Water skiing

Water skiing involves being towed over water, at a speed of 8 knots or more, by a vessel, supported by a ski, or skis, an aquaplane, other apparatus or float. This includes being towed on a wakeboard, kneewalk, or inflatable device.

Water skiing is a high risk activity and as the skipper of a vessel towing a water skier, it’s your responsibility to ensure the safety of your crew and the skier at all times.

To reduce the risks associated with water skiing it is important that skippers familiarise themselves with:

- the rules and regulations;
- the layout and boundaries of the ski area;
- the direction of skiing;
- the hours of operation;
- the location of the take-off and landing areas; and
- any shallow water areas or other hazards.

This information is available in local boating guides and charts, available from OUT or on signage at boat ramps.

Before commencing skiing, it is recommended that skippers brief each participant on their roles and responsibilities, hand signals and the various procedures associated with water skiing, such as recovering and reboarding of a downed skier.

Care should also be taken to brief participants on the location and use of safety equipment on board the vessel and measures to avoid propeller strikes.

When underway:

- follow the required direction of travel and remain inside the ski area;
- be alert and maintain a good lookout for other vessels, objects and downed skiers; and
- be courteous of other users and keep clear of slower moving vessels, paddle craft and sail craft.

With a lot of planning, courtesy and attention to safety, all users of water ski areas will be able to enjoy their day out.

The ski boat crew

To go skiing there must be a minimum of two in the ski/boat, the skier and at least one observer. The observer faces towards the skier at all times and communicates to the skipper while the skipper faces forward to maintain a proper line and concentrates on the vessel’s course within the ski area.

The skipper

To be the driver of a vessel, with a motor over 6 hp (4.5 kW), engaged in water skiing you:

- must hold an Recreational Skipper’s Ticket (RST), or be supervised by an RST holder who is at least 18 years of age; and
- must be at least 17 years of age.

The skipper is responsible for abiding by the rules and regulations and for the safety of the:

- skier;
- crew; and
- skiers.

The observer

To be the observer you:

- must be at least 14 years of age;
- have the prime responsibility of observing the towing skier and reporting all matters affecting the skipper;
- alert the skipper about other vessels approaching from behind; and
- should be familiar with the standard hand signals.

The skier

Skiers can be any age, however, it is recommended they wear an approved Level 50 or 50S lifejacket while skiing.

Areas for water skiing

You can only water ski in a gazetted ski area at the permitted times. Ski areas are marked by signs on the foreshore and at each public boat ramp adjacent to the ski area. Ski area boundaries may also be marked in the water by buoys. The signs also provide information on the direction (downstream or anti-clockwise) you must follow, times when skiing is permitted and if/where the take-off and landing areas are located.

Consult these signs before skiing.

Water skiing hand signals

Waiting to take-off with a skier

Driver’s signal
When waiting for a skier to take-off with a skier, the skier should signal to vessels dropping a skier that they do not intend to move until it’s clear. This is indicated by holding both hands in the air and applying pressure so that they are not at the boat’s controls.

Skier down

Observer’s signal
The observer should hold one arm straight up in the air to indicate to other vessels that the skier has fallen off and is in the water.

Vessels seeing this signal should keep a lookout for the skier in the water.

Skier down and a OK

Observer’s signal
A fallen skier who has sustained no injuries should signal to vessels that they are not in any distress. This is indicated by the raising of a hand above the head. Vessels seeing this signal should keep a lookout for the skier in the water.

Drop off a skier

Driver’s signal
When taking off to the shore the driver should indicate this by the raising and lowering of a hand above the head.