SKIPPER ASLEEP AT WHEEL

BUOYS AND BEACONS → KNOW THE SIGNPOSTS
Skipper asleep at wheel as trawler heads ashore
A lucky escape for two fishermen when their vessel grounded

Vessel slams into rock
A man was killed and another seriously injured when their boat hit a rocky point

No help at hand for jet boat crash
Three men thrown into a river had no first aid and no way to call for help

Legs caught in unguarded propeller
A tourist suffered serious injuries on a trip out to swim with dolphins

Keep clear of safety zones
A 1,500 tonne vessel came within 300 metres of a production platform

Crew abandons ship in mystery sinking
A fishing vessel foundered in clear conditions while travelling to fishing grounds

Vessels collide in sheltered waters
A commercial vessel collided with a yacht travelling on a reciprocal course

Safety feature: Know your buoys and beacons

Introduction
Guest editorial: Seamanship at the heart of safety
News & updates: Engage with us online
Kia ora and welcome to the June issue of LOOKOUT!

The stories in this issue of LOOKOUT! have a distinctly commercial flavour, which seems timely given the number of tragic commercial accidents that have occurred in New Zealand waters and on New Zealand wharves so far this year.

Many of those involved in these recent accidents were experienced seafarers, some of whom had, in the past, taken part in the rescue of others. These accidents have shown that safety must be top of mind at all times for all those on or near the water, no matter how experienced they are.

The guest editorial by Steve Hainstock, Tasman District Harbourmaster, discusses the notion of seamanship as it applies to recreational and inshore commercial boating. Steve also talks about the value of “what if” thinking as a way of avoiding accidents and near misses – a mindset that means you’re more likely to be prepared for things when they go wrong and have contingency plans ready to put into action.

The crew in the cover story were unprepared for any emergency, with the skipper asleep at the wheel. Although it was a serious accident, fortunately no one was injured.

In the second story, a vessel hit a rocky point at speed at night, killing the skipper and seriously injuring his companion. Both on board the recreational boat were experienced commercial skippers who had spent the night drinking and socialising. The skipper was operating the boat at night, with poor visibility at high speed while intoxicated – a combination that proved lethal.

The story “No help at hand for jet boat crash” also looks at the issue of preparedness, after three recreational boaties were injured in an isolated area with no first aid kit and no way to call for help.

Eliminating any reasonably foreseeable hazards and being prepared for an emergency will result in safer seas, rivers and lakes for all.

In the story “Crew abandons ship in mystery sinking” the crew were well prepared, monitored the situation, abandoned ship to their liferaft (after realising their vessel was sinking) and set off their emergency beacon. They were picked up within an hour.

Unfortunately, it took a serious accident before steps were taken to eliminate the hazard from propellers in the story “Legs caught in unguarded propeller”.

This issue’s safety feature gives an overview of buoys and beacons – the signposts of the sea. To navigate safely, you need to be able to recognise, understand and follow these marks.

We’ve been running safety features in LOOKOUT! for a couple of years now and have covered a broad range of topics. If there’s anything you’d like to see featured, drop a line to publications@maritimenz.govt.nz.

Please pass this LOOKOUT! on to friends, family or crew and encourage them to sign up to receive print or email copies.

Keith Manch
Director of Maritime New Zealand
I was a late starter in boating by Kiwi standards, beginning with Sea Scouts as a twelve-year-old, then with fishing and waterskiing at age fifteen when my Dad bought a Marlborough Dart runabout. Some basic boating skills were learned the hard way, but many mishaps were avoided by heeding advice freely given by more experienced boaties, and by observing the actions and attitudes of others on the water. Some set a good example, others less so.

We lost the family runabout when a spark from the radio ignited petrol fumes. In hindsight, stowing the fire-extinguisher under a foam seat, and the lifejackets where they could be soaked in petrol when the fuel expanded in the sun, weren’t the brightest ideas. As I say, some lessons are learned the hard way.

To gain experience and sea time, I crewed on various potting, long-lining and trawling commercial fishing vessels out of Milford Sound and Port Chalmers.

Many of the guys I worked with came from fishing families, and the job was ‘in the blood’. I noticed a distinct contrast between how safe I felt on some boats compared with others, and it largely came down to the attitude and behaviour of the skipper, which extended to the condition of the vessel.

None broke down or suffered any other incident while I was aboard, all were handled with skill, all the skippers were very experienced. Nevertheless, a range of overall ‘seamanship’ was evident.

Between the days of the runabout and my first ‘real’ job of commercial diving, I undertook postgraduate study in science. My grandfather had been a traffic cop, so I was used to a rules-based approach to life.

It’s no surprise, then, that I attempted to rationalise ‘seamanship’ when I came to prepare for my first skippers’ ticket, because it wasn’t ‘in my blood’.

‘Seamanship’ is a rather hazy term. Ask any boatie or professional mariner what it means, and you’ll get a different answer every time. Even the dictionaries vary. The Oxford Dictionary definition leans towards ship and boat-handling skills. Collins Dictionary is broader, including skill and knowledge in navigation, maintenance and operation of a vessel. Noah Webster described seamanship as the skill of a good seaman, applicable to officers and men.
My personal take on seamanship is both broader and simpler. I think good seamanship is making sound decisions in relation to a vessel with regard to the circumstances, best practice and any regulations, and the skill to follow those decisions through with actions that reflect creditably on the seafarer.

It occurred to me that the law should, in intent at least, be a distillation of the principles of seamanship. I started with reading the Maritime Transport Act, then the maritime rules (all of them – heaven help me). Then I read every relevant book I could lay my hands on.

I did my first ticket by workbook and distance learning, and the subsequent ones by traditional courses. On every course I learned important information or got advice that I would otherwise have been unaware of.

The Restricted Radar Observer course, in particular, taught me how little I really knew about using radar – after several years of thinking I had it nailed. The real value of structured training is that ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’ until your knowledge gaps are made clear to you. It’s better that this happens to you in a classroom than at sea.

After a few years skippering tourist launches and water taxis and getting back into recreational boating, like most skippers I still made a few dubious decisions, but fortunately no real harm was done.

“It was pointed out to me by an employer that most incidents and near-misses could be avoided by a bit of ‘what if?’ thinking by the skipper before situations developed …”

It was pointed out to me by an employer that most incidents and near-misses could be avoided by a bit of ‘what if?’ thinking by the skipper before situations developed, and I started to apply that to my own thinking, making it a habit. As I cruised around, I would often think “where’s the nearest beaching point if I’m holed?” “what if the steering seized right now?” “can I anchor before I’m blown into a lee shore if the engine stops?” “what if that un-flagged boat has a diver between them and the shore?” and so on.

Developing my seamanship still has a long way to go and we should never stop learning and seeking to improve ourselves, but I think at least I now have the attitude part of it right.

In my current role as Tasman District Harbormaster, I am pleased to be able to make a hands-on contribution to navigational safety. A stretch of coast in my patch seasonally experiences some of the highest concentrations of recreational boating and water taxi traffic in the country and, unfortunately, I regularly witness or hear about examples of poor seamanship.

Despite the best efforts of MNZ, harbormasters and Coastguard units around the country, many recreational boaters in particular have scant knowledge of, or regard for, the principles of good seamanship. It appears that there is no political appetite to require recreational boats to carry the range of equipment required of commercial vessels, even basics such as charts – nor for boatsies to undertake any formal training or licencing.

Boaties need to realise that with the privilege of the relatively unregulated activity of boating (compared with, for example, driving a car) comes a responsibility. That responsibility can best be summed up as the expectation to exhibit ‘good seamanship’.

At the least, all boaties should make the effort to read and understand Maritime Rule Parts 22 (Collision Prevention) and 91 (Navigation Safety), and any navigation safety bylaws for the region they are boating in, and obey these rules.

My basic advice is to carry and use the largest scale up to date chart of the area you are boating in. If you are new to an area, seek advice from locals, especially about selecting anchorages and anchoring tackle and techniques. If you are new to a type of boating, join a suitable club to benefit from the experience of other members. And, as you don’t know what you don’t know, consider taking a relevant boating education course to help identify any knowledge gaps.

If you’re a commercial skipper, you’ll tend to have plenty of experience and a high level of vessel handling skills, but think about whether it’s time you refreshed your understanding of the maritime rules. This is all part of good seamanship in my opinion, and should be as routine as doing your regular safety drills.

You should also consider that your actions not only reflect on the reputation of your company, but that others consider you a role model. Often when I stop a boatie for taking a risky route, or speeding where it is not appropriate, their excuse is that they saw the commercial guys doing it.

Being professional in your demeanour and actions is all part of good seamanship. And if your seaman-like actions result in another boatie avoiding an unsafe situation by following your example, that may even save a life.

POSTSCRIPT

As I write this, I have been following the news coverage of the loss of FV **K-Cee** in Fiordland and, most likely, her two crew. One of them was a mate of mine when we both worked from Milford Sound about a decade ago, the other was more of an acquaintance, his voice easier to recall from our radio conversations than his face.

Both were respected practitioners in their chosen field – rock lobster fishing in Fiordland. This is a tough job – a high degree of skill is required to make a go of extracting the crays from the rocks. The vessel was well found and equipped, the skipper experienced, and still something has clearly gone very wrong.

I don’t presume to speculate on what that was. All those who put to sea know that she is unforgiving. I would have no hesitation in describing both of the men aboard **K-Cee** as having a high degree of ‘seamanship’ in the context of inshore fishing in Fiordland.

Skill, experience and the right equipment tip the odds in your favour, but ticking all those boxes still doesn’t guarantee you’ll come home.

Please take care out there.

Steve Hainstock
Tasman District Harbormaster
The trawler grounded at night when the skipper fell asleep at the wheel, after checking the vessel’s position two nautical miles from the beach.
A commercial fishing trawler grounded because its skipper fell asleep at the wheel.

The skipper and crewman, both experienced fishermen, had been fishing for two days and had anchored in a local bay for both nights. When they set off for the fishing grounds in the early morning of their third day out, the skipper had developed toothache and did not sleep well when relieved at the helm.

At about 8pm, at the end of the day’s fishing, the 18 metre vessel steamed north, intending to anchor 200 metres off a beach in 15 metres of water.

The skipper was navigating with the vessel’s GPS, depth sounder and radar. Because he didn’t feel particularly tired, he had the alarm on the depth sounder set on low volume and didn’t activate the watch alarm on the bridge. He wasn’t sure how to operate the GPS alarm and left it off.

The skipper checked the vessel’s position at two nautical miles from the beach and, at some stage after this, he fell asleep.

The crewman was on deck preparing to anchor when he became aware of breakers ahead. He alerted the skipper, who put the vessel into reverse, but a stabiliser arm struck the sea bed, causing the trawler to turn beam-on to the seas and ground on the shore.

The skipper alerted Maritime Radio and the company manager by cellphone. The men then took shelter in the wheelhouse until early morning, when they disembarked onto the beach and sought refuge in a local farmhouse.

Over the following days, fuel was removed from the vessel and it was eventually towed clear of the beach and back to port.

LOOKOUT POINTS

- This was a serious accident that could have had more serious consequences, and it highlights the dangers associated with fatigue on fishing vessels.

- The vessel grounded because the skipper fell asleep. As a consequence, he failed in his responsibility to keep a proper lookout by sight and hearing, as well as by all available means, while the vessel was underway.

- The skipper should have ensured before taking the helm that he was not so tired that there was a possibility he could fall asleep. He should also have ensured the watch alarm was on and that the alarm on the depth sounder was loud enough to wake him.

- The skipper said he was only three days into a five- or six-day trip and didn’t consider himself unduly tired. However, he had worked for 18 to 19 hours for each of the previous three days.

- It is also possible that suffering from toothache affected his fatigue level and that he had failed to appreciate its impact.

- The skipper and crewman were share fishermen and received a percentage of any catch. The skipper said commercial pressure required them to work long hours. He also commented that the manning level was kept to two to provide them with a reasonable catch percentage.

- To assist the crew in managing the hazards associated with fatigue, the vessel’s managers had fatigue management documents on board, some of which were posted at the helm position. They had also ensured that the crew had attended a FishSAFE meeting, which included fatigue management.

Read our LOOKOUT! safety feature on fatigue, issue 21 June 2011, or visit our website to view and order our free fatigue safety resources.
The skipper was killed and his passenger seriously injured when the boat collided at speed with a rocky point at night.

Two commercial skippers were out on an evening trip when their recreational vessel collided at speed with a rocky point. One man was killed and the other was seriously injured.

The pair had set out in the 5.8 metre aluminium vessel with a 24-pack of beer to visit friends on other vessels dotted about a sound. They spent the evening visiting vessels, stopping to drink a few cans with friends on each. They were last seen at about midnight as they left the last vessel and headed off on the 16 nautical mile trip back through the sound.

The passenger later said the skipper liked to go fast, and the vessel was making about 35 to 40 knots.

The following morning a Department of Conservation (DOC) vessel spotted what appeared to be a drifting vessel in the distance. Pulling up alongside, the DOC crew saw the skipper lying dead in the vessel and the passenger with significant head injuries.

Both men were airlifted to hospital by helicopter. The skipper had suffered fatal frontal impact injuries, and the passenger suffered multiple fractures to the face and skull, blood clots, and significant bruising.

Impact marks on a rocky point midway on the vessel’s return journey suggest that the vessel struck this point at speed, rather than rounding it as intended. The vessel’s GPS track had also stopped at this point.

The vessel’s bow was caved in from the impact, and its plastic steering wheel had broken off completely and was lying near the skipper. The handrail on the passenger’s side was bent, probably when the passenger was flung forward into it.
Despite both men being very experienced skippers, neither was able to maintain an effective lookout and situational awareness.

The skipper was found to have a blood alcohol level beyond the legal limit for driving a car — an amount linked to a clear deterioration of reaction time and control, slurred speech, poor coordination and slow thinking.

These effects would have been likely to contribute to the skipper’s impaired decision-making on the return journey.

Boaties should get to know their equipment, and make it work for them. The vessel’s GPS was set at the highest brilliance setting. It is possible this brightness contributed to the men’s poor night vision. This setting can be easily altered.

The skipper was not using the GPS’ waypoint track navigation function, which allows waypoints to be manually set, and a course plotted between the two. With this function, if the vessel strays off track, a pre-set alarm sounds.

View the full report online at: maritimenz.govt.nz
Know your buoys and beacons

Buoys and beacons are the signposts of the sea. To navigate safely, you need to be able to recognise, understand and follow these marks.

The system uses marks that have a variety of colours, shapes and light characteristics arranged in simple ways to show the side to pass a buoy or beacon on, when heading in a given direction. Buoys and beacons are shown on charts.

A buoy is a floating mark that is secured to the seabed by mooring chains and a beacon is a mark that is permanently fixed to the seabed. Many unlit buoys and beacons have reflective strips to make them more visible at night.

Within the maritime buoyage system there are six types of mark:

1. Lateral marks
2. Cardinal marks
3. Isolated danger marks
4. Safe water marks
5. Special marks
6. Other marks (includes sector lights, leading lines etc).

**LATERAL MARKS**

In New Zealand, lateral marks use red and green colours during the day and at night to define port and starboard sides of the channels, respectively. Secondary channel marks are sometimes used to show where a channel divides, and to indicate the preferred channel or primary route.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Port hand marks</th>
<th>Starboard hand marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be passed on the port (left) hand when travelling with the buoyage direction.</td>
<td>To be passed on the starboard (right) hand when travelling with the buoyage direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colour</strong> red</td>
<td><strong>Colour</strong> green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shape</strong> cylindrical (can), pillar or spar</td>
<td><strong>Shape</strong> conical, pillar or spar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top mark (if any) single red cylinder (can)</td>
<td>Top mark (if any) single green cone, point upward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preferred channel to starboard marks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Red with one broad green horizontal band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Cylindrical (can), pillar or spar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top mark (if any)</td>
<td>Single red can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preferred channel to port marks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Green with one broad red horizontal band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Cylindrical (can), pillar or spar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top mark (if any)</td>
<td>Single green cone, point upward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General rules for lateral marks**

**Numbers**

If marks at the sides of a channel are numbered, the numbering follows the “conventional direction of buoyage”. The convention is port = even (2, 4, 6 etc), starboard = odd (1, 3, 5 etc) numbered from seaward.

**Lights**

If a lateral mark is lit by a light, then a red light is used on port and preferred channel to starboard marks, and a green light is used on starboard and preferred channel to port marks. Preferred channel marks have a distinctive light pattern, for example FI (2 + 1).
CARDINAL MARKS

A cardinal mark shows that the deepest water in the area lies to the named side of the mark, or shows the safe side on which to pass a danger, or draws attention to a feature in a channel (such as a bend, a junction, where a channel divides, or the end of a shoal).

Cardinal marks are normally pillar or spar shape. They are always painted in yellow and black horizontal bands and their distinctive double cone top marks are always black. The direction of the top mark cones, the position of the yellow and black bands, and the light (when fitted) character or rhythm identify the type of cardinal mark.

North cardinal mark
- Colour: black above yellow
- Shape: pillar or spar
- Top mark: two black cones, one above the other, points upward

East cardinal mark
- Colour: black with a single broad horizontal yellow band
- Shape: pillar or spar
- Top mark: two black cones, one above the other, base to base

South cardinal mark
- Colour: yellow above black
- Shape: pillar or spar
- Top mark: two black cones, one above the other, points downward

West cardinal mark
- Colour: yellow with a single broad black horizontal band
- Shape: pillar or spar
- Top mark: two black cones, one above the other, point to point

LIGHTS

If the cardinal mark is lit by a light, then a white light is used with a specific character or rhythm for each type of cardinal mark.

- **north**: continuous ‘very quick’ or ‘quick’ flashing
- **east**: three ‘very quick’ or ‘quick’ flashes, followed by darkness
- **south**: six ‘very quick’ or ‘quick’ flashes, followed immediately by a long flash, then darkness
- **east**: nine ‘very quick’ or ‘quick’ flashes, followed by darkness.

Very quick (VQ) flashing is when a light flashes at a rate of 120 or 100 flashes per minute, quick (Q) flashing is when a light flashes at either 60 or 50 flashes per minute.

The long flash (L.Fl) is a light appearance of not less than two seconds and ensures that three or nine very quick or quick flashes cannot be mistaken for six.

To help remember the character of the flash used on a cardinal mark, think of a clock face and the position of three (east), six (south) and nine (west).

Two other marks also use white lights: the isolated danger mark and the safe water mark. Each has a distinctive light rhythm that can’t be confused with the very quick or quick flashing light of the cardinal marks.

CONTINUED PAGE 12
**SAFETY FEATURE CONTINUED**

**ISOLATED DANGER MARKS**

Isolated danger marks are placed on, or near to a small area of danger that has navigable water all around it. They have distinctive double black spherical top marks, a black base with red band, and when fitted, a white light.

**SAFE WATER MARKS**

Safe water marks identify an area that has navigable water all around it but do not mark a danger. These marks can be used as mid-channel or landfall marks. They can be pillar or spar with a single red spherical top mark and vertical stripes (red and white). If they have a light, it will be white.

**SPECIAL MARKS**

Special marks indicate a special area or feature, which can be identified on a chart or another nautical document. They are yellow and may carry a yellow ‘X’ top mark, and if they have a light, it will be yellow.

**OTHER MARKS**

New dangers – newly discovered hazards that are not yet indicated in nautical documents. These include naturally occurring obstructions such as sandbanks or rocks, or introduced dangers such as wrecks. New dangers are marked with the appropriate lateral, cardinal, isolated danger mark or an emergency wreck marking buoy (blue and yellow vertical stripes).

Waterski access lanes – a lane where skiers and similar water users may exceed the 5 knot speed limit while within 200 metres of shore. Each sign of the lane is marked on the shore, with transit posts of orange and black horizontal bands, along with noticeboards to warn bathers. Orange and black buoys may be placed in the water.

Surfing lanes – each side of the lane is marked with transit posts of bright orange (or yellow) and royal blue, along with noticeboards to warn bathers.

Reserved areas – an area reserved by a regional council for the exclusive use of specified vessels. Special events may take place in these areas and special rules may apply. Areas may be marked with floating or fixed markers coloured with horizontal red and blue bands. Noticeboards may be used to warn bathers or other water users of any special rules that apply.

Other marks also include leading lines, sector lights, lighthouses, beacons, major floating aids and auxiliary marks.

**NEW ZEALAND BUOYAGE SYSTEM**

- military exercise zones
- cables or pipelines
- recreation zones
- marine farms.

**Sources:** New Zealand’s System of Buoys and Beacons, Maritime New Zealand, Safety in Small Craft, Mike Scanlan.

View the “Buoys & beacons” clip on MNZ’s Boat Safety in NZ channel on YouTube: youtube.com/user/boatsafetyinnz

For more on buoys and beacons, order our free publication New Zealand’s System of Buoys and Beacons by emailing publications@maritimenz.govt.nz

(This is being updated and reprinted, so there may be a small delay for orders).
All three men on board were thrown into the river when the jet boat they were travelling in hit a rock at speed.

No help at hand for jet boat crash

Three men were thrown into a river when a jet boat travelling at speed hit a submerged rock. One of the men was thought to have died at the scene and received limited first aid attention. He later regained consciousness after suffering serious injuries, but his survival was uncertain after being hospitalised, due to the extent of his injuries.

The boat’s owner and driver, who had travelled on the river many times, was transporting the three men on a Christmas work trip in convoy with another jet boat. Everyone drank beer during the day, with the driver of the jet boat that crashed consuming six stubbies.

On their return journey, one of the jet boats struck a rock while travelling at about 50 kilometres an hour.

The water was slow, only about knee deep, with no ripples, and the rock wasn’t visible at the surface. The driver was unharmed, but all three passengers were thrown from the boat into the water.

The driver dragged the men out of the water onto the riverbank. Meanwhile, the other jet boat went downstream to raise the alarm at a farmhouse. The rescue helicopter and paramedics eventually arrived at the remote location.

The unconscious man woke up at the scene, but had significant head injuries and a broken neck. He spent weeks in intensive care and needed long-term medical treatment. The other two men suffered serious, though not life-threatening, injuries.

Damage to the bottom of the jet boat.
A tourist suffered serious injuries and was permanently impaired when her legs got caught in a boat’s propellers as she entered the water to swim with dolphins. The woman was with a party enjoying a dolphin-swimming charter trip aboard a 12 metre catamaran.

The guide gave a detailed safety briefing about the trip and explained the procedure for getting in and out of the water, warning the swimmers about avoiding two propellers just below the surface at the rear of the boat.

When the skipper located a pod of dolphins, he would position the boat about 250 metres ahead of it, put the vessel into neutral and then sound a horn to signal to the guide that it was now safe to enter the water. After their swim, the passengers would climb up a ladder in the centre of the stern and sit on the rear step as the skipper manoeuvred the vessel ahead of the dolphins, stopping about 300 metres in front of the pod. He would then put the engines into neutral and sound the horn.

Legs caught in unguarded propeller

The tourist was seriously injured when her legs became caught in the unguarded propeller.
On this day, four of the six passengers were fitted with wetsuits and booties so they could get into the water with the dolphins. The four passengers moved to the step at the rear of the vessel. The guide removed a gate and directed them to sit on the step leading to a duck board across the stern, and to then ease into the water to avoid scaring the dolphins.

As the woman entered the water, a propeller, still turning, hit her legs. She was knocked over to the left and, when she resurfaced, realised she had been seriously injured.

The guide jumped into the water to help hold the woman up, while a knife was used to cut her free of the propeller. The woman was then lifted on board and first aid administered, while the vessel rushed to meet an ambulance at the nearest access point.

The woman was airlifted to hospital for emergency surgery. For a time, her survival was uncertain. It wasn’t clear whether her leg could be saved or whether she would walk again, and although she did recover, she has needed long-term medical treatment and rehabilitation. The impact on her active lifestyle and career is permanent.

**LOOKOUT! POINTS**

- There was no guarding around the vessel’s propellers, which were located immediately below the point where people entered the water.
  
  Apart from the guide warning them not to, there was nothing to prevent a passenger sitting on the rear step from slipping into the water while the vessel was moving and the propellers were turning.

- Despite the very real risk of people coming into contact with the propellers, this was not listed as a possible hazard on the vessel’s hazard register. No action was taken to prevent it occurring, apart from the guide’s safety briefing and the skipper waiting after shifting the engines into neutral before signalling that it was safe to enter the water.

The owners of the business had engaged a reputable company to review the vessel’s safety systems. They recognised that the propellers were a hazard, but assumed the previous owner’s safety measures would be sufficient. These measures included leaving an interval of five seconds between placing the boat into neutral and sounding the horn to signal that it was safe to enter the water.

- The skipper had a responsibility to keep his crew and passengers safe from harm, and should have identified the risk of putting people into the water beside two large operating propellers. He should have raised the issue with his employer and asked for it to be fixed.

- Since the accident, new safeguards have been put in place, including fitting large drop-down guards over the propellers. Other possible options to reduce the risk to passengers were to replace the surface drive system with a safer system like jets, or creating an area forward of the stern for people to get into and out of the water safely, away from the propellers.

- As well as being convicted and fined as a result of this event, the company had to pay substantial reparations for the woman’s loss of livelihood and quality of life.
Sixty metres of vessel weighing 1,500 tonnes steamed through the safety zone of a gas production platform last year coming as close as 300 metres.

Several platform crew saw the vessel approaching during the early afternoon, but were initially not concerned as they mistook it for their own support vessel bringing in a delivery.

The vessel continued its approach, and as it eventually steamed straight past the platform, crew realised it was not their vessel.

The crew contacted the vessel, and accused the master of having entered the charted 500m safety exclusion zone around the platform. The vessel tried to deny the breach, but positional plotting later showed it had come 203 metres inside the zone.

At the time, the vessel’s second officer was on the bridge and the master was below. They had both been relieving staff at the time of the close quarters.

LOOKOUT POINTS

- The vessel’s management rightly took this matter very seriously and did not renew the contracts of the master, nor the second officer.
- Breaches of safety zones are extremely dangerous, and carry penalties of significant fines and/or imprisonment. Safety zones are typically set up to protect off-shore installations, and any collision could clearly be cataclysmic.
- Watchkeepers must ensure they are fully aware of any charted safety zones where they are operating.

Safety zones are clearly marked and supported with notes (usually within the chart’s title block). Up-to-date charts are vital.

- A continuous radio watch must be maintained, particularly in the vicinity of safety zones, to ensure that any events, alarms or warnings are heard and can be responded to.

Read Guidance Notice – Issue 20 “Fishing vessels and safety zones near offshore installations.”

“Search called off for missing crew…”

Don’t add to the stats! Plan for emergencies.

- Practise safety drills
- Plan for weather
- Do radio skeds
- Maintain safety equipment

For more info go to
maritimenz.govt.nz
newzealand.govt.nz
A steel-hulled fishing vessel foundered in clear conditions while travelling to fishing grounds.

The 18 metre vessel left port in the early hours of the morning, with the skipper/owner and two crew on board. After clearing the harbour, the skipper went to bed, leaving one crew member on watch. The second crew member took over the watch three hours later.

When the skipper got up at about 7am, he noticed water in the engine room. For the next three hours, the crew tried to remove the water from the vessel, using onboard pumps. However, the water was coming in faster than they could pump it out and, finally, they were forced to abandon the vessel.

The men got in their liferaft and activated their distress beacon. The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand picked up the signal and sent broadcasts to vessels in the area and tasked a helicopter to begin a search. A fishing vessel responding to the broadcasts picked up the men within an hour and then took them back to port.

The vessel sank in calm conditions in about 1,200 metres of water. One crew member thought he heard a small bang that sounded like something striking the hull, but wasn’t sure about this. Nobody else heard or saw anything unusual leading up to the discovery of water in the engine room.

The vessel sank in daylight, in calm seas. Investigators were unable to determine what caused the sinking, and it remains a mystery. There were no signs of mechanical or other failure. The vessel was correctly certified and manned, and there were no breaches of regulations. It is considered possible that the vessel had collided with a submerged object, but this could not be substantiated.

The crew responded appropriately to the situation and recognised they would not be able to pump the water out and save the vessel. They did the right thing by abandoning ship before their lives were put at risk, and setting off their distress beacon to call for help. It is not feasible to salvage the boat, as it remains submerged in deep water.

**LOOKOUT POINTS**

- This event shows just how quickly a vessel can be lost in a seemingly manageable situation. All crew members must be trained to be alert for and understand how to deal with any ingress of water. The crew thought they could get rid of the water coming in. After trying various types of pump, it became obvious that they were fighting a losing battle.

- All crew members must be trained and drilled on emergency procedures, such as how to safely abandon ship should the need arise. It is also essential that crew are familiar with life-saving equipment such as distress beacons, liferafts and flares. This knowledge is vital when you are suddenly faced with losing the fight to save your boat and perhaps your life.
A commercial vessel transporting workers to a worksite in sheltered waters collided with a yacht travelling on a reciprocal course, despite reasonable visibility and conditions.

The 8.5 metre catamaran was travelling at about 20 knots, with the wipers operating intermittently to remove windborne spray from the windows. An 8.5 metre yacht was travelling at about 4 knots in the opposing direction. The yacht’s skipper saw the catamaran ahead, travelling well to port of his intended track. He made an alteration to starboard, but was unconcerned because he assessed there was ample safe passing distance on their reciprocal courses.

As the vessels approached each other, the catamaran veered to port and collided with the yacht at a right angle. The yacht’s skipper said he could not see anyone in the wheelhouse as the catamaran bore down on him, and only had time to engage full astern. He was then thrown overboard as the catamaran struck amidships and rode up onto the cabin top.

When the yacht’s skipper surfaced alongside, he saw above him the two outboard engine propellers, still turning, well clear of the surface of the water.

The skipper of a passenger vessel travelling on a parallel course with the catamaran saw the collision and was able to provide assistance.

The catamaran’s skipper came out of the cabin in a confused state and appeared to have no recollection of what had happened. He was taken for medical treatment for a gash caused by his forehead striking the vessel. He was hospitalised for the night and discharged.

“The yacht’s skipper saw the catamaran ahead... but was unconcerned because he assessed there was ample safe passing distance...”

A possible explanation is that the catamaran’s hull may have broached on a wave, causing a sudden lurch to port and knocking the skipper over.

The catamaran was relatively undamaged.
Maritime rules state that if vessels are on a reciprocal course and a risk of collision exists, then each vessel must alter to starboard and pass port to port. Not enough is known about why the catamaran veered towards the yacht in this incident to draw conclusions about steps that might have prevented the accident.

The doctor who evaluated the catamaran’s skipper ruled out a medical event as the cause of the vessel altering course.

If the catamaran’s skipper had been wearing an engine cut-out lanyard, the collision may have been avoided. The lanyard would have cut power to the engine when he fell, and stopped the vessel’s forward momentum. The catamaran’s owner is now requiring all skippers of its vessels to wear an engine cut-out lanyard when operating the vessel on their own, except at close quarters when the vessel is travelling at less than 5 knots.

The catamaran’s skipper was using a GPS plotter, but had not activated the radar. If the radar had been working, the skipper may have been made aware of the yacht’s close proximity and taken action in time to avoid hitting it. All other skippers of the organisation’s commercial vessels have been briefed about the need to use all available navigation aids aboard at all times.

The yacht was a total loss, but was able to be salvaged because its rigging stayed attached to the catamaran.
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There’s also a wealth of information available for commercial and recreational boaties, including safety information, rules, the latest news, searches and rescues underway and how to protect our marine environment.

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Maritime fatalities 2012

From 1 January to 31 March 2012 there were 15 fatalities – 4 in the commercial sector and 11 in the recreational sector.

This compares with 2 commercial and 7 recreational fatalities for the same period in 2011.

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