit, avoid anchoring in a narrow channel.
RULE 12
SAILING VESSELS APPROACHING ONE ANOTHER

When each has the wind on a different side, the vessel which has the wind on the port side shall keep out of the way of the other.

When both have the wind on the same side, the vessel which is to windward shall keep out of the way of the vessel which is leeward.

When a sailing vessel with the wind on its port side sees another sailing vessel to windward and cannot determine with certainty whether that sailing vessel has the wind on its port or its starboard, it shall keep out of the way of that other sailing vessel.
**RULE 13**

**OVERTAKING**

All vessels, whether sail or power, overtaking another vessel when the boats are in sight of one another shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken. That is, if a vessel is coming up with another from any direction which is more than 22.5 degrees (in the shaded arc of the diagram below) abaft her beam, it shall be deemed to be the overtaking vessel until finally past and clear.

If in doubt, assume that you are the overtaking vessel and keep clear. Alteration of course by either vessel does not relieve the overtaking vessel of the responsibility of keeping clear.

**RULE 14**

**HEAD ON SITUATION – EACH VESSEL TO STEER TO STARBOARD**

Power-driven vessels meeting head-on or nearly head-on shall alter course to starboard so that each may pass on the port side of each other.
RULE 15
POWER DRIVEN VESSELS CROSSING SITUATION

When two power-driven vessels are crossing, the vessel with the other on its starboard side shall keep out of the way and avoid crossing ahead of the other vessel. The other vessel must maintain its course and speed until it is apparent that the vessel required to give way is not taking appropriate action.
Power and sail vessels

Power-driven vessels shall keep out of the way of sailing vessels.

A vessel under power

The master of a power-driven vessel (the give-way vessel) underway must ensure that the vessel keeps out of the way of:

(a) a vessel constrained by its draught that is displaying lights or shapes to indicate that it is constrained by its draught

(b) a vessel not under command that is displaying lights or shapes to indicate that it is not under command

(c) a vessel restricted in its ability to manoeuvre that is displaying lights or shapes to indicate that it is restricted in its ability to manoeuvre

(d) a fishing vessel engaged in fishing with nets, lines, trawls or any other fishing apparatus which restricts its ability to manoeuvre

(e) a sailing vessel.

A sailing vessel

The master of a sailing vessel (the give-way vessel) under way must ensure that the vessel keeps out of the way of (a) to (d) above.
Large vessels

Recreational vessels have a responsibility to stay well clear of large vessels. Small craft are prohibited from impeding the passage of big ships. All boat operators should take note of the following:

• big ships operate at all times of the day and night
• the speed of a ship can be deceptive and may be in excess of 20 knots
• ships can weigh up to 100,000 tonnes and do not have brakes
• ships cannot stop or change course suddenly and will travel a long distance before stopping
• a ship’s blind spot can extend for many hundreds of metres ahead
• bow waves caused by a ship can swamp a small boat hundreds of metres away
• sailing vessels do not have right of way over big ships
• a ship may sound five short blasts on its whistle if it believes you are at risk of a collision. Small vessels must take evasive action immediately.

RULE 19
RESTRICTED VISIBILITY

In restricted visibility, reduce to minimum speed. When hearing the fog signal of another vessel ahead, proceed with extreme caution until danger of collision is over or stop until you have ascertained the danger.
The buoyage system used in Victorian ports and around the coast is known as the IALA System A, which is a system of different types of navigational markers. Although called a buoyage system, markers may be buoys, piles or beacons. To navigate safely, you need to know each marker and its meaning as each has its own colour, shape, top mark and light combination.

### IALA SYSTEM A LIGHT RHYTHM TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhythm</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Navigation chart abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed</td>
<td>A light showing steadily and continuously</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash</td>
<td>Duration of light shorter than duration of darkness</td>
<td>FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occulting</td>
<td>Duration of light longer than duration of darkness</td>
<td>Oc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iso phase</td>
<td>Duration of light and darkness are equal</td>
<td>Iso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick flash</td>
<td>A flash rate of 60 or 50 per minute</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very quick flash</td>
<td>A flash rate of 120 or 100 per minute</td>
<td>VQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long flash</td>
<td>A flash of not less than two seconds</td>
<td>LFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group flash</td>
<td>A group of two or more flashes (with the number indicating the number of flashes in a group)</td>
<td>FL(2) or VQ(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morse A</td>
<td>A light flashing Morse code signal A (dot, dash)</td>
<td>Mo (A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
When the light exhibited is not white, the colour is indicated in the chart abbreviation by Y (yellow), R (red) or G (green), for example, Fl.(4)Y
The period of a light (time between the start of successive sequences) is indicated in seconds by the letters, for example, Fl.R.5s means a single red flash every five seconds.
DIRECTION OF BUOYAGE

In order to navigate safely it is essential to know the direction of buoyage. On Victorian coastal waters, buoyage runs east to west through Bass Strait and from seaward inwards to ports, harbours, rivers, estuaries and other waterways. When leaving a port, harbour, river, estuary or other waterway the port-hand mark (red) should be passed on the vessel’s starboard (right) side.

Upon entering a port, harbour, river, estuary or other waterway the port-hand mark (red) should be passed on the vessel’s port (left) side.

As Western Port has two entrances, boundaries are laid down to indicate where the direction of buoyage from each entrance meets. They form a line from just north of Lang Lang River to Palmer Point (French Island) to Observation Point (Phillip Island).

It is necessary to know the direction of north and the other main points of the compass.

Under the MSA it is an offence for any person to interfere or tamper with, or obstruct the use or operation of, a navigation aid.
**BUOYAGE TYPES**

There are five major types of marks under the IALA System A: lateral, cardinal, isolated danger, special and safe water.

**LATERAL MARKS**

These are used to indicate the port (left) and the starboard (right) sides of the channels when travelling into port.

**Port-hand marks** are red and the basic shape of the buoy (and topmark when fitted) is cylindrical (a can). Such a mark would be on the port side of a vessel when travelling in the direction of buoyage.

- **Colour:** Red
- **Shape (buoys):** Cylindrical (can), pillar or spar
- **Topmark (if any):** Single red cylinder (can)

**Lights** are red (when fitted) and may have any rhythm other than composite group-flashing (2+1). They are used on modified lateral marks to indicate a preferred channel. Examples are:

- **Q.R:** Continuous Quick Light
- **F.I.R:** Single-Flashing Light
- **L F.I.R:** Long-Flashing Light
- **F.I (2) R:** Group-Flashing Light
**Starboard-hand marks** are green (occasionally, black may be used) and the basic shape of the buoy (and topmark when fitted) is conical. This mark would be on the starboard side of a vessel when travelling in the direction of buoyage.

**Colour:** Green  
**Shape (buoys):** Conical (cone), pillar or spar  
**Topmark (if any):** Single green cone point upwards

**Lights** are green (when fitted) and may have any rhythm other than composite group-flashing (2 +1). They are used on modified lateral marks to indicate a preferred channel. Examples are:

- **Q.G** Continuous quick light
- **Fl.G** Single-flashing light
- **L Fl.G** Long-flashing light
- **Fl (2) G** Group-flashing light

When marks are numbered, odd numbers are on the starboard side and even numbers on the port side when travelling in the direction of buoyage. They are numbered from seaward to port.
CARDINAL MARKS

These are used to indicate the location of the best navigable water, to show the safe side on which to pass danger (rocks, wrecks, shoals, etc.) and to draw attention to a feature in a channel.

To understand the meaning of a particular cardinal mark, the navigator must be aware of geographical directions and therefore needs a compass to determine where the best navigable water lies. The mark is placed in one of the four quadrants: north south, east or west. If in doubt, consult the chart.

Shape

The shape of a cardinal mark is not significant, but in the case of a buoy it will be a pillar or spar.

Topmark

The most important daylight feature of the cardinal mark is the black double cone top mark and the four different arrangements that indicate the relevant direction from the mark.

Colour

Black and yellow horizontal bands are used to colour the cardinal marks and indicate the type of cardinal mark. Top mark cones point in the same direction as the location of the black bands on the marks.

Lights

If lit, the mark will exhibit a quick flashing (about 1 per second) or very quick flashing (about 2 per second) white light. The rhythm of the light will indicate the particular quadrant of the mark.

The number of flashes corresponds to the numbers on a clock face:

N = 12 flashes
E = 3 flashes
S = 6 flashes
W = 9 flashes.
West cardinal mark

Topmark consists of two cones point to point. The mark has yellow/black/yellow bands. When lit, a west mark exhibits a white light flashing in groups of nine quick or very quick flashes. Pass on the western side of this mark.

North cardinal mark

Topmark consists of two cones pointing up. The mark has a black band over a yellow band. When lit, a north mark exhibits a continuous quick or very quick flashing white light. Pass on the northern side of this mark.

South cardinal mark

Topmark consists of two cones pointing down. The mark has a yellow band over a black band. When lit, a south mark exhibits a white light flashing in groups of six quick or very quick flashes followed by a long flash. Pass on the southern side of this mark.

East cardinal mark

Topmark consists of two cones pointing away from each other. The mark has black/yellow/black bands. When lit, an east mark exhibits a white light flashing in groups of three quick or very quick flashes. Pass on the eastern side of this mark.
SPECIAL MARKS

These are used to indicate a special area or feature, the nature of which may be found by consulting a chart or sailing directions. Some local examples are the spoil ground, pipeline and recreation buoys in Port Phillip and the pilot buoy off Flinders in Western Port.

The colour of the special mark is always yellow, and the top mark, if fitted, is a single yellow X. Some special marks may be in the shape of a lateral mark. If a light is fitted it will be yellow and may have any rhythm not used for white lights, for example, Fl.Y, Fl.(4) Y.

In Victorian waters, special marks are commonly used to indicate no boating zones, special activity zones and speed restriction zones.

ISOLATED DANGER MARKS

These are on, or moored above, an isolated danger of limited extent that has navigable water all around it. The colours are red and black horizontal stripes and the mark is, when practicable, fitted with a topmark of two black spheres, one above the other. If lit, the light will be white showing a group of two flashes. It may help to remember this mark by associating the two flashes with two spheres.

Some examples of the isolated danger mark are on the Prince George Bank off Indented Head, Wooley’s Reef at Frankston and Eagle Rock in northern Western Port. Isolated danger marks are not always positioned centrally over a danger and it is therefore advisable to refer to a chart and not to pass too close.
SAFE WATER MARKS

These are used to indicate that there is navigable water all around the mark. These marks can be used as a channel entrance, centre line, mid-channel, or landfall buoy. The Westernport Fairway buoy is a local example of this mark. The shape of the buoy can be a sphere, spar or pillar and is coloured with red and white vertical strips. The topmark, which is fitted, when practicable, to pillar and spar buoys, is a single red sphere. If lit, an isophase, occulting, one long flash every ten seconds, or morse ‘A’ (dot, dash) white light is exhibited. The buoy shape is optional but should not conflict with that used for a lateral or special mark.

Operators of vessels are cautioned that large commercial vessels may pass close by these marks.

NEW DANGER MARK

The term new dangers is used to describe newly discovered hazards not yet shown in nautical documents. New dangers include naturally occurring obstructions such as sandbanks or rocks or man-made dangers such as wrecks. New dangers may be marked using lateral, cardinal, isolated danger marks or by using the emergency wreck marking buoy. The mark may be removed when the new danger has been sufficiently communicated or otherwise resolved. The shape of the emergency wreck marking buoy is a pillar or spar and is coloured with blue and yellow vertical stripes. The topmark, if any, is a vertical/perpendicular yellow cross. The light will occult to show alternate blue and yellow light; one second of blue light and one second of yellow light with half a second of darkness between.
BOATING ZONE BUOYAGE (INLAND WATERWAYS)

**Red Mini Buoy**

‘Stop – no boats’ or ‘Swimming – no boats’: used to mark prohibited water and swimming areas.

**Green Mini Buoy**

Access lane: the waters between these buoys are unrestricted to allow the picking up or dropping off of a water skier.

**Yellow Mini Buoy**

Speed restrictions: an area is set aside as a speed restriction zone because excessive speed is a risk to the operator, to other vessels or persons, or to the environment. The yellow buoys may be placed because of local or general requirements for slower speeds.

**Red and Yellow Mini Buoy**

Special purpose: these unmarked buoys are used to signify things like regatta areas, hazards, channels.
BOATING ZONE MARKS AND SIGNAGE

Sometimes signs on the shore are used instead of, or in addition to, marks in the water. Examples of boating signs include “No boating zone”, “special purpose zone” or prohibited zone”.

Access lanes are solely for waterskiing or for launching or retrieving a vessel at a boat ramp when the ramp is located in that area. Access lanes are marked by beacons or signs on the shore with each boundary being delineated by the alignment of an orange disc and a black and yellow triangle beacon. Access lanes provide access to the shore for waterskiers at speeds greater than 5 knots when otherwise it might not be possible. Bathers are not permitted within an access lane.

Special purpose areas such as waterskiing only, PWC or kite boarding areas may also use onshore beacons to delineate the zone. In this case an orange disc may be used with a black and white triangle.

NAVIGATION LIGHTS

The MSA and MSR require that lights are displayed from sunset to sunrise and in times of restricted visibility during daylight hours. Vessel navigation light layout and sectors are shown in the image below:

VEssel NAVIGATION LIGHT MOUNTING AND SECTORS
OPERATING AT NIGHT

Navigating at night or at times of restricted visibility can be hazardous. It is more difficult to judge speeds and distances than during a clear day so you must take every precaution. Vessels under way must show the proper lights from sunset to sunrise and in restricted visibility. You must also be able to tell from the lights of other vessels what they are, what they are doing and their direction of travel, so you can take the right timely action to avoid collision.

Know where they are, from unlit buoys to rocks and shoals, and keep their position in relation to your vessel constantly in mind. Spotlights and lightbars may be used, but take care not to dazzle other people on the water, or yourself.

Only specified navigation lights should be shown at night. Any other lights onboard must not interfere with the range and arc of visibility of navigation lights or the ability of others to maintain a proper lookout.

Always travel at a reduced speed to increase your safety margin. Keep a careful lookout around you for hazards and other vessels and, for extra reassurance, travel in company with another vessel or vessels where possible.

A proper lookout is important when the background of bright lights on shore tends to obscure the lights of other vessels, buoys and marks. This is especially true in waters close to populated areas, such as the shore of Port Phillip where even larger ships can be hard to see.

Occupants of vessels less than 12 m in length are required to wear lifejackets at all times when the vessel is under way and they are in an open area of the vessel when operating at night.
VESSEL NAVIGATION LIGHTS TO BE DISPLAYED

Recreational vessels at anchor

All recreational vessels must show an all-around white light while at anchor. However, if the vessel is drifting (under way but not making way) the vessel must display appropriate navigation lights.

Sail and human powered vessels

Sailing vessels under way or drifting

A sailing vessel under way must exhibit side lights and a stern light. If the vessel is less than 20 m in length, the sidelights and stern light may be combined in one lantern (tricolour lantern) carried at or near the top of the mast where it can be seen.

In addition to the sidelights and stern light, a sailing vessel may exhibit at or near the top of the mast, where they can be best seen, two all-round lights in a vertical line, the upper being red and the lower being green. These lights must not be exhibited in conjunction with a combined lantern (tricolour lantern).

Reminder – whenever a sailing vessel is using its engine, with or without sails, it is a power-driven vessel within the meaning of the rules, and must act accordingly and show the appropriate shapes by day and lights by night. This means that a tricolour lantern or two red/green masthead lights must not be used under power.
Sailing vessels under way (not using power)

Sailing vessels less than 7 m in length and boats under oars or drifting must, if practicable, display any of the combinations for vessels under sail.

An electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light and exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision is an acceptable alternative for these vessels when the lighting configuration described above is not practicable.

Powerboats

Powerboats under way or drifting

Vessels under 12 m in length must show:

a) sidelights and an all round white light

or

b) sidelights, masthead light and a stern light.
Vessels under 7 m in length and under 7 knots

Power-driven vessels of less than 7 m in length, whose maximum speed does not exceed 7 knots, when under way, may exhibit an all-round white light and must also, if practicable, exhibit sidelights.

Larger vessels

Vessels under 50 m in length may exhibit a second masthead light.

Vessels under 12 m in length, sidelights may be combined in one lantern on fore and aft centreline.

Vessels towing

A vessel towing another when the tow length is under 200 m must show two masthead lights (three masthead lights if over 200 m). A yellow towing light is situated over the stern light of the towing vessel. The towed vessel shows side and stern lights.

Vessels at anchor

Vessels 50 m or more in length must show two all-round lights, the forward one higher than the aft one. Vessels under 50 m may show a second (lower) light at stern.

A vessel of 100 m or more length shall also illuminate her decks with lights.
**Vessels aground**

A vessel aground must show anchor lights and two all-round red lights. A vessel under 12 m length is not required to exhibit these lights.

This signal does not mean distress or in need of help, but operators should navigate with caution.

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**Vessels restricted in ability to manoeuvre**

A vessel restricted in its ability to manoeuvre, including diving vessels, must show three all-round lights, with the top and bottom lights being red and the middle light white. When making way through the water, the vessel must also show masthead lights, sidelights and stern light.

When at anchor, the vessel must also show anchor lights. This signal does not indicate distress or a need for help, but operators should navigate with caution.

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**Vessels engaged in underwater operations**

A vessel engaged in underwater operations, including dredging, with an obstruction on one side shall show lights indicating a restricted ability to manoeuvre. It must also show two all-round red lights on the side of the obstruction and two all-round green lights on the side that vessels may pass.
**Vessels constrained by their draught**

A power-driven vessel restricted to a narrow channel by her draught and unable to deviate from course must show lights for power-driven vessel under way and may also show three all-round red lights.

**Pilot vessels on duty**

Pilot vessels on duty must show two all-round lights, the top light white and the lower light red.

When at anchor, the vessel shows anchor light or lights and when under way sidelights and stern light.

**Vessels not under command**

Vessels not under command must show two all-round red lights. When making way through the water, sidelights and stern light are also required. Vessels under 12 m in length, except those engaging in diving operations, are not required to comply with these lights. This signal does not mean distress, but shows inability to manoeuvre. Vessels are required to keep clear of vessels not under command.
COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS

A commercial fishing vessel engaged in trawling must show two all-round lights, the top light green and the lower light white and a masthead light.

A rear masthead light is optional for fishing vessels under 50 m in length. When making way through water, sidelights and stern lights must also be shown.

FISHING VESSELS (OTHER THAN TRAWLING)

A fishing vessel that is not trawling must show two all-round lights, the top light red and the lower light white. If outlying gear extends more than 150 m horizontally from fishing vessel, it must show one all-round white light in direction of gear plus sidelights and stern light shown when making way through water.

VESSELS WORKING IN CHAINS

A vessel working in chains, for example, Raymond Island Ferry, must show an all-round red light at each end. An all-round green light above the red light at the forward end must be used to indicate the direction in which the vessel is proceeding.

Vessels operating in the vicinity of the Paynesville/Raymond Island vehicular ferry must proceed with caution and keep clear of the ferry.

More information at transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/nav-lights
**DAY SHAPES FOR VESSELS**

Day shapes are signals shown by day in all weathers on vessels to denote certain activities in which vessels are engaged. In restricted visibility, the appropriate lights should also be displayed by day. You must be able to recognize these day shapes which are generally used by larger vessels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VESSEL AT ANCHOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When at anchor, vessels greater than 7 m must display forward, where best seen, one black ball. This is not required for vessels of less than 7 m when at anchor, not in or near a narrow, fairway or anchorage, or where others normally navigate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VESSELS UNDER POWER WITH SAILS SET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A vessel proceeding under power with sails set, that is motor sailing, must display forward, where best seen, one black cone, point down.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FISHING VESSELS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A fishing vessel using trawls, nets or other gear, whether under way or at anchor must display in a vertical line, two black cones pointing toward each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VESSELS NOT UNDER COMMAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No day shapes are required for vessels under 12 m, except those engaged in diving operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels greater than 12 m, must display two black balls in a vertical line where they are best seen. This indicates inability to manoeuvre not distress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VESSELS CONSTRAINED BY THEIR DRAUGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A power-driven vessel restricted to a narrow channel by her draught and thus unable to deviate from her course must display one cylinder where it is best seen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**VESSELS AGROUND**
A vessel greater than 12 m aground must display three black balls in a vertical line where they are best seen. This signal does not indicate distress or a need for help and is not required for vessels under 12 m length.

**VESSELS RESTRICTED IN ABILITY TO MANOEUVRE**
A vessel restricted in its ability to manoeuvre, for example, one engaged in flying aircraft, laying cable laying, replenishment at sea, underwater operations, servicing navigation marks, towing, where manoeuvre is restricted by tow, must display a black ball, black diamond, and black ball in a vertical line where best seen. This signal does not indicate distress or a need for help.

When at anchor, the vessel must also show the shape required at anchor.

**VESSELS ENGAGED IN UNDERWATER OPERATIONS OR DREDGING**
A vessel with an obstruction on one side because they are engaged in underwater operations or dredging shall display two black balls on the side of the obstruction, and two black diamonds on the side on which vessels may pass. The ball, diamond, ball shape that indicates a vessel is restricted in its ability to manoeuvre must also be shown.

Black balls on both sides may be used to indicate passage or channel is blocked and vessels should await instructions before proceeding.

**POWER-DRIVEN VESSELS TOWING**
A power-driven vessel towing another when the length of tow is greater than 200 m must show one black diamond where best seen. The same shape must also be displayed on the towed vessel.
DIVING OPERATIONS

Any vessel with divers operating from it must always display signals by day or night to inform other vessel users.

The daytime signal for divers is an international Code Flag ‘A’, at least 750 mm long and 600 mm wide, in the case of a vessel that is less than 10 m. For vessels longer than 10 m, the dive flag must be at least 1 m. It should be placed to ensure all-round visibility.

During night diving, the vessel must show the international signal for a vessel restricted in its ability to manoeuvre. These must be at least three lights in a vertical line, with the top and bottom being red and the middle one white, only where the size of the vessel makes it impracticable to exhibit the lights and shapes otherwise required.

For Masters

Be aware that divers in the water may not be near a vessel. A diver who is not operating from a vessel that is displaying a dive flag will be attached to a buoy that has a dive flag attached to a rigid replica of the flag. A master of the vessel must not operate at a speed exceeding 5 knots within 100 m of a vessel or a buoy on which a dive flag is displayed. Divers may ascend at any time.

A five knot speed limit applies to vessel operators and water skiers within a distance of 100 m of a vessel, buoy or structure on which a ‘diver below’ signal is displayed.
SOUND AND LIGHT SIGNALS

DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNAL</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whistle</td>
<td>Means of making short or long blasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short blast</td>
<td>About one second duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged blast</td>
<td>4–6 seconds duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels of 100 m or more in length</td>
<td>Use bell, whistle and gong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels of 20 m or more in length</td>
<td>Use bell and whistle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels of 12 m or more in length</td>
<td>Use whistle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels less than 12 m in length</td>
<td>Use any efficient sound signal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Manoeuvring and warning signals when vessels are in sight of one another

Whistle signals below may be supplemented by light signals using the same code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SIGNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am altering my course to starboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am altering my course to port</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am operating astern propulsion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unsure of your intentions, or doubt whether you are taking enough action to avoid collision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Warning signals – vessels in narrow channels

When the vessel overtaking or being overtaken must take action to permit safe passing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SIGNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I intend to overtake on your starboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to overtake on your port</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement by overtaken vessel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A vessel in doubt about signals, intentions or safety of the proposed manoeuvre of an overtaking vessel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessel nearing blind bend in channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessel other side of bend repeats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## SOUND SIGNALS FOR VESSELS IN RESTRICTED VISIBILITY (DAY AND NIGHT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>MAX PERIOD</th>
<th>SIGNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power under way and making way</td>
<td>every two minutes</td>
<td><img src="signal1.png" alt="Signal" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power under way and not making way through water</td>
<td>every two minutes</td>
<td><img src="signal2.png" alt="Signal" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Not under command  
• Restricted manoeuvring  
• Constrained by her draught  
• Sailing ship – not under power  
• Vessel fishing  
• Vessel towing or pushing | every two minutes | ![Signal](signal3.png) |
| Vessel towed – if manned | every two minutes | ![Signal](signal4.png) |
| Pilot vessel on duty – gives normal signals above and may sound four short blasts | | ![Signal](signal5.png) |
| Vessel at anchor (under 100 m in length)  
BELL rung for five seconds | every minute | ![Signal](signal6.png) |
| Vessel at anchor (100 m or more in length) BELL rung for five seconds from the bow of the vessel and then – GONG rung five seconds from the aft of the vessel immediately following bell signal | every minute | ![Signal](signal7.png) |
| Vessel at anchor – may give WARNING of possibility of collision to approaching vessel | | ![Signal](signal8.png) |
| Vessel aground – as at anchor but preceded and followed by three separate and distinct BELL strokes | | ![Signal](signal9.png) |
| Vessels under 12 m in length may make the appropriate signals given above but, if not, must make some other efficient sound signal every two minutes | | ![Signal](signal10.png) |
BASIC BOAT HANDLING TIPS

LAUNCHING

Launching a boat from a trailer and retrieving it (loading) are important skills. In each instance, they must be carefully planned and executed to ensure safety and to avoid damage to the vessel.

- Make pre-launch preparations well away from the ramp.
- Include checking the bungs in your pre-launch preparations.
- If you’re launching a trailer sailer, check for overhead wires before you rig or move your boat.
- Line up the car and trailer so that the backing process will be straight and as short as possible.
- Study the ramp and surrounding water area for any hazards.
- Do not remove the trailer winch or safety chain until your vessel is in the water.
- Secure lines to the bow and stern, then either float or motor off with care.
- When setting off, insist that everyone on board is within the boat itself, not on the side decking and especially not on the bow or where they will obstruct your view.
- Move off slowly.
- Always check for trailing ropes that could get caught in your propeller.
BERTHING AND UNBERTHING

This section provides some tips (courtesy of Club Marine), about manoeuvring alongside jetties and other boats.

Know your boat!
Know how it handles and what impact waves, wind and current would have on handling it.

• Understand how your boat reacts when left to drift in a breeze. Knowing how the boat will swing, or want to swing at low speed is really important knowledge to have when manoeuvring in confined spaces in windy conditions.

• Boats steer from the stern, which means that the stern swings out when steering. In most conditions you cannot drive a boat forward off a jetty. Doing this will typically result in the stern colliding with the jetty, or other boats, as it swings away from the direction of the turn.

• If you find yourself in trouble and drifting toward other boats or structures, reverse. The stern is where the steering is, so use the throttle to pull the boat backwards and out of harm’s way.

• Skippers need to become familiar with how their boat reacts to the throttle and gears. Common problems are not being in or out of gear at the right time, or using more power than is needed.

• In outboard or sterndrive boats it’s common for people to coast in neutral and expect the boat to steer. In these boats, it’s the position of the leg and thrust that steers the boat.

• Rudders require flow of water to provide turning forces.

• Slipping in and out of gear is a good technique to practise.

• Turning the wheel and constant adjustment of speed through engagement and disengagement play an important part in controlling the boat. Getting it wrong can result in a nasty crunch!

• Boats will slide when turning. How much will depend on the hull shape, boat weight, speed and environmental conditions. This can cause problems in confined areas and should be taken into account.

• Sliding sideways can actually be helpful when berthing alongside a jetty. The slide, when executed correctly can put a vessel alongside nicely.

• Slow down and only use sufficient power to counteract wind and/or tidal flows.

• Train your crew to throw a line or loop over a cleat or bollard when coming alongside, rather than jumping off a moving vessel to secure lines. Always make safety for you and those around you paramount.

• Have crew positioned before coming alongside as any movements to get into position or grab a line or fender can upset the trim and alter the boat’s path through the water, and affect your final approach.

• Develop the right skills and be confident in boat handling. Practice your skills in an area where there is a lot of space and minimal traffic. You can gradually practise in tighter spaces as you gain more confidence.

For more information visit www.clubmarine.com.au
ANCHORING
Anchoring is not only a normal part of boating, it is also an important safety measure in an emergency. Anchoring may keep the vessel safely positioned head on to heavy conditions and it can also allow you to retain your position and not be swept away or on shore.

The anchor with chain or line, or both, must be of sufficient strength and durability to secure the vessel. It must also be appropriate for the area of operation of the vessel. The chain or line or combination must be securely attached to both the anchor and the vessel at all times.

• Choose your anchor, chain/or line carefully to suit your vessel requirements, the depth of water, and the bottom type you are likely to find where you are operating.
• Always lower the anchor rather than hurling the anchor and chain overboard as this may lead to tangling.
• As a rule of thumb, the line paid out should be at least three times the depth of water. This distance should be increased to five to one in rougher seas.
• Regularly check the anchor is not dragging by inspecting the rope tension and monitoring your position.
• Never drop anchor from the stern or midship, you risk swamping the vessel.

The use of a sliding buoy system in anchor recovery is not recommended. If the anchor fouls, large forces may be transferred to the vessel leading to capsize or damage to the vessel.

Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules (VOZR), see Regulatory Environment section, states that anchorage of vessels is not permitted in certain areas.

• It is illegal and dangerous to anchor in shipping channels or transit lanes.
• It is illegal and dangerous to tie vessels to navigational aids.
MOORING

If you intend to put down a permanent mooring, contact your local waterway manager. The following issues should be considered:

• is the location protected from wind and tide effects
• can it be easily accessed for use and regular maintenance
• will it interfere with any other mooring or property
• will your vessel have full swing clearance?

It is recommended that a professional install the mooring for you once you receive approvals from the relevant authority. Check the condition of lines and attachment points on your vessel for damage and wear regularly.

When you are ‘picking up’ (attaching to) a mooring:

• travel slowly
• observe wind and/or tidal flow before approaching a mooring
• don’t take other boats’ positions as a guarantee of wind and current; some boats lie in the opposite direction to the wind and/or current, as surface effects of wind may differ from general tidal or current effects
• use the small pick-up buoy as an indicator of drift direction
• approach slowly into the wind or against the tide, using the stronger of the two as a ‘brake’
• don’t overrun the mooring buoy as this risks fouling the propeller on mooring lines
• use a boat hook to capture the pick-up buoy
• secure the line or chain to a bow cleat.

When you are leaving a mooring:

• warm up the engine – or prepare the sails if sailing
• check for other boats nearby
• travel slowly, and make sure your passengers and crew stay within the boat itself—not on the side decking or the bow, where they could block your view or risk injuring themselves
• relieve any heavy strain on the mooring by using the motor or sails to come up to it
• release the chain or rope from the bow cleat, and drift back to clear the buoy before moving away. As you drift, check for trailing ropes that may get caught in your propeller.
RETRIEVING

This is an important skill that should be practised at a quiet ramp. The key points are:

• align the centre of your vessel to that of the trailer; proceed carefully up the trailer until the winch or safety chain can be secured

• secure a line to both the bow and stern to control the boat as you use the winch. If you are not confident about driving your vessel on to the trailer

• vacate the ramp as quickly as possible and park in the appropriate preparation area to finish securing the vessel for towing.

More information at transportafety.vic.gov.au/msv/safe-operation

Secure your vessel to the trailer using both the winch and safety chain.
Towed water sports such as waterskiing, wakeboarding, tubing and kneeboarding are popular recreational boating activities and often involve high speeds. A recent Monash University study commissioned by Transport Safety Victoria (TSV), examined data from 2005 to 2015 that produced some interesting insights.

- Maritime-related injuries occur most frequently to males aged 15-29 residing in metropolitan Melbourne.
- Males outnumbered females 4:1 and this finding is consistent with figures previously reported by TSV (2016).
- Injuries were more common in the 17-29 year age group but those aged 30-44 and 45-59 years still accounted for a comparable proportion of maritime-related injuries.
- Waterskiing, wakeboarding and kneeboarding were identified as a cause of injury in 37% of maritime incidents resulting in emergency department presentations.

Where death, injury or property damage occurs, the incident details should be reported as soon as possible to the police officers present or to the police station nearest to where the accident took place.

Vessel masters and crew members should arm themselves with appropriate skills and be aware of the local waterway rules.

Observer

The obligation is on the master of a vessel not to tow without an observer on board.

The observer must be at least 12 years of age. In NSW Waters, including the Murray River, observers must hold a boat or PWC driving licence or be 16 years of age or older.

The observer must watch the water skier at all times and give the master directions to keep the water skier safe. This allows the master to concentrate on operating the vessel.

Towing Safely

The MSA, MSR and VOZR state that:

- Towing is only permitted in the period from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.
- A maximum of three persons can be towed at any one time. When towing multiple water skiers, it is safer to have tow lines of the same length.
- A person being towed is required to wear a type 1, 2 or 3 lifejacket at all times and types 2 or 3 are recommended.
- Once back in the vessel, the person who has been towed must wear the appropriate lifejacket for that vessel on the waterway being used. Speed and distance restrictions apply to the vessel as well as anything being towed.
- The vessel must have carrying capacity for the master and observer. You should consider seating for any person/s being towed.

When you are the master towing a person or persons, do not turn around to watch or allow yourself to get distracted by other people in the vessel.
Details of speed restrictions and local operating and usage rules are generally displayed on signage on the shore or marked by buoys or beacons in the water and are contained in the notices published in the Victorian Government Gazette and the VOZR. They set out information such as the number of boats permitted on a waterway at any given time, direction of travel and days when towed sports can be undertaken.

Masters of vessels need to be aware that areas may be set aside where specific activities are prohibited (for example, no waterskiing, no bathing), or that areas may be set aside for exclusive use (for example, sailing vessels only).

Further information may be obtained from the relevant waterway manager or from TSV. To find out more information about waterway managers, visit transport safety.vic.gov.au/msv/waterways

All vessels must travel at a safe speed at all times. A safe speed cannot be expressed as a maximum or minimum number of knots because it varies with circumstances and conditions. The operator must always assess the safety of the vessel’s speed.

Towed water sports are exciting, however consideration needs to be given to the combination of relatively narrow waterways, conflicting usage, crowds during busy periods and the relatively high speeds involved. All of these factors create risks.

Things to take into consideration are:

- check your intended course to look for any hazards in the area every time you go out
- speed and distance restrictions apply to the vessel as well as anything being towed
- avoid towing in areas being used by others, such as swimmers or anglers
- seek out boating areas with plenty of room and not too much boating traffic
- handle wake with care by slowing the boat down when crossing wakes. Persons being towed at high speeds can be seriously injured by bouncing on the wakes of other vessels
- multiple occupants of inflatable devices have an increased risk of injury due to collisions between occupants
- physical fitness plays a crucial role in preventing or decreasing serious injury. Work on your fitness pre and post season to ensure you’ve given yourself the best possible chance to enjoy your activity
- slow down to reduce wake before commencing a turn to pick up a fallen skier
- on inland waters, vessels are required to travel in an anticlockwise direction in relation to the approximate centre of the waterway, except in a speed restriction zone or where local rules provide for travel in a clockwise direction
- inflatable items being towed tend to be pulled to the outside of turns as they have little grip on the water, resulting in high speeds and little directional control during turns
- all turns on the Murray River must be in an anti-clockwise (left-hand) direction. This helps you keep to the starboard side in the direction of travel at all times
- dropped skis, ski ropes, biscuits etc must not be left in the water where they can be a hazard to other traffic.
**NO WASH ZONES**

Vessel wake may impact other waterway users such as moored and anchored vessels, bathers, human powered vessels such as kayakers and onshore anglers.

Wake can cause moored or anchored vessels to be damaged and persons to fall overboard. Human powered vessels, such as kayaks and canoes, may be impacted by large waves, which could also lead to an overboard, capsizing or swamping incident. Swimmers may also be swamped by wake waves.

Masters of vessels need to be aware that ‘No Wash’ zones are where a vessel must proceed at a speed that creates minimal wash.

**ACCESS LANES**

An access lane is an area set aside for vessels engaged in towed water sports, such as waterskiing, to access the shore at unrestricted speed while towing.

Vessels may only operate in an access lane for the purpose of dropping off or picking up a water-skier or accessing a launching ramp located within the access lane.

Vessels must follow the correct direction of operation when entering or leaving the access lane. Keep as far right as possible or, if the lane specifies travelling in a clockwise direction, keep as far left as possible.

Vessels in an access lane must give way to vessels that are proceeding past the access lane or dropping off a water skier.

Further information can be obtained from the relevant waterway manager or the VOZR. Visit [transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/waterways](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/waterways) for more information.
HAND SIGNALS

Boat operators, observers and waterskiers should learn the following hand signals. They are the most commonly used to communicate when participating in towed water sports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hand Signal</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Speed up</strong></td>
<td>Thumbs up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Slow down</strong></td>
<td>Thumbs down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Turn</strong></td>
<td>Circling motion above head followed by pointing in the direction of the turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Back to shore</strong></td>
<td>Pat top of head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Cut motor</strong></td>
<td>Slashing hand across throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. OK after all</strong></td>
<td>Hands clasped over the head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Stop</strong></td>
<td>Hand raised with fingers outstretched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. All OK</strong></td>
<td>An ‘O’ made with the thumb and index finger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>