
CHAPTER 5

PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

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PERSONAL WATERCRAFT

A personal watercraft (PWC) is defined under the *Marine Safety Act 2010* (Vic) (MSA) as any recreational vessel that is of a kind that is required to be registered and that:

- a. has an engine that is used for propulsion
- b. has a fully enclosed hull
- c. does not retain water on it if it capsizes, and
- d. is designed to be operated by a person standing, sitting astride or kneeling on the vessel but not seated within the vessel.

PWC OPERATOR CONDUCT

Regardless of the type of PWC, it is important for operators to remember that PWCs are a type of vessel and are required to be operated within the rules pertaining to 'powerboats'. PWCs are generally much more powerful and manoeuvrable than traditional powerboats and, in the wrong hands, can present a danger to the operator and to other people using our waterways.

A recent Monash University study commissioned by TSV examined data from 2005 to 2015 and found that:

- PWCs are the vessel most commonly involved in marine accidents and account for more than 30% of accidents
- the types of injuries suffered include leg fractures and other injuries to knees, legs and feet
- injuries incurred on PWC are a common cause of people needing treatment at hospital
- these injuries are on the rise every year, with more people being admitted to hospital as a consequence.

Many collisions between vessels result from a lack of understanding of the rules of safe navigation and/or carelessness.

Remember, PWC operators are required to:

- maintain a proper lookout and travel at a safe speed at all times
- observe the rules.

SPEED AND DISTANCE RULES

PWC operators should:

- check for local rules which may apply specifically to PWCs, such as personal watercraft prohibited zones
- observe the rules
- know their limitations as well as the limitations of the vessel in varying conditions
- be aware of potential hazards (allowing for the action of others, both reasonable and unreasonable)
- follow vessel manufacturer's instructions and maintenance schedule
- consider joining a PWC riders club or similar organisation to improve skills, knowledge and experience.

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

Remember:

- in surf areas, swimmers may be hidden from view by waves and swell. Keep well away from areas where swimmers are likely to be present or slow right down
- do not cut blind corners – slow down
- if vision is affected by the sun or spray – slow down or stop
- keep well clear of anchored or moored vessels
- in channels and narrow stretches of water, you must operate on the right hand or starboard side
- on circular bodies of water, travel in an anticlockwise pattern unless local waterway rules specify otherwise
- stay out of PWC exclusion zones.

SAFE SPEED

All vessels are required to travel at a safe speed at all times. Manufacturers are progressively introducing improvements that help the operator control the PWC and potentially avoid a collision. While these improvements are beneficial to new operators; nothing replaces the need to learn the proper skills and have the knowledge required to confidently and safely operate the PWC.

The operator of a PWC must constantly monitor the speed of the vessel to ensure that a safe speed is being maintained. Follow speed signs and buoys marking waterway zones.

Remember, stunts and manoeuvres must be done well away from other people, other vessels and the shore. If you cannot maintain the minimum distances off, you must slow down to 5 knots.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

The main complaint received by marine authorities relates to the operation of PWCs close to other water users and/or the water's edge.

These are minimum safety distances that must be applied on all waterways unless a specific local rule provides otherwise.

In Port Phillip Bay the 5 knot zone extends to 500 m of the waters edge from Martha Point to Point Nepean National Park.

Like any other boaters, PWC operators should make sure that they know the rules applicable to any waterway they intend to use. See the Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules (VOZR) for particulars and the general rules as outlined in this Safety Handbook.

When operating near beaches and swimmers, care must be taken to adhere to the speed and distance rules and be aware of people in the water.

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

KNOW THE COLLISION REGULATIONS

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, which are adopted in Victoria by marine safety legislation, apply to operators of all vessels including PWC riders. It is the responsibility of anyone in charge of a PWC to be able to correctly apply these rules in all circumstances.

For more information on the Collision Regulations, refer to the 'Know the Collision Regulations' section in Chapter 2.



One of the most important rules is the requirement to maintain a proper look out at all times.

HOON LAWS

PWC operators are subject to hoon legislation. The master of a PWC must not operate at a speed or in a manner which is dangerous to the public, birds and marine animals.

A member of Victoria Police may exercise the power to seize, impound or immobilise a vessel. In addition, Victoria Police and MSV have the power to embargo and prohibit the use and operation of a vessel.

NOISE

One of the most common complaints received about PWCs is noise. PWC operators tend to congregate near residential or popular recreation areas and drive around repeatedly in the same area. This noise can be irritating to people using the foreshore and to residents often some distance from the water.

Individually, most PWCs are not excessively noisy when compared with other vessels. However, if continually operated close to the shore, in groups, 'porpoising' or performing manoeuvres, noise levels increase.

Don't operate a PWC in the early morning, or when winds are blowing onshore, if you are in populated areas - including camp sites.

Respect the peace of other people and wildlife and remember, the fewer complaints, the greater chance to enjoy the sport.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

The operator and passengers, including anyone being towed, must wear an approved lifejacket Type 1, 2 or 3 at all times.

PWCs must also carry a working, waterproof and buoyant torch at all times. A torch can be used to signal the shore or other vessels if you encounter difficulties.

A PWC must show the navigation lights for a powerboat if operating at night. Note that a mast may be required for the all-round white light to ensure it is not obscured by the occupant(s).

A registered EPIRB is to be carried on all vessels, including PWCs, if operating more than 2 nm from the coast. Consider carrying an EPIRB on all waters or wearing a PLB in case you are separated from your PWC.

TOWED WATER SPORTS

PWCs are often used in towed water sports. Remember that when engaged in towed water sports on a PWC, the rules for towed water sports must be followed, including the need to carry an appropriate observer.

The PWC must have seating for the master and observer. You should consider having adequate seating for any person(s) being towed.

CARRYING CAPACITY

To determine the carrying capacity of your PWC, refer to the manufacturer's specifications.

PENALTIES

Boating is meant to be enjoyable and no one wants to finish up in trouble when they are out having fun.

To operate a PWC on any Victorian waters, all PWC operators must hold a Marine License with PWC endorsement.

Penalties exist for those operators who do not want to play by the rules. On-the-spot infringements may be issued by Victoria Police, TSV transport safety officers and other external officers appointed by the Safety Director.

LICENSING AND REGISTRATION

Approved boating safety training courses are highly recommended for any person considering obtaining a marine licence. For more information about licensing and a list of training providers, visit [transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/licence](https://www.transportsafety.vic.gov.au/msv/licence) and refer to Chapter 4 of this handbook.

Following a change to the law in 2017 persons under 16 are not eligible for a PWC endorsement on their restricted marine licence. They may still learn to operate a PWC provided they are directly supervised by a person over 18 who has a PWC endorsement and is on board the PWC in a position to take immediate control of the vessel.

The owner of a registered recreational vessel, that is a personal watercraft, must ensure that the identification mark that is assigned by the Safety Director for that vessel is painted or displayed in appropriate characters:

- a. on each side of the hull of the vessel
- b. forward of the beam, and
- c. so that the highest part of each digit commences at a point no more than 25 mm below the gunwale.

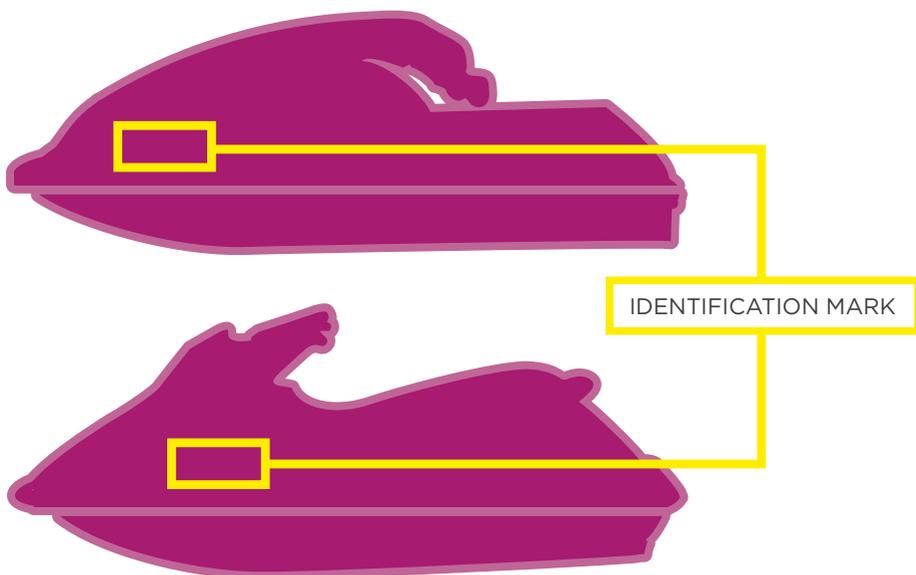
Appropriate characters means characters that are:

- a. no less than 100 mm high
- b. in proportionate breadth, and
- c. coloured in contrast to the surface on which they are displayed.

A person must not act as the master of a registered vessel on State waters unless an identification mark is painted or displayed on the vessel in accordance with the above.

These identification marks must take preference over decals and striping provided to decorate or customise the PWC.

Be a courteous rider!



RIDE RIGHT

YOU MUST FOLLOW THESE RULES:



Carry your **marine licence** with PWC endorsement



Wear a **lifejacket** and attach engine **kill switch**



Maintain a **proper lookout** at all times and travel at a safe speed



Carry a **waterproof buoyant torch**



Carry an **EPIRB** if you're going more than 2 nm off shore



Respect the rules, others, wildlife, environment



We also recommend:
Carrying a **phone** and **PLB** so you can call for help, wearing **protective clothing** and **letting someone know** before you go.

RIDE RIGHT

