

Proposal to mandate lifejacket wear on domestic commercial vessels

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) is exploring practical options to minimise the risk of drowning for all people onboard domestic commercial vessels by increasing the wearing of lifejackets.



Since 2013, 44 people have fallen overboard from domestic commercial vessels and drowned.

In 2020 alone, there were four fatalities from people falling overboard from domestic commercial vessels, all involving a crew member going overboard. Three crew fatalities occurred on fishing vessels and involved a solo operator, a crew member working over the side and a small tender vessel. The fourth fatality occurred on a charter vessel (class 2) and involved a person being knocked overboard by a sailing boom. In all these incidents none of the people who lost their lives were wearing a lifejacket.

The only real prospect of survival in most marine incidents is if the missing person is wearing a lifejacket

Survivability expert Dr Paul Luckin



Data and research have found that wearing a lifejacket significantly increases your chances of survival in the water.

Most Australian states and territories have already mandated lifejacket wear requirements on certain recreational vessels. Internationally, some countries such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom have begun mandating lifejacket wear on some commercial vessels.

Since making lifejacket wear mandatory, states such as Tasmania and Victoria have seen a decrease in drowning fatalities.

AMSA has identified several options:

Proposal 1

Mandate lifejacket wear requirements on all domestic commercial vessels, at all times, when on deck

Proposal 2

Mandate lifejacket wear on specified kinds of domestic commercial vessels. This proposal includes the four operations below:

- Domestic commercial vessels that are less than 7.5 metres
- Solo/single-handed domestic commercial vessel operations
- Fishing vessels of any length, when on deck
- Unpowered barges that do not have rails or means to prevent a person falling overboard

Plus - all vessels to have a documented risk assessment and procedure on lifejacket wear in their safety management system. This should take into consideration heightened risk situations, such as crew working over the side of the vessel, reduced visibility and severe weather or heavy seas.

Proposal 3

Continue with lifejacket carriage requirements and do not introduce lifejacket wear requirements, however, all vessels must have a documented risk assessment and procedure on lifejacket wear in their safety management system.

Have your say now! You can provide feedback until 17 December 2021.

Make an online submission:

amsa.gov.au/lifejackets

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For more information on this consultation,
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