

Ridesmart - personal watercraft

February 2011

Information for personal watercraft users

The term personal watercraft (PWC) applies to a powered vessel that has a fully enclosed hull and does not take on water if capsized and is designed to be operated by a person standing, crouching or kneeling on it, or sitting astride it, rather than within the confines of it.

Licensing

It is compulsory for all personal watercraft operators to hold a personal watercraft licence. To obtain a personal watercraft licence, applicants must first hold a recreational marine driver licence or commercial marine qualification as a master.

A competency-based training course (BoatSafe) must be completed for personal watercraft operations before being eligible for a licence.

If you move from interstate, you are required to obtain a personal watercraft licence unless you hold an equivalent personal watercraft licence issued by another state. Currently, only New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania issue a specific personal watercraft licence.

Note: restricted personal watercraft licences issued to children in states such as New South Wales and Victoria are not accepted as a suitable equivalent to the Queensland PWCL and these restricted interstate licences may not be used in Queensland waters.

Short-term visitors can use their boat licence equivalent, if that is all that is required to operate a personal watercraft in their home state. If your home state does not require any licence to operate a boat then you must obtain a Queensland licence.

You can operate a personal watercraft without a licence only if accompanied by a licensed operator who is able to take immediate control of the craft if required. Unlicensed operators are not permitted to tow a skier.

A hired personal watercraft can be ridden without a licence under special restrictions which must be outlined clearly before the personal watercraft can be operated.

For a list of BoatSafe training providers go to www.msq.qld.gov.au.

Registration

All personal watercraft must be registered. Personal watercraft registration symbols must be:

- displayed on both sides
- at least 100 millimetres high
- legible from 30 metres
- clearly visible in a contrasting colour to your craft
- easily seen while your craft is under way.

The registration label must be displayed on the port (left) side of your craft, adjacent to the registration symbols.

* Requirements for personal watercraft registration differ across Australia; always check local rules before operating your personal watercraft in another state.

On the
spot fine
\$500

Safety equipment

Personal watercraft operators and passengers must wear a personal flotation device (PFD) at all times.

All PFDs must meet Australian Standards. Some approved international standards are also acceptable – see the Maritime Safety Queensland website for details.

The type of PFD and other safety equipment for personal watercraft is dependent on where you are operating:

- in smooth water limits a PFD type 2, 3 or a wetsuit with inbuilt flotation approved as PFD type 3
- in partially smooth and offshore water limits a PFD type 2.

Other types of safety equipment required onboard a PWC are:

- a signalling device between sunset and sunrise (torch or cyalume stick for example)
- a 406 MHz EPIRB is required to be carried when a personal watercraft is operated beyond smooth and partially smooth waters and more than two nautical miles from land.

As storage capability has improved with the evolution of personal watercraft, it is recommended that personal watercraft operating in partially smooth and open waters also carry signal flares and a 'V' sheet to attract attention in the event of a breakdown or emergency.

Note: Safety equipment (PFD and EPIRB) which carries a manufacturer's expiry date must be replaced or serviced by the manufacturer (or authorised service agent).

Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB)

All ships operating beyond smooth and partially smooth waters must carry an EPIRB if more than two nautical miles from land. If it is a requirement to carry an EPIRB as part of your safety equipment, it must be a 406 MHz EPIRB.

You must register your 406 MHz beacon with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). You must also advise of any change to ownership and boat details. Registration is free and can result in a more efficient search and rescue effort.

Battery World, in an agreement with AMSA is providing a collection service of the redundant 121.5 MHz EPIRBs at no cost. By dropping your old EPIRB into a Battery World store you can be certain that the unit is decommissioned correctly and harmful components are recycled to reduce their environmental impact.

Navigation lights

Personal watercraft operating between sunset and sunrise or at times of reduced visibility must show navigation lights – sidelights and an all round white light which is visible from 360 degrees.

Ride Smart sticker

A Ride Smart sticker must be affixed to the personal watercraft and visible to the operator at all times.

On the
spot fine
\$200

On the
spot fine
\$200

On the
spot fine
\$200

Capacity label

All personal watercraft are required to have a capacity label affixed in a position which is visible to the operator at all times. Capacity labels are designed to show operators how many people they can have safely onboard.

Courtesy and general safety

Know and understand the rules on the water and always keep a good lookout at all times for other boats, hazards and other people involved in water activities.

Avoid operating your personal watercraft in a manner that could cause nuisance, noise or danger to people in the area. Consider the environment and peace of others who use or live by the water.

Check with your local council about the location of bathing reserves where the operation of motorised craft may be prohibited.

Approaching head on

Each boat alters course to starboard (right) and passes port to port (left). This applies to both narrow channels and open waters.

Freestyling

High speed manoeuvres such as wake-jumping, donuts, figure 8s and 360s are examples of freestyling. This is erratic and non-directional driving.

When you are freestyling be aware of other waterway users. Find a place away from populated areas like beaches and residential areas. For distance rules look under 'Distance and speed' in this fact sheet.

Freestyling is prohibited in some areas. Maps showing these areas can be found on the Maritime Safety Queensland website under 'Waterways management' and 'Marine zones'.

Wave jumping and surf riding

Wave jumping and surf riding can be dangerous for inexperienced riders. Avoid collisions and injuries by thinking carefully before jumping a wave.

Consider:

- that you must be 60 metres from other water users
- the speed of the craft at take-off
- the height of the wave
- where the personal watercraft is likely to land.

Be aware of rocks and sandbars in shallow waters; make sure there is sufficient water to manoeuvre after the wave has subsided.

If there are dwellings in the area where you are operating, observe the requirements for distance and speed.

Towing skiers and water toys

The same rules apply to towing and waterskiing as for a boat. It is a requirement to have a person over the age of 12 years as an observer for the skier or person/s being towed. The personal watercraft must be capable of carrying the driver and observer within the passenger capacity as determined by the personal watercraft manufacturer.

Personal watercraft when used in tow-in surfing

Strict conditions apply to personal watercraft when used in tow-in surfing activities. Refer to www.msq.qld.gov.au and consult councils for local regulations.

Personal watercraft exclusion zones

Personal watercraft exclusion zones exist in the following locations:

- Gold Coast – the waters of Tallebudgera Creek.
- Sunshine Coast – Noosa River, upstream of the Noosa Waters inlet and upstream of a line in Weyba Creek. Waterskiing is only permitted in the two waterski runs between Tewantin and Lake Cooroibah, between the hours of 8am and 5pm. This does not include the use of personal watercraft in waterskiing activities. Freestyling, surfing and wave jumping is not permitted on any part of the Noosa River.

Before operating in any area, check with the local council for any further restrictions.

Distance and speed

For your safety and that of everyone else using the water, do not exceed set speed limits. Do not travel at speeds where your wash can cause damage to the shoreline or other boats, or injury to others. Consider the density of traffic in the area to determine a safe speed.

If conditions are rough or visibility is bad, the maximum speed isn't necessarily the safe speed. The following distances must be maintained or reduce speed to 6 knots (=11 km/h approx) within:

- 60 metres from people in the water
- 60 metres from anchored or moored boats, boat ramps, jetties or pontoons
- 60 metres from shore
- 60 metres from the boundary of a bathing reserve.

Exceptions apply to '6 knots within the 60 metre' from the shore rule under the following conditions:

- the waterway is less than 120 metres wide, and
 - the personal watercraft operator is operating the personal watercraft as close as practicable to a straight line to transit the area
 - the personal watercraft operator stays as close as practicable to the centre of the waterway or a marked channel
- the personal watercraft is being used in waterskiing/towing.

In coastal waters, freestyling or wave jumping is not permitted within 200 metres of the shore if there are dwellings within 100 metres from the shore line and these dwellings are visible to the operator. Coastal waters do not include dams and inland waters.

Steerage

Personal watercraft are jet driven and do not normally have a conventional rudder. Throttle needs to be applied to steer (turn and manoeuvre) the craft. Collisions have often occurred when the rider reduces power, not realising the craft does not turn away from the object/vessel without throttle. To avoid a collision apply power to make your craft turn, then reduce power when you can.

All personal watercraft have a safety ignition cut-off key (lanyard) which is designed to stop the engine if you fall off. The lanyard is an important safety device designed to be attached to the operator's wrist. It is a good idea to wear your lanyard on the opposite hand to the ignition switch, as it will prevent it from slipping off your wrist. Some lanyards can be attached to your PFD.

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