Wakapedia Tip #1
Personal Flotation Device (PFD)

'It is a legal requirement of Maritime NZ for all Waka Ama paddlers to have a PFD on board when out on the water' -

A good PFD will:
- Keep you afloat
- Keep you warm
- Make you visible

Your PFD should:
- Be the right weight rating
- Should fit properly (waist and shoulder adjustment is recommended)
- Should be in good working order
- Be accessible on your Waka

Choosing the right PFD

Midgets and Small kids
Waka Ama NZ recommends that Midget aged paddlers wear a full lifejacket PFD (includes neck flotation) also with the option of a crotch strap.

Intermediates to Adult PFDs
The most common PFD used by Waka Ama paddlers is the buoyancy vest. A buoyancy vest does not include neck flotation but often has more freedom around the arms for paddling. Other things to consider would be a neoprene panel under the arm to reduce chaffing.

Inflatables
Inflatable PFDs are becoming more common among Waka Ama paddlers due to their reduced size, more freedom of movement and they are a lot smaller to stow on your Waka. One thing to consider is an inflatable PFD will not keep you as warm in colder water as a full foam PFD. Inflatables also require the gas canister to be replaced when expired. Some inflatable PFDs are manually activated and some will activate when in contact with water. Once your PFD has been inflated it is very **difficult** to climb aboard a Waka from the water.

Extras features could include
- Pockets, good for storing a communication device, food and other safety equipment
- Shoulder and torso adjustment straps (this is good for Club PFDs that will be worn by various size paddlers)
- Reflectors for night paddling
- Crotch strap for smaller kids
- Pocket for hydration bladder (when paddling longer distances)

Check your local regional council bylaws for the requirements that apply in the waters in your part of New Zealand. Some bylaws go further than maritime rules, making the wearing of lifejackets compulsory for all on board small craft – for local bylaws [click here](#)