

1. Purpose

At Melbourne Water, Working in Proximity to Water is defined as a Critical HSE Risk. Unmitigated, the consequence associated with this risk may be a fatality.

This document outlines the minimum requirements when working in proximity to water to reduce the risk So Far As Is Reasonably Practicable (SFAIRP).

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all assets and premises owned, leased or occupied by Melbourne Water employees and contractors. It covers all types of work where there is the risk of drowning due to exposure to the hazard of working in proximity to water.

3. Process

3.1 Planning work

When planning works that will involve working in proximity to water (e.g. collection of samples, investigative and maintenance works and various community engagement activities) the risk shall be communicated to those performing the works. Furthermore, steps should be taken during the planning phase to eliminate or control the hazard so far as is reasonably practicable.

3.1.1 Elimination and substitution control options

When the need to work in proximity to water has been identified, and to meet the principles of SFAIRP, alternative methods to complete the work to reduce or eliminate exposure shall be considered. These may include use of:

- Submersible remote operated vehicle (ROV)
- Remotely operated bathymetric survey boats
- Floating monitoring vessels
- Auto samplers
- Drones

3.1.2 Hazard awareness, assessment and communication

When working in proximity to water cannot be eliminated, relevant hazard assessments should also consider, but would not be limited to, additional hazards such as:

- Steep/challenging terrain
- Slippery surfaces and unstable ground (soil, rocks, mud, rock, silt, sand etc.)
- Thick vegetation, fallen trees/logs, hanging branches/tree limbs, unstable trees
- Fast running water and currents, surf, discoloured water (making depth difficult to judge)
- Wildlife (snakes, wasps and other insects)
- Livestock
- Pest species/feral animals (deer, goats, pigs, foxes, rabbits)

- Use of equipment (including mobile plant) and vessels
- Working at heights
- Storm or flood conditions
- Discarded syringes and other debris, water contamination
- Contact with sewage
- Aerated water (reduced buoyancy)
- Spray or aerosols from sewerage tanks/ponds
- Low water temperature
- Depth of waterway or water body
- Proximity to operating assets (e.g.: stormwater outlet, pump suction inlet etc.)

3.2 Execution of work

3.2.1 Good to Go and Control Plans

Whenever work is conducted in proximity to water, some form of risk assessment shall be developed to capture how the hazards associated with the activity are being managed. The risk assessment could take the form of, but is not limited to: Good to Go Assessment, Control Plan or SWMS. The assessment shall consider the full scope of works being undertaken and consider all relevant [hazards](#).

Alternatively, a relevant SOP may be utilised whereby the hazards and controls associated with working in proximity to water are identified.

Any PPE being utilised during works should be maintained as per AM PRO Portable Equipment Management.

The following sections describe the additional, minimum controls and requirements to be adopted for a specific scenarios, however any developed risk assessment shall be the primary tool for determining and recording the appropriate controls.

Jump to:

- [Entering on foot](#)
- [Using a vessel](#)
- Working adjacent to or above water:
 - [Built environments](#)
 - [Natural environments](#)
 - [With mobile plant](#)
- [Diving](#)

3.2.2 Entering Water on Foot

The risk assessment and selection of controls should take into account the employees' ability to swim.

- Before entering the water, the flow rate shall be verified. To do this, locate something that floats, throw it in the water and time it over two reference points of a known distance. Reference points could be two rocks, trees or anything, as long as you know the distance.

Water shall not be entered in the water flow rate is greater than 1 m/sec calculated via this method.

- Entrance shall only be to hip depth.

The following controls shall be in place for entering water on foot:

- Minimum of two people if entrance to water is required
- If the water is higher than calf deep, waders with a wader belt and a Personal Flotation Device (PFD)
- An emergency rescue plan
- Visually inspected operational and rescue equipment to ensure it is in good condition

Consider use of a stabilisation stick.

3.2.3 Entering Water using a Vessel

The risk assessment and selection of controls should take into account the employees' ability to swim.

Vessels include, but are not limited to boats, barges, canoes, kayaks.

The following controls shall be in place when utilising a vessel:

- Wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD)
- Determine the most appropriate vessel for the task taking into account:
 - water depth,
 - access,
 - vessel condition,
 - crew training, experience and competence
- Review site and upstream environmental conditions
- Review the [Bureau of Meteorology](#) website for flood, strong wind, gale or storm warnings
- Verify the vessel has a:
 - certificate of survey
 - certificate of operation (or exemption)
 - safety management system (for further information regarding these requirements, [refer to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority](#))
- A minimum of two people are required to undertake all work from a powered vessel (one person/operator on the vessel is acceptable whilst launching or retrieving the vessel)
- The person in control of a powered boat must have, as a minimum requirement: AMSA Coxswain Grade 3 licence
- When working from a non-powered vessel (i.e. canoe or kayak), work should be done in pairs of vessels and each vessel must remain within eyesight/verbal communication distance

3.2.4 Working Adjacent (within 1m) to or Above Water, including Aerated water

Built environment

- Ensure all walkways over water have adequate edge protection fitted in accordance with Access Covers Platforms and Walkways Standard
- Activities that require one's centre of mass to pass beyond a fall barrier shall require fall prevention controls to be implemented
- Where edge protection is not available, then other means of travel restraint and fall prevention shall be used
- Where necessary, isolate operating assets in and around water or install an exclusion zone
- Only use structures specifically designed or intended for human access as walkways or work platforms
- Ensure appropriate signage and barricading is in place when platforms and walkways above water can normally be accessed by the public

Natural Environment

The risk assessment and selection of controls should take into account the employees' ability to swim.

The following controls should be considered:

- Personal flotation device
- Throw-bags

Working in or Adjacent to Water with Mobile Plant

In addition to the requirements of H&S PRO Excavations:

- Operators of mobile plant on vessels are authorised by the master or owner of the vessel before carrying out any work
- Mobile plant on vessels is fixed, balanced and securely anchored
- Zones where mobile plant is operating are assessed for structural stability, clearly demarcated and properly fenced off
- Anyone working in an Elevated Work Platform over water wears a PFD in addition to a safety harness or uses a safety harness that has flotation capabilities

3.2.5 Diving

- Only use specialist diving contractors with appropriate qualifications and certification
- Where possible, a survey of the dive location shall be undertaken using a submersible ROV to aid in dive planning and reduce dive time
- A Diving Project Plan (DPP) must be prepared by the diving contractor prior to commencing all dives, which contains as a minimum:
 - the method for carrying out the diving work
 - the tasks and duties of each person involved in the dive
 - the diving equipment, breathing gases and procedures to be used in the dive
 - dive times, bottom times and decompression profiles
 - emergency procedures

- Where diving is being conducted by emergency services within our assets, the manager of the area where the dive will take place must:
 - Be notified of the dive
 - Communicate any lessons learned from previous dives within the asset
 - Inform them of any operational hazards that may be present within the dive zone

4. Awareness and Training

For persons in charge of a powered vessel, a AMSA Coxswain Grade 3 licence is required.

5. Definitions

Reference	Definition
PFD (personal flotation device)	Any device used to keep a person afloat in the water, including closed cell foam or inflatable jackets, belts.
Proximity	In, immediately next to and within 1 metre of water.
SFAIRP	So Far As Is Reasonably Practicable
Vessel	Boat (powered or not), canoe (powered or not), barge or other watercraft
Water	For the purpose of this procedure the locations in which water is found includes (but is not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Waterways – streams, creeks, rivers, bays, wetlands, retarding basins, sediment pond • Water Treatment Assets – settlers, filters, clarifiers, open tanks • Waste Water Treatment Assets - inlet carriers, clarifiers, sedimentation ponds, drying pans, aeration tanks, holding basins, treatment tanks • Water Supply Assets – reservoirs, tanks, aqueducts
Boat	A small vessel propelled by sails, oars or a small engine

6. Stakeholders

Stakeholders	
Service Delivery	Service and Asset Lifecycle
HSRs	HSE

7. References

Reference
H&S PRO Good to Go
AM PRO Portable Equipment Management
H&S PRO Excavations
H&S FOR Rescue Plan
Access Covers Platforms and Walkways Standard
Australian Maritime Safety Authority
Bureau of Meteorology

8. Document History

Date	Reviewed/ Actioned By	Version	Action
April 2025	Senior Advisor HSE Systems Integration and Implementation	13	Rearrangement of content and addition of references to related processes. Addition of consideration of ability to swim. Addition of requirement for fall prevention for activities above water where centre of mass goes beyond protective barrier. Separation of working adjacent to work: built vs natural assets. Addition or requirement for two people if anyone is entering the water on foot or by vessel. Addition of consideration for a stabilisation stick when entering water. Update of Coxswain certificate title.
Jan 2024	Records Administrator	11/12	System updates
September 2020	Records Administrator	9	Document reformatted into new template. No content change
August 2020	SHEQ Manager Service Delivery	8	Document revised and simplified Updated into new template