

Waikato Yacht Squadron

Safety Policy, Racing and Cruising Event Safety Plan

1.0 Scope

The Waikato Yacht Squadron (the Squadron) is an Incorporated Society that is governed and managed by a Committee that is elected annually. All the officers are volunteers and there are no paid employees. The principal officer is the Commodore.

The Squadron's activities are limited to:

- Sailing events in the Hauraki Gulf, that are a mix of cruising and racing, held during each 'summer' sailing season, generally from October to April.
- Social events that are usually held monthly. The social events are held in facilities that are owned and managed by other organisations, primarily the Hamilton Yacht Club.

The Squadron's only physical facility is a leased, secure, lockup Compound at Kawakawa Bay that accommodates trailer yachts.

The scope of this document is limited to the Squadron's sailing events.

The Squadron's Sailing Events

While many of the Squadron members' sailing activities are undertaken independently, the Squadron holds a number of racing and cruising sailing events during each season. These fall into the following three categories.

1. Race Events, with separate races being held for the trailer yacht and keeler fleets. The majority of Squadron races are passage races though there is also a series of 'round the buoys' races.
2. The Gulf Classic Endurance Race, which is a formal race event that is open to other clubs. It is usually held on a weekend in March and is based from the Maraetai Beach Boating Club.
3. Cruising Events where a group of members may cruise to the likes of Great Barrier Island or the Mercury Islands.

The **Safety Policy** below applies to all Squadron sailing events, while the **Racing and Cruising Event Safety Plan**, though mainly applying to the races, also applies to the Squadron's Cruising Events where indicated. There is a separate safety plan for the Gulf Classic Endurance Race that forms part of the documentation for that race.

2.0 The Squadron's Safety Policy

Safety at sea is of paramount importance and all members are required to comply with the following policy.

2.1 Compliance with the Yachting NZ Safety Regulations

Skippers and owners must ensure they are familiar with, and comply with the Yachting New Zealand (YNZ) Safety Regulations 2021 – 2024 (The Regulations). These Regulations are available through the YNZ website www.yachtingnz.org.nz.

2.2 Responsibility

Responsibility for the crew and boats in Squadron events always lies with the skippers/owners. This is specifically defined in Part V Section 2.01 of the Regulations which states:

“The safety of a yacht and its crew is the sole and inescapable responsibility of the owner, or skipper as owner’s representative, who must do their best to ensure that the yacht is fully found, thoroughly seaworthy and manned by a sufficiently experienced crew who are fit enough to cope with the weather conditions expected during the voyage or event being undertaken. The owner, or skipper as owner’s representative, must be satisfied as to the soundness of hull, spars, rigging, sails and all gear. The owner, or skipper as owner’s representative, must ensure that all safety equipment is properly maintained and stowed, and that the crew know where it is kept and how it is to be used”.

Part V Section 2.03 of the Regulations additionally states:

“It is the sole and exclusive responsibility of each skipper to decide whether or not to start or continue in any event”.

By participating in a Squadron event, each participant agrees and acknowledges that sailing is a potentially dangerous activity with inherent risks. These risks include strong winds and rough seas, sudden changes in weather, failure of equipment, boat handling errors, poor seamanship by other boats, loss of balance on an unstable platform and fatigue resulting in increased risk of injury. Inherent in the sport of sailing is the risk of permanent, catastrophic injury or death by drowning, trauma, hypothermia or other causes. It is incumbent on the skipper of every yacht to independently obtain and review the marine forecast for wind and sea state, and to make their own decision as to whether or not to participate in any particular event.

2.3 Minimum Requirements for All Yachts

Skippers and owners (member or non-member) of any yacht participating in Squadron events, or using the Squadron’s equipment or facilities, are required to comply with the applicable YNZ Safety Regulations. The Squadron’s minimum requirements for yachts participating in our events are:

- Trailer Yachts – YNZ Safety Regulations Part V Category B.
- Keelers – YNZ Safety Regulations Part II Category 4.

2.4 Additional Requirements

The following additional requirements apply:

- Where trailer yachts are being sailed single-handed in a Squadron event:
 - their VHF radio must be capable of being operated within the cockpit (which may require carrying a separate handheld VHF radio), and

- they are required to carry a safety harness with a suitable means of attachment that allows harnessed access to the foredeck.
- Trailer yachts are required to have their centreboards fully lowered and locking pins/devices (as applicable) locked in place. Those with ballast tanks are required to sail with their tanks full.
- Trailer yachts are required to have their forehatches closed and locked in all but very light conditions.
- It is recommended that every yacht carries a spare anchor of the correct size for the vessel.

2.5 Training, Coastguard Courses and Coastguard Membership

The Squadron encourages members to progressively increase their knowledge and practical skills of sailing, boat handling, seamanship, navigation and lifesaving. To this end the Squadron includes training and instructional topics in some of the monthly social events. On-the-water training events are also periodically provided within the Squadron's sailing programme. A night sailing event is held annually to enhance night sailing skills. Where considered practical and beneficial, the Squadron links new members with more experienced members who can assist them.

The Squadron also fully endorses the Coastguard education courses that are administered by Coastguard Boating Education www.boatingeducation.org.nz. It is strongly recommended that the Squadron's boat owners maintain up to date Coastguard membership.

2.6 Recognition and Acceptance of This Safety Policy by Members

Copies of this policy are provided to all members and compliance with the policy is a pre-requisite for sailing in Squadron events. New Squadron members sign a declaration on their membership application that when sailing in Squadron events, their yacht will at all times comply with the relevant Regulations and this policy. The Squadron reserves the right to undertake safety inspections of boats.

3.0 The Squadron's Racing and Cruising Event Safety Plan

The following Safety Plan applies to the Squadron's Racing Events. It also applies to the Squadron's advertised Cruising Events, to the extent that is applicable.

There is an additional specific safety plan for the Gulf Classic Endurance Race. The Gulf Classic is managed by a separate committee that may hold members outside of the Squadron, has its own Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Safety Policy, and is conducted in close liaison with YNZ and Coastguard.

3.1 Race Oversight and Management

The various tasks associated with race oversight and management are allocated between the Committee, the Squadron's Trailer Yacht and Keeler Race Officers, and Race Officers of the Day.

The **Committee** has overall responsibility for all matters associated with the Squadron's racing.

Each season, two Committee members are allocated the roles of **Trailer Yacht Race Officer** and **Keeler Race Officer** for that season. The respective Race Officers prepare the season's race programme in consultation with the Committee and, under delegation from the Committee, have direct input and oversight of matters arising during the racing season, including matters of safety.

Each individual racing event is managed on the race day by an appointed **Race Officer of the Day**. This person need not be a Committee member but does need to be an experienced sailor. The race day role is shared amongst members so a member usually only undertakes the role for one or two race events in each season.

3.2 Race Communications

3.2.1 The race programme for the year is published in the Squadron's Members' Handbook for the season, which is distributed prior to the first race. As well as the programme, the Handbook contains details of the race courses, the Squadron's Safety Policy, details of each Committee member, and the contact details of all members and their boats. This includes mobile phone numbers and the VHF call sign for each boat. Members are encouraged to take a copy of the Handbook on their boat. The handbook is also distributed in electronic format for easy retrieval on portable devices.

3.2.2 Notification of each individual race is also conveyed to members during the month prior to the race. This notification may be via a combination of text, email, Facebook and the Squadron's monthly newsletter. A 'Notice of Race' is also published for each race series that sets out the race details and relevant information. These communications also advise the name and contact details of the Race Officer of the Day. Members are encouraged to advise this person (during the week prior to the race event) of their intention to participate, so they can be contacted if there are any changes prior to race day (such as cancellation or postponement due to weather).

3.2.3 Communications on race day are made on VHF Channel 77, both prior to and during the race as follows:

- On race day, each yacht intending to take part in the event is required to confirm their race entry to the Race Officer of the Day (ROD). This notification, by VHF or in person, is to be made prior to a specified cut-off time and is to include the name of the boat and the number of persons on board. The details are recorded by the ROD which, among other things, provides a record for safety purposes.
- Around 30 minutes prior to the start of each race, the ROD provides a briefing over VHF Channel 77. The briefing covers any details of the race/course the ROD wishes to highlight and may include information on the weather, tide/currents, hazards, the destination bay for the post-race social gathering, and in some cases notice of a change to the course. All boats are required to acknowledge that they have heard and understood the briefing and the opportunity is given to seek clarification or ask questions.
- During the race, any additional information (e.g. a course shortening) is conveyed by the ROD on VHF Channel 77.

- If a boat decides to withdraw from the race, it is required to immediately notify the ROD on VHF Channel 77, and to advise where the boat will be heading.
- At the end of the race, as part of the notification and collation of finish times and results, the ROD is required to make sure every boat that entered has been accounted for.
- The ROD's role to account for all boats that entered the race is completed once all boats have been accounted for, whether as race finishers or withdrawals.
- In the event that a boat is having difficulty hearing or transmitting a message from/to the ROD, other boats are to relay the message as necessary. If there is a VHF fault/breakdown, the default position is to convey the information by phone or text.
- Boats whose VHF radios have dual watch capability should have their radios set to dual watch Channels 77 and 16 during the race event. Ideally the ROD's VHF radio should also be set to the applicable Coastguard Channel 60 or 64, particularly if it has triple watch capability.

3.3 Sailing Conditions and Associated Decisions on Cancellation or Course Shortening

3.3.1 Programmed races will be held whenever conditions permit, though in some cases this may necessitate selecting a different course to the one originally proposed. A decision to not start a race at all will be made jointly by the respective ROD and the Trailer Yacht Race Officer, or Keeler Race Officer as applicable. This decision will be based on a range of factors including but not limited to, the actual conditions on the water, weather forecasts and forecast wind ranges, the prevailing weather pattern, Coastguard Nowcasting sites, the proposed course and alternative courses that could be sailed, sea state, visibility and the ability to seek shelter if conditions deteriorate.

As a general guide, the Committee advises that it is unlikely that a race will be held if the wind is gusting above 30 knots.

With regard to trailer yachts it should be noted that:

- YNZ Safety Regulation Part V Section 11.05(b) states that for trailer yachts "Suitable sails capable of taking the yacht to windward in winds of 40 knots shall be carried". (This is likely to require a reefed mainsail and a small headsail, perhaps a storm jib depending on the class of trailer yacht).
- It is considered that the wind guide indicated by the Committee provides a reasonable buffer from the wind level capability for trailer yachts required by the YNZ Safety Regulations. Nevertheless, it is important that Squadron members progressively develop the capability to sail in comparatively high wind speeds, as they could easily face high wind conditions while cruising independent of Squadron events.

3.3.2 If a race has started in suitable conditions, but conditions deteriorate during the race, it is then up to the ROD (who may consult with other Committee members who are sailing the race) to decide whether to shorten the course. As stated above, this decision will be conveyed to all entrants on VHF Channel 77.

3.3.3 As per the Squadron's Safety Policy, members are reminded that Part V Section 2.03 of the YNZ Safety Regulations states:

“It is the sole and exclusive responsibility of each skipper to decide whether or not to start or continue in any event”.

Regardless of the fact that an event is being held, a member who is not fully confident to sail in the conditions on the race day should make the personal decision to not sail their boat, or to withdraw if they subsequently find the conditions are beyond their confidence level.

- 3.3.4** On race day, the ROD and their respective Race Officer have authority to refuse to accept a race entry from a member who they consider has insufficient experience to be sailing in the conditions that day, or for that particular race course. Ideally, options should be explored to alternatively add a suitably experienced member to the crew of that yacht, or to have the member sail on another more experienced member’s yacht. The aim is to nurture newer sailors and to assist them to increase their skills and confidence in a safe environment.

In the event that a skipper is advised to not sail an event, due to the Race Officer opinion on their experience level, and that skipper continues to cruise in association with the fleet, then that skipper must acknowledge that they are sailing outside of the Safety Plan of the Squadron, and the Squadron holds no responsibility for their welfare while on the water.

4.0 Cruising Events

The Squadron endeavours to hold several Cruising Events each season. These events provide an opportunity for members to meet at a specified destination such as Great Barrier Island. While each event has an Event Co-ordinator, the events are primarily informal, self-directed/self-managed sailing trips. Some boats may sail to the destination on the same day while others may arrive earlier or later on. Some will stay a few days, while others may stay for two weeks or more, or they may sail on to other destinations. As per the Squadron’s Safety Policy, the safety of each vessel lies solely with each individual owner or skipper, though members obviously liaise with each other and assist each other whenever required. The primary form of communication and messaging between Squadron vessels during a Cruising Event is VHF Channel 77, with texting or mobile phone as a backup. It is incumbent on each participant to advise the Event Co-ordinator of their forward plans.

The Cruising Event Co-ordinator and the Commodore jointly have authority to refuse participation from a member who they consider has insufficient experience to sail a return trip to/from the event’s destination. They also have authority to refuse participation from a vessel that, although compliant with the Safety Policy in all other respects, is considered too small or too slow to be assured of undertaking a safe journey.

5.0 Emergency Situations During a Race or Cruising Event

The action to be taken in an emergency situation during a race or Cruising Event will depend on the gravity of the situation. As an overriding principle, if assistance is required by another boat, it is incumbent on all members to immediately provide assistance in any way they are able.

In a serious emergency situation where the boat or crew are in grave or imminent danger, whether through boat damage/disablement, injury, or a medical event, the crew should immediately action the distress (mayday) or urgency (pan pan) procedures on VHF Channel 16 or by phoning 111. In this case, Squadron boats nearby are required to provide whatever assistance they can until external help arrives.

If a Squadron boat is in difficulty, but not in grave or imminent danger, their first action should be to call Coastguard on VHF Channel 60/64 for help/advice. Following this they should call the ROD or Event Co-ordinator (as applicable) on VHF Channel 77 to advise they are in trouble and if they need assistance. It should be noted that Channel 77 is a line of sight Channel, so there is no guarantee of reception if they are behind a landmass or at the back of the fleet. Coastguard is the first point of call, and should coordinate any assistance. For this reason it is recommended that the ROD's/Event Co-ordinator's VHF radio also be set to VHF Channels 60/64, to ensure awareness of any Coastguard involvement.

Note that the specific case of **a man overboard who is missing** is a distress (mayday) call situation. A full-scale search is to be implemented immediately by Squadron boats without waiting for the authorities (Police, Coastguard, rescue helicopter) to arrive. If the event is a race, the race will be abandoned and yachts who are able to help are to be directed immediately to do so. Sails should be lowered for yachts that are able to safely move under motor. All yachts should perform a sweep type search of the area and continue to do so, as more eyes are better in a search situation. The Coastguard will take control of search patterns (which will naturally happen when Police arrive), but the best chance of success will be if the search starts immediately.