

10. Rowing on the Sea

Many of the hazards and risks associated with coastal rowing, together with their barriers and controls, are similar to those for other types of rowing. This chapter deals with the issues specific to rowing on the sea.

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10.1 Coastal and Inshore Rowing

Coastal and inshore rowing in this context refers to rowing on the coast but within a short distance of land. Coastal rowers typically use sliding seat boats that are specifically suited for this purpose. These boats are not suited for open sea, offshore or ocean rowing.

Expectations

The other sections of RowSafe also apply to coastal and offshore rowing. However, the following additional expectations are also appropriate.

Everyone

Everyone is expected to:

- Understand the hazards associated with coastal and inshore rowing (such as tide, wind strength and direction and waves) and the barriers and controls to be used.
- Check, prior to each launch, that:
 - Their boats have sufficient buoyancy,
 - Self-bailers, where fitted, are in full working order, and
 - If self-bailers are not fitted then that there is a method of manual bailing.
- Understand the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway. There is further information on [boat handling in rough water](#).
- Understand [how to fit and adjust a lifejacket](#), especially coxes are expected to wear correctly fitted lifejackets at all times when afloat.
- Abide by club rules, local navigation rules and any other rules.



Understand the hazards associated with coastal and inshore rowing

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Club

Club Officers are expected to:

- Ensure all boats and equipment used by their members are fit for their intended purpose and safe to use in the intended environment.
- Ensure that all coxes and rowers understand the hazards (such as tide, wind strength and direction and waves), and the barriers and controls to be used.
- Ensure that crews abide by local navigation and other rules.
- Ensure that all boats have sufficient buoyancy.
- Ensure that crews keep a good lookout for swimmers (see [Safety Alert - look out for swimmers](#)).
- Ensure that self-bailers, where fitted, are in full working order. If self-bailers are not fitted then ensure that there is a method of manual bailing. This does not apply to those single sculling boats where the boat design ensures self-bailing.
- Ensure that crews are educated in the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway. There is further information on [boat handling in rough water](#).
- When no launch is available then ensure that no crew goes out without an experienced coastal rower supervising the session, in the boat with them (either as rower or cox) or from the beach keeping them close to shore.
- Ensure that there is a method of radio communication with the shore in the boat if a safety launch is not available and ensure that there are at least two rowing boats afloat at any one time and that they operate a buddy system. Marine Mobile Band VHF's are preferred as these can be used to call the Coastguard directly.
- Ensure that coxes' lifejackets have crotch straps fitted and that coxes are trained to fit and adjust them correctly.

Coaches

Coaches are expected to:

- Understand the hazards associated with coastal and inshore rowing and also understand their barriers and controls.
- Assess risk prior to each outing and either modify the planned outing or find a safer alternative if the level of risk is not low or moderate, taking into account the capabilities of the crew.
- Coach crews in the hazards, and the barriers and controls to be used (such as understanding tide, wind strength and direction and waves).
- Coach crews so that they are able to check that:
 - Boats have sufficient buoyancy,
 - Self-bailers, where fitted, are in full working order, and
 - If self-bailers are not fitted then that there is a method of manual bailing.
- Coach crews in the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway. There is further information on [boat handling in rough water](#).

- When no launch is available then ensure that no crew goes out without an experienced coastal rower supervising the session, in the boat with them (either as rower or cox) or from the beach keeping them close to shore.
- Have a means of communication with the boat and with someone on shore.
- Coach coxes to fit and adjust their lifejackets (including crotch straps) correctly.

Launch Drivers

Launch drivers are expected to:

- Hold qualifications of, or equivalent to, at least RYA Level 2 Powerboat with coastal endorsement.
- Ensure that they have an effective means of communications with the shore and emergency services.
- Ensure that they are competent to rescue crews from rowing boats in coastal conditions.
- Ensure that their launches are suitable to rescue rowers in the conditions that they are likely to encounter.
- Understand the correct technique for recovering a person to a safety boat.

Regional Rowing Councils

Regional Rowing Councils, in regions with coastal and inshore rowing clubs, are expected to:

- Provide support and advice to those clubs on coastal and inshore rowing.

British Rowing

British Rowing:

- Provides guidance to clubs through RowSafe.
- Provides an [Incident Reporting System](#).
- Provides [Safety Alerts](#) and other safety communications.
- Provides safety training material on its website.
- Provides courses that include safety.

Further Information

- Boat Handling in Rough Water - coastalrowing.org/storage/downloads/safety/BoatHandlingInRoughWater.pdf
- Safety Alert on Lifejackets - britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-February-2015-Lifejackets.pdf
- Safety Alert - check your Lifejacket, <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-check-your-lifejacket.pdf>
- Safety Alert - look out for swimmers, <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-look-out-for-swimmers.pdf>
- RNLI Guidance on Life jackets - <https://rnli.org/-/media/rnli/downloads/rnli-guide-to-lifejackets-and-buoyancy-aids.pdf?fd=true>
- British Rowing Incident Reporting System - incidentreporting.britishrowing.org
- Safety Alert Archive - britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/safety-alert-archive

10.2 Fixed Seat Sea Rowing

Fixed seat sea rowing in this context refers to fixed seat rowing on the open sea or in estuaries.

Expectations

The other sections of RowSafe also apply to fixed seat sea rowing. However, the following additional expectations relate specifically to this style of rowing.

Everyone

Everyone is expected to:

- Understand the hazards associated with sea rowing (such as tide, wind strength and direction and waves) and the barriers and controls to be used.
- Understand the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway.
- Understand how to fit and adjust a lifejacket, especially coxes who are expected to wear correctly fitted lifejackets at all times when afloat.
- Not wear boots (such as wellington boots) when afloat as they make it very difficult to tread water.
- Abide by club rules, local navigation rules and any other rules.



Ensure all boats have sufficient buoyancy

Club

Club Officers are expected to:

- Use their club's Risk Assessment ([see RowSafe 3.1](#)) to determine the club's safety plans, safety rules and emergency procedures ([see RowSafe 3.2](#))
- Use the Risk Assessment to determine under what conditions, if any, it is safe for a boat to go afloat alone (i.e. not accompanied by another rowing boat or a safety boat). Where it is not safe for a boat to go afloat alone then boats should stay in close contact with each other.
- Use the Risk Assessment to determine under what conditions rowers should wear lifejackets.
- Ensure all boats and equipment used by their members are fit for their intended purpose, safe to use in the intended environment and that boats are not used in conditions that would expose rowers to an unacceptable risk.
- Ensure that all boats have sufficient buoyancy for the conditions in which they are to be

used. Boats without additional buoyancy should not be used in areas and at times when sea conditions are rough. This is particularly important in traditional wooden gigs as, without additional buoyancy, they will not support their crew when swamped.

- Ensure that all coxes and rowers understand the hazards (such as tide, wind strength and direction and waves), and the barriers and controls to be used.
- Ensure that crews abide by local navigation and other rules.
- Ensure that crews keep a good lookout for swimmers (see [Safety Alert - look out for swimmers](#)).
- Ensure that crews are educated in the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway.
- If a radio is carried, ensure that someone on board is competent to use it and knows which channels to use. (see [RowSafe 2.3](#))
- Ensure that coxes' lifejackets have crotch straps fitted and that coxes are trained to fit and adjust them correctly.
- Ensure that a boat safety kit is provided for each boat (see [RowSafe 10.2.1 Gig and Other Fixed Seat Boat Safety Kit](#)).

Coxes

Coxes are expected to:

- Wear a lifejacket at all times when afloat
- Check, prior to each launch, that:
 - Their boats have sufficient buoyancy for the conditions likely to be encountered
 - That there is a method of manual bailing
 - Seals and bungs are correctly fitted
 - Seats and stretchers are secure
 - The rudder and rudder lines are in good condition and working order
 - The oars are in good condition
 - Thole pins are in good condition correctly placed (hard forward, soft astern)
 - The safety kit and other safety equipment (see [RowSafe 10.2.1](#)) are aboard the boat
- Know and understand the [sound signals](#) and [lights](#) used by other vessels.
- Learn about local hazards, local rules of navigation and [navigation marks](#) particularly when visiting unfamiliar venues.
- Read and understand the [principles of coxing](#)

Coaches

Coaches are expected to:

- Understand the hazards associated with sea rowing and also understand their barriers and controls.
- Assess risk prior to each outing and either modify the planned outing or find a safer alternative if the level of risk is not low or moderate, taking into account the capabilities of the crew.

- Coach crews in the hazards, and the barriers and controls to be used (such as understanding tide, wind strength and direction and waves).
- Coach coxes so that they are able to check their boats and equipment as described above.
- Coach crews in the correct techniques for launching and recovery from a beach or slipway.
- When no launch is available then ensure that no crew goes out without an experienced sea rower supervising the session, in the boat with them (either as rower or cox) or from the beach keeping them close to shore.
- Have a means of communication with the boat and with someone on shore.
- Coach coxes to fit and adjust their lifejackets (including crotch straps) correctly.
- Ensure that a boat safety kit is carried in each boat when afloat (see [RowSafe 10.2.1 Gig and Other Fixed Seat Boat Safety Kit](#)).
- Know and understand the [sound signals](#) and [lights](#) used by other vessels.
- Learn about local hazards, local rules of navigation and [navigation marks](#) particularly when visiting unfamiliar venues.

Launch Drivers

Launch Drivers are expected to:

- Hold qualifications of, or equivalent to, at least RYA Level 2 Powerboat with coastal endorsement.
- Ensure that they have an effective means of communications with the shore and emergency services.
- If a radio is carried, ensure that someone on board is competent to use it and knows which channels to use. (see [RowSafe 2.3](#))
- Ensure that they are competent to rescue crews from rowing boats in offshore conditions.
- Understand the correct technique for recovering a person to a safety boat.
- Ensure that their launches are suitable to rescue rowers in the conditions that they are likely to encounter.
- Know and understand the [sound signals](#) and [lights](#) used by other vessels.
- Learn about local hazards, local rules of navigation and [navigation marks](#) particularly when visiting unfamiliar venues.



When no launch is available make sure an experienced coastal rower supervises the session, either as a cox or rower, or from the beach

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Regional Rowing Councils

Regional Rowing Councils, and Rowing Associations in regions with coastal and inshore rowing clubs, are expected to:

- Provide support and advice to those clubs on fixed seat sea rowing.

British Rowing

British Rowing:

- Provides guidance to clubs through RowSafe.
- Provides an [Incident Reporting System](#).
- Provides [Safety Alerts](#) and other safety communications.
- Provides safety training material on its website.
- Provides courses that include safety.

Further Information

- Launching and recovery – Principles of Coxing – Lyme Regis Gig Club, <http://www.lymeregisgigclub.com/media/pg/97/1458123262/principles-of-coxing.pdf>
- Flushing & Mylor Pilot Gig Club Members Handbook - <http://www.fmpgc.org/images/docs/Club%20documents/FMPGC%20Members%20Handbook.pdf>
- Safety Alert on Lifejackets - britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-February-2015-Lifejackets.pdf
- Safety Alert - check your Lifejacket, <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-check-your-lifejacket.pdf>
- Safety Alert - look out for swimmers, <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-look-out-for-swimmers.pdf>
- RNLI Guidance on Life jackets - <https://rnli.org/-/media/rnli/downloads/rnli-guide-to-lifejackets-and-buoyancy-aids.pdf?fd=true>
- British Rowing Incident Reporting System - incidentreporting.britishrowing.org/
- Safety Alert Archive - britishrowing.org/knowledge/safety/safety-alert-archive/
- Sound Signals - <http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/soundsig.htm>
- Navigation Lights - <http://www.bosunsmate.org/seamanship/lights.php>
- Navigation Marks - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYdED6cXtI&index=3&list=PLomvEgt6UAfE45F1qiSpr0_hxXlo-kbnf

10.2.1 Gig & Other Fixed Seat Boat Safety Kits

For gigs and other fixed seat rowing boats that are used on the open sea, it is recommended that the following equipment should be included in a Boat Safety kit.

- A First Aid kit in a waterproof bag, checked monthly
- A throw line, throw bag or equivalent grab line (at least 15 metres long).
- A serrated safety knife with rope cutter
- An audio signalling device: air horn, whistle, loudhailer or megaphone
- Enough survival equipment or 'Bivvi bags' for the maximum number of persons on board. (Note: Foil blankets tend to keep cold people cold and are not recommended.)
- Sufficient lifejackets for the maximum number of persons on board
- A bailer
- Spare thole pins
- A communications device such as a waterproof VHF radio transceiver or mobile phone, fully charged
- A tow line secured to the bow of the boat

As a result of the risk assessment of the location, water and weather conditions, the following equipment may also be required.

- A tool kit and spares
- A spare length of rope
- An anchor and line appropriate for the water and weather conditions
- Sufficient in-date flares
- GPS system
- Compass
- Suitable lights in low visibility conditions
- Sea anchor to prevent the boat drifting with the wind; this could be a canvas bucket on a rope
- Fenders

10.3 Ocean Rowing

Ocean rowing in this context refers to long distance rowing in rowing boats constructed to cross oceans.

It is very similar to Adventure Rowing that takes place at sea but does not normally involve crossing oceans. There is more information on Adventure Rowing on the [British Rowing website](#).

Ocean rowing is, by its very nature, a high risk activity. It requires extensive safety provisions to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. Anyone considering participating in ocean rowing should carefully consider the risk associated and in all cases ensure that appropriate safety provisions are in place.

This guidance is intended to help in that process but only to the extent of the hazards that it covers.

There are many hazards associated with Ocean Rowing but this guidance is limited to the two that are probably of most concern. These are being lost overboard and capsize.

It has been assumed that this activity takes place in warm water. There is advice on rowing on cold water elsewhere in RowSafe.

Anyone who has little or no experience of ocean rowing and who intends to participate is advised to do so in an organised event that comprises a large number of rowing boats and has support available both on land and at sea. Events of this type are usually organised by experienced and competent people. The infrastructure and backup that they provide helps to reduce the level of risk.

The following guidance is general and should be used with care. For example, there is little advantage in having a throw line on a single seat boat and it may not be practicable to have more than one person on deck at all times on a small boat.

There is more information in the generic Risk Management Plan in [9.9 Ocean Rowing Risk Management Plan](#).

People lost overboard

People who fall or are swept overboard risk being lost if they are not recovered quickly. The basic approach to the management of this risk is:

1. Keep people on their boats

- Stop people from falling overboard using taut webbing rails (not guard wires) as high as practicable
- Have a second, lower, rail midway between the upper rail and the deck.
- Rowers should take great care when moving about the boat and keep a firm grip at all times.

2. Rescue anyone who falls or is swept overboard but is still connected to the boat

- Everyone will use a lifeline at all times when they are on deck.
- Everyone will wear a secure waist belt or harness, the lifeline will run from a secure attachment on this belt or harness to a jackstay on deck or another strongpoint on deck
- Lifelines will be attached before anyone leaves the cabin and kept attached to it until they are safely back inside the cabin.
- In conditions where a lifejacket is needed, then the lifeline should attach to the harness point on the lifejacket. Crotch straps shall be used.
- The lifeline should be sufficiently long so that if the boat rolls then anyone on deck is not trapped under water as the boat self-rights.
- All members of the crew know exactly how to respond if there is a person in the water and crews should have practised man overboard drills extensively.

3. Attempt to rescue anyone who is in the water but not connected to the boat

- Have a rescue quoit on a thin line (proprietary device) at each end of the deck. A throw bag may be an acceptable alternative.
- Throw lines (as described above) should be securely mounted on the outer surface of each cabin bulkhead and retained such that they can be accessed without delay but will not be lost accidentally in a storm or in a knockdown.
- Ensure that all crew members know how to throw a rescue quoit or throw bag.
- Ensure that all crew members know how to hold a line (with the arms and not just with the hands).
- Do not keep a loose line on deck, it is difficult to throw from a moving deck and can easily become a tripping hazard or lost overboard.

4. Facilitate the rescue of anyone lost overboard

- Deploy a drogue or parachute anchor and tow a floating line with a buoy and floating light at the end (encourage the casualty to grab the line and recover them into the boat).
- Deploy an auto-inflation danbuoy with light.
- The casualty should activate their PLB (or AIS).
- Fix position by GPS, transmit MAYDAY by VHF ([see section 2.3](#)).
- Notify Event organisers.

Surviving knockdowns and capsizes

Ocean rowing boats are designed to be self-righting and have sealed cabins for the protection of the crews. Many are also fitted with drinking water tanks, or spaces for drinking water containers, low in the boat; these act as ballast in rough seas. They should be kept full to expedite self-righting

Capsizes are relatively common but boats should self-right without delay.

In conditions where a capsize is likely:

Ensure that the crew is safe in the cabins

- Deploy a drogue or parachute anchor.
- Ensure that the entire crew are sealed in the cabins.
- Ensure that all hatches are closed and watertight.
- Ensure that all vents are closed and watertight in the event of a capsize.
- Ensure that all loose items are stowed.
- Ensure that all crew members are wearing head protection to protect their heads if the boat capsizes.

Expectations

The other sections of RowSafe also apply to ocean rowing. However, the following additional expectations relate specifically to this style of rowing.

Everyone

Everyone is expected to:

- Understand the hazards associated with ocean rowing (such as weather, shipping, distance from land, etc.) and the barriers and controls to be used ([see Risk Management Plans section 9.9](#)).
- Abide by event rules.

Ocean Rowers

Ocean rowers are expected to:

- Be familiar with the operation of every item of safety and communications equipment carried on board.
- Comply with the requirements of event organisers.
- Carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) at all times. A portable Automatic Identification System (AIS) beacon may be preferred but this is only suitable for the crew of multi-seat boats.

- Take great care when moving about on deck, whenever appropriate crawl rather than walk and hold on to the boat.
- Ensure that, where fitted, water ballast tanks or containers are kept full and any heavy items are securely stowed low in the boat full to promote self-righting.

The expectations of Ocean Rowers are summarised in the table below:

Sea conditions	Daylight	Night
<p>Calm</p> <p>WMO Sea State Code 0 (Calm) to 2 (Smooth) (Wave height less than 0.5 metres) Low Swell Wind strength force 0 to 2 (less than 6 knots, 3.3m/s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clip on harness before leaving the cabin, unclip only after returning to and safely inside the cabin. • Ensure that decks are kept clear and that there are no tripping hazards. • Ensure that Drinking water ballast tanks or containers are full. 	<p>As in daylight, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a red head torch switched on. • Switch on navigation lights.
<p>Moderate</p> <p>WMO Sea State Code 3 (Slight) to 4 (Moderate) (Wave height between 0.5 and 2.5 metres) Moderate Swell Wind strength force 3 or 4 (7 to 16 knots, 3.5 – 8 m/s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clip on harness before leaving the cabin, unclip only after returning to and safely inside the cabin. • Wear auto-inflation lifejacket • Ensure that all hatches and vents are closed and watertight. • Have at least two persons on deck (or whole crew in cabins). • Ensure that Drinking water ballast tanks or containers are full. 	<p>As in daylight, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a red head torch switched on. • Switch on navigation lights.

Sea conditions	Daylight	Night
<p>Rough</p> <p>WMO Sea State Code 5 (Rough) or more. (Wave height greater than 2.5 metres) High Swell Wind strength force 5 or more (greater than 16 knots, 8m/s)</p> <p>Note: It may be safe to continue rowing in larger boats, with strong crews in otherwise good conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that decks are cleared and deck equipment is stowed below deck or lashed securely on deck. • Ensure that Drinking water ballast tanks or containers are full. • Ensure that any heavy items are securely stowed low in the boat. • Ensure that Crew members are all in cabins, hatches closed and secured, vents watertight, helmets on. • Ensure that moveable equipment, etc. is stowed securely. • Ensure that fixed equipment is enclosed. • Monitor AIS and use VHF to warn other shipping of your presence. 	<p>As in daylight, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch on navigation lights.

For further information on Sea State see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_state. Sea state definitions should be used as guidance, the actual conditions, the size of the boat, and the state of the crew, should be used to determine the action to be taken.

Event Organisers

Event Organisers are expected to:

- Provide detailed safety rules for rowers.
- Provide infrastructure and backup to support rowers.
- Provide event rules that includes:
 - Boat and equipment specifications.
 - Boat and equipment specifications and inspections.
 - Communication rules.
 - Training and competence requirements.
- Provide support facilities at sea directly or through other agencies.
- Liaise with rescue coordination centres.

10.3.1 Ocean Rowing Safety Equipment

The following equipment should be carried on board

- Throw quoit and line or Throw Bag
- Life raft
- Grab Bag
- Life jacket (one for each person on board and a spare, rearming kits)
- Rated safety harness, or belt, and line (one for each person on board)
- Helmets or other head protection (one for each person on board)
- Safety clothing
- Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) with integral GPS
- Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) (one for each person on board) or Personal AIS on larger boats
- Flares
- Fire extinguisher
- Medical kit
- Signal mirror
- Safety knife
- Automatic Identification System (AIS) Radar transponder
- Satellite telephone
- VHF radio
- Global Positioning by Satellite (GPS) system
- Water maker
- Navigation light
- Suitable power supply
- Deck and shoulder height jackstays
- External grab lines
- Compass
- Suitable food stores
- Suitable cooking device
- Para anchor and Drogues

- Bilge pump in each cabin to pump water out of the cabin
- Anchor, chain and warp
- Tool kit
- Spares
- Auto-inflation danbuoy with light
- Long floating line with buoy and floating light at the end ready to trail astern.
- Towing Line