

# Freshwater boating

February 2011

## Information on boating in dams, rivers, creeks and streams

### Licensing

A licence is required to operate any boat powered by a motor of over 4.5 kW (over 6hp).

A licence can be a valid:

- recreational marine driver licence
- recreational ship master's licence
- speed boat driver's licence
- current commercial licence
- marine licence issued by other safety authorities within Australia (check with Maritime Safety Queensland).

Recreational marine driver licences are obtained by successfully completing a competency-based BoatSafe course and making application to any one of the Department of Transport and Main Roads customer service centres or QGAP offices. You must complete the Medical Fitness Disclosure Statement and present it to the BoatSafe training provider at enrolment for the BoatSafe course. If you are unable to complete the Medical Fitness Disclosure Statement due to concern about your medical fitness, you should contact Maritime Safety Queensland on (07) 3120 7354. For more information or for a copy of the Medical Fitness Disclosure Statement go to the 'Licensing' link at [www.msq.qld.gov.au](http://www.msq.qld.gov.au).

### Registration

All boats fitted with a motor of 3kW (over 4hp) must be registered when on the water in Queensland.

All registered boats must display the allotted registration symbols. Symbols must be clearly visible from 30 metres, in plain characters and in contrasting colours to the hull of the boat.

The size of the characters depends on the type of boat.

Vessels capable of planing must have characters a minimum of 200mm high on both sides.

Personal watercraft registration symbols must be displayed on both sides at least 100mm high, easily seen while the craft is underway.

### Safety equipment

Carrying the right safety equipment and knowing how to use it is essential for any successful boat trip. The type of safety equipment you must carry on your boat depends on whether the boat requires registration, its size and the areas of operation (all fresh water areas in Queensland are designated smooth water).

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Required safety equipment may include:

- **PFDs/life jackets** – one of the appropriate size for each person 12 months and over, except if the person is wearing an inflatable diver jacket (and the boat is engaged in diving activities) or wetsuit with built in buoyancy. The PFD can be a type 1, 2 or 3. You do not have to carry a PFD in rivers, creeks, streams or waters contained within breakwaters and revetments if the boat has positive flotation and grab lines/rails. A positive flotation statement is a certificate, in the approved form, from a manufacturer or an accredited marine surveyor. It is not required to be carried on board, but an enforcement agency may ask the owner to provide proof of its existence. Children under 12 need to wear a life jacket when in an open boat under 4.8 metres, when underway (not anchored, made fast to shore or aground). A PFD of appropriate size for children will ensure they do not slip through harness straps when in the water.
- **Signalling device** – for all boats between sunset and sunrise.
- **Fire fighting equipment** – for all boats over 5 metres.

It is recommended that you also carry pumping or bailing equipment, anchoring equipment, oars or paddles and extra drinking water for everyone on board.

**Capacity labels** are required on all registrable boats. Overloading is dangerous and the easiest way to overturn your boat. A capacity label displays the maximum number of people that can safely travel in a boat, and must be permanently displayed and clearly visible on powered recreational boats near each steering position.

Capacity labels are available from Maritime Safety Queensland regional offices, Department of Transport and Main Roads customer service centres and through the Maritime Safety Queensland website.

### Waterskiing and personal watercraft

Make sure you know and understand all rules about riding personal watercraft and towing skiers before heading out. It is critical to familiarise yourself with the area every time before attempting high-speed activities – changed water levels can change conditions considerably.

Waterskiing is prohibited in certain areas – check with local authorities.

Keep a proper lookout and be aware of navigation hazards. When skiing, boats should travel in an anticlockwise pattern. Check rules and customs of the area.

It takes three to ski – an operator, an observer and a skier. The observer must be competent and over 12 years of age, and the operator must be licensed.

Skiers and anyone riding a personal watercraft must be wearing an appropriate life jacket. The observer must face the skier at all times.

## Speeding

There is a 40 knot maximum speed in all inland waters, unless otherwise indicated. Check with your local authority if in doubt.

Watch your speed when boating in narrow rivers or any freshwater dam or lake where there is often a lot of debris above and below the waterline.

Regardless of the maximum speed limit, you should always travel at safe speeds to avoid collisions, injury to other persons and damage to the shoreline.

Make sure you limit your speed to six knots or below within 30 metres of:

- anchored or moored boats
- boat ramps, jetties, wharves, pontoons
- people in the water.

Personal watercraft operators must not exceed six knots within 60 metres of the situations mentioned above. In addition, they must not exceed six knots within 60 metres of:

- boundary of a bathing reserve
- shore.

If the waterway is less than 120 metres wide, a personal watercraft operator may travel faster than six knots only if they maintain a straight course and stay as close as possible to the centre of the waterway or marked channel. Travelling faster than six knots in waterways less than 120 metres is also permitted when a personal watercraft is being used for waterskiing or towing.

Do not navigate your boat or personal watercraft within 100 metres of any dam, weir, barrage or spillways. Water flowing over spillways can cause dangerous currents and pumping facilities within dam structures, when operating, can create strong currents.

## Electric power

Electric motors use considerable power. Make sure the battery is fully charged before use, and have a back up.

Petrol motors are not permitted on some dams for environmental reasons. Check before you go.

## Freshwater tips

Freshwater is not as buoyant as salt water and the wearing of life jackets is highly recommended. The water temperature varies considerably and is usually colder increasing the risk of hypothermia, even in the warmer months of the year.

Always check the weather. Smooth water does not mean calm water. Sheltered water can become rough quickly, especially on dams located in mountainous areas where very strong winds are funnelled through the surrounding valleys, creating short and steep waves.

Heavy rain causes strong currents and carries debris and flotsam. In dams thousands of litres of water can be lost during drought or released causing a substantial drop in the water level. Keep a proper lookout and be aware of navigation hazards as the water is often murky and may hide submerged trees, snags, fence posts and rocks.

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Rivers can be winding and have blindspots caused by land, trees and overhanging branches.

Boat registration does not include third party liability. Reputable insurers offer third party liability insurance for boat owners in a comprehensive policy or as part of a special policy.

Queensland has many inland waterways ideal for fishing, boating and water sports. Boat registration and licensing requirements are no different for these areas than they are in coastal waters.

Some freshwater impoundments have restrictions imposed\* by the authority which manages the dam. These restrictions range from what activities can take place, access to the water and whether outboard motors are permitted.

As part of your general safety obligation you should ensure your boat is safe, has the right safety equipment and is operated as safely as possible.

\*The *Beacon to Beacon* Directory includes maps of all freshwater lakes and dams south of Rockhampton and the restrictions that apply to each.

Note: Fines are correct at time of printing, but may change without notice.