

Proposed changes to Lake Wendouree waterway rules

City of Ballarat | For public consultation

27 November 2024

1 Introduction

BACKGROUND

Lake Wendouree is an ever-popular community destination in Ballarat. For more than 150 years, the lake has supported sporting and recreational activities for generations of local rowers, fishers and sailors, as well as the general public.

The City of Ballarat is privileged to have a world class rowing course on the lake, making it one of the best rowing facilities in Australia. The lake is also a large and vibrant trout and redfin fishing location and hosts a proud and historic yachting community. The public open spaces and gardens fringing the lake are well used by locals and visitors alike.

However, the current waterway rules for the lake (known as a '[Schedule](#)' in Safe Transport Victoria's Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules) do not provide sufficient guidance to the lake's diverse and growing number of waterway users.

A temporary Code of Conduct was introduced in 2018 to trial proposed changes to the waterway rules, particularly around the rowing training course. In 2021, the City of Ballarat reviewed the trial rules and other potential changes with representatives from local rowing, fishing and yachting communities.

In 2024, the City of Ballarat, Safe Transport Victoria and RM Consulting Group (RMCG) met to discuss the proposed changes to the rules. The proposed rules documented here reflect the outcomes of all consultation to date.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document presents proposed changes to the waterway rules for Lake Wendouree and the key drivers for the changes. They were developed in consultation with user groups, the City of Ballarat Waterway Managers, and Safe Transport Victoria.

The proposed rules align with Safe Transport Victoria's requirements, which call on the City of Ballarat to consider:

- The safety risks that the proposed rules aim to minimise or eliminate
- Whether alternative approaches (legislative or otherwise) could address the identified issues
- The anticipated benefits and costs to individuals likely to be impacted by the implementation of the rules.

2 Proposed waterway rules

OVERVIEW

The proposed changes to the waterway rules were trialled and discussed with user groups and documented in the Code of Conduct. Following feedback on user experiences during the trial period and consultation with Safe Transport Victoria, it was determined that some risks can be addressed through the Code of Conduct and signage/updating of the water level gauge by Council.

Changes to the waterway rules were proposed where there were concerns specifically related to safety, in addition to rules that already applied statewide.

The intent of the four proposed waterway rules are outlined below.

- **Speed limit zones:** Apply 5 knot limit to all motorised vessels other than boats coaching human powered vessels.
- **Water levels:** When water levels are lower than 449.90 AHD (500mm under the full lake level) at marker gauge on the east side of the lake, the whole of the waters of Lake Wendouree are prohibited to vessels equipped with engines used for propulsion.
When water levels are lower than 449.65 AHD (750mm under the full lake level) at the same gauge, the whole of the waters of Lake Wendouree are prohibited to all vessels.
- **Rowing course:** Formalise the rowing course as a designated area and include its operational hours – between 1 September and 30 April, 6.00am-9.00am and 4.00pm-8.00pm on weekdays, and 7.00am-11.00am on weekends – as “special purpose hours”.
During special purpose hours, all vessels must give way when crossing the rowing course in designated crossing areas. Outside of the special purpose hours, the rowing course can be accessed by any vessel in accordance with this schedule. No anchoring is permitted on the rowing course.
- **Maximum draft:** All vessels must have a draft less than 1600mm.
- **Harvester:** When reed harvesters display the “vessels limited in their ability to manoeuvre” day shapes, all vessels on the lake need to keep 30m clear of the harvester.

PROPOSED RULES AND DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

Table 2-1 outlines the proposed changes to the waterway rules, drivers for the change and associated risks.

This is based on consultation with the City of Ballarat, Safe Transport Victoria and key user groups including schools, sailors, fishers, boaters and rowing clubs. A full list of organisations who shared feedback is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 2-1: Proposed changes to the original and trial rules

Original rules tested in trial period	Proposed changes to waterway rules based on trial results and consultation	Driver for change
42.1.Prohibition of specific activities for the purposes of Clause 12. The whole of the waters of the lake are subject to a speed restriction of five (5) knots to vessels equipped with engines used for propulsion.	Apply 5 knot limit to all motorised vessels other than vessels used for coaching human powered vessels.	Safety for all users is a priority, with efforts focused on minimising risks. Historically, some minor incidents at Lake Wendouree were caused by excessive speed. Rowing has experienced exponential growth in recent years, primarily driven by private schools and more recently, public schools. Together, they form a significant and regular user group on the lake. In coaching scenarios, coaching boats will not be able to travel at the same speed as rowers if they are capped at 5 knots. This could present a risk of collision for the rower if the coach is not there to provide navigational guidance during peak periods. Noting the lake is closed for rowing events.
Vessel Operating and Zoning Rules for water level. 450.40 metres AHD or lower. 42.2. Areas prohibited to vessels for the purposes of Clause 9.	Apply to all vessels (MSV) on marker on east side of lake: - Water level below 449.90 (i.e. 500mm below spillway) prohibited for motorised vessels - Water level below 449.65 (i.e. 750mm below spillway) prohibited for all vessels	Shallow water presents a hazard as it increases the risk of vessels becoming stuck in the mud or colliding with underwater infrastructure, potentially causing injury to operators and passengers. These rule changes aim to adopt a more conservative approach and ensure consistency for all users. During the last dry event, 100 people became stuck in the mud and required rescue by the State Emergency Service.
No stopping on rowing course for all vessels.	Formalise in waterway rules schedule. Enact a <i>Give Way</i> permanently for all vessels every time.	Boats anchoring in the rowing course pose a significant danger. Additionally, rowing crews stopping within the rowing course create a hazard for other crews. Clearer rules will benefit everyone and help reduce the risk of collisions. While only a few people who fish are expected to be affected, they should be able to fish outside of the designated rowing hours.
Anyone crossing the rowing course must give way to rowers in course. Non rowers and powered vessels must give way when crossing the rowing course.	Formalise trial rule. Everyone crossing the rowing course must give way.	See above. Right of way rules apply and users can cross the rowing lane outside of special purpose hours.
The whole of the waters of Lake Wendouree are prohibited to vessels equipped with engines used for propulsion.	No boats with a draft (e.g. propeller length) greater than 1.6m may enter the lake.	The lake is shallow in parts with a depth of only 1.4m. There is also significant underwater rowing infrastructure which can damage a vessel and cause injury to passengers in the event the propeller collides with it.
	When reed harvesters display the “vessels limited in their ability to manoeuvre” day shapes, all vessels on the lake need to keep 30m clear of the harvester.	The vessel has limited manoeuvrability so to avoid collisions, all other watercraft must stay 30m away to avoid collision.

3 Lake Wendouree map



Figure 3-1: Map of Lake Wendouree with rowing course indicated

Appendix 1: Stakeholder consultation list

Stakeholders:

- Australian Outrigger Canoe Racing Association [not active]
- Dragon Boat
- Canoeing Victoria (Paddle Victoria)
- Rowing Victoria
- Triathlon Victoria
- Scouts Victoria
- Ballarat Rowing Association (newly formed group – combined for rowing)
- Ballarat Associated Schools
- Ballarat High School
- Phoenix College
- Mt Clear College
- Mt Rowan Secondary College
- Woodmans Hill Secondary College
- St Patrick's College
- Loreto College
- Ballarat Grammar
- Ballarat & Clarendon College
- Damascus College
- Wendouree - Ballarat Rowing Club
- Ballarat City Rowing Club
- Ballarat Yacht Club
- Ballarat Canoe Club
- Scout Water Activity Centre
- Fish protection society Ballarat Angling Club
- Commercial operators
- City of Ballarat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country on which this project has been conducted. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and we acknowledge emerging leaders. Moreover, we express gratitude for the knowledge and insight that Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contribute to our shared work in Australia.

We pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We recognise that Australia was founded on the genocide and dispossession of First Nations people and acknowledge that sovereignty was not ceded in this country. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards self-determination, equity of outcomes, and an equal voice for Australia's First People.

This report has been prepared by:

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