ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Sea Kayaking

Schools must follow the Department’s [Excursions Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/policy) and [Guidelines](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance) and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the excursion must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

For the purposes of this document the term sea kayaking as an adventure activity covers all activities conducted in sea kayak or surf kayak craft on coastal, enclosed and inland waters. It does not include canoeing sports. Separate guidelines have been developed for [Canoeing and Kayaking](https://nginx-php-content-policy-det-vic-gov-au-production.lagoon.vicsdp.amazee.io/sites/default/files/2020-04/Canoeing_PAL_Word_layout.docx).

Sea and surf kayak activities require a thorough risk management plan which considers:

* educational merits of the activity
* size, age and previous activity experience of the group
* skills and experience of the supervising staff
* prevailing, forecast and observed weather conditions
* availability of rescue vessels
* nature of the location
* emergency situations.

Sea kayak activities conducted on open waters pose a significant risk to students due to various factors such as:

* the potential difficulty in reaching the safety of the shoreline
* the potential for the group to spread out
* difficulties in calling for help while on water.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to [Camping guidelines](https://nginx-php-content-policy-det-vic-gov-au-production.lagoon.vicsdp.amazee.io/sites/default/files/2020-04/Camping_PAL_Word.docx).

## VENUE Definitions

[Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety) provides the following definitions of waterways in Victoria to provide guidance for minimum safety equipment and preparation:

**Inland waters** – rivers (inside the seaward entrance), creeks, canals, lakes, reservoirs and any similar waters either naturally formed or man-made and which are either publicly or privately owned but does not include any navigable rivers, creeks or streams within declared port waters.

**Enclosed waters** – any declared port waters inside the seaward entrance. See [Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-vessel-operators/powerboat/victorian-recreational-boating-safety-handbook) for all listed port waters.

**Coastal inshore waters** – all waters other than inland waters or enclosed waters, including all beaches (bay and surf) with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any beach that is exposed to currents, rips, strong winds or surf. This may include enclosed waterways at times with these features. Staff may find [Beachsafe.org.au](https://beachsafe.org.au/) a useful reference when planning activities in coastal waterways.

In addition to the definitions above, this document uses the following terms for specific types of waterways:

**Flat water** – non-flowing water not affected by tides or currents and relatively sheltered from wind.

**Inland open water** – a wide body of water that has the potential to be greatly affected by wind.

**Swift water** – flowing river water which may be categorised according to the international river classification system. This covers water commonly known as ‘moving water’ or ‘white water’ but also refers to flowing water which may not look either ‘swift’ or ‘white’ to an observer.

**Coastal offshore** – all waters greater than two nautical miles from the coast.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See [Excursions Guidelines – Staffing](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/staffing-roles-and-responsibilities) for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher, an external provider or a volunteer (See: [Volunteers in Schools Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy)):

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

## Student preparAtion and skills

Sea kayaking activities should begin with an assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in sea kayaking, swimming and water environments (including their swimming abilities).

Students can be classified as either:

* **Beginner swimmers**

Students with little or no experience including in shallow water.

* **Intermediate swimmers**

Students with basic skills, able to swim 25 metres with a recognisable stroke.

* **Advanced swimmers**

Students able to swim 50 to 100 using two recognisable strokes and to demonstrate one survival stroke in deep water.

Schools must consider the swimming competency of students in particular water environments when deciding on the venue, staff-student ratio, risk management plan and emergency response plan. If the activity is to take place in swift water, it is recommended that staff or instructors assess students’ swimming ability in the designated swift water environment.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology.

A basic introductory briefing should also include:

* equipment use
* the response of students in the event of a capsize or accidental submersion
* principles of self and assisted recoveries
* float and swimming methods
* explanation of relevant paddling terminology.

Students should also undertake navigation training suitable for the location and activity.

In addition, when paddling on enclosed, coastal and offshore waters, students should be instructed on:

* basic coastal water behaviour and hydrology
* paddling in wind and waves
* how to enter, exit and sit in craft securely and safely
* specific boat based risks
* specific swimming based risks and how to manage these
* capsize procedure
* deep water re-entering and assisting others to re-enter craft
* appropriate assisted and self rescue techniques and principles
* marine fauna interactions and dangers.

To paddle more complex coastal waters, students should be able to:

* control their craft effectively
* identify coastal water features and conditions
* land and launch from beaches with waves
* understand and follow group management and communication practices
* perform capsize and re entry drills
* identify coastal hazards to avoid.

In some cases, parts of briefings and instruction may occur on or next two the water. Supervising staff must be able to provide close instruction, supervision and seek acknowledgement of understanding.

Sea kayaks can be heavy and awkward to carry. Students must be shown safe methods to get paddle craft on or off waterways and boat landings.

Students must be instructed on safe lifting techniques for carrying and lifting canoes if required to do so. For assistance in the determination of appropriate lifting techniques, load sizes and weights, please see WorkSafe’s [Manual Handling Topic.](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/hazardous-manual-handling-safety-basics)

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, and must meet applicable industry safety standards. It is important that all craft and equipment be suited to the activity and the environment in which it is undertaken.

##### Sea kayaks

The designated instructor must ensure structural strength is sufficient to withstand intended use and to minimise the likelihood of entrapment.

Cockpits must be clear of attachments and smooth on the edges to enable the student to exit quickly.

Hand loops at stern and bow need to be permanent and of sufficient strength to be used in rescues and boat retrievals. Perimeter deck lines should be installed and maintained on all kayaks. Due to the danger of rope entrapment, the use of painters on sea kayaks is not encouraged unless all paddlers know how to store them safely and use them appropriately.

All craft must contain sufficient positive buoyancy to prevent sinking if capsized. Sea kayaks need buoyancy fitted to bulkheads fore and aft. Single sea kayaks must maintain suitable hatches and bulkheads fore and aft installed and maintained correctly with integrated positive buoyancy. Double sea kayaks must have suitable hatches and bulkheads both fore and aft with a separate central hatch with integrated positive buoyancy.

Each kayak must carry a bilge pump and alternative bailing device.

Repair methods and equipment will vary according to the construction materials of the craft. A repair kit can be carried and used for temporary repairs, as long as the structural integrity of the craft is maintained. Arrange for temporary repairs to be replaced with more permanent repairs as soon as possible.

##### Helmets

Helmets specifically designed for water activities must be worn when participating in sea kayaking where the activity involves entry or exit through the surf zone.

Otherwise, helmets may be provided after consideration of:

* participants’ kayaking experience and skill
* the risk of participants sustaining a head injury due to the nature of the activities being undertaken during the session.

##### Paddles

Paddles must:

* be buoyant
* be of appropriate construction for the activity.

Paddles should:

* be the correct length for the paddler and type of paddling activity to avoid injury
* have suitable blade feather angles.

A spare paddle should be carried on all sea kayak trips by staff and/or guide boats.

##### Life jackets

The wearing of a securely fitted Australian certified life jacket is required under Victorian marine safety law on all paddle craft that are underway on all Victorian waters. Type 2 ­– Level 50 lifejackets are considered the most appropriate for Sea Kayaking activities. See [Life jacket laws](http://www.wearalifejacket.vic.gov.au/lifejacket-laws).

##### Rescue equipment

Rescue equipment should be considered based on the environment in which the activity is undertaken.

Rescue equipment that is suitable for the location or trip and category of water conditions must be in good condition, securely stored and readily accessible. Staff must be proficient in its use. Under the Marine Safety Regulations 2012 a bailer or bilge pump is required for human powered vessels, which include canoes and kayaks.

Other key safety equipment items that should be carried by each guide includes (for coastal waters these are mandatory) include:

* a towing system
* rescue knife
* paddle float
* whistles
* flares
* webbing stirrup
* GPS
* VHF Radio.

When conducting activities in a coastal inshore waters, a minimum of a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) appropriately secured and accessible or registered Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) must be carried by a leader in the group to enable emergency communication. Mobile phones, satellite phones, radios and satellite messengers are not sufficient on their own as these can be harder to operate in wind and waves while paddling, have less transmission strength and intermittent reception, be less robust and waterproof, and not access dedicated a dedicated emergency satellite network. In some inland and enclosed water environments, a PLB may also be appropriate. The decision regarding use of a PLB must be documented in the risk assessment for these activities.

For coastal sea kayaking greater than two nautical miles from the shore, a registered EPIRB and additional safety equipment is required by the Marine Safety Act 2010 and Marine Safety Regulations 2012. Refer to the [Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-vessel-operators/powerboat/victorian-recreational-boating-safety-handbook).

##### Spray decks

When spray decks are used, they must be an appropriate fit for each kayak and fitted with release tapes or toggles. Students must only use spray decks after direct tuition, practice and close supervision of their capacity to exit the craft.

## Clothing

Participants must dress in a manner that will not hinder flotation. For example, heavy boots or bulky clothing must not be worn. A waterproof jacket must not be worn over a personal flotation device.

Participants must wear footwear suitable for in the craft and in the event of capsize or a walkout.

Wear well secured sunglasses. Do not wear loose jewellery. Rings, if worn, should be taped. A complete change of clothing should be available on shore and carried on overnight touring trips in waterproof containers.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

It is considered best practice that the designated instructor has taken a familiarisation trip or has conferred with others who have recent experience on the proposed trip and know the location well.

The designated sea kayak instructor/s must have one of the following:

* an Australian Canoeing Sea Instructor or Sea Guide or Enclosed Sea Guide qualification appropriate for the program, or documented equivalent qualification, or equivalent National Training Package units of competency appropriate for the level of activity being undertaken
* equivalent documented training and experience from another training provider or education institution.

Equivalent training and/or experience for sea kayaking includes experience and knowledge of:

* sea kayak instruction
* rescue techniques
* location of other possible boat traffic, particularly shipping lanes
* coastal navigation techniques including using coastal charts and marine navigation markers
* use of tide charts and knowledge of local tidal conditions
* boating regulations
* local surf zones, rips and currents including surf types and patterns if surf is likely to be encountered
* marine weather patterns and prevailing local weather
* the use and types of emergency communication and procedures.

Sea kayaking guides must have their own rescue equipment, suitable for the location and activity (see Equipment section above).

An assistant staff leader may hold a qualification such as a Certificate III in Outdoor Recreation with paddling units or have equivalent paddling training and experience.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

* have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures
* have conferred with the instructor on the safety requirements of this role.

The designated assistant should have:

* proper paddling techniques
* rescue skills
* group management skills.

[Documentation of staff qualifications and experience](https://nginx-php-content-policy-det-vic-gov-au-production.lagoon.vicsdp.amazee.io/sites/default/files/2020-02/excursion_staff_qualifications.docx) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see[: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/external-providers).

## Supervision

Supervision is the critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with responsibility for activity instruction and the other able to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for sea kayaking.

|  |
| --- |
| Inland waters |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | Up to 12 |
| 3 | 13-18 |
| 4 | 19-24 |
| Inland open waters/enclosed waters/coastal waters\* |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | Up to 8 |
| 3 | 9-12 |
| 4 | 13-16 |

\* Minimum two designated instructors that meet the experience/qualifications criteria are required.

Additional staff must have experience in the activity at this level. Any staff member who is not a designated instructor or assistant instructor is counted as a participant in the supervision ratios.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with [Excursions Guidelines – Supervision](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/supervision).

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Australian Canoeing <http://www.canoe.org.au/>

Australian Canoeing – Risk Management <http://canoe.org.au/safety/>

Maritime Safety Victoria <https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au>

[Paddle Australia](https://paddle.org.au) <https://paddle.org.au/>

[Paddle Australia – Safety](https://paddle.org.au/education-safety/safety/) <https://paddle.org.au/education-safety/safety-guidelines-v2/>

[Paddle Vic](https://vic.paddle.org.au) <https://vic.paddle.org.au/>

Surf Life Saving Australia – BeachSafe <https://beachsafe.org.au/>

Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety <https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety>

Victorian Rainfall and River Height Data <http://www.bom.gov.au/vic/flood/index.shtml?ref=hdr>

For further enquiries, please contact community.stakeholders@education.vic.gov.au

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