



The rules

All Skippers must be aware of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

Safe speed

All vessels must travel at a safe speed at all times.

A safe speed cannot be expressed as a maximum or minimum number of knots because it varies with circumstances and conditions. The master (skipper) must continually assess the safety of the vessel's speed.

A safe speed is one at which the vessel can be stopped in time to avoid any danger which arises suddenly. In judging a safe speed the master must consider a number of issues including:

Visibility – drive slowly in rain, fog, mist, smoke or glare.

Special caution is required at night because many potential hazards may not be lit or may not be easily seen. Background shore lighting may confuse you.

Other vessels – slow down on busy waterways and when near moored or anchored vessels, working vessels showing special signals and large vessels which have difficulties in manoeuvring.

Navigation hazards – slow down in shallow areas or in unfamiliar waterways.

Water depth can vary and change frequently. Not all hazards may be marked or lit and signs, buoys, marks or lights may have shifted or been vandalised.

Wind, waves and currents – may adversely affect the manoeuvrability of a vessel.

Manoeuvrability of the vessel – stopping and turning ability depends on the speed travelled, wind and current and the boat's design (such as hull shape, engine and propeller type and number).

If your vessel does not have a speedometer, you must be able to determine if you are exceeding a local speed limit. For example, if your boat is planning in a restricted speed zone it is likely that you are exceeding the speed limit, so slow down.

Proper lookout

A good lookout must be kept by sight and hearing.

The Skipper must be fully aware of the boating environment, especially in bad weather, restricted visibility or darkness. Don't forget to look all around – even behind you.



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Special care should be taken when operating your boat in areas where high speed vessels operate, such as Sydney Harbour. The situation can become dangerous very quickly due to rapid closing speeds, even if your vessel is travelling slowly.

For example a vessel going at 20 knots will cover more than 100 metres in less than 10 seconds and the speed of your boat may further decrease your time to react to avoid a collision.

Don't confuse the lookout duties of the master with those of the observer when the boat is towing a person on skis, tubes, etc.

The Skipper is responsible at all times for keeping a lookout for dangers.

Bow riding is illegal

Bow riding means extending any part of your body outside the perimeter of a vessel that is underway.

NOTE: The offence relating to bow riding relates to both the operator of a power-driven vessel and the person on board the vessel who extends any part of their body outside the perimeter of the vessel.



Giving way

The master must continuously assess the risk of collision with other vessels and power vessels must give way to:

- Sailing vessels.
- Vessels approaching head on (by altering course to starboard).
- Vessels approaching from the right (starboard) hand side (ie, crossing).
- Vessels displaying the special lights and signals shown in this chapter.
- Large vessels restricted in their manoeuvrability.
- Any vessel being overtaken.
- Vessels engaged in fishing activities and showing appropriate signals.

A vessel drifting is deemed to be underway and has no special right of way. It is required to comply with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

Do not create a dangerous situation by forcing your right of way. Always keep a safe distance off other vessels so the vessel can be stopped or manoeuvred to avoid any sudden danger.

The faster the speed, the greater the safe distance must be.

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When altering course make your intentions clear to others as early as possible.

NOTE : In a collision, all Skippers involved can be held responsible even if the give-way vessel does not give way, because all masters are required to exercise caution and take avoiding action if the other vessel does not.

Sound signals

Special sound signals exist for vessels to indicate their manoeuvring intentions when they are in sight of one another.

1 short blast

I am altering course to starboard (the right).

2 short blasts

I am altering course to port (the left).

3 short blasts

I am operating engines astern (stopping/slowning).

5 short blasts

I am unsure of your intentions and I doubt whether you are taking sufficient action to avoid collision.

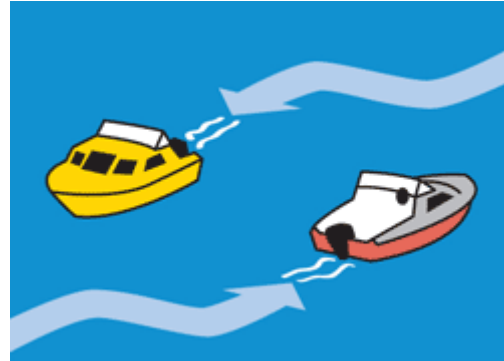
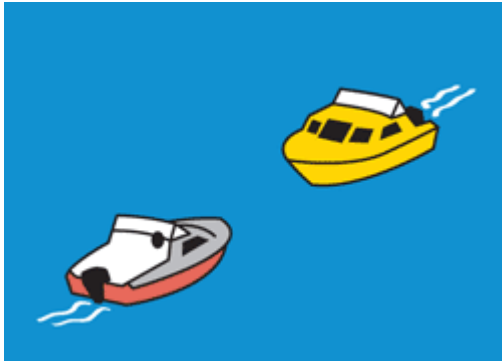
Power gives way to sail

A power driven vessel must give way to a sailing vessel unless the sailing vessel is in the process of overtaking it.



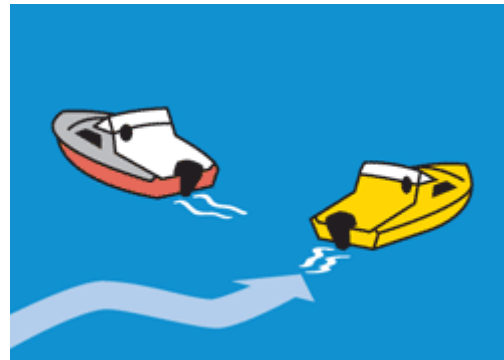
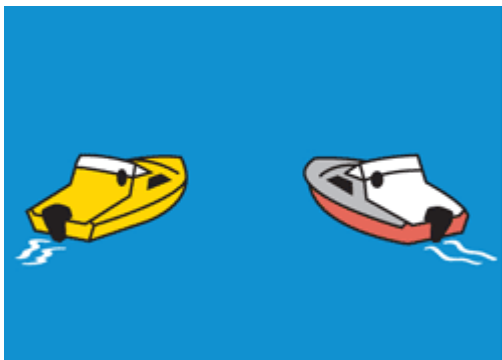
Power driven vessels meeting head on

When two power driven vessels meet head on, each must alter course to starboard (to the right) and pass at a safe distance.



Power driven vessels crossing

In crossing situations, give way to the right.



Action to avoid collision

The give-way vessel must avoid a collision by changing course substantially, by slowing down, or stopping and allowing the vessel which has right of way to pass clear ahead. This must be done as early as possible.

NOTE: The Skipper of the vessel which has right of way must maintain a lookout, maintain course and speed and be prepared to take action to avoid a collision if necessary.

Vessels overtaking

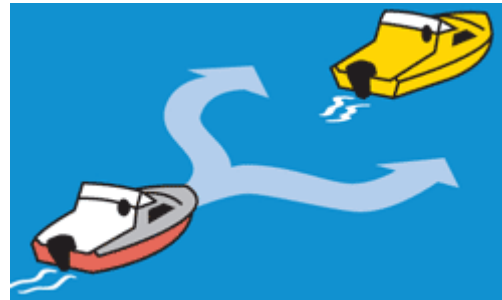
Any vessel (including a sailing boat) which is overtaking another vessel must keep well clear of the vessel being overtaken.

You can overtake another vessel on either side but only when it is safe and you must stay well clear.

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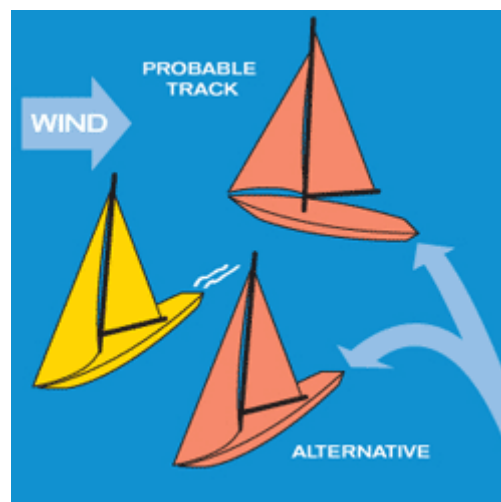
In narrow channels you must be particularly careful when overtaking.

In all instances, make sure you do not cut in front of the vessel you have overtaken.



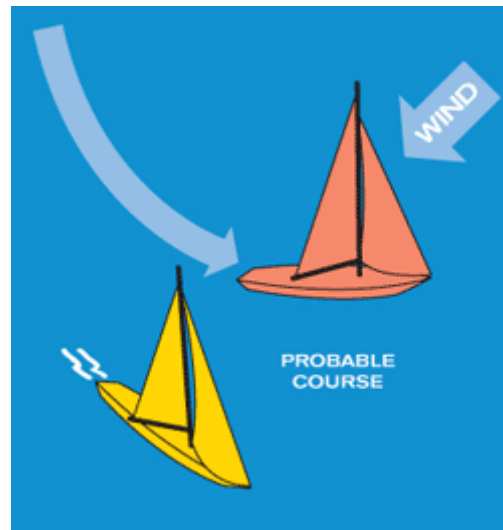
Sailing vessels and sailboards

When two sailing vessels have wind on different sides, the vessel with wind on the port side gives way.



When both craft have wind on the same side, the vessel which is to windward shall keep out of the way of the vessel which is to leeward.

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NOTE: If a collision appears inevitable, the Skipper of each vessel must take proper action to avert the collision.

Distance off

When driving a vessel at a speed of 10 knots or more **or** towing a person you must keep the vessel and the person being towed a minimum distance of:

- **30 metres** from power-driven vessels, any moored vessel, land and structures (including jetties, bridges, moorings and navigation markers) or, if that is not possible, a safe distance.
- **60 metres** from persons or non-powered vessels (sailing and passive) that are underway or if that is not possible, a safe distance.
- **100 metres** from a dredge or work barge, if you are travelling faster than 4 knots.
- A **safe distance** from any vessel towing a person.



Safe distance

A **safe distance** between a vessel and a person or thing (including another vessel) is a distance that will ensure that the vessel will not cause danger or injury to the person or

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damage to the thing, having regard to all relevant safety factors including weather conditions at the time, visibility, speed of the vessel and obstructions to navigation that are present.

It should be noted that where a Skipper is issued a penalty for breaching the distance off requirements referred to above and claims that even though this distance off was breached, the distance off was a 'safe distance', the onus is on the Skipper to prove this in court.

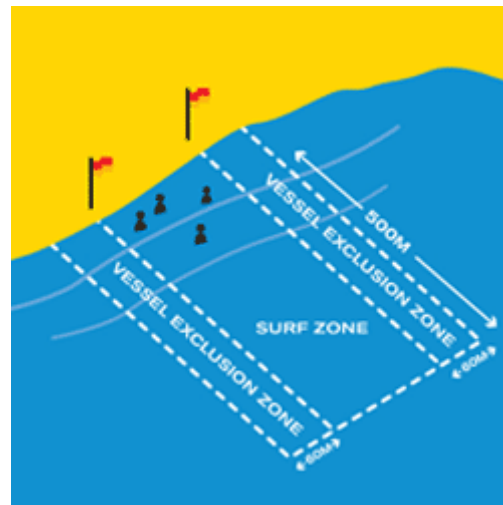
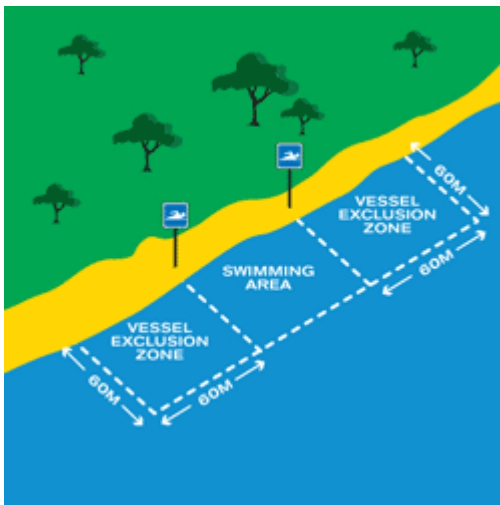
Designated swimming areas

Remember the same rules apply for PWC as other vessels operating near surf zones/swimming areas.

A designated swimming area in a surf zone is defined as the area extending **500 metres** out from shore between surf patrol flags or signs.

In all other areas a swimming area is defined as the area extending **60 metres** out from shore between signs for swimmers.

A vessel must not be operated in these zones or within **60 metres** either side of the flags or signs marking such zones unless it is a vessel operated by Surf Life Saving NSW or Council lifeguards.



Mooring areas

On many waterways in NSW, areas are set aside for the mooring of vessels. These vessels are not required to be lit at night and the masters of other vessels must be aware of the location of such moorings.

Check local maps or charts, or contact your local NSW Maritime Operations Centre for details of mooring areas. When navigating near, in or through a mooring area:

- Drive slowly and keep wash to a minimum,
- Keep a lookout for people in the water, small dinghies, and trailing ropes.

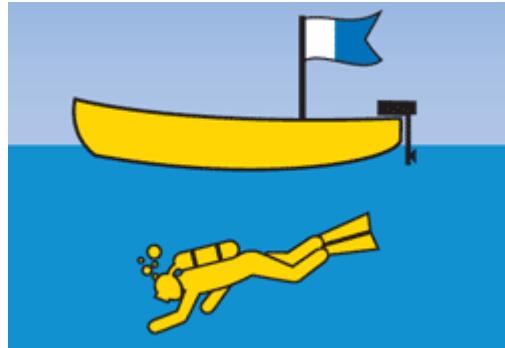
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- When travelling at 10 knots or more you must stay at least 30m from any moored vessel.

Diving activities

The diver's flag – white and blue no less than 400mm x 400mm in size – must be shown when people are engaged in diving activities from a vessel. It is to be flown in a vertical position above the superstructure. It is recommended that this flag be shown when diving/snorkelling from shore.

As divers may not always be in close proximity, it is important that as soon as you see a dive



flag you slow down, keep well clear and keep a good lookout.

If you are within speaking distance of the dive master, get their instructions as to a safe direction to travel to avoid any possible encounters. If there is no dive master about then it's your responsibility to keep a good lookout at all times for any divers above and below the surface and then determine a safe distance.

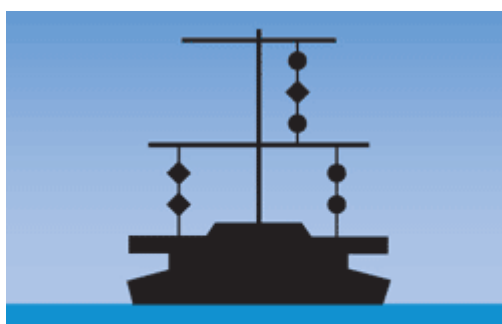
If you see a snorkeller in the water, remember to remain a safe distance.

If you are travelling at a speed of 10 knots or more, keep a minimum of **60 metres** from persons in the water.

When you see a diver's flag slow down, keep well clear and keep a lookout.

Dredges

When driving your vessel you must not create wash that may damage or unreasonably impact on a dredge.



Safe side
to pass
(Diamonds)

Obstruction
this side
(Balls)



Safe side
to pass
(Green - Go)

Obstruction
this side
(Red - Danger)

Vehicular ferries

In some areas vehicular ferries drag themselves across channels using wires or chains. Because these wires/chains are often below the water you may not see the danger.

You must slow down to 4 knots or less when within 100 metres of the wires or chains of a vehicular ferry when it is underway and disengage power when crossing the wires or chains.

Always pass astern of the ferry. Preferably wait until it has reached the shore to avoid becoming entangled in the wires.

A vehicular ferry underway will display an all-round flashing light. You should give way, as it is significantly restricted in its ability to manoeuvre.

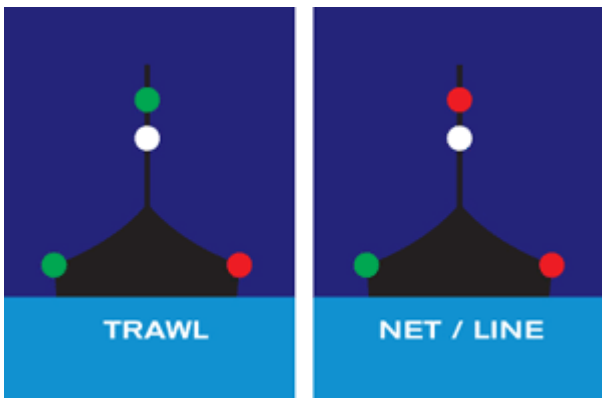


Commercial fishing vessels

Licensed fishing vessels (LFB) display special shapes and lights when their manoeuvrability is restricted by their fishing apparatus.

You should keep clear of these vessels when you see such shapes or lights or notice they are working with nets and lines.

(Contact your local Fisheries office for more details about the rights of commercial fishing vessels).



Navigation Marks and Signs

A system of buoys, poles and lights is used to assist safe navigation. Each type of mark has a unique combination of colour, shape, topmark and light. You must be able to identify these marks and pass them safely on the correct side.

Lateral marks

Port and starboard marks are referred to as lateral marks.

Port hand markers

Port markers are red and have a can shaped topmark or buoy.

If lit, a port hand mark shows a flashing red light. Port markers may be any of the shapes shown below.



Starboard hand markers

Starboard markers are green and have a cone shaped buoy or topmark.

If lit, a starboard hand mark shows a flashing green light.

Starboard markers may be any of the shapes shown below.



When both port and starboard marks are placed near each other, you travel between the two.

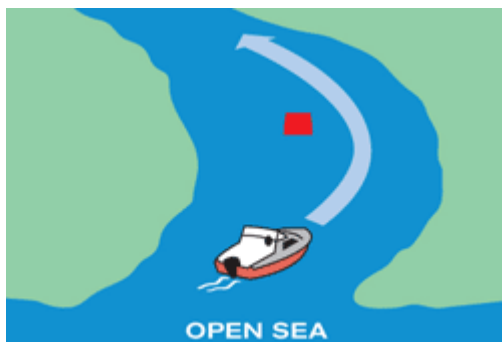
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Single lateral marks

Often lateral marks are not placed in pairs, so you will need to decide on the safe side to pass.

The safe side to pass a lateral navigation marker is determined by your direction of travel to or from the sea.

NOTE : Heading upstream means in a direction away from the sea. Heading downstream means in a direction towards the sea.



Keep **red** (port hand marks) on your **left hand side** (to port) when going upstream.



Keep **green** (starboard hand marks) on your **right hand side** (to starboard) when going upstream.



Keep **red** (port hand marks) on your **right hand side** (to starboard) when going downstream.



Keep **green** (starboard hand marks) on your **left hand side** (to port) when going downstream.

Channels and rivers

Extreme caution should be exercised when driving a boat because not all shallow areas and navigation hazards may be marked. This is important on rivers and estuaries where shallow areas may shift.

- Be careful at bends. Keep a good lookout for boats coming the opposite way. Do not cut corners.
- In channels or narrow stretches of water the following rules apply:
- Keep to the starboard side (right-hand side) of the channel.
- Do not get in the way of larger vessels operating in the channel and watch for unexpected alterations of course as they try to follow the deepest water route.
- Do not anchor or fish in channels where you may obstruct other vessels.



NOTE: All regulations for avoiding collision still apply in channels.

Leads

Leads are often used to guide vessels into a port or through sections of a waterway. By moving your vessel to a position so that both leads are lined up, the course should be a safe one.

At night, major leads are lit. Move your vessel to ensure that the lights are vertically above each other. All leads are shown on maps and charts, so it is essential to consult your chart for relevant leads and other navigation aids before entering unfamiliar waters.



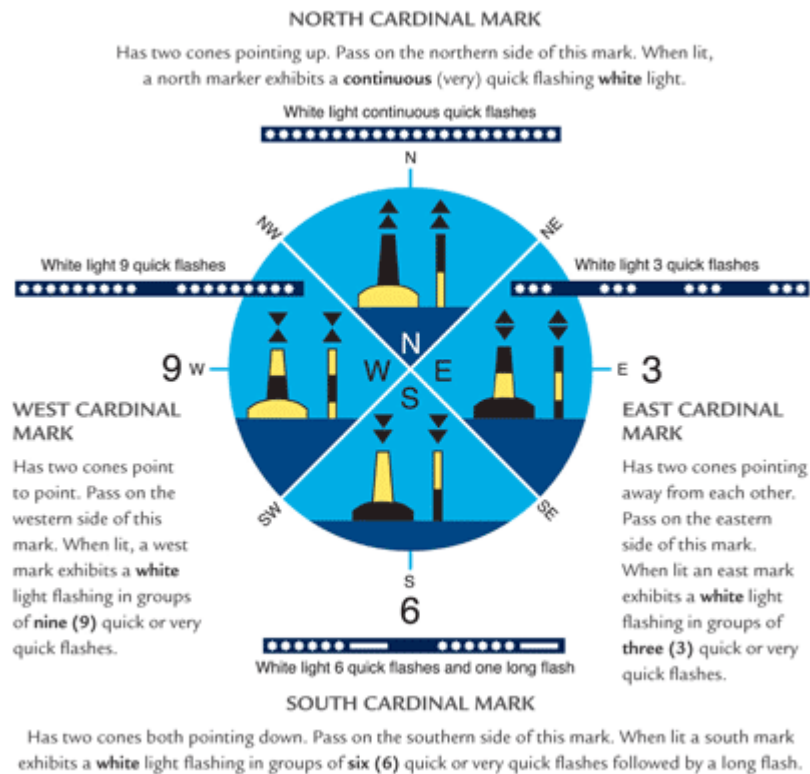
The leads at major ports are usually highly visible blue triangular or vertical lights mounted on bright orange or red triangular boards.

Cardinal marks

Cardinal marks are used to indicate that deeper water lies in a compass direction away from a danger such as a reef, shallow areas, etc.

They are painted in combinations of yellow and black as shown.

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Think of a clock face when remembering the lights on cardinal marks.

- three flashes = east,
- six flashes = south,
- nine flashes = west,
- Continuous flashes = north.

Speed signs

In some areas, speed restriction signs are used for safety reasons. Two types of speed signs are used in NSW.

Wash

The operator of a vessel must not cause wash that damages or impacts unreasonably on:

- Any dredge or floating plant.
- Any construction or other works in progress.
- Any bank, shore or waterside structure.
- Any other vessel, including a vessel that is moored.

NOTE: Penalties apply

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No Wash signs

“Wash” is the wave effect created by a vessel moving through the water. No Wash signs are placed in some areas where the wash from a vessel is likely to cause damage to the foreshore or vessels, or injury or annoyance to people.

Travel at a speed which creates minimal wash when you see this sign and when near moored or anchored vessels. Look behind you to check that you are not creating wash and note the effect of your wash on other boats and the shore. Adjust your speed if necessary.



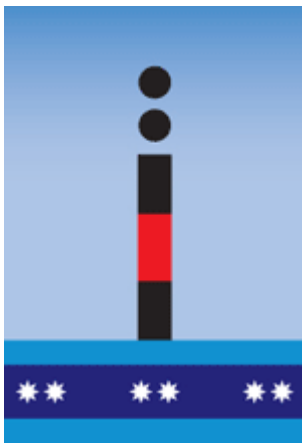
Regardless of signs, you should not navigate your vessel in such a way as to produce excessive wash that endangers other vessels or impacts unreasonably, as this is an offence.



NOTE: Travelling at the speed shown on a speed restriction sign does not guarantee you are not creating wash.

Other buoys and signs

Isolated danger



Indicates specific dangers with generally safe waters all around (eg a wreck). You can pass them on any side but do not pass too close. If lit, it shows a white light flashing in groups of two.

Special marks



Indicates special features or areas such as:

- tide poles
- spoil grounds or
- underwater pipes.

They can be utilised as lateral marks by using can or conical shaped buoys. If so they must be passed as lateral marks: can (eg port hand going upstream) conical (starboard hand).

These marks, if lit, show a yellow light at night which may flash in any rhythm.

Safe water marks



These are not common in NSW. However, they may be used to mark the division of large shipping channels. They may show a white flashing light at night and can be passed on any side.

Aquamark minibuoys



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Used in some areas as alternatives to conventional buoyage. They often have advisory messages on them and penalties may apply for breaching the requirement displayed.

Submarine cables

Anchoring is prohibited within 200 metres of submarine cables. If an anchor becomes snagged near one of these signs, it should not be retrieved – cut the anchor line.

Overhead power lines

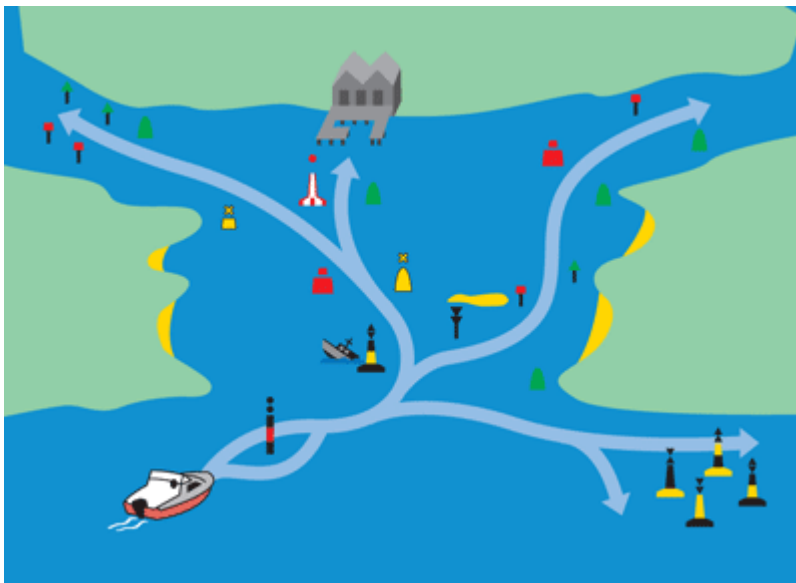
As clearance height can vary according to water levels, it is most important that masters know the heights of their masts and understand the height level given on any sign.

Most of the existing signs on the water give the clearance of the power lines as the clearance above Mean High Water Springs or the average of very high tides. It is important to know that this clearance height may be reduced during king tides or floods.

However a new crossings signage system is progressively being introduced on NSW waterways. The new signage advises the maximum vessel height which can be navigated under an overhead crossing. It is important to note that clearances may be reduced during floods.

To assist boaters to interpret the new signs NSW Maritime has prepared a sticker which you can use to help you remember the height of your vessel above the water line. You are encouraged to place the sticker close to the steering position of your vessel.

Extra caution is required during the changeover period from the old to the new system and when launching/retrieving vessels with a mast on shore. Always keep a lookout for overhead power lines.





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Be safe at night

When night falls it is a completely different world on the water and so vessels that operate from sunset to sunrise, whether at anchor or underway, must carry and exhibit the correct lights.

BOATING AT NIGHT: Go slow, be seen, keep a lookout and be bright.

Go slow

When fog, glare, smoke or darkness restricts your visibility, you must slow down to a safe speed. A safe speed is one at which you can stop and avoid a collision, considering the circumstances and conditions at the time.

You wouldn't drive fast on a dark road without headlights – the same applies on dark waterways – be bright.

Remember – the faster you go, the faster you approach hazards and hitting a hazard at speed can have a greater impact on you, your passengers and your boat.

Be seen

You may be able to see others but can they see you? At night, every type of craft on the water needs lights in order to be seen. Whether you are paddling, rowing, sailing or motoring, everyone needs to be able to recognise where you are and what you are doing.

Make sure you have the right lights for your craft and that they work properly. Use them as soon as the sun goes down or when visibility is poor. Your lights should be mounted in a position that gives you optimum night vision and allow others to see you from every direction.

You must carry a working waterproof floating torch. It may help others see you if you shine your torch on your sails or superstructure.

Make sure you don't adversely affect your night vision, or the vision of other boat skippers.

Navigation Lights Checklist

Check your lights before heading out.

- Check switches are on.
- Check navigation lights are on and working.
- Physically check each light is on.
- Turn off cabin lights as it may reduce your ability to see.
- If the vessel has a flybridge and weather permits, it is generally preferable to drive from there as you will have a better all round view.
- If you anchor at night, show an all-round white light where it can best be seen.

Keep a lookout

Navigating at night requires special care – it can be like looking into a black hole. Look and listen at all times, as a number of hazards such as logs, moored boats or sandbanks are unlit.

Navigation lights may not be as bright as other lights and background lights may hide something that is closer. If it is a large ship, the lights might be high and you may not realise that you are looking at the sides of a black hull.

If you have the slightest doubt, stop, ensure you are lit and have a good look around you.

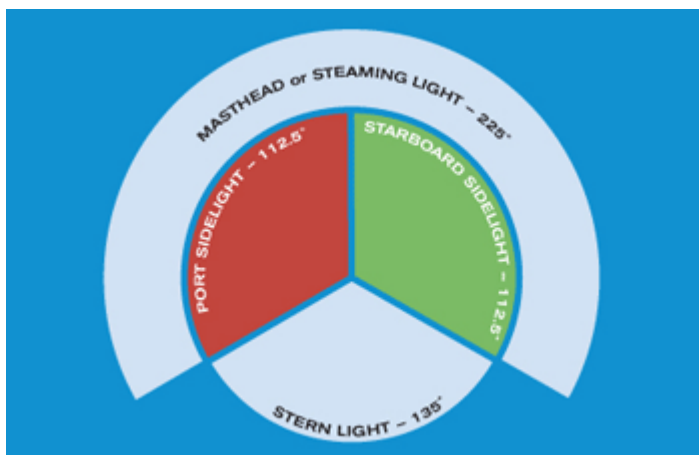
LOOKOUT AT NIGHT

- Is that a vessel(s)?
- How big is it?
- What direction is it travelling in?
- How fast is it moving?
- How far away is it?
- Does it have priority?
- What is our relative position?

Know your waterway

Navigation markers can aid you in safe passage of a waterway. These aids to navigation can indicate where prominent hazards are, but should be coupled with reference to a map or chart and use of local knowledge of the area, particularly in the dark.

Different lights



All round white light: a white light showing an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of 360 degrees.

Masthead light: a white light placed over the fore and aft centreline of a vessel, showing an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of 225 degrees and fixed to show from anywhere ahead, to just behind the beams of the vessel.

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Sidelights: a green light on the starboard (right) side, and a red light on the port (left) side of a vessel. Each shows an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of 112.5 degrees, and is fixed to show from ahead to just behind the beams of the vessel on its respective side.

On a vessel of less than 20 metres in length, the sidelights may be combined in one light unit, carried on the fore and aft centreline of the vessel.

Sternlight: a white light placed near the stern, showing an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of 135 degrees, fixed to show from behind the vessel.

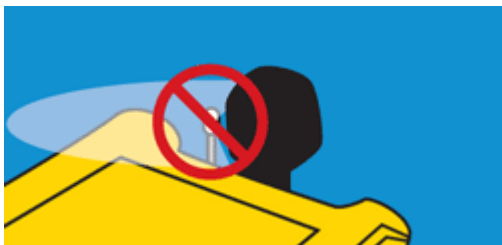
Range of visibility

Vessels under 12 metres

- Masthead light – 2 miles
- Sidelight – 1 mile
- Stern light – 2 miles
- All round lights – 2 miles

Vessels 12 metres to 20 metres

- Masthead light – 3 miles
- Sidelight and stern light – 2 miles
- All round lights – 2 miles



Placement of lights

Navigation lights should be positioned so they are not obscured by the vessel's superstructure or interfered with by deck lights.

Masthead

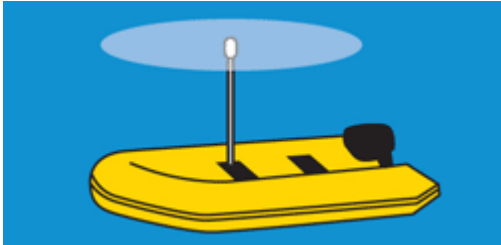
The masthead and/or all round white light must be fitted (if practical) on the centreline (bow to stern) of the vessel.

Power vessels underway

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Vessels under 7 metres and less than 7 knots

Powered vessels of less than 7 metres in length, with a maximum speed of 7 knots or less, shall exhibit a white light visible all round and if possible, separate and/or combined sidelights.



Vessels under 12 metres

- Separate or combined sidelights; a masthead light and a stern light; or
- Separate or combined sidelights and an all round white light.

The masthead or white all round light shall be carried at least one metre above the sidelights.



Vessels 12 metres to 20 metres

- A masthead light, separate sidelights and stern light; or
- A masthead light, combined sidelights and stern light.

The masthead light shall be carried at least 2.5 metres above the gunwale. Combined sidelights shall be carried at least one metre below the masthead light.



Sailing vessels underway

Sailing vessels while underway (being motor driven) under power shall exhibit navigation lights applicable to power driven vessels.

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Sailing vessels under 7 metres

Sailing vessels of less than 7 metres in length, or vessels being rowed, should if practicable exhibit the lights required for sailing vessels over 7 metres.

If not they should have ready use of an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision.



Sailing vessels 7 metres to 20 metres

- A combined lantern, that is at or near the top of the mast and incorporates sidelights and stern light; or
- Separate sidelights and stern light.



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Sailing vessels over 20 metres

Must exhibit sidelights and stern light and may carry the optional red and green all round lights. However, these vessels may not carry a combined lantern.



Optional lights for sailing vessels

A sailing vessel of any length which is fitted with sidelights and a stern light (but not a combined lantern) may, in addition, carry two all round lights in a vertical line at or near the top of the mast. The upper light shall be red and the lower green.



Power and sailing vessels at anchor

Vessels less than 50 metres in length at anchor shall exhibit an all round white light, placed where it may be well seen.

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Anchor lights must always be shown from sunset to sunrise. If you are at anchor in a busy area, then show additional lights to ensure you are seen and keep a good watch.



Rowing/Paddle vessels

Such craft must have a torch or lantern ready to display in time to prevent a collision. Craft that are more than 4 metres long should exhibit two all-round lights, either continuous or a combination of continuous and flashing white lights, positioned at either end, in accordance with the Code of Conduct of Rowing.

NOTE: There are many other combinations of lights used on vessels. The lights shown relate to the activity the vessel is engaged in, ie. fishing, dredging, not under command.

A simple rule of thumb for a small power boat is to stay clear of any vessels exhibiting additional lights.