



South African Maritime Safety Authority

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Date: 10 December 2020

Marine Notice No. 54 of 2020

Crossing the Bar vs Surf Launch Endorsement

TO ALL SMALL VESSEL OWNERS, SMALL VESSEL OPERATORS, SKIPPERS, SKIPPER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS, NSRI COXWAINS, SURVEYORS AND PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

Summary

This marine notice serves to remind all small vessel owners/operators of the hazards and risks to be considered prior to crossing the bar at the Kowie river mouth. The notice follows the conclusions and recommendations made after several accidents and near-miss incidents had occurred, which were subsequently investigated. The principles applied and considerations given can also be applied to other instances of crossing the bar out of **any** river mouth

1. BACKGROUND

Several incidents and accidents similar in nature have occurred in the Kowie river mouth, sparking debate regarding the historical requirement for SVCC holders to hold a surf launch endorsement prior to exiting the river mouth. There is a very shallow sand bar across the Kowie river mouth causing a very sudden build up and break of large waves which are difficult to anticipate. The sudden onset of a set of large breaking waves across the river mouth after a small ski-boat has committed to exiting the river can lead to damage to vessels and injury or fatalities to personnel.

In the past SAMS has required skippers using the river mouth to have a surf launch endorsement on their SVCC. However, it has recently been concluded in collaboration with the national boating manager that the skillset required for surf launching (which is traditionally an endorsement required for launching off the beach on the South and East coast of the Republic) is not the same as the skillset for navigating the river mouth where a shallow sandbar exists. Therefore the surf launch endorsement will not be a requirement for skippers crossing the bar. Skippers qualifying at, and using the Kowie river mouth are cautioned however to consider this Marine Notice (or the SAMS pamphlet on the matter) prior to attempting to cross the bar.

2. SKILLS

Knowledge, understanding and proficiency for surf launch endorsement as per MN13 of 2011 (p96), are:

1. Manoeuvre the boat in the surf	1. Knowledge of: .1 The effects of beach gradient on size and nature of breakers .2 The importance of pre-launch checks, safety and preparation of the vessel and instructions to crew. .3 Methods of launching in differing types of breakers and weather conditions. .4 Preparation of vessel prior to landing .5 Methods of beaching in differing types of breakers and weather conditions.
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Whereas the competencies for crossing the bar are encompassed on p96/7 under boat manoeuvring and handling :

<p>2. Manoeuver the boat</p>	<p>2. Knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> .1 the effects of a single and twin propeller(s) on the turning circle of a boat; .2 the effects of deadweight, draught, trim, speed and under-keel clearance on turning circles and stopping distances; .3 the effects of wind and current on boat handling; .4 basic maneuvers and duties during berthing and un-berthing and the use of the various mooring ropes when alongside. .5 handling ship in rivers, estuaries and restricted waters, having regard to the effect of current, wind and restricted water on helm response; .6 Turning a boat "short round"
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and

<p>1. Manoeuvre and handle a boat in all conditions</p>	<p>1. Manoeuvring and handling a boat in all conditions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> .1 choice of anchorage; anchoring with one or two anchors in limited anchorages and factors involved in determining the length of anchor cable to be used; .2 dragging anchor; clearing fouled anchors; streaming a drogue .3 management and handling of boats in heavy weather, including assisting another vessel in distress; towing operations; means of keeping an unmanageable boat out of a trough of the sea, lessening drift and the use of oil; .4 methods of taking on board survivors from the water, other boats and survival craft; .5 ability to determine the manoeuvring and propulsion characteristics of common types of vessels with special reference to stopping distances and turning circles at various draughts and speeds; .6 importance of navigating at reduced speed to avoid damage caused by own ship=s bow wave and stern wave; .7 use of, and manoeuvring in and near, traffic separation schemes and in vessel traffic service (VTS) areas.
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3. KEY POINTS FOR CROSSING THE BAR:

Tide:

- a. Exiting: only cross the bar from: 3hrs before high tide until tide turns
- b. Return: only cross the bar from: 3hrs before high tide until 1.5hrs after high tide
- c. Avoid 2 days leading up to and including Spring Tides, Spring Tides and 2 days post Spring Tides

Weather:

- d. Crossing the bar should only happen in favourable weather conditions
 - i. Visibility
 - ii. Wind
 - iii. Waves

Local knowledge:

- e. Skippers new to the area should plan their voyage
 - i. Visit the bar site from shore and watch the movement of the water
 - ii. Identify the point where you can pause and wait for the right pattern of waves to cross the bar
 - iii. Identify the point of no return, after which you have to complete the bar crossing

- iv. When exiting vessel should be between 12° and 24° off the face of the wave and not 90° (head on)
 - v. When returning vessel should be at ± 90° to the face of the wave while travelling just about one boat length behind the crest of the wave, never overtake and surf down the face of a wave.
 - vi. Understand the effect that the gradient of the bar and the rate and direction of the current relative to the wave direction has on the wave size and steepness of the wave face.
 - vii. Understand the importance of crew preparedness, pre-launch checks and vessel preparation with emphasise on water tight integrity before crossing the bar in or out.
 - viii. Understand how to negotiate different types of breakers.
- f. Consult the local NSRI Base Coxswain
 - g. Check charts for the area of operation
 - i. Shift in channel
 - ii. Depth of water

Vessel to be fully operational:

- h. Test steering prior to arrival at bar
- i. Test and warm up engines during the run from launch site towards the bar

Crew to be wearing PFDs

Only surf launching skippers are allowed not to wear kill switch.

4. BROCHURES

The following brochure is also available from SAMSA offices to provide further guidance on the crossing the bar:



5. REPORTING OF INCIDENTS:

Skippers are reminded of their obligation as outlined in MN 8 of 2011 to report any incident to SAMSA within 24 hours of occurrence, on the form provided.

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Issued by and obtainable from:
The South African Maritime Safety Authority
146 Lunnon Road
Hillcrest, Pretoria 0083

PO Box 13186
Hatfield 0028

Tel: +27 12 366 2600

Fax: +27 12 366 2601

E-mail: marinenotices@samsa.org.za

Web Site: www.samsa.org.za