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## **Yacht and Powerboat Safety at Sea - Preparedness for Non-Coastal Passages - Good Practice**

**Notice to all designers, builders, surveyors, owners, managing agents, skippers, crew and Certifying Authorities of yachts and powerboats including pleasure vessels and small commercial vessels.**

*This notice should be read with:*

*The Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/2771) as amended\*;*

*The Safety of Small Commercial Motor Vessels - A Code of Practice (Yellow)*

*The Safety of Small Commercial Sailing Vessels - A Code of Practice (Blue)*

*The Safety of Small Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure Operating from a Nominated Departure Point (NDP) - A Code of Practice (Red)*

*The Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/1609) as amended\*;*

*The Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats - A Code of Practice (Brown) ;  
and MGN 280.*

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### **Summary**

- Responsibility for making sure that a vessel is maintained to assure safe passage resides with the owner/managing agent while the Master (skipper) is directly responsible for undertaking voyage planning for individual passages.
- Owners, managing agents and skippers should, prior to undertaking a voyage, take all reasonable measures to:
  - understand the history of the vessel for which they are responsible for,
  - assess the suitability of the crew and seaworthiness of the vessel for which they are responsible for,
  - have the condition of the vessel assessed by an experienced marine professional and,
  - in the case of a sailing vessel, ensure that this assessment includes the mast, rigging and sails.
- Owners, managing agents and skippers should ensure that access to long range weather forecasts is achievable prior to and during prolonged non-coastal passages.
- This guidance is non-mandatory for pleasure vessels.
- This MGN is one of six MGNs aimed at providing generic good practice safety advice.



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 For the purposes of this MGN;

“Non-coastal voyage” means any voyage beyond 60 nautical miles from a safe haven.

“Small Commercial Vessel” means a vessel which is certificated under one of the Yellow, Blue, Red or Brown Codes.

“Pleasure Vessel” has the meaning given in the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 1998, as amended<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 Non-coastal voyages (regardless of whether the vessel is a pleasure vessel or a Small Commercial Vessel) present a greater risk because of the extent to which the vessel can be isolated, out of contact, a long way from help, and prone to more extreme weather/ sea conditions.

1.3 Whilst the advice contained within this MGN is primarily addressed to non-coastal voyages, there will be instances where the information provided will be relevant to those undertaking voyages which are within 60 nautical miles from a safe haven; the situations described in this guidance note could occur at any time and at any distance from land. Understanding where a vessel is operating is an important factor which will impact on decision making during emergency scenarios. For example, a vessel crossing the English Channel will have more support options from other vessels and rescue services compared to a vessel operating close to shore but in a remote part of Scotland where rescue services may not be readily available and therefore the advice for a non-coastal passage may apply.

1.4 The advice provided in this MGN should be considered by owners, managing agents and skippers preparing to embark on non-coastal passages but is not exhaustive. The responsibility for making sure that a vessel is prepared for safe passage resides with the owner or managing agent of vessels while the Master (skipper) is directly responsible for undertaking passage planning for individual passages as well as safety on the voyage itself.

1.5 An owner should particularly take into account the guidance listed at Section 4.2 of MGN 599 prior to planning a voyage. In addition, this MGN describes the preparedness guidelines with respect to structure, crew and equipment for pleasure and Small Commercial Vessels on non-coastal voyages.

## 2. Vessel History

2.1 Knowledge of the history of a vessel in terms of its previous use, any incidents such as grounding or collision, or repairs will enable an owner or managing agent to determine the suitability of a vessel for undertaking non-coastal passages. An up to date maintenance log will complement the vessel history and should be kept on board where possible.

## 3. Vessel Seaworthiness and Crew Suitability

3.1 Every vessel and its crew will have limitations as to their ability to undertake a passage, which is further stretched for non-coastal passages. In particular, consideration should be given to the vessel size, vessel hull-form, rigging or propulsion configuration, number of berths, ability to generate/store water, ability to stow food, ability to carry fuel, fitness of individual crew members, number of crew members, experience of crew members, and the purpose for which a vessel has been designed, which are all factors that determine the suitability of a vessel for undertaking non-coastal passages.



#### **4. Inspection of Vessel Structure and Machinery**

4.1 In order to adequately assess the ability of a vessel to undertake a non-coastal passage, owners or managing agents should consider whether an inspection is required to be carried out of the vessel's structure. During this inspection particular regard should be had to the keel/hull interface, the hull shell, keel bolts, rudder stock, machinery, and any other area prone to high stress such as the inner hull matrix. If it is anticipated that a vessel will be offshore for a prolonged period then it is prudent to arrange for an experienced marine professional to assess the vessel's suitability to undertake the passage. If in doubt owners or managing agents should seek professional advice on the condition of the vessel prior to embarking on a non-coastal passage so as to reduce the risk of vessel or equipment failure while at sea and being isolated from immediate rescue.

#### **5. Inspection of Rigging on Sailing Vessels**

5.1 For vessels where the main method of propulsion is through sail power, the loss of the mast, rigging or sails when isolated at sea can present a significant risk so regular inspection of these components prior to and while at sea is essential. A rigging survey conducted by an experienced marine professional prior to a planned prolonged period at sea is a useful means of mitigating the risk of losing sail power at sea.

#### **6. Ability to Access Weather and Sea State Data**

6.1 There are limitations for vessels on non-coastal passages for prolonged periods regarding their ability to access up to date weather and sea state forecasts. A long-range forecast is typically accurate for no more than 5 days ahead so a trans-oceanic passage will require the ability to have regular access to new forecasts. Prior preparation is essential for an owner / managing agent to be able to achieve this.

6.2 There are a number of organisations which offer shore-based routing services which can reduce the pressure on downloading large electronic data files on weather forecasts and synoptic charts at sea but they do not substitute the responsibility of the skipper to plan a passage beforehand and to ensure that the passage is safely undertaken by monitoring progress and changes in prevailing conditions to determine the safest course to take. A satellite phone with a data allowance is a useful provision on board a vessel which is required to be self-sufficient for a period of time.

#### **7. Ability to Safely Abandon a Vessel in an Emergency**

7.1 The requirements for life saving appliances on Small Commercial Vessels are set out in the Code of Practice against which that vessel has been certified.

7.2 It is essential that for any vessel undertaking a non-coastal passage that consideration is given to the ability to safely abandon when a long distance away from immediate rescue. Consideration should be given to the following areas;

- a. the type of liferaft which should be considered against the expected sea conditions such as sea temperature and the need for an insulated floor.
- b. the stowage position of the liferaft such that it can be safely stowed and launched quickly whilst in a variety of conditions and sea states and with consideration to the number of persons on board.
- c. any additional equipment that may be needed in the event of an emergency. A grab bag containing some specific items of equipment such as portable VHF etc, may be considered for easy access in the event of abandonment.
- d. the range of conditions in which an abandonment may need to take place



7.3 MGN 614 provides further advice on considerations for liferaft stowage.

## Note

\* A consolidated copy of an amended statutory instrument can be made available upon request

<sup>1</sup> A Pleasure Vessel is a vessel which is either (a) wholly owned by an individual or individuals and used only for the sport or pleasure of the owner or owners or their immediate family or friends; or (b) owned by a body corporate and used only for sport or pleasure by the employees or officers or the body corporate or their immediate family or friends. In scenarios (a) or (b) the owner or owners must not receive money or any other payment for such use other than as a contribution towards the direct expenses incurred in relation to the operation of the vessel during the voyage or excursion in question. A vessel will also be a pleasure vessel if it is (c) wholly owned by or on behalf of a members' club formed for the purpose of sport or pleasure and used only for the sport or pleasure of members of that club or their immediate family. Any charges levied for such use must be paid into club funds and applied for the general use of the club.

## More Information

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