What to know before you tow
Before starting a towing activity, consider the following towing related rules.

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 towed person must be at least seven metres behind the vessel.

For wake boarders and wake surfers, the vessel operator 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. However, this requirement does not apply if the following conditions are met:
  - The operator 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.

THE DRIVER

- Must hold a general boat driving licence if the vessel will be operated at 10 knots or more. A PWC driving licence when operating a PWC at any speed. Additional restrictions apply to licence holders under 16 years of age. Visit rms.nsw.gov.au/maritime for more information
- 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 be under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- The driver of a vessel must not cause wash that damages or impacts other vessels, any construction or the shoreline

NOTE: Drivers, people being towed and observers must be under the 0.05 alcohol limit.
• Must not operate the vessel at more than 60 knots if anyone under 18 years of age is on board or being towed, unless in accordance with an aquatic licence

• 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, and must not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Concentrate on watching the person being towed:

• Learn the hand signals so that you can communicate between the driver and the person being towed

• If the person being towed falls, immediately tell the driver and keep your eye on the person being towed at all times. Indicate to other boats that your person is in the water by raising your arm or, for increased visibility, raise a skier down flag

• Tell the driver if another boat is following closely behind and, if possible, signal this to the person being towed. The skipper should maintain a straight course, and the person being towed remains directly behind the vessel, until the other vessel has passed.

**NOTE:** When towing, the observer must face backwards to watch the person being towed whilst the driver faces forward to maintain a lookout. This includes PWC.
THE TOWED PERSON

• 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
• Must not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

SAFE DISTANCE AND SPEED

When towing a person or 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.

If towing aerial equipment (e.g. paraflying) the vessel, any towing equipment and anyone being towed must maintain a distance of at least **200 metres** from any other vessel, bridge, cable, wire, pipeline or structure.

**NOTE:** These distances apply when approaching other vessels or people from any direction, including when following another vessel.

When using a PWC for towing activities, the same rules apply as for other vessels. This includes having an observer on board who must face the person being towed. You should also consider having space onboard the PWC for anyone being towed.

Always keep a safe distance between the towed person and the shore.
NO TOWING AREAS
In some areas water-skiing and wakeboarding etc 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.

TOWING PROHIBITED
• 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.

TIPS FOR SAFER TOWING ACTIVITIES
Before you tow
Ensure your boat is in good working order, is suitable for towing and has all the required safety equipment on board. If your boat has an inboard engine, take extra care to make certain all fumes have been cleared from the engine space before turning the key.

Lifejackets are the most important piece of safety equipment on any recreational vessel. A lifejacket must be carried for each person on board and must be worn in many situations. It must be the correct size for the wearer and in good working condition.
When riding tubes and other toys, always shorten the rope as these devices have little steering control and the shorter rope will provide the driver with better control. You should never use a tube or other inflatable water toys in congested or narrow waterways, or in areas where there are snags or structures in the vicinity.

Check the condition of the tow rope.
If it has any knots or fraying, replace it immediately. A tow rope in poor condition could break while towing, creating a dangerous situation.

Check the water before towing.
There may be floating logs, shoals or other unexpected dangers in the area.

Check the manufacturer’s instructions for the device you are towing. For instance, some inflatable towing devices are designed to get airborne. Such devices can pose increased risks and extra care must be taken to avoid injury.

If you’re new to your sport, ask someone with experience to show you how to drive the boat properly. Don’t tow a person until you feel confident that you can do so safely.

Drive smoothly without sudden changes in speed or direction, and always respond quickly to your observer’s instructions. Don’t drive beyond the ability of the person being towed.

As the driver you must always keep a sharp lookout ahead for other boats or obstacles. Have your observer report to you any boats which may be approaching from behind.

If the person falls while being towed, stop and navigate slowly with caution and in a straight line, retracing your course. Make sure the person being towed is always in sight and put the engine in neutral or switch it off if the person is near the propeller. A skier down flag may help to highlight a person is in the water.

In congested areas, it is strongly recommended that you pull the rope back into the boat after a fall so that another boat doesn’t run over your rope.
Keep to the right hand side of your channel, particularly at corners. In lakes and dams, vessels should travel in an anti-clockwise direction.

It is your job as a driver to ensure the observer understands his or her duties and the person being towed has a safe and enjoyable tow, free of any incident.

Don’t whip into the shoreline or near other vessels or structures. Skiers can be injured from hitting the seabed, shoreline or other objects.

**Communication**

The need for driver, observer and rider communication is the most important thing to understand before you even step near the water. There are many hand signals that you need to know as you venture further into your sport, but the four cornerstones are:

- **Faster** – thumb up
- **Slower** – thumb down
- **Turn around** – circular helicopter motion above the head with your arm or hand
- **Home (or in the boat)** – patting your head with your hand.

**Wash**

When undertaking towing activities at slow speeds such as wakeboarding or wake surfing, please consider the impact of your wash on other people and the environment. In some areas it may not be appropriate to ballast or load your vessel to increase vessel wake. Observe ‘No Wash’ or ‘Reduce Wash’ zones by reducing speed so the vessel creates minimal wash.

**Remember to be considerate of other water users.**
When being towed

Make clear, concise signals to the towing vessel and use the recognised signals.

Keep a safe distance from other boats and people, and never try to spray another boat crew or person being towed.

Always wear an appropriate lifejacket. Level 50 and Level 50S lifejackets are the best, and these may include approved buoyancy wetsuits. Wetsuits are highly recommended as they provide protection against water injection, additional padding and flotation in a fall.

When you fall, always hold your hand in the air to indicate your position to oncoming traffic, or even hold your ski or board out of the water so other boats can clearly see you.