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Beach driving tips protect your car and the environment

By [Jodie van de Wetering](#)

If you're itching for the ground to dry out so you can hit the coast in your four wheel drive, a code of practice has been put together to help keep both your vehicle and the environment in top condition.



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Four wheel drive instructor Dave Darmody says many of the guidelines are also common sense driving tips, such as checking the tide times before you head out.

"Some people think there's a bit of a challenge in pushing up the beach in a high tide, but you're bashing yourself around, your car around, and you're doing the beach no good at all.

"So the first thing, check the tides. You'll have a much more pleasant day if you drive within two hours of low tide.

"Secondly, check the weather. Nobody wants to be camped on a beach with an offshore low kicking up 40 knot winds. No-one wants to have a bad time camping, so a little bit of preparation, checking the weather, checking the tides, is a good place to begin."

Once you're on the beach, driving on the firm, damp sand exposed by the low tide, Dave says you have to go slowly and remember you're not on a road.

"There's no driving environment as dynamic as a beach.

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Once you're on the beach, driving on the firm, damp sand exposed by the low tide, Dave says you have to go slowly and remember you're not on a road.

"There's no driving environment as dynamic as a beach.

"Driving up and down the Bruce Highway you don't have to look out for fishermen, for people swimming, for animals or, on Fraser Island, for aircraft landing.

"So, when you're driving on the beach you need to chill out a bit. Relax and acknowledge that you're in a beautiful place, and really take the opportunity to slow down and look around. There's an awful lot happening on a beach, be it just the natural movement of the water or all those other people and animals who choose to be there at the same time.

"One of the points of driving within two hours of low tide is you have the maximum amount of beach, so all these people and animals and planes and everything else have the greatest amount of beach that we can share.

"That way we're not forcing anyone to drive up in the soft sand which is bad for the car, bad for the environment, and bad for the people inside who're bouncing around like crazy things. It's a more pleasant way to approach the day."

The new code of practice applies to sandy foreshore areas and tidal wetlands. To the untrained eye a tidal wetland might just look like a large, flat, sparsely vegetated area. Maybe it even looks like wasteland where you could practice some circle work. But these areas are very fragile, and something as simple as a wheel rut can spoil the region's fishing and crabbing in years to come.

Sue Sargent is the Burnett Mary Regional Group's business development and planning manager, and a specialist in coastal areas.

"Ultimately these are very, very special areas, because they're very productive ecosystems.

"It's not just four wheel drives, it's trail bikes and quads as well. They can cause damage directly to the vegetation and they can also cause ruts,

particularly when people get a bit excitable and want to chuck a few donuts, or see how deep they can risk it in their new four wheel drive.

"In some of those areas, ruts can cause long term damage and reduce the connectivity of the wetland. They stop the water passing freely, and that reduces the opportunities for small fish to migrate up and down, and also the crabs and other species that use the area."

Sue says some of our local tidal wetlands are so fragile they're still recovering from inadvertent damage done by horses' hoofs and buggy wheels generations ago.

The BMRG secured the funding to develop the code of practice through the federal Caring for our Country program. Sue says they were inspired by feedback they received from local four wheel drive enthusiasts after a wetlands tagalong tour they ran last year.

"A lot of feedback we got from people was that they just didn't know. They hadn't understood or they weren't aware of how important these areas were for the fish and the animals that these guys had all come down to enjoy.

"We decided it'd be a great idea to develop something that allows people to get some basic information about how they can then plan their activities while minimising the damage they cause when they're out there."

Areas covered by the code of practice include:

- Drive on the damp, firm sand below the high tide mark, and travel within two hours of low tide.

- Stick to established vehicle tracks where they exist.
- Go slowly and look out for other vehicles, people and animals (and the occasional aircraft).
- make sure your vehicle is mechanically sound so you're not contaminating the sand with leaking oil or petrol, or billowing exhaust smoke into the atmosphere.

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/01/24/3120555.htm>