

Highlights from the Rules Night

The Rules Night held on 15 October 2024 was well-received by Members.

The session was presented by national sailing judge Erica Kirby, who is also a member of Balmain Sailing Club.

The aim was to clarify the rules arising from perennial questions such as Mark Room, Continuous Obstructions and Start/Finish line.

A lot of time was spent on the scenario in which a row of slower boats is ahead of faster boats in a narrow stretch of water such as Humbug.

Erica later provided more thoughts on this question, and she has also generously offered to share her email address so members can send her questions. Please contact the Twilight Captain if you wish to get in touch with Erica.

'I've had a thought about the problem of the slow boats blocking the channel for the fast boats. I've also talked to it with other judges. There is no solution other than the fast boats slowing down – or starting the fast boats first.'

The fast boats are keep clear when they are astern (RRS 12) – if they get a small overlap, they are then the leeward boat (RRS 11), but have to give the slow boat room to keep clear (RRS 15).

But the definition of 'room' says: 'The space a boat needs in the existing conditions, including space to comply with her obligations ..., while manoeuvring promptly in a seamanlike way.'

To me there is no 'space', ie where could the slow boat go? So therefore, 'room' would be NOT forcing your way into a gap that isn't there.'

During the Rules Night Erica also reminded members that being 'right' in a situation is not as important as avoiding a collision.

'Think of the damage, think of the people, think of the money.'

She shared one anecdote in which two classic wooden yachts were racing and one 't-boned' the other in a Port/Starboard situation. The Protest Committee heard from the Starboard boat's skipper who said: 'I saw him coming on port: I waited; called; called again, then when he didn't respond, I went straight into him.'

The Starboard boat was disqualified – the Committee noting that despite being in the right on the Port/Starboard rule, in this case, Rule 14 applied: *A boat shall avoid contact with another boat if reasonably possible.*

Erica noted: 'Some boats are faster, some slower, skippers have different levels of experience, all this needs to be taken into account.'

She reminded sailors it is preferable to avoid a potential incident during a race, lodge a protest and seek redress. A reminder that if you do wish to protest, you must immediately hail Protest and fly your Protest Flag. After the race you must notify the Starters of the protest and submit the correct form. Unless these steps are taken the Protest is not valid, see details here.

<https://gfs.org.au/yachts/protests/>

Another piece of advice Erica gave: 'If you're in breach, take your penalty and do your turns; even if you're not hailed, it's the right thing to do.' A breach of Part 2 of the Rules requires two turns while touching a mark requires one turn.

Erica's responses to Members' questions reflected her deep knowledge and many years' experience umpiring match racing and overseeing protest hearings.

As the Twilight Season gets underway, we want to see competitive racing along with good seamanship and sportsmanship.

As Vice-Commodore Steve Bradley said at the Skippers Briefing prior to commencement of twilights this year:

Aim for all to return SAFELY after an ENJOYABLE race

- Know the rules and abide by them
- If you infringe, take your penalty
- Be considerate of others
- Leave a good margin of error, appropriate to the conditions and all skippers' abilities
- Be friendly, no abuse
- Help others in need

In last year's Member Survey, the question was asked: how safe do you find racing at GFS? 51.5% said 'very safe', however, almost as many (46.2%) said '*reasonably* safe'.

It would be nice to see an improvement in members' experiences reflected in a higher response in the 'very safe' category next time.

Thanks to all who attended and made it a great night.

See you on the water.

Leigh McLaughlin

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