

Freshwater boating

Queensland has many freshwater and inland waterways ideal for fishing, canoeing, kayaking, boating and water sports. Whatever activity you choose, you need to know your responsibilities when boating.

Owners and operators have a general safety obligation to make sure their boat or personal watercraft (PWC):

- is in good condition
- is used safely
- has the correct safety equipment.

Registration and licences

Boat and PWC registration and licence requirements are the same for freshwater or inland waterways as they are for coastal waters.

Remember to also check the rules if you are:

- water skiing
(www.msq.qld.gov.au/Safety/Waterskiing)
- riding a PWC
(www.msq.qld.gov.au/Safety/Personal-watercraft).

Safety equipment

The safety equipment that must be carried on board depends on:

- the type of boat or PWC
- the area you are operating in
- your type of activity.

Inland waterways are 'smooth waters' – make sure you carry the right safety equipment for smooth waters before you go out.

Visit www.msq.qld.gov.au/Safety/Safety-equipment-recreational-ships for more information.

It is strongly recommended that non-registrable boats like kayaks and canoes carry safety equipment approved for the area they operate in, to ensure you are prepared if there is an emergency. Carrying extra safety equipment is a good idea for all types of boats.

Safety equipment must be easily accessible and everyone on board must be told where the safety equipment is kept and how to use it.

Boats and PWCs travelling at night, or at times of reduced visibility, must also show navigation lights (side lights and an all-round white anchor light).

Boats such as kayaks/canoes (boats under oar) should have ready at hand an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which can be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent a collision.

Lifejackets

The type of lifejacket required depends on the type of water you operate on:

- smooth water limits – Level 50 or 50 special purpose (50S), or PFD type 2 or 3, or a wetsuit with inbuilt flotation approved as PFD type 3.
- partially smooth and smooth water limits – Level 50 or PFD type 2
- open, partially smooth and smooth water limits – Level 100, 150 or 275, or PFD type 1 (not to be used by PWC riders, skiers or people being towed).



There must be enough appropriately sized and easily accessible lifejackets available on board for each person aged over 12 months.

It is compulsory for all children under 12 years of age (from 12 months old and up to, but not including, 12 years old) to wear their lifejacket when underway in an open boat under 4.8m in length.

When water skiing, the skier must wear a lifejacket at all times.

Lifejackets must be easily accessible and clearly visible to passengers or clearly signed.

Freshwater boating rules

Some dams do not allow some types of activities, while others have specific restrictions or permit requirements. Petrol motors are not always permitted on some dams for environmental reasons. Check before you go.

Fishing licences and regulations apply to freshwater waterways and dams in Queensland. Visit the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website (www.daff.qld.gov.au) for more information.

Unless a lower maximum speed limit is indicated, all inland waters have a 40 knot maximum speed limit. Check with the operating authority if you are in doubt.

Remember the distance-off rules – 6 knots is the maximum speed within 30 metres of:

- anchored or moored boats
- people in the water
- a jetty, wharf, pontoon or boat ramp
- a float or structure showing a diver flag.

For PWCs, the rule is within 60 metres of these things, the boundary of a bathing reserve or the shore.

All boats, PWCs and watercraft must keep at least 100m from dam walls and spillways.

Quick safety tips

- Freshwater does not necessarily mean calm water – have your safety equipment on board and be prepared for any conditions. Always check the weather.
- Freshwater is not as buoyant as salt water and the water temperature is usually colder. This increases the risk of hypothermia, so wearing lifejackets at all times is highly recommended.
- If you are using an electric motor on your boat, make sure the battery is fully charged before every trip and have a back-up.
- If you are canoeing and kayaking, travel close to the banks to avoid high traffic areas and be aware of wash from larger boats.
- If you are boating, riding your PWC or water skiing, remember to consider other waterway users and be aware of your speed, wash and freshwater hazards.
- Keep a proper lookout at all times:
 - Heavy rain can cause strong currents and bring debris and flotsam to the waterway.
 - Drought can cause a big drop in the water level and expose submerged objects like old fences, sticks, trees, rocks and sandbanks. Slow down when boating close to shore and avoid hitting underwater hazards.
 - Rivers can have blind spots at river bends or caused by land, trees and overhanging branch obstructions.
- Don't go alone and tell someone where you are! Freshwater areas can be remote and miles wide with no quick access to shelter or assistance if you run into trouble.

