

Maritime Safety Plan 2026

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Transport for NSW has published the Maritime Safety Plan 2026 (the Plan) that sets the direction for maritime safety over the next five years as we work towards zero fatalities and serious injuries on navigable waterways in NSW by 2056.

Through analysing safety data such as fatality and serious injury incidents, we developed a series of countermeasures to address key safety issues and thereby reduce or mitigate risks in order to achieve our goal to make every waterway journey as safe as possible.

Stakeholder and community feedback shapes final design of the plan

Extensive stakeholder engagement occurred throughout the drafting of the Plan through several forums and workshops. Transport undertook preliminary consultations with government agencies and key industry partners to identify initial focus areas. We then sought wider community feedback through the Have Your Say online engagement portal. The portal included a survey where community members could share their thoughts and provide valuable input. The engagement period ran between 27 August and 27 September 2021 and of the over 4800 surveys completed:

- More than 57 per cent of respondents were from Greater Sydney, 7 per cent from Central Coast, 6 per cent from Illawarra Shoalhaven and another 2 per cent from another State or Territory
- 91 per cent were male, of which 77 percent were aged 40 years and over
- Over 44 per cent use the waterways for fishing on a boat followed by 15 per cent for sailing and 14 percent for cruising.

Feedback revealed that the community was broadly supportive of actions that focused on:

- The importance of lifejackets for safety on NSW waterways
 - importance of lifejacket wear for reducing fatalities
- The promotion of safer vessels and safer vessel technology
 - 78 per cent supported the mandating of kill switch lanyards for PWCs
 - 7 per cent believed that on-board vessel technology, specifically digital connectivity and wearable technology would help improve safety outcomes
 - 55 per cent supported the mandatory carrying of GPS equipment to improve safety outcomes for people participating in offshore boating.
- Simplifying boating safety information to make it more accessible and easier to understand
 - 70 per cent supported information relating to on-water judgement and avoiding risks
 - 69 per cent supported information on understanding risks associated with weather
 - 66 per cent supported information on managing weather and waterways risks.
- Public education on maritime safety
 - 77 per cent indicated that technology could be used to improve knowledge and training.

Based on the feedback received, we made amendments to the draft Plan and undertook additional consultation with key industry stakeholders and community representatives.

These changes include:

- A new action to improve the management of flares, including the potential for new emergency signal technology, such as digital and chemical flares
- A new action to improve information technology systems, including data-sharing, research, and evaluation to improve safety outcomes
- Changes to the wording of the action relating to drones to improve maritime safety through search and rescue
- The removal of proposed QR codes at boat ramps to provide real-time messaging capabilities, recognising that apps already cover this function
- Changes to the wording of the action relating to the mandating of a kill switch lanyard to avoid confusion about whether there is a switch on the PWC itself
- A new action focusing on increasing safety measures for juvenile PWC operators and boat operators.

Stakeholder feedback around the complexity of lifejacket laws

We acknowledge there is complexity around lifejacket laws. Your feedback around this issue included:

- the difference between operating in enclosed and open waters
- the proposed change in vessel size from 4.8m to 6m
- support for more boating safety education.

Further consultation took place with key stakeholders to better understand the feedback received. This included the Maritime Advisory Council, Boating Industry Association, Marine Rescue NSW, NSW Police (Marine Area Command) and representatives involved in paddle craft activities.

We know that lifejackets remain the single most important piece of safety equipment for survival in boating incidents where persons are forced into the water. Of the 138 recreational boating fatalities that occurred up to 2020–21, 83 (60 per cent) were 'preventable drownings. These lives lost might have been saved had these people been wearing a lifejacket at the time of the incident.

Responding to stakeholder feedback around the complexity of lifejacket laws, the Maritime Safety Plan 2026 commits to revisiting the law so it is easier to understand, and to ensure more lives can be saved.

- Education remains an important pillar in our approach to increasing lifejacket wear and we will:
- deliver a renewed lifejacket program to boaters with information on how to self-service or service their lifejacket, access spare parts and receive customised advice.
- explore further opportunities to make lifejacket care and lifejacket servicing easier for boating customers.

We would like to thank all who participated in the various stages of the consultation and who shared news of the consultations with your networks. We are pleased to have collaborated with stakeholders and our community on the initiatives and commitments within the Maritime Safety Plan 2026.

