Where a ‘Reduce Wash’ or ‘No Wash’ and speed limit sign (eg. 4, 6 or 8 knots) are present in the same area, do not assume you can travel at the maximum speed posted. That will depend on your vessel and the wash it creates at slower speeds. You may need to go slower than the speed limit to minimise your wash.

For example, if your vessel is small and heavily laden, you may need to travel at less than 4 knots to avoid generating significant wash – regardless of any higher limit. This is much like on the road, where maximum speed limits don’t always indicate the actual speed at which you can safely drive in all conditions.

Don’t forget, that even if there are no signs, it is still an offence to create waves that cause danger, inconvenience or damage.

For more information:
nsw.gov.au/boating-and-marine
13 12 36

NSW GOVERNMENT

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Transport for NSW

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Don’t make waves on waterways

Reducing boat wash

'Wash' is the wave effect created by a vessel moving through the water. The size of a vessel's wash and the effects it might have, depend on the shape of the hull, the loads it is carrying and how the vessel is driven.

A vessel that is driven 'half on the plane', will generate the most wash – and this applies to smaller craft, as well as large cruisers. With smaller boats especially, the stern will tend to dig in and the bow will rise – making it very difficult for you to keep a proper lookout ahead. A vessel driven this way will also tend to use more fuel. Always try to minimise the time you spend transitioning onto the plane.

The impact of wash will vary, depending on the waterway. In an open waterway, it might be okay to open the throttle and make a big wash, without causing any impact. In a narrow, sheltered waterway more care will be needed, because the shoreline might be more susceptible to erosion, or there are small craft could be affected. On some sensitive waterways, even the relatively small wash from fast planing vessels can still have an impact.

As a rule of thumb, if your vessel is making waves that are bigger than what you might reasonably expect in an area (from wind, swell etc), then there is a high risk that you might be causing problems – especially if you are close to shore or other vessels.

Be especially careful if you are driving a big cruiser, as some hull designs can cause a very large wash, big enough to capsize small dinghies, damage moored boats and other property, and even contribute to foreshore erosion. Always keep a proper lookout for smaller craft and slow down when close to shore. When approaching a popular anchorage, be considerate of others and slow down well in advance.

If you are into wakeboarding, water-skiing or other towing sports, look for wider, more open waterways such as lakes, bays or wide rivers in preference to narrow waterways, and try to spend most of your time well away from the shore. When towing on a river, look for areas with rocky or armoured banks, as these will be less prone to erosion than soft banks.

These considerations are especially important when wakeboarding, as this activity uses vessels designed or ballasted to create large waves. Make sure you select appropriate areas for this activity to avoid adverse impacts on other vessels or the environment.

'Reduce Wash' and 'No Wash' signs are placed in areas where vessel wash is likely to cause damage to the foreshore or vessels, or injury or annoyance to people.

This means you should:

- Reduce speed as necessary to avoid creating wash that affects others.
- If in doubt, take your engine(s) out of gear and wait until your vessel is no longer making any wash before re-engaging your engines and carefully driving forward.
- Look behind occasionally to see if your boat is creating wash that affects other boats or the shore.

If your wash is causing other vessels to rock at all, or is causing any sort of breaking or 'slapping' waves on the shore, you need to slow down further.

The surest way to minimise your wash, is to travel at just above idle speed – at this speed all vessel types will produce minimal wash.

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