

Vehicle lights explained

There's some confusion in the motoring world about the use of fog lights, driving lights, daytime running lights (DRLs) and parking lights.

This fact sheet explains how these lights differ and what role they play.

Daytime running lights (DRLs)

DRLs are a modern safety feature designed to help oncoming drivers see your vehicle during the day. They're usually an LED type light and are commonly positioned around the normal headlight casing. DRLs are illuminated as soon as the vehicle's ignition is switched on. They're not intended to be used as fog lights, and keep in mind that the tail lights don't come on with DRLs.



Different types of DRLs

Fog lights

Under section 217 of the Australian Road Rules:

- 'front fog light' means a light (other than a headlight) fitted to the front of a vehicle to improve illumination of the road in fog, snowfall, heavy rain or dust clouds
- 'rear fog light' means a light (other than a brake light, a tail light, a number plate light or a reversing light) fitted to the rear of a vehicle to make the vehicle more easily visible from the rear in fog, snowfall, heavy rain or dust clouds.

These lights have a specific purpose and must only be used in the poor visibility conditions listed in the rules above. It's important to turn them off when conditions improve because they can dazzle oncoming drivers. Using them in clear conditions can attract a \$270 fine, plus a \$94 Victims of Crime Levy (as at February 2023).



Rear fog lights

Fog lights are usually fitted to the bottom of a bumper bar (or bull bar on 4WD vehicles) and will have a separate switch. This switch – required by law – is sometimes fitted on the rotating light switch on the dashboard or on the indicator arm. If in doubt, check your owner’s manual.



Bull bar mounted fog lights

Driving lights

These are powerful lights designed to improve visibility on darkened roads. They’re commonly found on 4WDs and SUVs, but they can also be fitted to sedans.

Because they can dazzle oncoming drivers, they must be hardwired through the vehicle’s high beam circuit so they’re not left on when high beam is turned off.

They must also have a separate switch so they can be turned off independently of high beam, if the extra brightness of driving lights isn’t needed.

Section 218 of the Australian Road Rules covers the use of high beam and indicates that high beam can not be used if traveling less than 200m behind a vehicle or from an oncoming vehicle.



Driving lights mounted onto a 4WD bull bar

Parking lights

Parking lights are not as bright as other vehicle lights, and their only purpose is to make it easier to see a vehicle parked on the side of the road in poor visibility.

Section 220 of the Australian Road Rules relates to the use of parking lights and indicates that parking lights must be operating when stopping on a road at night unless there is street lighting and the vehicle is visible for at least 200m in all directions.

You can use them at other times if you think it’s safer to do so, but leaving them on for too long could flatten your battery. If you plan to leave your car parked for a long time, it might be better to find a spot where parking lights aren’t needed.



Parking lights

We’re here to help

If you’ve broken down and need Road Service, call **13 11 11**

For more information on road safety, visit raa.com.au/roadsafety

If you have a question about road rules or road safety, call our Road Safety team on 8202 4570 or email motoringroadrules@raa.com.au raa.com.au/roadrules