



Transport for NSW

# What to know before you tow



January 2020

Towing activities include water-skiing, wakeboarding, kneeboarding, tubing and similar sports such as wake surfing. The following rules apply to these activities on NSW waterways.

## The towing vessel

- Must have current registration (if applicable)
- Must have a minimum crew of two, the master (driver) and an observer (also applies to PWC when towing unless tow-in surfing)
- Must have a Safety Label or PWC Behaviour Label
- Must carry appropriate safety equipment, including lifejackets for all on board:
  - Level 50S or greater for enclosed or alpine waters
  - Level 100 or greater for open waters.

## The driver

- Must hold a general boat driving licence if the vessel will be operated at 10 knots or more, or a PWC driving licence when operating a PWC at any speed. Additional restrictions apply to licence holders under 16 years of age
- Is responsible for the safety of the vessel and towed people and for maintaining the minimum distances off (applicable to the boat and the person or people being towed)
- Must not cause wash that damages or impacts other vessels, any construction or the shoreline
- Must not tow more than **three people** at once.



## The observer

The observer is the vital link of communication between a driver and the person being towed.

- Must hold a boat or PWC driving licence or be 16 years of age or older
- Must not suffer hearing, sight, or other disabilities which could affect the performance of observation duties
- Has the prime responsibility of observing the towed person or people and reporting all matters affecting their safety to the driver, including vessels approaching from behind
- Should be familiar with the standard hand signals.

When towing, the observer must face backwards to watch the person being towed while the driver faces forward to maintain a lookout. This includes PWC.

## People being towed

- Must wear a lifejacket Level 50S or greater at all times
- Must maintain the minimum distances off (listed below) and, when returning to shore, must do so safely.

The driver, observer and person being towed must remain under the 0.05 blood alcohol limit.

## Safe distance and speed

When towing people at any speed, you must keep the vessel, any towing equipment and people being towed a minimum distance of:

- 60 metres from other people in the water or if that is not possible, a safe distance and speed
- 60 metres from a dive flag on the surface of the water or if that is not possible, a safe distance and speed.

When towing at a speed of 6 knots or more, you must keep the vessel, any towing equipment and the people being towed a minimum distance of:

- 30 metres from any other vessel, land, structures (including jetties, bridges and navigation markers), moored or anchored vessels, or if that it is not possible, a safe distance and speed.

## No towing areas

In some areas, towing activities such as water-skiing or wakeboarding may be prohibited and signs may be displayed.

The signage may specifically prohibit operating a power-driven vessel that is ballasted at low speed so as to generate a large wave or wake for wakeboarding or wake surfing activities.

In other areas, water-skiing may not be possible because of surrounding hazards, or because a safe distance cannot be maintained.

Always check the waterways for hazards before beginning any towing activity.

## Towing prohibitions

- Towing is prohibited between sunset and sunrise
- 'Teak surfing', being pulled through the water while holding the swim platform of a vessel, is prohibited at all times.

## Tow rope requirements

- People being towed must be at least seven metres behind the vessel.

For wake boarders and wake surfers, the vessel driver must ensure they are at least seven metres from the centreline of the stern of the vessel, whether or not they are using a tow rope or other device. This requirement does not apply if the following conditions are met:

- The driver considers and mitigates the risks associated with carbon monoxide emissions
- The vessel is not fitted with a propeller at the aft most position of the hull.

Sudden movements involving tow ropes can result in serious injuries to people in the boat or the water.

For more information:



[roads-maritime.transport.nsw.gov.au](https://roads-maritime.transport.nsw.gov.au)



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