



**Cornish Pilot Gig  
Association**



## **Safety Alert - Manual Lifejackets in Gigs**

Some members of a crew containing junior rowers were trapped under their inverted boat, following a recent Gig capsize. The juniors were wearing auto-inflation lifejackets and the buoyancy provided held rowers under the boat. They were able to continue breathing in the pocket of air. The CPGA requires that juniors and coxes wear lifejackets.

The air pocket under the boat is small, dark, cold, wet and scary. It is not a good place to be. The rowers were all rescued by launches and taken to safety.

There is some concern about the use of auto-inflation lifejackets in wide-beamed rowing boats, in situations where entrapment under the water is possible. If there is no significant risk of becoming unconscious, then manual-inflation lifejackets are preferred.

It is easy to convert an auto-inflation lifejacket into a manual-inflation one. Simply remove the firing head from the actuation mechanism and replace it with a blanking cap. These are proprietarily available devices obtainable from lifejacket suppliers. There is more information available from lifejacket manufacturers, for example [here](#) and in a video [here](#). The lifejacket should be marked so that it is clear to everyone that it is manual, and not auto-inflation.

It is recommended that rowers, particularly if in traditional wooden gigs, should wear lifejackets because these boats have little inherent buoyancy when swamped. They are not able to support the weight of the crew in the water.

In the event of a capsize in surf conditions, it is important that the crew are able to account for each other and get to the seaward side of the boat as soon as possible. If one of the crew is trapped beneath the boat, it would be possible for other crew members to swim back under in order to assist them. Once all crew are together and accounted for, the lifejackets should be inflated.

The crew should have an appropriate means of calling for help, attached to them, not to the boat.



### **Take care to use the right equipment to save lives.**

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