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The Australian Adventure Activity Standards: a national approach to safety outdoors

Safety standards shouldn't change just because you cross a state border. That is why state outdoors bodies have come together to develop a single set of national standards for outdoors adventure activities.

A new national standard.

Adventure Activity Standards (AAS) are industry best practice guidelines used to manage risk and safety across a wide range of outdoor adventure activities. They are designed to be used by skilled outdoor leaders who are responsible for participants in these activities.

Currently, each state and territory maintains its own set of standards. However, this has resulted in unnecessary duplication, lack of coordination among jurisdictions, and less sharing of expertise and experiences about how to best manage safety and risk outdoors.

The industry and government bodies responsible for AAS development have therefore decided to develop a single set of Australian Adventure Activity Standards.

The Australian AAS will have many benefits over the existing system:

- A single set of standards will ensure outdoor professionals are pooling their expertise and experiences at a national level, resulting in higher quality standards and less chance of confusion.
- Consistency across Australia will improve professional mobility, and reduce compliance costs for operators working in multiple jurisdictions.
- The cost of standards development will be reduced.
- Outdoor activity leaders will be able to spend less time keeping tabs on multiple standards, and more time taking people into Australia's great outdoors.

Are these legally binding?

Like the current AAS in each jurisdiction, the Australian AAS will not be legally binding. Instead, they are intended to "provide the best practice framework for

safe and responsible planning and delivery of outdoor adventure activities with dependent participants."

Even though the AAS is not legally binding by law, compliance is often required by public and private land managers, regulatory agencies, insurers and others as a contractual or management condition. Further, compliance with the AAS may assist in demonstrating that an operator has fulfilled their duty of care to activity participants.

The AAS is intended to be a flexible framework, which can guide decision-making across the great diversity of environments, activities and circumstances present in Australia.

What activities are covered?

Current state and territory standards cover the following activities:

- Abseiling
- Bushwalking
- Challenge ropes
- Horse trail riding
- Recreational angling
- River rafting
- Snow Sports
- Trail Bike riding
- Canyoning
- Surf kayaking
- Wildlife swims
- Artificial climbing
- Canoeing & kayaking
- Four-wheel driving
- Mountain biking
- Caving
- Rock climbing
- Surfing
- Archery
- Sea kayaking
- Snorkelling
- Scuba diving

During the next three years, these activities will all be brought within the Australian AAS framework. Additional activities may be added as needed to reflect current practice.

Who is developing the standards?

The Australian AAS is being developed by a coalition of groups including all those currently responsible for the relevant state and territory standards:

- ACT Sport and Recreation Services
- Northern Territory Department of Sport and Recreation
- Outdoor Council of Australia
- Outdoor Recreation Industry Council NSW
- Outdoors Victoria
- Outdoors WA
- Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation
- Recreation SA
- Tasmania, Communities Sport and Recreation

The Committee of Australian Sport and Recreation Officials (CASRO) has recognised the national importance of the Australian AAS and is providing funding support through its members including:

- ACT Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
- Australian Sports Commission
- NSW Office for Sport
- Northern Territory Department of Sport and Recreation
- Office for Sport, Australian Government Department for Health
- Qld Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing
- SA Office for Recreation and Sport
- Sport and Recreation Victoria
- Tasmania, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- WA Department of Sport and Recreation

The initial development for the Australian AAS was undertaken during the update of the Victorian

AAS, funded by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

For each category of outdoor adventure activities, a technical working group will be established to draft the standard, drawing on the existing standards in place around Australia. Thousands of hours of work and financial contributions by many stakeholders have gone into developing the existing standards, which will greatly assist in creating the Australian AAS. The public will be invited to comment on these standards before they are finalised.

Each state and territory will still need to consider whether to adopt the Australian AAS. It is the intention of all participants that variations will be made only where strictly necessary. While there may be some legislative differences among jurisdictions, it will be the responsibility of each jurisdiction to ensure these are clearly marked in the final document.

How can I contribute?

You can keep informed and contribute to the development of the Australian AAS in the following ways:

- Visit www.australianaas.org.au to register your interest in the Australian AAS and to receive periodic updates on this project.
- There will be a public call for nominations to participate in AAS technical working groups. If you consider yourself an expert in the field, consider nominating to participate in a working group.
- Contribute a submission on a draft standard once it has been published.

For more information:

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Outdoors Victoria

