



Marine Notice 5/2012 Supersedes 14/2009

Collision Risks to Off-Shore Yachts

The purpose of this Marine Notice is to reinforce to masters, officers of the watch and all seafarers, including yacht crew, their obligations to avoid collisions in accordance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (COLREG). This can be found in Marine Orders Part 30 – Avoidance of Collisions.

In particular all masters, officers of the watch and seafarers are alerted to the risks of collision between off-shore yachts and commercial trading vessels when yachts voyage in the vicinity of commercial shipping lanes.

In this regard Rule 18 of the COLREGs prescribes that a power driven vessel underway shall keep out of the way of a sailing vessel. This presumes that the power driven vessel can see the sailing vessel (either by visual means or radar), is able to develop a Closest Point of Approach assessment and, if necessary, can take the appropriate avoiding action.

However, Rule 2 – Responsibility - states generally that:

- (a) Nothing in these Rules shall exonerate any vessel, or the owner, master or crew thereof, from the consequences of any neglect to comply with these Rules or of the neglect of any precaution which may be required by the ordinary practice of seamen, or by the special circumstances of the case.
- (b) In construing and complying with these Rules due regard shall be had to all dangers of navigation and collision and to any special circumstances, including the limitations of the vessels involved, which may make a departure from these Rules necessary to avoid immediate danger.

Rule 9 (b) says a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.

Rule 10 (j) says a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the safe passage of a power-driven vessel following a traffic lane.

Rule 18 (d) also says that any vessel other than a vessel not under command or a vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, avoid impeding the safe passage of a vessel constrained by her draught, exhibiting the signals in the Rules.

Yachts also need to be aware of the risk of collision, by day or by night, with anchored vessels.

Overall, although a trading vessel may be required to take avoiding action in certain circumstances, the skippers of yachts need to be aware that investigations into collisions between commercial trading vessels and yachts, both in Australia and overseas, repeatedly show that yachts are extremely difficult to see from the bridge of a major vessel in some circumstances. Factors contributing to this difficulty include:

- Yachts are usually painted white, or light pastel colours, and merge with the seascape;
- Yachts make poor radar targets due to their construction and size;
- Yachts frequently do not maintain a steady course and make unexpected course alterations; and

- At night the lights prescribed by the COLREGs for yachts (small yachts in particular) have very limited visual range – as little as one mile for yachts of less than 12 metres length over all.

As a result, yachts should not presume that they can be seen by an approaching vessel and should act accordingly.

Additional exacerbating factors are that:

- Large vessels can not alter course or reduce speed quickly;
- The visual lookout from yachts, particularly in a seaway, is often poor; and
- In confined waters, harbour channels or some designated routes (the Inner Route of the Great Barrier Reef for example); large vessels can not deviate from their intended course without engendering the risk of grounding.

As a result, officers of the watch on large vessels, and all crew aboard yachts are encouraged to exercise caution in circumstances where large vessels and yachts might be at close quarters.

Some simple precautions recommended for yachts on coastal voyages are:

- Keep a good visual and radar lookout;
- Avoid recognised shipping routes where at all possible;

- Fit and activate a radar reflector, an anti-collision radar transponder or radar target enhancer;
- Fit and utilise AIS;
- Maintain a listening watch on VHF Channel 16;
- Do not make unexpected course alterations when in the vicinity of other vessels; and
- Do not impede large vessels that have restricted room to manoeuvre

Yachts should also carry a registered 406 MHz EPIRB (GPS enabled version is recommended) and marine radios, have an agreed contact schedule and make details of their intended voyage available to their emergency contacts for use should the need arise.

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