



Boating
safety



Torres Strait

Published by:

Australian Marine Environmental Protection Association
PO Box 4282
Hawker, Canberra
ACT 2517, Australia
www.ausmepa.org.au

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Boating Safety in the Torres Strait

Acknowledgements:

This book has been based on the Publication: *Better Boating Behaviour*; Author Bob Moffatt; Published Wet Paper
AUSMEPA would like to gratefully acknowledge Tagai State College and the students of campuses at Thursday Island and Horn Island who brought their enthusiasm to bear on improving boating safety in the region;

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Galai Dau	Nelson Foster
Inno McKeown	Te'a Boyd
Isabel Mosby	Thomas Keenan
Josuha Wasaga	Thomas Pearson
Ketch Cousins	Tristan Blair
Kobe See Kee	Wayne Heritage Jr

In addition we acknowledge the following individuals and organisations for their welcome input into this publication;
Michael Alexander and Denise Angelo
Tagai State College; in particular Andrew Denzin and Roy Pearse
Maritime Safety Queensland; in particular Frank Thomson, Captain Alan Boath, Kimberly Foster, Jim Huggett,
David Oelrichs and Don Cowie
Australian Maritime Safety Authority
Torres Strait Regional Authority
Rebel Marine Tours

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Author: Bob Winters

Title: Boating Safety in the Torres Strait

ISBN: 978-0-9808123-1-2

Printed in Australia



Boating Safety in Torres Strait

In Torres Strait, boats are our most important way of moving around. We also use them for fishing and having fun.

We are students from Torres Strait who took part in writing and preparing this book.

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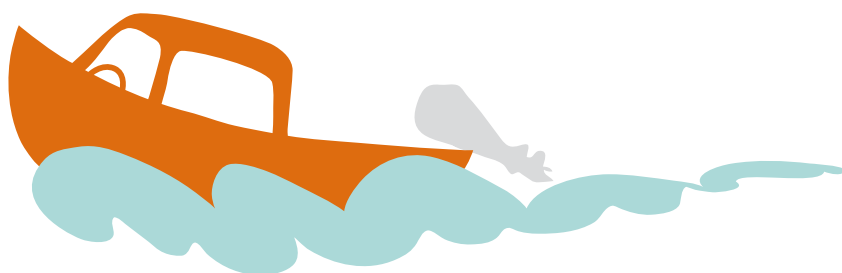
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Staying safe while boating



Make sure there is enough fuel to reach your destination.



What are the facts?

The skipper is in charge of the boat and must make sure all the safety equipment is on the boat. The skipper must also make sure the motor has been maintained and will not break down. The boat must have enough fuel to reach its destination. Fuel can explode when it is near a hot flame. Boats more than five metres long must have a fire extinguisher.

What are the issues?

When boats go out without the proper safety equipment it can place people's lives at risk. People on boats are also at risk if the boat runs out of fuel or if the fuel explodes because it comes too close to a naked flame.

What can we do?

We can make sure the skipper checks the safety equipment every time we go out with them. By confirming the skipper has enough fuel to get to our destination we can relax. We can make sure no one has a hot flame near fuel containers or fuel lines. We should check we know where the fire extinguisher is on board the boat.

Safety gear on boats

What are the facts?

In Queensland, small boats must carry safety equipment.

- Flares
- Mirror or reflector
- V sheet
- A container to safely store the flares, mirror and V sheet
- Torch
- EPIRB
- Anchor plus rope or chain
- Life jackets
- Rope for towing
- Bailer
- Paddles
- Fire extinguisher
- When boating over long distances in small boats, these extra items can help keep people safe.
- Enough fuel
- Water and food
- Marine radio
- Mobile phone
- Knife
- Cast net

What are the issues?

When people are not properly prepared before they go boating, they can put their own and other people's lives at risk.

What can we do?

We can learn about all the safety equipment boats must carry and how to use it in an emergency. We can know where all the safety equipment is stored and make sure it is handy but not at risk of being washed overboard in heavy seas. We can think about other useful items we might need for longer trips. How many items of safety equipment can you find in these photos?



Life jackets

What are the facts?

There must be enough life jackets for each person on board a boat. To stay safe on a boat, children up to 12 years old must always wear their life jacket. Children's life jackets must be much smaller than adult life jackets.

A collar on the life jacket helps to keep the person's head in a safe floating position. Life jackets are orange or yellow so they can be seen in the sea. Some life jackets are made from foam while others fill up with air when a tab is pulled.



What are the issues?

Life jackets must be easy to access in an emergency. People need to learn how to jump into the water holding onto their life jackets. Small children's bodies can easily slide out of the big adult-sized life jackets.

What can we do?

We need to wear life jackets that fit us properly so we can't slide out of them. We should make sure any children on board are wearing their life jackets.



Using a life jacket

What are the facts?

People must fit their life jackets tightly by pulling on the straps. Before they jump into the water, they must hold onto the top of the life jackets. They should press their arms against their body and then step out into the water keeping their legs spread. This slows them down as they drop into the water. If there is more than one person in the water, they should hold onto each other's hands. This will keep everyone together and make it easier to be rescued.

What are the issues?

If people jump into the sea the wrong way while wearing a life jacket, it can bounce up and hit them in the chin or face. They could also slide out of their life jacket. It is easy to be separated from other people once they are in the water, making it more difficult for rescuers to find everyone.

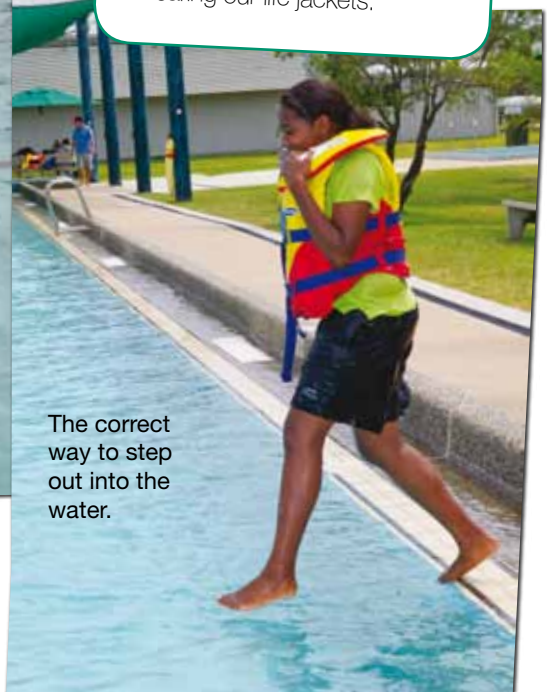


What will happen when this boy raises his arms?

What can we do?

Practicing how to put on life jackets and jump into the water safely could help us if there is an emergency on a boat. In a safe place like a swimming pool, we can practice holding hands in a circle and treading water while wearing our life jackets.

Holding hands will keep everyone together and make it easier to be rescued.



The correct way to step out into the water.

Emergency signals



"Aircraft can be attracted by spreading out the V sheet in the boat..."

What are the facts?

When there is an emergency on a boat, there are standard ways to show other people that help is needed. The boat's occupants can attract attention by waving their arms above their heads. The boat must have a brightly coloured V sheet and a reflector

or mirror. Aircraft can be attracted by spreading out the V sheet in the boat and using the reflector to reflect the sunlight.

What are the issues?

These emergency signals are useful only if there is someone around who can see and get

help for the people in the boat. Do not use flares or EPIRBs if it is possible to attract attention quickly by waving arms or using a V sheet or two-way radio.

What can we do?

When there is an emergency, look around to see if someone is watching. Everyone in the boat should wave both their arms to try to attract their attention.

Unpack the V sheet. Hold the V sheet so it can be seen and wave your arms. If you still don't have their attention, use the reflector to reflect the sunlight in their direction.



Flares

What are the facts?

Use flares only when there is a good chance somebody will see them. Use an orange flare during the day or a red flare at night. Flares have a use-by date and must be replaced when they get old. Flares must only ever be used in real emergencies.

What are the issues?

A flare is very hot and needs to be held away from the body and from others on the boat. The flare should be held over the water. If a hot flare does drop into the boat, it can burn a hole through the hull. Old flares that are past their use-by date may not work.

Hold the flare away from your body.



What can we do?

We can check the use-by dates on the flares stored on boats and replace flares when the dates come up. We can think about how we might use a flare in an emergency and remember to hold the flare over the water, away from our bodies and others.

Radios



What are the facts?

In Torres Strait and other places, VHF channel 16 on two-way radios is used for emergencies. Radios have handheld microphones with a button. To send a voice signal the button must be held down. Over a large area within radio range, many people can listen on the same radio channel, but only one person can speak at a time. The person speaking must take their finger off the microphone button before someone else can speak over that radio channel.

Sometimes people forget that VHF channel 16 is for emergencies only and chat on it.

What are the issues?

Sometimes people forget that VHF channel 16 is for emergencies only and chat on it. This may prevent other people using the channel when there is a serious problem. Radio reception is poor in many parts of Torres Strait so an EPIRB is the only way of making sure a call for help will be heard.

What can we do?

We should use VHF channel 16 only in an emergency. We should tell people they must switch channels if they are using channel 16 for a chat.

406 EPIRBs



What are the facts?

EPIRB is short for emergency position-indicating radio beacon. When it is activated, it sends a distress signal, picked up by satellites, that transmits information to tell the emergency services the exact location of the signal and which EPIRB sent the call. There is a button on the EPIRB that checks if it is working properly.

What are the issues?

The 121 EPIRB is now out of date and its signals are no longer picked up by satellites. It is easy for the EPIRB to get stuck in a sinking boat or to float away. If the EPIRB is separated from the people needing to be rescued, the people could be hard to find. The EPIRB should only be used if there are no people around to see the V sheet, spot the reflector or a flare.

What can we do?

We can make sure the model in the boat is the 406 EPIRB. If there is an emergency, we should make sure we keep the EPIRB with us so it can't float away or get stuck in a sinking boat. The EPIRB will provide only its own location, so if it isn't with us the emergency services may still have trouble finding us.

Weather, tides and navigation

What are the facts?

People who live in Torres Strait know a lot about the seasonal changes in winds, currents and daily tides. It is easy to find out about weather conditions by listening to ABC local radio, watching the TV or looking up the internet. GPS (Global Positioning System) navigation systems and charts are essential when people are boating in areas they don't know.

What are the issues?

When small boats venture into bad weather, the people in the boat can be at risk. If nobody knows where a boat is going, it is more difficult to find the people on board if they need to be rescued. The skipper needs to know where they are going so they don't get lost.

What can we do?

Before we go on a long boat trip, we must tell someone where we are going and when they can expect us to arrive. We should go on boat trips only if the weather is going to be mild. Visitors should get advice from locals about the tides, winds and currents, and carry charts and a GPS. We should always have charts and a GPS in unfamiliar waters.



Keeping the boat steady

What are the facts?

When people get in and out of a small boat, everyone needs to work together to keep it balanced. The weight should be spread evenly across the boat. When the engine is started, everyone should be seated. There needs to be enough room for the skipper to pull the engine's cord.



What are the issues?

If the boat does not stay balanced while people get in, it can capsize and fill with water. If someone is too close to the skipper when they start the engine with the pull cord, the person might be hit.

What can we do?

Before we get into the boat we can discuss where each of us will sit to keep the boat balanced. Someone could hold the boat as each person gets in. We should sit away from the skipper so they have enough room to pull the cord to start the engine without hitting anyone.



When people get in and out of a small boat, everyone needs to work together to keep it balanced.

Boat ramps

What are the facts?

People use boat ramps to slide their boats off trailers into the water and then pull their boats out of the water again. Boat ramps can be very slippery and slimy. Space and time must be shared at boat ramps, pontoons and other places where boats are tied up.

What are the issues?

It is easy to slip and get injured while walking on the boat ramp to get boats in and out of the water and attend to the boat and trailer. It is difficult for drivers backing a car and trailer to see other people on the ramp, and even more difficult when the sun is in the driver's eyes.

What can we do?

We can share the ramp with other people and take turns on pontoons and other places where boats are tied up. We can wear an old pair of shoes that still grip well to help stop us slipping over and hurting ourselves. We need to stay well away from cars backing their boat trailers. When drivers are backing trailers, they must be very careful and observant and even more careful when the sun is in their eyes.

Space and time must be shared at boat ramps, pontoons and other places where boats are tied up.



Keeping our sea healthy

What are the facts?

Corals and seagrasses must have clean water to survive. Most of the sea creatures in Torres Strait depend on the corals and seagrasses for some or all of their life cycle. Pollution comes from the land, boats and ships. It is important that oil, petrol and other chemicals are not tipped into the sea. Boat anchors damage coral. The anchor can break the coral as it falls or is removed and the chain can smash the coral as the boat moves around.

What are the issues?

Rubbish and oil from boats and ships damage the sea. Rubbish and chemical pollution is washed into the sea from the land. When anchors are dropped on coral reefs, the anchor and chain can damage the coral.



What can we do?

We can collect all the rubbish on our boats and make sure it goes into a bin when we reach land. On land we can make sure none of our rubbish can escape to become litter and we can dispose of rubbish or chemicals properly. We can recycle some cans and bottles. When dropping anchor, we can make sure the anchor and chain are away from living coral. If we see pollution in the water we can contact the Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) Duty Officer on the telephone number 4052 7470.

A job on the sea



"Ships and barges transport the food and goods and unload them at ports or onto beaches."



What are the facts?

There are many different jobs that can be done on the sea. The people living and working on the islands need food and goods. Ships and barges transport the food and goods and unload them at ports or onto beaches. Ferries transport people. Fishers use their boats to catch fish, squid or prawns. Pearl farms need to be looked after. Customs and the Navy need boats to patrol Torres Strait. Cruise ships visit the islands and other tourists visit the area to fish, dive or snorkel on the reef.

What are the issues?

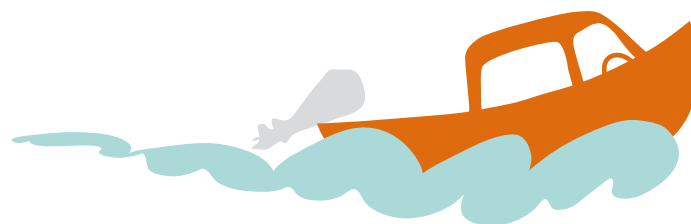
Students want to know what kinds of jobs will be available to them in Torres Strait when they finish their education. Many students would like to have jobs that involve the sea in Torres Strait.

What can we do?

We can find out what kind of education we need to help us find a job at sea. We can learn from Roy who trains Torres Strait school students to use boats safely. Roy is from Torres Strait and he has Coxswain qualification.

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Maritime Safety Queensland
Queensland Government