

F&B's 2008 LIFE JACKET SURVEY

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One by one, Australian states are falling into line bringing forward legislation that will eventually force all boatowners in Australia to wear life jackets for at least most of the time, in pleasure boats under 6.0m LOA.

Over the last couple of years, F&B's been fielding an increasing number of enquiries from worried parents and boatowners who are either getting pulled up on the launchramp by men in uniform looking to inspect their life jackets, or pulled up on the water by the various Harbours & Marine type officials, who carry out 'on the spot' inspections of boating safety equipment.

There is a great deal of confusion in the street about what is legal and what isn't, and as this involves a mixture of state and federal legislation, it's still extremely difficult to determine in some cases what is, and isn't, required.

With this in mind, after looking at the problem for quite some time, and talking to many sectors of industry, the public and the legislators, we're going to take a slightly different tack and approach it from an F&B viewpoint, and study the leading brand the life jackets (well, "PFDs" to give them their correct title) that are available, whether legislation requires them or not.

The F&B team would like to thank all the lifejacket suppliers (Marlin, RFD, BLA) and our modelling team headed by Ineke Bulle, Geoff Carey and kids Kyla and Mathew Major - as well as Telwater and Hinterland Marine for the Quintrex Freedom Sport used in the shoot. Thanks people!

national standards.

Time Out: The issue of standards in itself is a real can of worms. We won't go there. The most commonly used standard is AS 1522 and that's what we've taken for our benchmark for this report.

A PFD 1 life jacket can easily be separated from a PFD 2 life jacket for one simple reason – PFD 1 has head support around the back of your neck to keep the head of the victim floating out of the water whether he's conscious or unconscious.

A category PFD 2 life jacket does not have the collar of floatation material and thus it is possible for an unconscious victim to lie face down in the briny, wearing this type of buoyancy vest, or "life

jacket".

There is also a commonly used PFD 3 category which really is a misnomer, because it is better called a buoyancy vest.

These are very common with jet-ski people, water skiers and the like; people who don't want to risk having their physical movement inhibited by bulky jackets, and really only need occasional buoyant assistance in the event of them coming off the PWC or ski.

Above: Family boating will increasingly be dominated by the need to wear lifejackets in pleasure boats under 6.0m - even unsinkable, 'level float' models such as this Quintrex 590 Freedom Sport.

Types Of Jackets

At the top of the heap we need to understand the difference between categories PFD 1 and PFD 2. In essence, a PFD 1 is the best of the life jackets and complies with the relevant



Above: This is what we recommend for adult fishermen and boatowners. These are the inflatable PFD Type 1 Marlin Yoke (often called the "horse-shoe" style) known as their Explorer series. They are technically the same, but the one Geoff is wearing is encased in a practical, lightweight vest.

These two are F&B's pick for the best mix of comfort, safety, convenience, cost and overall 'user friendliness'. Several manufacturers make inflatable horseshoe-type PFDs, including RFD, who have them in several types, styles and quality levels. They range in price from this manually inflated Marlin jacket at \$119 (PW's choice) to the vest (above) or long sleeve jacket types. These range in price from \$299-\$399.

