



Marine Notice 14/2015
Supersedes 05/2012, 04/2012, 11/2011

Reducing the risk of collisions at sea

The purpose of this Marine Notice is to remind masters, skippers, watchkeepers and all other personnel involved in the operation of vessels about the importance of adhering to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (known as the Collision Regulations or COLREGs). This Notice also provides guidance for fishing vessels, yachts, barges and towing vessels to reduce the risk of collisions at sea.

Application of COLREGs

The COLREGs apply to all vessels including barges, tugs, yachts, both commercial and recreational fishing vessels and all types of cargo and passenger vessels whether underway or at anchor. These regulations are applicable in all navigable waters, from inland waters to the high seas. The *Navigation Act 2012* and Marine Order 30 (Prevention of Collisions) implements the COLREGs for Australian vessels and for other vessels operating in Australian waters. Contravention of COLREGs may jeopardise the safety of life at sea and constitutes an offence, for which substantial penalties may apply¹.

The COLREGs recognise the limitations associated with the navigation of different types of vessels in different waterways. For example, larger vessels may not be able to reduce speed quickly and will often require more sea-room to slow down or alter course. In confined waters, such as the Great Barrier Reef, large or deep draught vessels may not be able to deviate from their intended course without the risk of running aground. Smaller vessels may also

be slow to manoeuvre and may experience difficulty keeping themselves clear of larger ships. Close quarter situations and potential collisions between vessels can be minimised by proper application of, and adherence to, the COLREGs and the observance of good seamanship.

General responsibility

It is the responsibility of masters, skippers, watch-keepers and all other personnel involved in the operation of vessels to have a thorough knowledge of navigational practices, good seamanship techniques and most importantly, a full understanding and application of the COLREGs. The bridge of any vessel should always be appropriately manned and the person in charge of a navigational watch should not undertake any other duties that would interfere with the safe navigation of the vessel. A continuous listening watch on VHF Channel 16 should be maintained by all bridge watchkeepers.

The COLREGs require all vessels to:

- maintain a proper lookout at all times (including while at anchor);
- exhibit appropriate day shapes, night navigational lights, and use sound signals as required;
- proceed at a safe speed, appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions;
- use all available means to determine if any risk of collision exists; and
- take early, positive and readily apparent actions to avoid close quarter situations.

¹ Sections 177 and 178 of the *Navigation Act 2012* are offence provisions. At the date of this Notice they specify penalties of imprisonment for 10 years or up to 600 penalty units or both for fault-based offences, and up to 6000 penalty units for civil offences.

Inappropriate use of navigational lights and shapes

AMSA is aware that, in some cases, vessels unjustifiably display *Not Under Command* (NUC) lights and shapes. NUC lights and shapes should only be exhibited when a vessel is unable to manoeuvre as required by the COLREGs, due to exceptional circumstances. Therefore, in circumstances which cannot be reasonably justified as 'exceptional', the use of NUC lights or shapes is considered a contravention of the COLREGs.

Safety of fishing vessels

Under the COLREGs vessels are only considered to be 'engaged in fishing' when using 'nets, lines or trawls or other fishing apparatus which restrict manoeuvrability'. Vessels are not considered to be engaged in fishing when using 'trolling lines or other fishing apparatus which do not restrict manoeuvrability'. Also, a vessel engaged in fishing does not always have the right of way. The COLREGs clearly state that a vessel engaged in fishing shall:

- not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway;
- not impede the passage of any vessel following a traffic lane; and
- avoid impeding the safe passage of a vessel constrained by its draught.

Fishing vessels can reduce the risk of collisions by:

- not fishing in the vicinity of areas used by large vessels;
- avoiding erratic and unpredictable manoeuvres when in the vicinity of larger vessels;
- not anchoring in and around busy sea lanes, particularly at night;
- exhibiting appropriate lights and shapes by day or night, and ensuring that the required lights and shapes are only displayed when the vessel is engaged in fishing; and
- ensuring status and data of the vessel's Automatic Identification System (if fitted) are entered and displayed correctly.

Safety of yachts

Yachts often provide poor radar targets due to their construction or size. Yachts do not always maintain a steady course and can make unexpected course alterations. Skippers of yachts should not assume their vessel has been seen by an approaching vessel in good time. In some circumstances, it may not be possible for large vessels to keep clear of a yacht or be able to take the appropriate action in good time. It is vital for yachts to monitor the movement of all traffic in their vicinity and to be aware of their COLREGs obligations.

Some precautions recommended for yachts include:

- keeping a good visual and radar lookout;
- not impeding the passage of large vessels that have limited room to manoeuvre;
- avoiding major shipping routes as far as possible, particularly where heavy traffic prevails;
- avoiding unexpected course alterations when in the vicinity of large vessels;
- fitting a radar reflector, an anti-collision radar transponder or a radar target enhancer;
- ensuring status and data of the vessel's Automatic Identification System (if fitted) are entered and displayed correctly; and
- ensuring watchkeepers are not distracted from navigational duties.

Safety of barges

Accident reports indicate that casualties involving collisions with anchored barges or barges under tow, some of which have resulted in loss of life, continue to occur due to the lack of a proper lookout. Barge lights may be difficult to detect as they are often installed at a lower height than that of a cargo vessel of similar length.

To reduce the risk of collisions, the following precautions are recommended for barges including:

- being fitted with appropriate navigation lights complying with the relevant provisions in the COLREGs;

- where fitted, side lights should have adequate inboard screening and horizontal sectoring; and
- while at anchor, navigational lights should be supplemented by additional deck lights. Where possible, lights should be placed to mark the sides and corner extremities of the barge / tow.

Safety of towing vessel and tow

In addition to assessing the situation and risk of collision, watchkeepers on towing vessels should be alert for the presence of other vessels, navigational dangers, wrecks and debris in the vicinity of both the towing vessel and the vessel under tow. During a towing operation, in addition to the towing vessel, an object such as a barge under tow, must exhibit the appropriate navigation lights, shapes and, if manned, make the sound signals as required by the COLREGs. Due consideration should also be given to the reliability of the lights and sound signals and their ability to function for the duration of the intended voyage. Where practicable, it is recommended that a duplicate system of lights be available.

Petroleum safety zones around offshore facilities

The attention of masters, skippers, watchkeepers and all other personnel involved in the operation of vessels is also drawn to the petroleum safety zones which may be established via notice by the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA). These notices are published in the Government Notices Gazette for the purpose of protecting offshore petroleum wells, structures, or associated equipment and may prohibit:

- (a) all vessels; or
- (b) all vessels other than specified vessels; or
- (c) all vessels other than the vessels included in specified classes of vessels;

from entering or being present in a specified area (the *petroleum safety zone*) surrounding the petroleum well, structure or equipment without the written consent of NOPSEMA.

A petroleum safety zone may extend to a distance of 500 metres around the well, structure or equipment specified in the notice, where that distance is measured from each point of the outer edge of the well, structure or equipment.

It is an offence for a vessel to enter or be present in a petroleum safety zone in breach of a notice, with penalties of up to 15 years imprisonment.

All current Gazetted notices, NOPSEMA's policy, applicable forms, and a petroleum safety zone subscription service are available from the NOPSEMA Website www.nopsema.gov.au/safety/petroleum-safety-zones/.

Information on petroleum safety zones is also promulgated by coastal (AUSCOAST) warnings or 'Notices to Mariners'.

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