

Greenwich Flying Squadron

Women's Helm Development Program 2025-2026

Introduction

The **Women's Helm Development Program** (WH) is a flagship activity of Greenwich Flying Squadron's mission to increase women's participation in Club activities. The program demonstrates a partnership between boat owners, skippers, crews and GFS women.

The WH consists of **five races on the last Wednesday of the month during Twilights, excluding December**, supported by onshore and on-water information and practice events. The dates are: **29 October, 26 November, 28 January, 25 February, 25 March.**

While participation is optional, members are encouraged to get involved.

Boat Owners/Skippers who enter the Women's Helm and agree to mentor a Helmswoman go into a draw to have an expert sailor come out on their boat in a future race to offer tips and advice. The **Women's Helm Draw** will be announced after each WH race.

The Women's Helm is managed by a Committee consisting of Leigh McLaughlin, Pam Joy, John Veale and Ken Gibson.

We are lucky to have outstanding Laser and Ocean Racing sailor Vanessa Dudley as a Mentor and supporter of this initiative. Vanessa has an enormous list of sailing credits to her name, is a previous winner of Australian Female Sailor of the Year and a former editor of Australian Sailing.

Target Groups

Helmswomen. Women who have sailing experience as crew and would like to learn to helm or develop their helming skills. Preference is given to current GFS members, however, women who are members of another sailing Club but active in GFS may also participate. It is hoped in time they will make GFS their primary Club and become a financial member.

Mentors. Men or women who are either full members or crew members of GFS. Mentors must be confident sailors experienced at helming in GFS twilight races and willing to share their knowledge. If the Mentor is not the boat owner, they will need to obtain the boat owner's permission and support.

Crew. By demonstrating their support for the initiative, crew on participating boats and all sailors in Twilights are critical to the success of the Women's Helm.

N.B. The event is focused on supporting women members' participation in the Club. It is not aimed at bringing in guest helmswomen for a couple of races.

Facilitating matches between Mentors and Helmswomen

Club members are invited to express their interest in being a Mentor or Helmswomen. Where boats have regular female crew members, they decide amongst themselves who the Mentor and Helmswoman are for the season. If there is more than one woman on the crew, they are asked to nominate one Helmswoman for the series as this allows for the best learning outcomes.

Where there is not a natural match, this will be facilitated by the WH Committee, drawing from a list of Mentors and Helmswomen who have lodged an expression of interest to participate. Once a match is made, ideally the woman will become a regular member of her Mentor's crew for the Season.

Mentors and Helmswomen need to have confidence in each other and a clear understanding of how they will work together; this requires an investment of time and effort from those involved.

Any questions, problems or issues arising that need assistance or resolution are the responsibility of the WH Committee.

Education and Training

At the core of the event is the provision of mentoring and guidance by the usual Skipper to the novice Helmswoman. Participants are asked to come with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and clear, respectful communication.

Participants should aim to complete the five WH races if possible. If they wish, the Helmswoman may be invited to helm during other races in the Season. There is a series of complementary events:

On Water

Pre-Season Practice – one or two informal sessions to be organised in late August/September before the Season begins at a time convenient to participants. The Mentor organises a date and time for the Helmswoman and usual crew to go for a sail to get to know each other and begin the learning process.

Pre-WH Training Race – a Training Race for all WH participants will be held at 2pm on Saturday 18 October. This practice event will replicate a normal Twilight Race with the objective of Helmswomen learning about the start, listening to radio calls, understanding the course, applying RRS and safe sailing. Participation in the Training Race is strongly recommended for all WH participants. The Training Race will commence after the normal Saturday fleet Div 1 and Div 2 starts (PT 1.15). Warning Signal 1.30, Prep Signal 1.31, One Minute Signal 1.34, Start 1.35

Off Water

Club events are held to inform Skippers of important information prior to the Season. Helmswomen are expected to attend these events.

Sail Fast Boot Camp – scheduled for Wednesday 20 August at 7.30pm, this is a new Club event open to all Club Members. A panel of three experienced Skippers will share their views on what goes into achieving safe, enjoyable and successful racing at GFS.

Compulsory Skippers' Briefing – Wednesday 17 September at 7.30pm. This annual event provides Skippers with essential information prior to season commencement. Rules and information on the Women's Helm will be included in this Briefing.

Rules Night – Tuesday 21 October at 7.30pm. Annual event to provide information about the *Racing Rules of Sailing* and *Sailing Instructions* for racing at GFS. Guest Speaker is national sailing judge Erica Kirby.

WH Racing Instructions

- A yacht competing in the Women's Helm must have a minimum of two persons on board (skipper and one crew member).
- For their entry to remain valid, the Helmswoman should be at the helm for at least 75 percent of the race. This will be a matter of self-assessment.
- If for any reason the Helmswoman and/or the Mentor deem it necessary, the Mentor may take back the helm for the duration of the race, in which case the boat must advise the Starters of their withdrawal from that night's WH. Managing risk and ensuring safety of people and boats are the primary factors influencing the decision.
- A boat that has withdrawn from the WH may continue in the normal twilight race.

- Boats participating in the Women's Helm will fly a special flag, provided by the WH Committee, along with their usual Division flag and the GFS burgee.
- WH to be acknowledged by Starters in introductory comments on scheduled WH race nights.
- WH to proceed on scheduled dates.
- If a Twilight race is cancelled or abandoned under the *Twilight Race Cancellation and Abandonment Procedures*, the Women's Helm will not be rescheduled to another night.

Scoring

The Women's Helm Series and Twilight Series are held simultaneously, and point scores are separately awarded.

The Women's Helm Series is for the best weighted-handicap result in the combined divisions in a series of five (5) races to be held within the Twilight Series.

The weighted handicap result is calculated as the handicap position in the division divided by the number of boats starting in the division. For example:

1st place in a division of 6 boats would score 0.17

3rd place in a division of 6 boats would score 0.5

3rd place in a division of 8 boats would score 0.37

1st place in a division of 1 boat will score 0.5

A race not entered will score 1

The helmswoman with the lowest total score across all races and all divisions will be the overall WH winner.

Recognition

After each WH race:

- the handicap WH winner in each Division will be announced at the BBQ and awarded a prize as part of the usual announcements of winners on scratch and handicap
- an update will be provided about who is leading the WH Series
- the winner of that night's Women's Helm Draw will be announced

Overall winner has boat and helmswoman's name engraved on Women's Helm trophy.

Risk Management

The Skipper remains responsible for the vessel and its safety.

The Skipper, Mentor and Helmswoman shall consider the conditions, crew experience, boat and equipment ahead of the start and may decide it is inadvisable to have an inexperienced person on the helm, in which case they advise of their withdrawal from that night's WH. This is part of the normal assessment required of a Skipper prior to committing to race. (*RRS Fundamental Rule #3*).

The Skipper shall ensure he or she has a full complement of competent crew who are fully briefed about the WH and supportive of the boat's participation. The Mentor remains focused for the duration of the race on providing guidance to the Helmswoman. The Mentor may decide to have no other role on the boat.

People new to helming may not have the skills and experience to manage the boat in challenging periods during the race. These may include dealing with gusty conditions; the Start; managing the risk of an accidental gybe; moving safely through congested parts of the course.

The role of the Mentor to support the Helmswoman to competently navigate these aspects is the intent of this program. If the Mentor deems it prudent, he or she shall take back the helm. Equally, the Helmswoman is able to hand back the helm voluntarily. The goal is a positive and safe experience for all involved.

Measuring success

The WH will be considered a success if participants report a positive experience and would be happy to do it again and if positive attitudes are evident among Club members to women's participation and the WH.

Implementation – roles and responsibilities

GFS Committee – monitoring and oversight. *WH Committee* – facilitate Helm-Mentor matches, resolve issues, champion event. *GFS Women Sailors Working Group* – Action Plan, eg. Participant lists, liaison, prepare information, organise events, communication and legwork.

Key Dates

| When | What |
|-------------|--|
| July | WH info communicated to Members and EOIs open |
| July-Aug | Encourage entries, facilitate matches, promote participation |
| August | Mentors and Helmswomen matched |
| 20 Aug | <i>SailFast Boot Camp</i> – Clubhouse event |
| Aug/Sept | Mentors and Helmswomen hold own training sessions |
| Sept | Participants receive WH Flags |
| 17 Sept | <i>Compulsory Skippers' Briefing</i> – Clubhouse event |
| 18 Oct | <i>Pre-WH Training Race</i> – On Water event |
| 21 Oct | <i>Rules Night</i> – Clubhouse Event |
| 29 Oct | <i>WH Race 1</i> |
| 26 Nov | <i>WH Race 2</i> |
| 28 Jan | <i>WH Race 3</i> |
| 25 Feb | <i>WH Race 4</i> |
| 25 Mar | <i>WH Race 5</i> |

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