

MARINE NOTICE

Marine Notice 04/2007
Supersedes 11/2000

Safety of Fishing Vessels

The purpose of this notice is to advise shipmasters, skippers and watchkeepers on trading vessels and fishing vessels about the potential risk of collisions between such vessels.

An unacceptable number of collisions and close quarters situations continue to occur in Australian waters between trading vessels and fishing vessels.

Investigations of these incidents indicate that, in almost every case, the fundamentals of good seamanship and basic adherence to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (COLREG) were contravened to varying degrees. Contravention of the COLREG is an offence to which penalties¹ apply.

The information provided in this notice aims to remind masters of trading vessels of the need to ensure that adequate lookout is maintained and the appropriate measures are taken to avoid collision with fishing vessels. It also aims to remind owners and skippers of fishing vessels that they have responsibilities under the COLREG both when fishing and when in transit.

Discussion of COLREG

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) specifies the right of international shipping to transit the waters of a coastal State. Australia is a signatory to UNCLOS.

In practical terms this means that all users must share Australia's coastal waters including the responsibility for safety.

Rule 5 of the COLREG requires all vessels, including vessels engaged in fishing, to maintain a proper lookout by all available means. In this context "all available means" includes hearing, sight, radar, and other electronic means.

Rule 18 of the COLREG, in simple terms, requires all vessels, except those "not under command" or "restricted in their ability to manoeuvre", to keep out of the way of a "vessel engaged in fishing". Although a trading vessel may be required to take avoiding action in certain circumstances, the skippers of fishing vessels need to be aware that:

- large vessels cannot turn quickly and certainly cannot make rapid speed reductions. In confined waters such as the northern section of the Great Barrier Reef they may be confined by the narrowness of the charted route and the proximity of navigational dangers.
- in certain visibility or sea state conditions, or in the presence of some radar propagation effects the bridge team on the large vessel may not detect the smaller craft either visually or on radar. It is recommended that fishing vessels, especially of fiberglass or timber construction, at least fit radar reflectors.

¹Subsection 258(7) of the *Navigation Act 1912* specifies penalties of up to \$ 10,000 or imprisonment for 2 years, or both, for a person, and up to \$20,000 for a corporation.



Under the COLREG, vessels are only considered to be engaged in fishing when fishing with “nets, lines or trawls or other fishing apparatus which restrict manoeuvrability”. Fishing vessels are not considered to be engaged in fishing when “trolling lines or other fishing apparatus which do not restrict manoeuvrability”.

In addition to complying with the COLREG, the following basic precautions should be taken:

- maintaining a radar watch and listening on VHF radio Channel 16² and DSC Channel 70 where fitted;
- ensuring that the required fishing or trawling lights and shapes are not obscured;
- ensuring that the required fishing or trawling lights and shapes are extinguished or hauled down when no longer engaged in fishing; and
- avoiding erratic and unpredictable manoeuvres when in the vicinity of a large vessel.

Collision Risks

Analysis of collision statistics shows that fishing vessels are at risk, not only when fishing, but more so when on passage to or from port or between fishing areas. However, the special provisions of the COLREG, applicable to fishing vessels, only apply when such vessels are engaged in fishing.

This risk of collisions for fishing vessels can be significantly reduced by ensuring that all crew members, specially the bridge watchkeepers and not only the skipper, have a knowledge of seamanship and navigation and, most importantly, a sound understanding of the COLREG.

Some serious incidents have also occurred when fishing vessels have anchored in busy sealanes. This is a dangerous practice and should be avoided, particularly at night. The requirement for keeping a proper lookout applies even when a vessel is at anchor.

Fishing vessels may be encountered anywhere off the Australian coast at any time of the year and using a variety of fishing techniques.

Australian Government authorities may investigate incidents at sea involving fishing vessels and

trading vessels that are subject to the *Navigation Act 1912*.

Incidents should be reported as soon as possible and in detail. The master of the vessel must forward an initial report (form AMSA 18) to the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) of AMSA in Canberra:

- by fax (+61 2 6230 6868 or 1800 622 153 (free fax within Australia); or
- by telex (+ 71 62349); or
- by e-mail (Reports@amsa.gov.au); or
- via a Maritime Communication Station

Emergency contact phone number for RCC is 1800 641 792 (toll free within Australia) or + 61 2 6230 6811 (from outside Australia).

A detailed report (form AMSA 19) is to be forwarded to RCC within 72 hours of the lodgement of form AMSA 18. Copies of incident reporting forms (AMSA 18 and AMSA 19) can be downloaded from the AMSA website at <http://www.amsa.gov.au>. Marine Notice MN27/2002 provides details of reporting requirements.

Information on Fisherman and Safety Awareness at Sea and the Confidential Marine Reporting System is available from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) website at:

http://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/2004/pdf/fisherman_safety.pdf; and

<http://www.atsb.gov.au/notification/cmrs/index.aspx>, respectively.

Clive Davidson
Chief Executive Officer
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Australian Maritime Safety Authority
GPO Box 2181
CANBERRA ACT 2601

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Internet address for all current Marine Notices:
AMSA Website www.amsa.gov.au

²The Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organization decided (resolution MSC.131(75)) that all GMDSS ships, while at sea, shall continue to maintain, when practicable, continuous listening watch on VHF channel 16.