



# BETTER BOATING

Enjoy a trip on the water and come home safely



*Make sure everyone has the right type and correctly fitting lifejacket*



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*The Australian Volunteer  
Coast Guard responds to  
a call for help*



# AVOID BECOMING A MARINE INCIDENT STATISTIC

## Know the risks

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As a skipper, the best time to think about the dangers, weigh up the risks and double check your safety gear is well before your trip takes place.

If something needs fixing or replacing you have time to do it and you avoid the choice between taking a risk or staying home.

Making safety a priority will make the difference when the unexpected happens and your life, or someone else's, is on the line.

Victoria Police and volunteers from marine search and rescue agencies located across the State respond to more than 1,300 marine incidents and calls for help each year.

In the past 10 years 87 boaters have died on waterways across the state in all types of vessels – new, old, small and large.

Maritime Safety Victoria's incident statistics and research are available at:

**[transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv)**





### Of the 87 people who died, what went wrong and why didn't they come home safely?



78 of these people were not wearing a lifejacket.



85 of these people were unable to raise the alarm themselves.



65 of these people had not told anyone they had gone boating, so no one could raise the alarm on their behalf.

*Have a great day on the water and come home safely*



## AVOID BECOMING A MARINE INCIDENT STATISTIC

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Maritime Safety Victoria wants all boaters to come home safely from each boating trip.

As a skipper, it is your responsibility to ensure that:

- > you keep your vessel in good working condition
- > you have the requisite skills to take your vessel out
- > the weather conditions are suitable
- > you have the best safety equipment possible (and required by law)
- > you know how to raise the alarm when something unexpected happens
- > you know what to do in an emergency.

**THE MINIMUM SAFETY  
EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS  
ARE A STARTING POINT. BETTER  
BOATERS TAKE EXTRA GEAR.**

*Southern Peninsula Rescue Squad responds to three kayakers in distress*



# WEAR A LIFEJACKET OR WEAR THE CONSEQUENCES

Certain activities require a lifejacket, however it's strongly recommended that you make it a habit to always wear a lifejacket on the water.

A properly-worn, correctly fitted lifejacket will bring you to the surface and will buy you precious time if you unexpectedly enter the water.

Maritime Safety Victoria's incident records show that boating deaths occur when boaters suddenly and unexpectedly enter the water.

Improved design technology has led to a range of lifejacket styles that are easy to wear, look good and don't get in the way of your favourite activity on the water.

In fact, there's a lifejacket for just about every body shape and every activity.

If you have an inflatable lifejacket, make sure you maintain it in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Most brands of lifejacket require yearly self-inspections and periodic services with an agent approved by the manufacturer.

Try our lifejacket selector at:  
**[wearalifejacket.vic.gov.au](http://wearalifejacket.vic.gov.au)**



Legislation making it compulsory to wear lifejackets in certain circumstances was introduced over 10 years ago.

In the first few years following the introduction of the laws we saw a dramatic increase in the number of boaters wearing lifejackets and big reduction in the number of boating related drownings.

In recent years however, we have noticed fewer people complying with the law and disturbingly, an increase in the number of people drowning in boating related incidents.

Lifejackets must be worn when you are in an open area of a boat that is underway and the vessel is:

- > a powerboat of 4.8 metres or less
- > an off-the-beach sailing yacht
- > a personal water craft
- > a human powered craft including kayak, canoe, raft, rowing boat, kite, sailboard or paddleboard
- > a recreational tender
- > boating in an area affected by a Bureau of Meteorology warning of expected
  - gales
  - storm force winds
  - hurricane force winds
  - severe thunderstorms
  - severe weather.



As a skipper, you must ensure that lifejackets are worn by all on board if you are boating in any 'heightened risk' situations.



## When else must lifejackets be worn?

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On power boats between **4.8 and 12 metres** or yachts of any size, you must wear a lifejacket when you are at **heightened risk**, that is, you are:

- > crossing an ocean bar
- > within a designated hazardous area such as Port Phillip Heads
- > alone on the boat (this includes circumstances in which your passenger is a child or has limited strength or mental capacity)
- > boating in the period between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise, that is, during darkness
- > boating with restricted visibility
- > in a vessel that is broken down or disabled
- > on a yacht when safety barriers, lifelines, rails, safety harnesses or jacklines are not being used.

**[transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/ocean-bars](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/ocean-bars)**

*You must wear a lifejacket when launching*



## Remember

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- Heightened risk is not a constant state — you have to be alert.
- 'Underway' means any circumstance when you are not anchored, attached to the shore or aground. Drifting is considered to be underway.
- Children under 10 must wear lifejackets at all times when in an open area of a boat underway.

*Correctly positioned night lights*



# RAISING THE ALARM

A lifejacket buys you time by keeping you and your crew afloat, but raising the alarm will make rescue possible during that 'bought' time.

How you call for help in an emergency depends on where you are and what method of raising the alarm you have available.

It's best to have multiple ways of raising the alarm — don't rely on just one.

**A registered emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) is required when boating more than 2 nautical miles offshore in coastal waters, however MSV recommends carrying a registered EPIRB or PLB for all boating activities.**

Mobile phone coverage is improving but make sure your phone is in a waterproof pouch so you'll be able to use it.

If you only have your mobile phone on you, call 000 if you are within phone range.





A **distress beacon** should be activated in situations of grave and imminent danger.

This equates to when you feel you are facing a life-threatening situation.

This is a personal decision that is different for everybody.

A **registered EPIRB or PLB** should be part of your safety kit, wherever and whenever you go.

Sometimes the simple act of letting someone know before you go will help trigger a rescue response in an emergency.

Tell someone where you are heading and when you expect to return.

Don't forget to let them know if your plans change and when you have come home safely.

When boating in coastal and offshore waters, make sure you are carrying the extra safety equipment required:

- > **a registered EPIRB**
- > **one red star parachute distress rocket flare**
- > **marine radio**
- > **compass**
- > **red distress flares and orange smoke signals.**

You and your passengers need to know how to use these items effectively when required to in an emergency.

**[transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/emergency](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/emergency)**



# WEATHER FORECAST

## Your first and foremost planning aid

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With everything else in place weather conditions should always determine whether you go out on the water.

Make sure you always check the marine weather forecast.

Land and general forecasts don't take into account wind speed over water, which is double that over land.

Wind speed is the average speed of the wind over a 10-minute period at a height of 10 metres above the surface.

As a guide, double the wind speed in knots to convert to kilometres per hour; for example 20 knots is approximately 40 km/h.

Gusts are increases in wind speed lasting for just a few seconds.

The speeds are typically 30 to 40 per cent higher than the average wind speed, but stronger gusts are likely in the vicinity of showers, thunderstorms and frontal systems.

- > Strong wind warning: 26 to 33 knots.
- > Gale warning: 34 to 47 knots.
- > Storm force wind warning: 48 to 63 knots.
- > Hurricane force wind warning: 64 knots or more.



It's vitally important to be aware of the current weather conditions in the area you plan to boat in.

It is equally important to know how conditions are expected to develop during your trip.

The Bureau of Meteorology says there are five things to take note of when planning your boating trip:

**1** Are warnings current for your boating area?

**2** Are there weather conditions affecting safe navigation and comfort?

**3** What are the wind trends?

**4** What are the wave conditions?

**5** When are the next high and low tides expected?

Check for weather alerts and explore BoM's Knowledge Centre at **[bom.gov.au/marine](http://bom.gov.au/marine)**

**BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY**

Going boating? Do the five vital weather safety checks

- 1** Marine warnings
- 2** Changing weather
- 3** Wind conditions
- 4** Wave conditions
- 5** Tide times

More info: [www.bom.gov.au/marine](http://www.bom.gov.au/marine)

**YOU'RE THE SKIPPER  
YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE!**



# COLD WATER KILLS

One of the greatest risks to boaters who suddenly and unexpectedly enter the water in Victoria is cold water immersion.

The shock to your body can kill long before hypothermia does.

When your body hits cold water, your immediate instinctive response is to gasp.

Your breathing becomes uncontrolled, your heart rate and blood pressure increase dramatically and you are at risk of a heart attack.

You have:

- > one minute to get your breathing under control.
- > 10-20 minutes of movement — when you should try to get back in your boat and prepare for rescue.
- > 1-3 hours before you become unconscious because of hypothermia.

Victoria's coastal waters are on average 9.5°C in winter and only 17°C in summer.

You increase your risk of drowning by five times if the water temperature is below 15°C.

60 per cent of fatalities due to cold water immersion happen in the first 15 minutes.



# ENSURE YOUR BOAT IS FIT FOR PURPOSE

As the skipper it is your responsibility to ensure that your boat is well suited to the location and the conditions where you intend to operate it – that it is ‘fit for purpose’.

It is vital that your capability as a skipper is suited to where you intend to go boating and the conditions you are likely to encounter.

Many vessels involved in swamping and capsizing incidents (some ending in fatality) are the result of skippers operating vessels that are:

- > not suited to the conditions (too small or not enough freeboard)
- > overloaded or not in good working order (taking on water, unreliable engine, electrical and fuel issues)
- > not carrying safety equipment
- > not equipped to raise the alarm.

*Wear a lifejacket or wear the consequences*



# WHAT CAN YOU DO AS THE SKIPPER?

## Keeping your passengers safe

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- Always wear a lifejacket and make sure your passengers do too.
- Have multiple means of raising the alarm should things go wrong.
- Make sure your boat is in good working order before you head out.
- Ensure your boat and your own capability as a skipper are suited for the conditions.
- Fit buoyancy to your boat so that it will stay level and afloat if swamped.
- Ensure you have the best safety equipment — your life may depend upon it.

## What to check

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- Are warnings current for your boating area?
- Are there weather conditions affecting safe navigation and comfort?
- What are the wind trends?
- When are the next high and low tides expected?

**YOU'RE THE SKIPPER,  
YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE**

# COLLISIONS

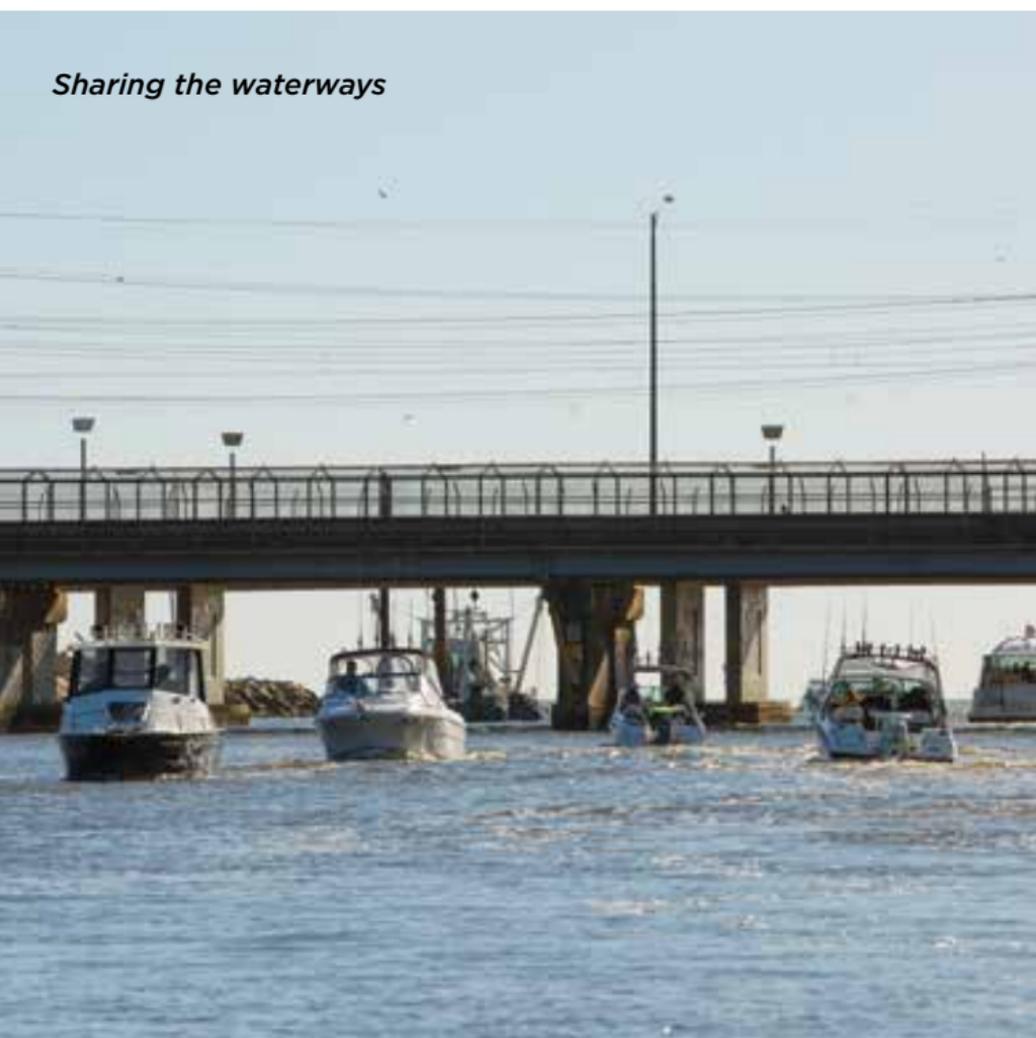
As the skipper you need to make sure that you 'know the rules of the road' that apply to each waterway. It is your responsibility to operate at a safe speed and maintain a proper lookout at all times.

State and local waterway rules are detailed in the Victorian Operating and Zoning Rules (VOZR).

Some rules may differ from waterway to waterway.

Waterway rules, maps and manager details can be found at:  
**[transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/waterways](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/waterways)**

## *Sharing the waterways*



# REFUELLING AND THE RISK OF EXPLOSION

Many boat explosions and fires have occurred during or immediately after refuelling.

It is unsafe and illegal to have passengers on board your boat when refuelling.

Make sure the engine bay and enclosed areas are well ventilated before restarting.

Don't start the engine if you can smell petrol fumes.

When planning your fuel load it is important to know the capacity of your tank.

**Allow one third of a tank for the outward journey, one third to get you home and one third in reserve.**

## Refuelling tips

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- > Turn off engine and electrical equipment before refuelling.
- > Close all doors and hatches.
- > Ventilate tank and engine compartments after refuelling.
- > Do not overfill tank, and clean up spills immediately.
- > Check for fuel fumes before starting your engine.
- > Passengers must not be on board while refuelling or until after the vessel has been re-started.



## SPEED AND DISTANCE

### Understanding the 5 knot speed limit

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- › 5 knots is a fast walking pace or almost 10 kph

On all Victorian waters a 5 knot speed limit applies within a distance of:

- › 50m of a person in the water
- › 50m of another vessel
- › 100m of a vessel or buoy on which a white/blue 'diver below' flag is displayed

In addition to the 'all Victorian waters' rule, when on coastal and enclosed waters, or bays, a 5 knot speed limit also applies:

- › within 200m of the water's edge
- › within 50m of any wharf, jetty, slipway, diving platform or boat ramp
- › when passing through a recognised anchorage for small vessels.

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

- › 50m of the water's edge
- › 50m of any fixed or floating structure.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Maritime Safety Victoria (MSV) has a range of free resources including the Victorian Recreational Boating Handbook, fact sheets and safety stickers.

Please contact us for these publications or advice:

E [info@transportsafety.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@transportsafety.vic.gov.au) or  
T 1800 223 022

## ABOUT MSV

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MSV is a branch of Transport Safety Victoria.

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.

You can keep up to date with how we are making progress by visiting [transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv)

This publication is a summary, and gives you general information about a particular topic but does not cover all of the relevant law regarding that topic. For more information visit the website [transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv)

This document should not be relied upon as a substitute for the relevant legislation, legal or professional advice.

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