

Department for Environment and Water

The Department for Environment and Water acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect the deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country.

Coastal Driving Code of Practice

The South Australian coast is loved by locals and visitors for its beautiful scenery, heritage values and variety of opportunities for fishing, boating, surfing, walking and camping. In many parts of the State, the number of people accessing coastal areas via vehicles is causing damage to fragile natural environments.

Beach nesting birds breed anywhere between August and March every single year, all across the coast, all across sandy beaches. If you visit South Australian beaches during this time, you're very likely to come across some breeding birds.

This Code of Practice has been prepared to help drivers minimise their impact on the environment so that sustainable and appropriate coastal access can continue. It guides the driving of any motorised vehicle, including four-wheel drives (4WDs), quad bikes, trail bikes (motorbikes) and buggies, in coastal areas including on beaches, dunes, cliff-tops, coastal lakes, wetlands and estuaries, sand flats and mudflats.

The Code of Practice describes the desired behaviours of drivers on coastal areas in South Australia.

Key Points

- 1. Be prepared – research where you are going, the conditions you will be driving in and the rules that apply.**
- 2. Respect rules and guidelines to minimise your impact on the environment and heritage.**
- 3. Drive safely and to the local conditions to protect yourself and other beach users.**
- 4. Know your car, its limitations and its safety features and how to use them in coastal environments.**
- 5. Always consider how your behaviour impacts other people's experience of coastal areas.**
- 6. You can be fined or prosecuted for breaking the law when driving in coastal environments.**

Know before you go

Be prepared – research where you are going, the conditions you will be driving in and the rules that apply.

- Some South Australian Beaches do not allow vehicles, some have restrictions such as no camping or camping vehicles, while others allow access for boat launching only, or require a permit to access via motorised vehicle. It is your responsibility to know whether vehicles are permitted, and that you have the required permissions to drive.
- Identify if you are going to be driving through national parks and reserves as different rules may apply. National parks and reserves may be closed on days of catastrophic fire danger and pets are generally not permitted (service dogs excepted). Entrance permits may also be required.
- Find out if you are crossing private property to access the beach and get permission from the land holder. Leave livestock alone and gates as found.
- Check if local closures or restrictions are in place. Access to coastal areas may be restricted at times due to safety, conservation, severe weather or environmental changes. (Council websites are a good place to start).
- Checking tide and weather forecasts is critical in avoiding unsafe conditions. When there are very high tides there may be no hard sand available to drive on. It is best not to be on the beach in those conditions.
- Find out which beaches are only accessible by 4WDs.
- Make sure you know what your recovery options are and tell someone where you are going before you leave home.

Be aware of the rules that apply to driving on beaches and coastal areas, and that penalties can apply to impacts to native plants, animals, or sites of cultural heritage

Good behaviours conserve our coasts

Respect rules and guidelines to minimise your impact on the environment and heritage.

- Drive only along designated tracks to access the beach and do not make new tracks.
- Do not drive on, through or across dunes except on established tracks. Do not drive over or through vegetation or undisturbed areas.

Fragile beach ecosystems including dunes, wetlands, coastal lakes, lagoons, mudflats and saltmarsh are easily damaged by vehicles and damage can take years to recover.

Significant Aboriginal heritage sites exist along the coast and throughout coastal landscapes areas. Irreplaceable Aboriginal heritage can be damaged or destroyed when driven over.

- Avoid shell accumulations while driving on the beach – collections of shells can represent important feeding habitat for shorebirds or ancient middens used by First Nations people.
- Regularly check your tyres, vehicle and trailer for seeds, soil, or mud that could contain seeds to avoid spreading weeds.
- Never disturb, feed or chase wildlife. Slow down, keep your distance and keep noise to a minimum.
Beaches provide both breeding habitat and food sources such as samphire, cockle-shell beds and seaweed. Some animals may not return to their feeding ground or nest if they are disturbed.
- Where possible, stay on the firm compacted sand when driving on beaches, and avoid driving on beach at high tide when the hard sand surfaces are under water.
Shorebirds nest in the softer sand above the high water mark and are almost impossible to see when driving. Chicks are often well camouflaged amongst the seaweed and sand. Wheel ruts create physical barriers that prevent chicks from reaching the water or foraging areas.
- Comply with all fenced and signposted areas to protect bird habitat or nesting areas.
Access can be restricted temporarily or seasonally in some areas and to some beaches. Do not remove barriers or fencing and respect access closures.
- Pass other vehicles at existing passing points.
Do not pass if this would require you to drive over vegetation or create a new track.
- Park in designated areas. Do not create new parking areas.
- Tracks are provided for access to beaches and through coastal areas. They are not intended for “play” such as intentional wheel spinning, stunts or racing.
- Leave no trace. Please take all your rubbish home with you.
- In many areas toilets are not provided. If no toilet is available use proper protocols for bush toileting and remove all waste and toilet paper.
- Reporting unsafe driving to SA Police can help with policing bad behaviour.

Best-practice coastal driving

Drive safely and to the local conditions to protect yourself and other beach users.

- Always drop your vehicle’s tyre pressure to appropriate levels for the driving surface and conditions.
Not reducing your tyre pressure can cause additional damage to the beach and access tracks.
- Obey speed limits and normal road rules. Default speed limit for driving on beaches is 40kph unless otherwise signposted, and 25kph when passing pedestrians.
Vehicles must be registered, drivers must be licenced and seatbelts must be worn. Stay to the left when approaching other vehicles.
- Extreme care is required around other beach users, particularly children and pets who may have less vehicle awareness.
- Park at an angle with your vehicle’s bonnet to the shoreline so other drivers know you’ve stopped.
- Use sand flags at any time when visibility is restricted.

Know your vehicle

Know your car, its limitations and its safety features to ensure you drive safely and appropriately in coastal environments.

- Carry a tyre pressure gauge, compressor, and appropriate recovery gear and know how to use them.
- If you are towing a boat or van you may need to adjust your vehicle set up to manage the extra weight.

- Help others if they are stuck or bogged but only if you have the required equipment and know how to use it.
- Vehicles should have appropriate ground clearance, tow points and carry recovery ropes.
Tow balls and tie-down points are not appropriate recovery points.
- Consider joining a 4WD club or doing a driver training course to learn how to use your car's features and how to drive safely in off-road conditions.
- Emergency rescue may be far away from your location and may be a very costly addition to a day at the beach, so ensure that your vehicle is properly set up and that you drive to the conditions.

Respect for others

Always consider how your behaviour impacts others' experience of coastal areas.

- Shorebirds and other animals live and breed on the beach and in the dunes and need our protection.
- Cultural sites and environmental systems are very vulnerable to motorised vehicle damage.
- Avoid noisy driving or riding, especially near campgrounds, houses, recreation areas and other beach/coastal users.
- Driving that chops up and/or deeply ruts the sand can make it very difficult for the elderly or those with disabilities to access the beach as a pedestrian.
- Remember that everyone has a right to a peaceful and safe time at the coast.

Legislative mechanisms and consequences

You can be fined or prosecuted for breaking the law when driving in coastal environments.

- Native vegetation, wildlife, and Aboriginal heritage are protected by law including on beaches, regardless of land tenure. Damage or disturbance is an offence that can attract heavy penalties.
- Place-specific laws also apply, whether under parks legislation or Council by-laws.
- Road rules apply everywhere! Driving off-track is an offence in most public lands.