



Australian Recreational Boating Safety Committee (ARBSC)

GUIDELINES FOR RECREATIONAL BOAT OPERATOR COMPETENCIES

ARBSC Working Group – November 2023

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Background

The Australian Recreational Boating Safety Committee (ARBSC) aims to improve recreational boating safety, reduce injuries and deaths, and promote uniform approaches to the regulation of recreational boats. In line with the committee's aims, the ARBSC in 2022 approved a working group to review the Guidelines for Recreational Boat Operators Competencies.

The Guidelines for Recreational Boat Operators Competencies were first published in November 2000 by the National Marine Safety Committee (NMSC). The NMSC included representatives from all Australian Government marine safety agencies, with a view to establish products and agreements for a national approach to the education, training, or licensing of recreational boats prior to that date.

In January 2000, the NMSC published “Principles for A Common Standard for Recreational Boat Operator Licences”, this provided a basis for mutual recognition of licenses throughout Australia and set out principles for the consistency of licensing systems. In parallel to the standards development, it was also recognised that there was a need to develop some guidelines for minimum competencies, which would underpin the education, training, and licensing of operators of recreational boats.

An extensive and comprehensive consultation period developed a minimum skills and knowledge set required to operate a recreational boat in the following areas: -

- Trip preparation and planning
- Safe boat operation
- Boating emergencies and incidents.

Whilst each safety agency has different recreational boat licensing requirements, the core competencies were developed to ensure there was a nationally consistent list incorporating the minimum skills required under each state’s licensing framework.

The ARBSC working group met on several occasions and agreed that the existing competencies be updated to reflect changes in technology and modern-day recreational boating practices. Changes have included adding items such as GPS-enabled EPIRBs and PLBs, weather apps and carbon monoxide detectors. Emerging technology such as Electronic Visual Distress Signals has also been included in this package of work.

Aim

The aim of the core competencies is to ensure those boating recreationally do so in the safest possible way resulting in a reduced number of marine incidents and fatalities involving recreational boaters.

It is intended these minimum core competencies be used by all jurisdictions to provide:

- A consistent means to promote a recreational boat operator’s understanding of boating safety and the safe use of waterways.
- A common basis for the development of State and Territory education and training courses for recreational boat operators in each jurisdiction.

- A means of accrediting the providers of such education programs and training courses.
- A source of information and guidance for designers and providers of private boating education safety and training courses and programs; and
- A common basis for the development of licence assessment methodologies, such as licence tests and practical training courses.

The competencies are designed to be taught, by one or a combination of the following methods:

- classroom instruction.
- practical on water instruction or demonstration.
- distance learning.

Purpose

These guidelines form the base knowledge for recreational boat operators. These are a set of minimum core competencies and do not necessarily address all potential environmental situations which can change due to weather conditions and other variables whilst on the water but capture key competencies.

The framework surround the content of these minimum core competencies is flexible to allow them to be broadened and extended to meet any local requirements needed but are not intended to be reduced.

Recreational boaters through their own on-water experiences and engagement with other likeminded people will continue to build on the minimum core competencies learnt through their licence training.

Structure of competency units

Unit Title

- Describes the area of competency.

Unit Descriptor

- Defines the purpose of the unit.

Elements

- Specifies the major component of the competency unit.

Performance Criteria

- Describes the desired level of performance.

Range of Variables

- These consider the different situations, conditions and contexts that may be expected and considered by the boater at any time in a situation whilst on the water. Not all

variables will be relevant at any given time whilst boating, including time in different water types and jurisdictions.

Evidence Guide

- This is intended to assist the assessor where the assessment of the competence is not prescriptive. The evidence guide also provides additional information to assist in the interpretation of and assessment of the competency unit.

Competency Units

The competency units provide the three core values for all good boating practices. The summary of each unit here provides for the framework with the detail of each activity that builds the competence in the following sections.

Unit 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip.

This unit covers aspects needed to plan for and to prepare for a safe boating trip. It includes but is not limited to ensuring that an up-to-date weather forecast is obtained, the boat is maintained, safety equipment complies with relevant legislation and is in a serviceable condition and stowed so it is accessible. This unit also ensures that a check is made to make sure the requirements of the Australian Builders Plate (ABP) or manufacturer's recommendations are not exceeded.

Unit 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat.

This unit is designed to demonstrate how to safely operate and handle a powered recreational boat in all waters. The unit includes but is not limited to the storage of safety equipment, manoeuvring and handling of the boat, International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) aids to navigation, collision regulations and anchoring.

Unit 3 – Respond to boating emergencies and incidents.

This unit encompasses but is not limited to understanding the use of all safety equipment, assisting others who may be in distress, dealing with onboard emergencies and the necessity to report marine incidents.

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

Unit Descriptor			
<i>This unit covers the competency required to plan and prepare for a safe boating trip.</i>			
ELEMENTS	PERFORMANCE CRITERIA		
1.1	Maintain the boat and safety equipment	1.1.1	The boat is maintained/serviced on a regular basis
		1.1.2	Safety equipment complies with relevant legislation
		1.1.3	Safety equipment is serviceable, accessible, labelled, securely and appropriately stowed
1.2	Maintain the mooring and berthing apparatus	1.2.1	Mooring and berthing apparatus is maintained/serviced on a regular basis
		1.2.2	Mooring apparatus is appropriate to the boat and location
1.3	Plan the trip	1.3.1	Weather, sea conditions, boat and personnel are checked for suitability for planned trip
		1.3.2	Trip planning considers the area and type of operation and emergency contact
		1.3.3	Adequate provisions, including reserve fuel/power sources, for the trip are carried and locations for re-fuelling or recharging are planned and located
		1.3.4	Trip details are communicated to an appropriate person
		1.3.5	Check is made to ensure the number of passengers does not exceed boat design limitations and/or legislative requirements including ABP (Australian Builders Plate) if fitted
		1.3.6	Check is made to ensure equipment, stores and personal items are securely stowed and do not adversely affect the boat's stability
		1.3.7	Check is made to the trailer and understanding of towing is sufficient including local requirements
		1.3.8	The appropriate person is informed of safe return from the trip
RANGE OF VARIABLES			
Minimum maintenance and servicing knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil levels and mix • Belts • Spark plugs 		

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular running and flushing of the motor including manual starting • Raw water intake filters • Fuel lines, filters, fillers, and tanks • Adequate fuel/power sources (including reserves) • Hoses • Compliance with program maintenance • Electrical wiring • Safety lanyard (kill switch) • Steerage • Propeller and shaft condition
<p>Minimum safety equipment understanding:</p>	<p>Navigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charts electronic and paper • Radar reflector • Compass • Sound signal • GPS • Sounding equipment • Mobile applications and emerging technology <p>Distress Signalling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floating torch • MOB Device • EPIRB/PLB – 406 GPS enabled (registered with AMSA) • V sheet • EVDS (Electronic visual distress signal) • Mobile phone with waterproof cover • Marine radio (27MHz/VHF/HF) • Pyrotechnic signals (flare and smoke) <p>Flotation equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifebuoy • Lifejackets (serviced and self-checked) • Dinghy/life raft (condition/service check) <p>First aid/Personal Protective Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First aid kit for marine use • Drinking water • Suitable clothing <p>Fire/Response equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire extinguisher • Fire blanket • Bilge pump • Bucket and line • Towing harness • Isolating switches • Tow rope

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

	<p>Other Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paddles/oars • Anchor/Sea anchor with appropriate line • Diver's flag – Code flag A • Alternative means of propulsion • Carbon monoxide detector • Toolkit
<p>Weather and conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current forecast • Weather outlook • Monitoring weather • Wind • Latest weather and conditions information • Source of weather information – BOM or boating application with weather information • Tides (flood, slack and ebb tides) • Wave and swell height and direction, beam seas and following seas, effects of tide • Visibility • Day/night
<p>Area of operation includes:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazards • Local knowledge • Local rules and protocols • Events • Notices to Mariners • Emergency response • Access and exit points • Safe havens • Launching ramps • Destination • Local jetties and marinas • Coastal bars
<p>Trip activity includes:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate fuel or power (including reserve) for the distance to be travelled • Waypoints • Suitability of boat for the activity • Radio used and frequency • Call signs • Trip intention forms • Description of boat • Registration number • Trip departure and return time • Area and nature of the voyage

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

Persons to advise includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family member • Neighbour(s) • Water/Marine Police • Recognised volunteer marine rescue services • Local police • Organisation/club • Harbour master • Note in car, if appropriate • Coastal radio stations • Phone applications
Provisions includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Food • Ice • Sun protection • Wet/Cold weather gear • First aid kit • Personal medication for all passengers • Batteries • Gas • Adequate emergency fuel/power source (reserve) and a method of fuel/power transfer
Mooring and berth maintenance includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriateness of mooring/berthing • Regularity of checks • Services by recognised contractor • Serviceable mooring and berthing lines • Fenders • Anchors and other ground tackle
Activity details to be communicated includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat description or photo including registration number • Number of people in boat • Trip intention • Departure time • Departure point • Arrival/return time • Amount of fuel in litres • Types of radios • Shore contact details • Trailer registration number
Pre-start check includes:	<p>Driveway (pre-trip/at home)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel is connected/valve open • Battery is charged and connected • Safety lanyard (kill switch) • Fuel and water leaks • Secure gear/load • Navigation lights • Weather

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

	<p>Boat ramp/launch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel is connected • Battery is charged and connected • Kill switch/safety Lanyard • Fumes, petrol • Fuel and water leaks • Open hatches/windows/doors • Ventilation • Seacock opening • Secure loose gear • Turn on marine radio to relevant listening channel • Checking bilge water levels • Navigation lights • Raise radio aerials • Bungs in
Trailer check includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitch and tie down point inspection • Lights inspection • Safety chains and shackles • Bearing, rim and tyre check • Rollers and slides • Cables and brakes • Springs • Registration • Coupling connection/lock
Towing with a trailer includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornering considerations • Stopping distance • Load/weight limitation and management • Sway response • Reversing • Boat ramp etiquette
EVIDENCE GUIDE	
Critical aspects of evidence	Boat is regularly maintained, motor serviced, and a pre-departure check is completed to ensure readiness for the planned activity. The activity is planned and trip details are communicated to an appropriate person.
Interdependent assessment of units:	Nil
Underpinning of knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather information • Boat maintenance and service schedule requirements • Capabilities of boat for the intended trip including seaworthiness • Safety equipment required on board boat

COMPETENCY UNIT 1 – Prepare and plan for a boating trip

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety procedures• Marine legislation, regulations, and rules• Area of activity• Legislative requirements regarding the use of safety equipment
Underpinning skills:	How to access and interpret weather forecasts
Resource requirements:	Phone/device with applications, marine radio, GPS
Consistency in performance:	Competence in this unit may be assessed over time in a range of boating contexts
Context of Assessment	Competence in this unit may be assessed in an actual or simulated boating context.

COMPETENCY UNIT 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat

Unit Descriptor			
<i>This unit covers the competency to safely handle/operate a powered recreational boat on coastal and inland waters.</i>			
ELEMENTS		PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	
2.1	Manoeuvre and handle the boat	2.1.1	A pre-departure check is undertaken
		2.1.2	Motor is prepared, safe to start and started
		2.1.3	Boat is manoeuvred safely according to conditions and in accordance with water traffic regulations
		2.1.4	The performance of the boat and personnel is always monitored
		2.1.5	Impact of boat use on others and the environment is considered
		2.1.6	Safety equipment is used, stowed and if required, worn in accordance with legislation and recognised regulations and rules
2.2	Navigate safely	2.2.1	Aids to navigation are identified and understood
		2.2.2	Collision avoidance techniques are applied when required in accordance with relevant legislation, recognised regulations and rules
		2.2.3	Operation of the boat is always carried out in accordance with relevant legislation, recognised regulations and rules
		2.2.4	Navigational aids and landmarks are used to determine and monitor boat position
		2.2.5	Hazards, location, weather, and sea conditions are considered in navigating the boat
2.3	Anchor the boat	2.3.1	Anchorage site is selected in accordance with prevailing and forecast conditions and in accordance with legislation
		2.3.2	The type of anchor used is suitable for the location
		2.3.3	Anchor is lowered, holding, and monitored in accordance with prevailing conditions and depth

COMPETENCY UNIT 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat

	2.3.4	Anchor is retrieved and securely stowed
	2.3.5	Adequate swing distance to other boats and infrastructure
RANGE OF VARIABLES		
Manoeuvring conditions includes:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From or to a ramp, pontoon, wharf, mooring, anchor, marina, pen • Confined areas: narrow channels, marinas, moorings, obstructions • Sea-states: bars, waves, rips, high seas, tidal surges, choppy conditions • Low speed/high-speed • Wakes • Poor visibility • Effect of wind • Large boats
Safe Manoeuvring includes:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering straight line • Going astern • Figure eight • Turn to port and starboard • Throttle control • Emergency stop • Trim and stability of boat • Towing or being towed • Berthing • Standing on/stemming the tide • Retrieval of person overboard
Monitoring includes:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooling system • Bilge, portholes, and hatches • Scuppers • Location and welfare of persons on board • Oil, fuel/power sources, and water • Radio • Position of other boats • Other water users, paddlers, boats, small craft, swimmers, divers • Lights, sounds and shapes • Battery and electrical systems • Ventilation • GPS – Plotter • Charts • Weather • Notice to Mariners
Hazards and conditions may include:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set and drift • Effect of wind, tides, and currents

COMPETENCY UNIT 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submerged objects • Flood debris • Other boats/wash • Restricted waters • Crossing bars • Carbon monoxide/hydrogen sulphide poisoning
Types of anchors includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danforth • Grapnel/reef • Bruce • Plough • Admiralty • Sea Anchor • Sarca
Anchoring systems includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple anchors • Bow and stern anchors • Mooring buoy • Length and type of anchor rode • Retrieving device • Snubbers
Aids to navigation includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IALA Buoyage System • Charts • Compasses • GPS • Sounder • Tide Tables - applications • Passage plan • Marine references • Notices to Mariners • Radio navigational warnings • Suitable phone applications • Local reference guides • Specific anchorage guides
Impact of boat use on others and the environment includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Wake • Safety of others • Disturbance or injury to wildlife • Disposal of waste (sewage) • Effects of detergent • Anti-foul • Disposal of bilge water • Fuelling arrangements
Legislation, procedures and rules relate to:	<p><i>International Collision regulations such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigation in narrow channels • Giving way to other boats • Overtaking • Proper lookout • Sound signals, lights, and shapes

COMPETENCY UNIT 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibilities and duty of care • Use of buoyage system • Safe speed • Recognition of lights and markers • Recognition of operation areas • Specific activity rules e.g.: personal watercraft (PWC), water skis • Equipment requirements • Accident/Incident reporting • Novel craft / emerging technologies <p><i>Marine regulations such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety regulations • Pollution prevention and response regulations • Licensing and registration • Lifejacket wear • Speed limit restrictions • Distance-off requirements • Port limits/rules • Marine incident reporting • Carrying capacity • Alcohol and drug use limits • Age of operators <p><i>Environmental and wildlife regulations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant and applicable State/Territory rules as they apply to the operations of boats or associated infrastructure.
EVIDENCE GUIDE	
Critical aspects of evidence:	Operation and anchoring of the boat are always conducted safely and in accordance with relevant legislation, regulations, and rules.
Interdependent assessment of units:	Pre-requisite units: Nil Co-requisite units: Nil
Underpinning knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boating and other relevant legislation, rules, and regulations • Area of activity hazards and prevailing conditions • Boating information resources • Legislative requirements regarding the use of safety equipment • Environmental awareness
Underpinning skills:	Nil

COMPETENCY UNIT 2 – Safely operate a mechanically powered recreational boat

Resource requirements:	Mechanically powered boat
Consistency in performance:	Competence in this unit may be assessed over time in a range of boating contexts.
Context of assessment:	Competence in this unit may be assessed in an actual or simulated boating context.

COMPETENCY UNIT 3 – Respond to boating emergencies and incidents

Unit Descriptor			
<i>This unit covers the competency to deal with boating emergencies and incidents including the use of safety equipment and the provision of assistance to others in distress.</i>			
ELEMENTS		PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	
3.1	Use safety equipment	3.1.1	Nature, type, location, accessibility, how to operate and serviceability of safety equipment is known and understood by all on board
		3.1.2	Pre-departure briefing of all on board is conducted by skipper
		3.1.3	Safety equipment is used in a manner appropriate to the emergency or incident
		3.1.4	Safety equipment is used for its intended purpose
3.2	Raise alarms	3.2.1	Nature of emergency is identified
		3.2.2	Alarm is communicated to all on-board
		3.2.3	Recognised distress signals are used to signal for assistance
3.3	Deal with on-board emergencies	3.3.1	All on board are instructed clearly to deal with the emergency
		3.3.2	Procedures are implemented to combat emergency
		3.3.3	Position is identified, recorded, and communicated to emergency services as required
		3.3.4	Injured persons are provided with assistance
		3.3.5	Communication with rescuers is maintained
		3.3.6	Preparation for abandoning the boat is undertaken, if required
		3.3.7	Cessation of emergency is communicated to appropriate personnel
		3.3.8	Activation of distress beacon/signals
3.4	Help others in distress	3.4.1	Recognise and understand the meaning of distress signals

COMPETENCY UNIT 3 – Respond to boating emergencies and incidents

	3.4.4	Appropriate response to the emergency is prepared for and implemented – provide or request assistance
	3.4.5	Inform emergency services/rescue if emergency is resolved and no further action is needed
RANGE OF VARIABLES		
Emergencies include:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire (smoke or heat) • Collision with another boat or infrastructure • Grounding • Man overboard • Person retrieval from water • Capsize • Swamping • Sinking • Motor breakdown or malfunction (electrical/mechanical) • Fouled propeller • Anchoring – fouled or lost anchor • Flooding • Lost • Injuries/illnesses/intoxication by alcohol/drugs • Cold water immersion • Hypothermia • Lack of fuel • Contaminated fuel • Gas contamination/pollution e.g. carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulphide
Distress signals include:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyrotechnic distress flares • Marine radio • Digital Selective Calling (DSC) • Hand signals • Dye marker • International Code Signal of Distress • Sound signals (including voice) • EPIRB/PLB (GPS enabled registered with AMSA) • MOB / AIS • V-sheet • Mirror or similar • Light signals – SOS • Mobile phone • Satellite phone • Electronic Visual Distress Signal - EVDS
Preparation for abandoning includes:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief all on board • Drinking water

COMPETENCY UNIT 3 – Respond to boating emergencies and incidents

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure everyone is wearing a lifejacket • Identify location of boat • Maintain communication with rescuers and update them of action taken and plan • Readiness of life raft/life rings • Activate EPIRB and take it with you if abandoning the boat • Mayday call on marine radio • Identification and collection of emergency equipment including flares and EPIRB, provisions and clothing – grab bag • Deployment of anchor or sea anchor (if applicable)
RANGE OF VARIABLES	
Briefing information include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat operation • Passenger assessment such as swimming skills, boating knowledge, medication, and dietary requirements • Location and use of safety equipment • Emergency procedures • Abandoning procedures
EVIDENCE GUIDE	
Critical aspects of evidence	Nature of emergency is communicated accurately to all onboard, potential rescuers and/or marine authorities. Safety equipment is deployed to suit the nature of the emergency
Interdependent assessment of units:	Pre-requisite units: Nil Co-requisite units: Nil
Underpinning knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of safety equipment • Types of boating emergency incidents and situations • Common emergency actions • Boating legislation, regulations, and rules • Incident reporting
Underpinning skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct use and understanding of safety equipment including radio procedures • Communication • Leadership • Delegation • First aid
Resource requirements:	Nil
Consistency in performance:	Competence in this unit may be assessed over time in a range of boating contexts

COMPETENCY UNIT 3 – Respond to boating emergencies and incidents

Context of assessment	Competence in this unit may be assessed in an actual or simulated boating context
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ARBSC Membership

The ARBSC brings together senior boating safety representatives from governments across Australia, including:

- Australian Maritime Safety Authority
- Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure SA
- Department of Transport WA (Chair)
- Marine and Safety Tasmania
- Marine Safety Branch, Department of Lands and Planning NT
- Maritime Safety Queensland
- Centre for Maritime Safety, Transport for NSW
- Maritime Safety Victoria