



## FACT SHEET No.19

# Personal Flotation Devices

## Q. What is a Personal Flotation Device (PFD)?

**A.** A Personal Flotation Device (PFD), also known as a lifejacket, buoyancy vest or a buoyancy garment, is a garment or device which, when correctly worn and used in water, will provide the user with buoyancy which will increase the likelihood of survival.

## Q. How are PFDs classified?

**A.** PFDs are classified by their intended use and their buoyancy levels, as per Australian Standards.

## Q. Are there different types of PFDs?

**A.** Yes, there are 6 categories of PFD:

**Level 275** – intended primarily for offshore use and by people who are carrying significant weights and thus require additional buoyancy. It is also of value to those wearing clothing which traps air and may adversely affect the self-righting capacity of the PFD.

**Level 150** – intended for offshore use and rough weather where a high standard of performance is required. It will turn an unconscious person into a safe position and requires no subsequent action by the user to maintain the position.

**Level 100** – intended for those who may have to wait for rescue, but are likely to do so in a safe position in sheltered water. This level of PFD is not to be used in rough conditions.

**Level 50** – intended for use by those who are competent swimmers and who are near the bank or shore, or who have help and a means of rescue close at hand. They do not keep the user safe for long periods of time and require active participation by the user.

There are also special purpose PFDs and SOLAS PFDs intended for use on sea going ships.

## Q. How do I choose a PFD?

**A.** When choosing a PFD, ensure that it fits securely and is comfortable, as this will encourage use and is appropriate for the conditions it will be worn in. When choosing a PFD for children, do not select a larger size that the child will 'grow into', it is important that it fits correctly to be effective.

## Q. I am a competent swimmer, why do I need a PFD?

**A.** Even a competent swimmer should wear a PFD when they are in open water or involved in activities such as fishing, boating and jet skiing. Should an accident occur you may have to spend a long time in the water, you may have to swim to shore or you may even be unconscious. A PFD will keep you buoyant, particularly when tired. If you are out on the water your PFD should always be on. Should an accident occur, a lifejacket that is stowed away will be of no use to you.

**ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.**

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**  
 or download them from: **www.keepwatch.com.au**



## PFD Safety Checklist:

- PFDs included with other gear before undertaking aquatic activity
- PFDs properly fitted
- Practiced putting on a PFD on land and in the water
- Practiced sharing a PFD as a flotation support
- Practiced getting in and out of the water while wearing a PFD
- PFD worn when on the water

## Real Life Story - PFD Saved My Life

A QLD man has paid tribute to his personal flotation device – saying it saved his life. The 34 year old was boating off the coast of Mackay when an engine problem caused his boat to turn sharply and he fell overboard. He spent 5 hours in the ocean until he was rescued by a passing boat. “I would have drowned for sure, had I not been wearing my life jacket. I can honestly say that it saved my life and I would encourage everyone to wear one when they are out on the water”. Water safety groups also remind people that a lifejacket can also be used in a throw rescue to save someone who is in trouble in the water.

**PFD'S SAVE LIVES!**

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