LOOK OUT!

LESSONS LEARNT BY ACCIDENT

KEEP RIGHT
Both up & down stream

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Welcome to the December issue of LOOKOUT! – my final as Director of Maritime New Zealand (MNZ).

As my five-year tenure as Director and CEO at MNZ comes to an end, my replacement Keith Manch takes the helm and will be introducing the March issue.

In my guest editorial this issue, I reflect back on my past seven years at MNZ, particularly on the changing role of MNZ as a regulator, the balance between environmental protection, safety and commercial viability, key safety messages and the learnings we take from accidents.

Looking back, it’s been an incredibly busy year. In the past months, the grounding of Rena has dominated headlines and MNZ’s staff have been heavily involved in the response. LOOKOUT!’s companion publication, Safe Seas Clean Seas, takes an in-depth look at the first part of the response to Rena. It will be some time before the grounding appears as a story in LOOKOUT! – after the accident has been thoroughly investigated.

This issue’s safety feature – paddle safely – is a basic overview of sea kayaking. Next year we hope to release Safe Paddling: Essential Guide, which will take an in-depth look at canoe and kayak safety.

Kayaking is one of the fastest growing recreational boating activities in New Zealand. But sadly, in line with this growth, we have seen a recent increase in kayaking fatalities, with four deaths in 2010 and four in the last nine months. As with all boating activities, it is important that kayakers follow basic common sense safety precautions. This means wearing a lifejacket, carrying emergency communications, checking the weather first and avoiding alcohol. Also, obeying the give-way rules and keeping an effective lookout are important for safe and enjoyable kayaking. If everybody did these things, then our waters would be a much safer place.

Our lead story “Keep right – both up and down stream” shows the tragic consequences of not sticking to the give-way rules, with two fatalities and two people seriously injured as a result. Had the two people who died been wearing lifejackets at the time of the collision, the outcome for them may have proved different.

Three separate stories in this issue examine the results of failure to keep a good lookout, although these, thankfully, had less tragic outcomes. All of the stories in this issue involve one or more basic safety messages. We hope, that by bringing you these stories, you will learn from the accidents of others, rather than by personal experience.

On behalf of MNZ, I’d like to wish you a safe, happy and relaxing holiday season.

Catherine Taylor
Director of Maritime New Zealand
to 2 December 2011
As my time as Director of MNZ comes to a close, we are still dealing with the impact of our biggest ever maritime incident – the Rena grounding and oil spill in the Bay of Plenty. For me, this reinforces the incredibly diverse and important role that MNZ has to play in supporting and leading the maritime sector, and the need for a robust and responsive regulatory system.

As I reflect back upon the last five years, I feel incredibly proud of the work that we have achieved as an organisation and as a sector. But, as events such as the Rena grounding show, there is always more for us to do.

The role of the regulator

When I took on the role of Director in December 2006, my focus was on re-establishing the role of MNZ as the body that regulates and monitors the safe operation of vessels on our seas, rivers and lakes, through a regulatory system that creates a level playing field.

Key to achieving this goal was implementing improvements that would help make the sector safer, cleaner and more secure for all, while also ensuring that all who operate on our waterways understand that they are the best placed to take responsibility for their own safety.

One of the biggest catalysts for this change occurred in May 2006, a few months prior to my starting in the Director’s role, when six people lost their lives after the trawler Kotuku capsized in Foveaux Strait. Both MNZ’s report into the tragedy and that of the Transport Accident Investigation Commission highlighted the need for change.

What was clear from these investigations was that we needed to move from a Safe Ship Management (SSM) system that focused heavily on SSM companies doing everything for operators, to operators understanding that they are responsible for their own safety.

It also highlighted the need for us as the regulator to improve oversight of vessel survey standards and safety management systems on board vessels.

It was quite a shift in culture, and one that required us to provide the necessary tools and information for operators to ensure they could play their part, while also making improvements to our own regulatory approach.

At the end of the day though, the simple reality is that creating a safe and effective maritime transport system relies on everyone...
environment. For example, when the rules were realities of operating in the modern maritime are very complicated, and don’t reflect the realities of modern vessel operations.

Simplifying the regulations

With this in mind, we recognise that many of the current maritime rules and regulations are very complicated, and don’t reflect the realities of operating in the modern maritime environment. For example, when the rules were first written, they probably never envisioned ‘adventure’ activities such as paragliding or riverboarding, so we have had to find new ways to adapt and regulate these.

In many cases, this has involved working closely with different industry bodies to develop best-practice guidelines that are clear and simple, and that can be more easily updated to reflect the realities of modern vessel operations.

The key point is that these guidelines are likely to be far more effective if they have been created with input directly from those who they will ultimately impact upon – a formula that has already proven successful in areas such as kayaking and paragliding.

A core part of our philosophy is that we want to make sure we create a regulatory system that’s easy for people to comply with. This is not about ‘relaxing’ standards, but rather about making sure there is less ambiguity and greater clarity in the rules, so that operators clearly understand their responsibilities in order to operate safely.

In the commercial maritime sector, this has seen us shift our emphasis to focus on three core components: operators having a safe operating plan that they adhere to; vessels being fit for purpose; and operators having the appropriate qualifications for their operation.

It is these core principles that underpin two of the most significant reviews ever undertaken by MNZ to date – the proposed Maritime Operator Safety System (MOSS) and the Qualification and Operational Limits (QOL) review.

The MOSS review sees some fundamental changes to SSM that will improve maritime operator safety. Introduced in 1998, several reviews have since found fault with the SSM system. As well as being confusing and overly complex, it has not provided MNZ with an effective and efficient means of overseeing SSM companies or commercial vessel operations. But the bottom line is that it is not improving safety to the extent intended.

In relation to QOL, we have completed a ‘clean slate’ review of commercial qualifications and operational limits. After extensive consultation with industry, we now have relevant qualifications and appropriate operational limits that meet industry needs, while ensuring the safety of vessels, of all those on board, and the protection of the marine environment. It is expected that the new framework will come into effect in April 2013.

The balance between safety and commercial viability

MNZ is well aware of the commercial pressures that vessel operators face and how this can impact upon safety.

Our vision is for a vibrant, viable maritime community that works and plays safely and securely on clean waters. However, to achieve this, we need to get the balance right, with regulations that work effectively without impeding commercial viability.

The bottom line is that unless commercial operators can actually make a living from their jobs, we won’t have an industry. However, this cannot come at the expense of safety. We need only look back at some of the accidents highlighted in past issues of LOOKOUT! to be reminded of this.

While it is the regulator’s role to promote safety, we also recognise that regulations can be

“Our vision is for a vibrant, viable maritime community that works and plays safely and securely on clean waters.”

an impediment to an operator being able to achieve an appropriate commercial return.

That puts the onus on MNZ to make sure that regulations are targeted, necessary and relevant. Regulations need to be appropriately targeted to take into account the specific uses of each vessel. For example, protection of a propeller is critical for a diving or dolphin swimming operation, but is probably not relevant to a commercial charter fishing operation.

The basic safety messages

Given the level of activity on our oceans, lakes and rivers, it is inevitable that there will always be incidents and accidents. However, we must continue to strive to reduce these accidents and learn from them to keep others from making the same mistakes. This becomes
even more important as the numbers of people taking to our waterways continues to grow.

Tragically, in my time at MNZ, I have seen too many families who have lost loved ones in these accidents. That’s why MNZ has such an important mandate to ensure that we continue to educate, regulate and, where necessary, take enforcement action, to make sure that these events are as isolated as possible, and their effects are minimised.

While the good news is that the vast majority of people are responsible and careful, a small percentage continue to make poor decisions, such as going to sea in bad weather or without the right safety gear, and will get caught out. The part MNZ plays is key to ensuring that the necessary regulations and other measures are in place, so as to minimise injury and the loss of life.

In the recreational sector in particular, we have worked hard over the last five years to reinforce the four basic messages about keeping safe at sea, and push to change people’s behaviours and attitudes towards safety. These messages include checking the weather, wearing a lifejacket, having the right emergency communications equipment, and avoiding alcohol, as these are still the main contributors to deaths and accidents on the water. None of these messages are rocket science.

However, at a basic level, these can probably all be distilled into one simple message: don’t take unnecessary risks. This is a message that is relevant to everyone on the water, from ‘tinny to tanker’.

### Learning from accidents

Every time we investigate an accident, we are looking to determine the causes and any trends that may emerge in order to prevent similar events from happening to others in future. This information is important, as it allows us to make sure we are targeting our limited resources in the right areas, and helps us ensure that there are not gaps in our rules and regulations.

Often the incidents, rather than the accidents themselves, provide very valuable information. For example, if there are a lot of incidents on a particular river, we will examine them for common threads and work out what action needs to be taken to prevent them escalating into something more serious.

Being human, we are all prone to making mistakes at times, and this is no less true on the water. This means it is inevitable people will from time to time make bad judgment calls and mistakes, while mechanical faults like engine failure can and do occur. But our role at MNZ is to continually educate and inform people, so that everyone understands these risks and accepts that they are ultimately responsible for their own safety.

LOOKOUT! plays a valuable part in this educative process, with its specific focus on ‘lessons learnt by accident’. It sets out the facts relating to accidents so that people can learn from them, while also providing safety features that take an in-depth look at a particular aspect of maritime safety. What is really encouraging is that LOOKOUT! still remains one of our most well-received and well-read publications, and I thank all our subscribers and readers who continue to support the magazine. Even after I am gone, I know I will continue to look forward to receiving my copy in the mail.

Finally, on a personal note, the last five years have been a fantastic journey for me. While there have been many challenges and obstacles to overcome (as there always will be), there have been many, many more highlights.

One of the many highlights has been working with an organisation – and a maritime community – whose people are passionate, committed and professional, and who genuinely care about making a difference. Please keep up the good work.

With that thought, I hope that you will all support my successor, Keith Manch, as he looks to continue to build on the good progress that has been made. Keith comes to MNZ with an excellent track record in the regulatory environment and I know that MNZ is in excellent hands.

I hope you all have a safe and happy festive season, and wish you well for the future.

Catherine Taylor
Retired Director/Chief Executive of Maritime New Zealand
The skipper of sea-farm water taxi found himself knee deep in mud after grounding on a mud bank.

The 7.8 metre aluminium water taxi was ferrying three passengers from the marina through the harbour channel to one of several sea farms in the outer sound. The passengers all worked for the company, and the vessel set off at about 6.30am in darkness and heavy fog.

Visibility was reduced to about 25 metres, improving to 50 metres at times. The skipper was navigating by radar alone, with the range set to 0.5 nm. He did not use the unit’s GPS chart plotting function or use his passengers as extra lookouts.

“The skipper cleared the inner 3 knot and 5 knot speed zones of the harbour, and then brought the vessel onto the plane at about 15 knots. As the vessel cleared one of the navigational beacons, he could make out the light of the next one through the fog.

As the skipper headed the vessel toward the second beacon, he heard the outboard starting to ground. The skipper immediately reduced the revolutions to neutral and the vessel slowly grounded, listed over and came to rest on a mud bank.

The skipper jumped overboard to try to push the vessel off the mud bank, but sank up to his knees in mud, and could not effectively push. He climbed back on board and the foursome sat waiting for the flood tide. After a few minutes, the skipper was able to reverse the vessel off the bank and continue to the sea farm.

Neither the vessel nor those on board suffered any damage or injuries.

LOOKOUT! POINTS

- The harbour approaches require navigation around various mud banks that are known to dry at low water. The skipper had grounded on a charted shoal that protruded into the middle of a direct line between the first navigation beacon and the second. The shoal had to be navigated around.
- The skipper was navigating by radar alone, and did not use the available GPS function to verify the vessel’s position, course and speed. Had he used the GPS function on a split screen with the radar, he would have been able to see the vessel’s position in relation to both beacons and the general topography of the area.
- The skipper did not know how to manually tune the radar and was not aware that it would not pick up the drying mud banks, despite having recently passed his radar operator certificate.
- Even though he was navigating by radar alone, in pre-dawn darkness, thick fog, and reduced visibility, the skipper opted to operate the vessel on the plane at about 15 knots. It would have been prudent, given the navigational hazards of the area and these conditions, to reduce the vessel to a safe speed.
- Of the three passengers on board, two were not boaties, but the third sea-farm worker was a regular passenger. As soon as the vessel left the marina, that passenger went to sleep in the cabin. It would have been prudent for the skipper to ask that passenger to remain awake and to help keep a lookout until the vessel had navigated safely to open water.
- Before the accident, the company had not identified grounding as a potential hazard facing its water taxi operation, despite the nature of the harbour. The company has since amended its hazard register, added a safe speed to its operating procedures, and adopted a policy of using all available means for watchkeeping.

While this event was a minor grounding, it serves as a wake-up call for the skipper and the company.

Complacency and routinisation are the enemies when operating a regular run such as this one. When conditions change for the worse, help reduce the risk by using all available means to ensure the safe operation of the vessel.

View the full report online at: maritimenz.govt.nz
Two men on a jet boat died after they collided head-on with a personal water craft (PWC) in a 100km/h impact.

The PWC, with two people on board, was correctly on the right-hand side of a well-known recreational river. The pair were taking a short evening ride downstream, and were travelling at about 50km/h as they approached a bend in the river. The way ahead was obscured both by the bend, and by a clump of overhanging willow trees.

Meanwhile, the jet boat’s driver and two passengers had been on a fishing trip along the river, stopping in several places, but without any luck. The driver was navigating on the left side of the river as they travelled upstream.

He had made two U-turns over onto the right side of the river, letting the vessel drift a short way downstream each time, but the wind was gusty on that side, and the trio couldn’t get their fishing lines where they wanted them.

Deciding to continue to other spots, the driver circled the vessel back over to the left side of the river and, while on the plane at about 50km/h, approached the blind bend. The driver saw the PWC straight ahead. He tried to steer to starboard, but only a split second later, the two vessels collided.

The pair on the PWC were crushed by the jet boat and thrown into the water. The three men on the jet boat were tossed forward and high into the air. One man landed back on the jet boat, but the driver and the other passenger were flung into the water.

The man still on the jet boat was able to manoeuvre closer and drag the two PWC riders on board. The PWC driver suffered a fractured leg, cracked elbow, liver damage and significant bruising. His passenger suffered life-threatening head injuries, several fractures, a collapsed lung, and was hospitalised in a coma.

The driver of the jet boat and the other passenger could not be found, despite an extensive search by several vessels.

The following day, the two men’s bodies were found in five metres of water. None of the men on board the jet boat had been wearing a lifejacket.
Above: Two men on a jet boat died when their boat collided with a PWC. The jet boat was on the wrong side of the river.

Above inset: The PWC was correctly being driven on the right-hand side of the river when it collided with a jet boat coming around a bend.

Far left: Despite lifejackets being habitually worn by the driver, he and his companions were carrying lifejackets on board but not wearing them that day.

Left: Signs in the area reminded river users to keep right, both up and down stream, and to give way to downstream traffic.

“None of the men on board the jet boat had been wearing a lifejacket.”

LOOKOUT! POINTS

- The jet boat driver should not have been operating on the left side of the river. He was an experienced operator, who knew the river well. Signs in the area reminded river users to keep right, both up and down stream, and to give way to downstream traffic.

- It is thought that the two men who were killed were knocked unconscious before they drowned. Lifejackets were carried on board the vessel, but were not worn. The driver, in particular, was understood to always wear a lifejacket, and it is not known why he did not on this occasion. Had both men been wearing lifejackets, they would likely have been rescued, and may well have survived.

- The PWC passenger suffered extensive head injuries, including amnesia for three months, short-term memory loss, and learning difficulties. Wearing protective helmets is not standard practice for PWC riders in New Zealand, but is gaining popularity overseas. A helmet would have almost certainly have lessened the injuries suffered in this case.
Whether you’re an experienced sea kayaker or just dipping your paddle in the water for the first time, you need to know the hazards in your area and make sure you and your gear are up to the job.

Let’s start with the gear

Get advice from an experienced kayaker, an instructor, and/or a specialty kayak store before buying your boat. Choose one that’s right for you, your family and the places you’ll be paddling.

A huge range of kayak types are available, including recreational, sit-on-top, sea, fishing, double and specialty kayaks and canoes.

Below is a basic sea kayak and equipment:

Wear a PFD

Wearing a lifejacket or PFD (personal flotation device) is essential when you’re kayaking, as things can go wrong very quickly, even if you’re not going far from shore. There are specialty PFDs available, which are more comfortable, but the essential thing is to make sure it’s the right size for you and that you always wear it.

Carry emergency comms equipment

You’ll need at least two types of emergency communications equipment that will work when wet. Attach them to your PFD, so you can call for help if you end up in the water. PLBs (distress beacons) and VHF radios are highly recommended, and a cellphone in a plastic bag is useful as a back-up. Emergency flares, a whistle, signal mirror and a light are all recommended.

Stay visible

Make sure you can be seen by others on the water. Kayakers have a great view of the world in front of them, but are not easily seen by others out on the water. All your gear should be as visible as possible – your kayak and clothing should be in bright (preferably contrasting) colours. A chopper guard flag and a day glow cap or hat is highly recommended.
Use light at night. Maritime rules require you to carry a torch to prevent collision and wearing a head torch will allow your arms to be free to paddle. Mounting an all-round white light (or a red, green and white sector light) on your rear deck above head-height means you will be visible from all directions. Reflective tape attached to your kayak and paddle will reflect any ambient light.

Dress to get wet

Kayaking is a water sport, so make sure that you’re going to be warm and comfortable if you get wet. Multiple light layers of synthetic or merino clothing will give you more flexibility. In colder weather, a wetsuit, waterproof outer jacket and wetsuit booties are a good idea, along with a warm hat or balaclava. A sunhat with chin tie is useful if it’s warm, along with a cord for glasses/sunglasses too.

Know your own limits and the limits of your kayak

Before you head out

Get experience. Join a local kayak network or club, take a course, and/or paddle with a buddy or a group of experienced kayakers. There’s also safety in numbers, so going out with a group is a great way to gain experience, with a designated group leader to keep an eye on everyone. Double kayaks are also a great way to learn, especially when kids are starting out. Start out in sheltered waters and stick close to shore until you gain experience.

Know the rules of the road on the water.

You need to know which international, national and local navigation bylaws apply to you, including collision prevention rules, rules about the identification of vessels (lights) and lifejacket wearing. Check your local navigation bylaws as they may have specific rules relating to kayaks, especially around lifejacket wearing and display of lights.

Let someone responsible know where you’re going and when you expect to be back. You can use a 2 minute form to record your trip intentions, along with an overdue action time. If you change your plans, let your contact person know, so an unnecessary search doesn’t get set in motion.

Check the weather before you decide to head out. Check the marine weather forecast for wind speed and direction, sea state, any gale warnings, or expected changes in the weather. If you’re new to kayaking or the area, talk to Coastguard or other paddlers about local conditions. Check tide times and a chart for the area you’re in. If in doubt, don’t go out.

While you’re out

Practise in sheltered waters. Make sure you know: how to operate your kayak, including adjusting pedals, so the rudder works correctly; paddle strokes (forward, backward, stop, turning and support strokes); how to operate the emergency communications equipment you carry; how to self-rescue if you capsize and how to rescue another paddler. Practise capsizing in calm water and leaving the cockpit (wet exit). There are several ways of getting back into your kayak on your own, depending on your craft.

If you capsize in open water

Stay with your kayak or canoe. It is more visible than a paddler swimming in the water and will provide more buoyancy than your PFD. Get back on/in your kayak if you can.
There are several ways of getting back onto your kayak, depending on the type of kayak, whether you have a strap or paddle float and your strength. For a sit-on-top kayak, the most common way is to position yourself alongside the kayak, reach across to the other side of the kayak and then with a kick of your legs pull yourself on, so your stomach is over the centre of the kayak, then roll yourself onto your bottom and back into your seat.

Practising capsizing and reboarding in calm conditions is the best way to ensure you will know what to do. Dressing to stay warm if you end up in the water is also a must. If you and your kayak are brightly coloured, you will also be easier to spot in the water. Wearing a lifejacket will significantly increase your chances of survival if you unexpectedly end up in the water. See the LOOKOUT! safety feature “Survive in cold water” in issue 12 for survival tips and techniques.

Keep alert for other vessels. Always be on the lookout for approaching vessels. Never assume an approaching vessel has seen you. Keep clear of shipping lanes, or cross in tight formation by the shortest, most efficient route, checking clear passage. Turn away quickly if a vessel is on a collision course. High visibility and contrasting clothing and a bright hat and chopper flag will help you stay visible during the day, with lighting essential if you’re paddling at night.

Stay safe and have fun. If you’re comfortable out on the water, you’ll enjoy your paddle more. Wear sunblock and a sunhat, warm clothing if needed, stay hydrated and carry food on board.

Other useful info:

Kayaking – Paddling to be seen
A two-page overview of what you need to know about kayak visibility (available on the MNZ website: maritimenz.govt.nz).

Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (KASK)
KASK promotes safety standards, deals with issues of coastal access and protection, organises sea kayak forums around the country, and publishes “A Basic Guide to Safe Sea Kayaking”, “The Sea Canoeist Newsletter” and “The KASK Handbook”.

Kayak safety module – a quick online safety module from Coastguard Boating Education Service (CBES) to help you get acquainted with kayaking basics (available at cbes.org.nz, visit http://learning.cbes.org.nz/)

Sea kayak short course – CBES also offers a three-hour sea kayak course covering sea kayaks, equipment, communication, emergencies, planning, weather, rules, and navigation.

Wearing a lifejacket and carrying ways of communicating on your person will help you stay safe.
A diver was struck by a twin-hulled passenger vessel just as he finished spearing a fish. The diver was about 6 metres from shore and trailing a 20 metre floating line, which was attached to a faded orange dive float with a short orange and white dive flag on top.

He had no warning of the vessel before it ran into him, pushing him below the surface and tumbling him over. The diver’s arm was struck by one propeller and one end of his float line became wrapped around his neck. The other end of the line snagged on one of the vessel’s propeller shafts and he was dragged along under water until the line was cut by a propeller.

When the diver surfaced, he could see the vessel and called out. Hearing the shouts, the skipper reversed the vessel and hauled the diver onto the transom between the engines. Until he heard the call, the skipper had no awareness that there was a diver in the area.

The diver suffered a broken right arm, a dislocated elbow, and a gash requiring 20 stitches. A metal plate was screwed into his shattered arm. This was expected to remain in place for two years.

\textbf{LOOKOUT! POINTS}

- The skipper was alone on the vessel at the time, and said he was motoring into the rising sun, which rendered him “almost blind”. He usually wore sunglasses, but had forgotten them on this occasion.

He was operating closer to shore than normal, because the vessel did not handle the choppy sea state well. There were other vessels in the area, but the skipper could not recall these, or the diver’s float and flag. The skipper was well aware, though, that the area was frequented by divers.

It is the absolute responsibility of skippers to maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing, using all available means.

When he became blinded by sun, the skipper could have stopped the vessel, or altered its course. If he had begun an active search for people in the water, he would likely have seen the diver’s float and flag.

- The vessel was close in to shore in a popular diving area, visibility was impaired, and the water was choppy, but the skipper continued on at 4 or 5 knots. This was not a safe speed given these conditions.

- Since the accident, the skipper has agreed to establish a minimum operating distance from shore, and to install a GPS unit to more accurately monitor his speed and position.

- The diver’s orange and white flag was not approved. In New Zealand, divers should display a blue and white ‘A’ flag (as below).
Twelve students cried out as a catamaran bore down on their stationary sailing cutter.

The students were in a well-known boating area and conditions were excellent. They were on their last day of an outdoor adventure course and had just begun stowing the 10 metre cutter’s oars in preparation for raising the sail.

Looking up, the students saw a 12.9 metre sightseeing catamaran approaching close on their port bow. They started yelling and waving their arms to try to attract its skipper’s attention.

Meanwhile on board the catamaran, the skipper and three guides were on the vessel’s second run for the day, with 14 passengers. The skipper and crew had been variously engaged in conversation about equipment, locating the correct owner of some baggage on board, and spotting wildlife.

Two of the guides had noted the sailing cutter when it was about 500 metres distant, but neither had mentioned it to the skipper, considering it plain to see.

The skipper though, was not aware of the cutter, and did not hear the warning cries of those on board. His first glimpse of the other vessel was as the catamaran drove over it. The skipper was thrown forward onto the wheel, and the bow of the catamaran struck the cutter’s bow, smashing it off and sending the 8 metre mast crashing astern. The catamaran’s starboard pontoon then struck the side of the cutter about 2 metres aft of the bow.

No one on board the catamaran was injured, but two people on board the cutter suffered severe bruising and several others were treated for minor injuries.

The catamaran’s bow was damaged, but no one on board was injured.
The catamaran skipper pleaded guilty to failing to keep a proper lookout, and was convicted and ordered to pay reparations. As the sole crew member on board the vessel, it was his responsibility to maintain an effective lookout by sight, sound and all other available means.

“When the vessel did not alter its track, some students started clambering to the vessel’s stern, and others jumped overboard.”

Above: The cutter was initially thought to be beyond repair, but was eventually back on the water after extensive repairs.
Above left: The students ended up in the water after the catamaran drove over the cutter. Some students jumped prior to impact.
Left: The cutter was extensively damaged in the collision.
Photos: Alison Kelso
A four-year-old boy and his mother jumped into the sea to escape a fireball on board their fibreglass recreational boat.

The woman and her husband had been on board the 6 metre vessel with their son and two other adults. The woman’s husband was skippering the vessel, and as the group began to get hungry, he anchored in a bay close to shore and set up a single gas burner.

The skipper took care to set the stove up on a solid platform, at the stern of the vessel, well away from the cabin area, lit the burner and started to shallow fry some pre-cooked chips. After about 15 minutes the stove exploded into flame without warning, seriously burning the skipper, and his wife and son.

The skipper was knocked into the sea by the explosion, and his wife and child both immediately threw themselves overboard. The skipper quickly climbed back on board and threw the still-burning gas stove overboard, before helping to retrieve his wife and son.

The skipper suffered burns to his neck, legs, arms and hands. His wife was burned on the thighs and left arm, and his son suffered burns to his arm and face.

The vessel was motored to shore and the trio were taken to hospital by ambulance.

LOOKOUT!POINTS

- The gas burner was thrown into the sea, so could not be examined. However, it was a type that did not have an automatic shut-off following a flame out.

The New Zealand Fire Service investigation concluded it was most likely that the flame had gone out at some time during the cooking, with the raw, unburnt gas continuing to escape into the air, creating an explosive mixture that needed only an ignition source. The vapour was most likely ignited by the stove’s own piezo igniter.

- This stove was operated correctly at the stern of the vessel on a steady platform and in an open space. Even so, this accident serves to warn of the potential dangers associated with portable, canister-fed burners.

These come with precise instructions and must be set up correctly. In particular, avoid inverting the trivet, and using large diameter cooking pans. This can direct heat from the burner down onto the gas canister and cause a BLEVE (boiling liquid expanding vapour explosion). Check frequently to ensure the flame has not blown out – this is most likely to happen when the temperature dial is on its lowest setting.

Report maritime accidents online

www.maritimenz.govt.nz/report-online

New Zealand Government
Despite conditions described by a witness as ‘heinous’ and ‘atrocious’, a jet boat driver loaded up 17 passengers and took to the water for an adventure ride.

The driver had about three years’ experience in the role, and typically made the same adventure jet boat trip several times a day. It involved leaving a large lake’s main wharf and travelling upriver into a well-known jet boating river, with many spins and thrills along the way.

After reaching a wide part of the river, the vessels would turn around and return the way they had come. The whole journey typically took about one hour. Passengers were seated in rows, wearing lifejackets, in the open-topped vessel, with the driver stationed at the forward port side.

In the early afternoon, the jet boat driver loaded the 17 passengers, including five children, and set out on the journey. Gale force winds to 60 km/h had been forecast, and the weather was such that no other commercial vessels in the area were operating. One witness said “the conditions were heinous – they were absolutely atrocious”. Another witness simply said “it was screaming in the bay”.

Despite the conditions, the jet boat driver continued with the trip. On his return journey, the wave heights in the bay were up to about four metres. As he rounded the tip of the more sheltered area to return to the bay, the vessel rode over a large wave, sank into its hollow, and slammed into a following wave, about 1.5 metres below the crest.

The wave passed completely over the vessel, swamping everything and everyone within it. Water entered the engine air intakes, which were about head height toward the stern. Within moments, one engine suddenly stopped.

The driver radioed to another company vessel that was loading up passengers in preparation for the next scheduled trip, and reported the engine failure. The driver was then able to operate the vessel using its remaining engine, and returned the passengers to the marina.

Despite being aware of the event, the other driver set off on the next trip of the day.

The company’s safe operating plan stated that commercial trips would not be undertaken in high winds, waves or other conditions that would compromise safety, and that trips would be altered or cancelled.

The driver also had the option to start the trip from a marina in the more sheltered area outside the first bay. Despite the conditions being such that no other company was operating, the driver did not take this opportunity.

It is estimated that the vessel’s bilge pumps took more than two tonnes of water off the vessel in the first five minutes – more than enough to sink the vessel, which had been in an area of deep water.

Had the vessel sunk, the passengers would have been spilled into the water, some way from the marina, in conditions that would have put any rescue vessels at risk. A successful rescue would have been by no means certain.

The five children on the jet boat wore buoyancy aids, which were not fitted with crotch straps as required by law. Children can slide out of lifejackets without crotch straps, and in this situation would have been at very real risk of drowning.

The company was convicted and fined as a result of this event.
A party-goer ended a work function with serious lacerations to the leg after being mauled by the propeller of an inflatable.

The victim and about 30 other colleagues had taken an excursion to a nearby island as passengers on a 19.7 metre motor vessel. The vessel was anchored, and the passengers were transferred in groups to the island on a 4.4 metre inflatable, powered by a 40 horse power outboard motor.

The group were drinking alcohol on the beach and enjoying the day, when two male passengers decided to swim back out to the anchored vessel. The larger vessel’s skipper was still operating the inflatable, and allowed them to hold on to it and be dragged out to the motor vessel for a more fun-filled ride. Both passengers clung to the starboard, forward section of the inflatable, and the skipper headed out to the vessel at anchor. Just before reaching it, a wave struck the inflatable, causing one of the men to let go. The inflatable rode over his body.

The skipper immediately turned off the motor, but the propeller had already cut into the victim’s leg.

Not initially realising the seriousness of his injuries, the victim swam on to the larger vessel. Once on board, his injuries became apparent and he was given first aid and transferred to hospital.
Four tonnes of fish were flung free from bins inside a fishing vessel’s hold, causing a 70 degree list to starboard in breaking waves.

The fishing vessel with three crew and one passenger had been sheltering in a bay after a day’s fishing with about 10 tonne of fish on board. A storm warning had predicted 50 knot winds and a 5 metre swell. The bay was the only sheltered area for some distance, and four other vessels had anchored there for the night.

The skipper retired to bed in the early evening, leaving the radar, GPS and VHF radios on, and the two crew took turns at anchor watch during the evening. The wind peaked at about 10pm.

By midnight it had died away and the skipper was back in the wheelhouse. The dropping wind allowed the prevailing swells to bend around a rocky outcrop and break into the bay.

As the sheltering vessels began to be hit by these breaking waves, the skipper started the main engine, just in case it was needed. All the while the vessel was taking waves on its port side.

Eventually this heeled the vessel so much that about four tonne of its fish cargo was flung across the hold, creating a severe list to starboard. Sea water now started to enter the starboard fuel tank vent, and a cabin window, which were both almost two metres above the deck.

During the early hours of the morning, the skipper decided the vessel was safer out of the bay, even while listing. The other vessels in the area were also preparing to leave. As the vessel was clearing the reefs at the entrance to the bay, the main engine failed, probably because of water-fouled fuel from the tanks, or a lack of oil reading from the engine sensors.

The crew dropped anchor and abandoned ship into the liferaft. They were immediately rescued by one of the other departing vessels.

Later that day the crew returned to the vessel and found it riding at anchor, still with a large list. It was towed to a larger bay for temporary repairs, and then steamed back to port.

“Four tonnes of fish were flung free from bins inside a fishing vessel’s hold”
Look out for our new lifejacket campaign

MNZ’s new television commercial, a key part of our safe boating education strategy, went to air on 4 December. One of MNZ’s roles is to promote and encourage recreational boaties to practise safe boating. The television commercial and print and online campaign form part of the wider strategy, which is to reduce the number of accidents and deaths per year by changing the behaviour of boaties in carrying and wearing lifejackets.

This summer’s advertising campaign takes a different approach to that of previous years, following research showing that — while boaties are aware of the safety measures they need to take — many still fail to put on lifejackets. The campaign focuses on the importance of the skipper’s role in taking responsibility and ensuring that everyone onboard wears a lifejacket.

It uses a light, humorous touch to make its point, with the key message being: “If you’re not onboard with lifejackets...you’re not onboard. Don’t be a clown. Wear a lifejacket.”

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