

11. Special activities

Waterskiing and operating personal watercraft are popular activities in South Australia's waterways. Both involve high speed, which is appealing but also comes with risks. In this chapter you will find information on licensing and registration, as well as the safety rules that apply to both activities, and steps you can take so you can enjoy your time on the water without attracting complaints from other water users or local residents.

You should always check the water for hazards before undertaking any high-speed activities.

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Personal watercraft

Personal watercraft (PWC) are often known by their brand names, including Jet Ski®, WaveRunner®, Sea-Doo® and WaveJammer®.

A PWC has four key characteristics:

- Has a fully enclosed hull.
- Is propelled by a motor.
- Is designed not to retain water if capsized.
- Is operated by a person who sits astride, stands or kneels on it.

PWC operate under the same general rules as other power-driven vessels. The rider must have a boat operator's licence and it is illegal to let an unlicensed person drive a PWC.

Exemptions may apply where an area is covered by an approved commercial hire and drive business operation.

Note: Special permit holders cannot operate a PWC.

The manoeuvrability of PWC is a large part of their appeal but it also makes them dangerous in inexperienced hands.

Noise is a common complaint about PWC operations. Constant or excessive noise when PWC congregate in one area can be very irritating for local residents and those who are visiting. You should respect other people's right to peace and quiet, the wildlife and be considerate. To avoid or reduce the chance of complaints being made, it is recommended that you avoid operating PWC when the winds are blowing onshore towards populated areas, including campsites.

Code of Practice Sticker (Ride Smart)

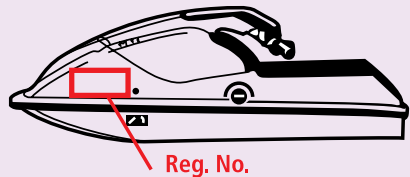
The Code of Practice (Ride Smart) sticker is a legal requirement and must be affixed on the PWC so that it is clearly readable from the steering position.

The sticker reminds the operator of rules which are specific to PWC.



Registration

As with other motorised vessels, PWC must be registered for use in South Australia. The following guidelines apply to affixing your registration number, which takes precedence



over decorative or customised decals and striping.

Your registration number must be:

- A different colour to the PWC.
- Be fixed on both sides of the PWC.
- A minimum of 150mm high if the PWC is 3m or more in length; numbers of a minimum 100mm are acceptable if the PWC is less than 3m.
- Affixed to the hull above the waterline and clearly legible from 50 m in fine, clear conditions (refer diagram above).

Operating rules

Operating in a reckless manner, without due care or causing nuisance are offences and carry serious penalties.

Like operators of other power-driven vessels, PWC operators are required to:

- Comply with give way rules, including giving way to sailing vessels, larger vessels operating in confined channels and other vessels crossing from your starboard side.
- Comply with all speed limits (vessels are required to travel at a safe speed at all times).
- Ride on the starboard (right) side of a river or channel in the direction of travel.
- Comply with waterskiing rules when towing a person (refer [Waterskiing, this chapter](#)).

There are other rules that are specific to PWC. Operators must:

- Check for local rules including operating restrictions, which are often displayed on signage at boat ramps and on beaches.
- Operate only until sunset or 8 pm (whichever is the earlier) on any day*.
- Only operate after 9 am on Sundays, or after 8 am on Monday to Saturday*.
- Comply with a 4 knot speed limit within 200m of the metropolitan shoreline (edge of water) between Outer Harbour southern breakwater and the southern end of Sellicks Beach and the backwaters of the River Murray, unless zoned otherwise.
- Comply with 4 knot speed limits or exclusion zones that apply to a number of other areas across the state, as well as all other general boating speed limits.
- Ensure that they and any passengers are wearing an approved lifejacket Level 50 or 50S (Level 100 or above can restrict movement and can cause injury in high-speed activities, and as such is unsuitable for use on a PWC).

- Not operate in unprotected waters (beyond two nautical miles seaward from the coast of the mainland and Kangaroo Island, or from the shores of Lakes Albert or Alexandrina), without approval from the CE of DIT.

* A PWC engaged in towing another person (that is, waterskiing and such) on the River Murray can operate between sunrise and sunset any day, provided all waterskiing rules are complied with.

There is no legal requirement to carry safety equipment on your PWC except that each person on board must wear an approved and properly fitted lifejacket Level 50 or 50S at all times. However, it is recommended that you carry easily transportable equipment including flares if you are operating in semi-protected waters (inshore of a line 2 nautical miles seaward of the low water mark of the coast of the mainland or Kangaroo Island, or of the banks of Lakes Alexandrina and Albert).

Safe operation

It is most important to keep a good lookout for other vessels, people, and hazards in the water at all times.

- Wherever you operate, swimmers may be hidden from view by waves and swell, so keep well away from, or slow down in areas where swimmers are likely to be. A 4 knot speed limit applies within 50m of swimmers or other people in the water.
- Don't cut blind corners.
- Slow down or stop if your vision is affected by sun or spray.
- Keep clear of anchored and moored vessels.

For your own safety you should always attach the ignition cut-out safety line to your lifejacket and consider suitable footwear, goggles and gloves.

PWC are increasingly being used for waterskiing. The same rules apply to PWC operators as all powerboat operators, including the requirement to carry an observer who must face the skier at all times. The PWC must have seating for at least two people and ideally three, in case the skier is injured. It is also advisable to use a PWC that is designed for towing.

Maintenance

As there are different makes and types of PWC, operators must refer to the PWC user manual for more detail on maintenance and services. As part of your trip preparation it is important to ensure that your PWC is in good order by inspecting key features before leaving home, the ramp or shore. It is recommended that you inspect your PWC when you return from each trip for any damage or faults. If you do not use your PWC for long periods of time, it is recommended that you arrange for it to be serviced by an approved service provider.

Hiring a PWC

You need a boat operator's licence to be able to drive a PWC on South Australian waterways. Exemptions may apply where a PWC is operated in waters defined under an approved Hire and Drive operation. For more information about domestic commercial vessel operations please contact The Australian Maritime Safety Authority ([refer chapter 13, Contact details & further information](#)).



Waterskiing

Waterskiing is a popular and exciting sport however the combination of relatively narrow waterways, crowds of boats at busy times and the relatively high speeds involved, there are some risks.

To help reduce the chance of an incident, the following special rules apply to waterskiing in addition to the general boating rules.

- Waterskiing is not allowed between sunset and sunrise, except with written permission from DIT.
- No more than three waterskiers, or one device with no more than three people on it, may be towed at one time, except with written permission from DIT.

Note: a special permit holder cannot operate a vessel towing a waterskier or any other person.

- Every person being towed must wear an approved lifejacket Level 50 or 50S.
- Any vessel (including a PWC) being used to tow a person must carry an observer as well as the licensed operator. In general, both the operator and observer must be aged at least 16 years (a special permit holder may act as the observer only if the boat operator is aged at least 18).
- The observer must watch the skier at all times and give the operator directions to keep the skier safe.
- Boat operators, observers and waterskiers must not have a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05 or above.

- On leaving a take-off/landing area, the operator should keep to the starboard side and keep well clear of any vessel approaching.
- All turns on the River Murray 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.
- On returning to a take-off/landing area, the operator should approach from the starboard side and clear the area as quickly as possible.
- Ski ropes, devices or skis trailing from a boat must be removed from the water and booms brought on board before returning to a take-off area.
- Dropped skis, ski ropes etc must not be left in the water where they can be a hazard to other traffic.
- For their own safety, skiers must be dropped off in the water to glide towards the riverbank or shore, rather than skiing into the launching area.
- Vessels must not approach within 100 m directly behind a person who is being towed.

Hand signals

Boat operators, observers and waterskiers should learn the hand signals in the following diagram for clear communication between boat and skier.

A skier falling into the water must hold an arm or ski in the air to show the observer where they are and that they are not hurt, and to draw attention of their presence in the water to other boat operators.

1—Speed up

(Thumbs up)



2—Slow down

(Thumbs down)



3—Turn

(Circling motion above head followed by pointing in the direction of the turn)



4—Back to shore

(Pat top of head)



5—Cut motor

(Slashing hand across throat)



6—I'm OK

(Waves a hand and indicates their position in the water.)



7—Stop

(Hands raised with fingers outstretched)



8—All OK

(An 'O' made with the thumb and index finger)



Seaplanes

When on the water, seaplanes are just like any other vessel. They are subject to all the restrictions and privileges of other boats and conduct their operations accordingly.

Don't be alarmed if a seaplane alights or takes off in the waterways near you. Seaplane Pilots are specially trained and qualified to operate upon the water. Like other boat operators, they hold a boat operator's licence to operate a vessel with an engine.

Avoid making sudden changes of direction which might confuse the Pilot or obstruct the Seaplane's path.



Chapter 11. Self-check questions

1) What is the speed limit when operating a PWC within 200 m of the metropolitan shoreline, and in backwaters of the River Murray?

- A. 5 knots.
- B. 10 knots.
- C. 4 knots.

2) On which side of a river or channel must a person remain when operating a PWC?

- A. On any convenient side, except when waterskiing.
- B. To the starboard (right) side in the direction of travel - the same as all vessels on water.
- C. To the port (left) side in the direction of travel - so that other vessels can see you coming and get out of the way.

3) What information is displayed on the PWC Code of Conduct ('Ride Smart') sticker?

- A. The rules and regulations that apply specifically to PWC.
- B. Maximum speed and stoppage distance information, to allow for safer stunts and tricks.
- C. Emergency telephone numbers.
- D. All of the above.

4) In what direction must turns be made by a vessel engaged in waterskiing on the River Murray?

- A. To the right (clockwise).
- B. To the left (anti-clockwise).
- C. In any direction, as long as you signal where you're going.

5) When is an observer required on board a vessel that is towing a skier or skiers?

- A. When the vessel is towing children.
- B. At all times and on all vessels towing a person or persons - whether on skis, a kneeboard/wakeboard, or a device.
- C. Only in or on vessels that have a seat for an observer.