RNLI Lifeboats

Fisher Safety Manual

FEBRUARY 2026

DEVELOPED FOR LOW-RESOURCE AREAS

About this manual

The RNLI *Fisher Safety Manual* contains essential skills, knowledge and guidance for those working or using artisanal/traditional fishing practices with limited access to safety equipment and training standards.

It is a guidance document and can be adapted to suit your local conditions.

The *Fisher Safety Manual* has been compiled by the RNLI, the charity that saves lives at sea.

This manual is reviewed every 3 years.

Please send any comments and feedback to: International_Resources@rnli.org.uk

February 2026

Piloted and developed by:

Lifeboats

Royal National Lifeboat Institution
West Quay Road
Poole
Dorset
BH15 1HZ
England

Tel: +44 (0) 1202 663000
Web: RNLI.org
Email: international@rnli.org.uk

Photos: Various contributors for the RNLI, Shutterstock, FAO. 2021. Safety at sea for small-scale fishers. Rome.

Contents

Unit 1: The Importance of Fisher Safety

Photo: Chimnay Sing

Learning outcomes

1.1 Understand the international drowning problem.

1.2 Understand various case studies of drowning in fishing communities.

1.3 Understand the importance of sustainability and the need to avoid illegal fishing.

1.1 The international drowning problem

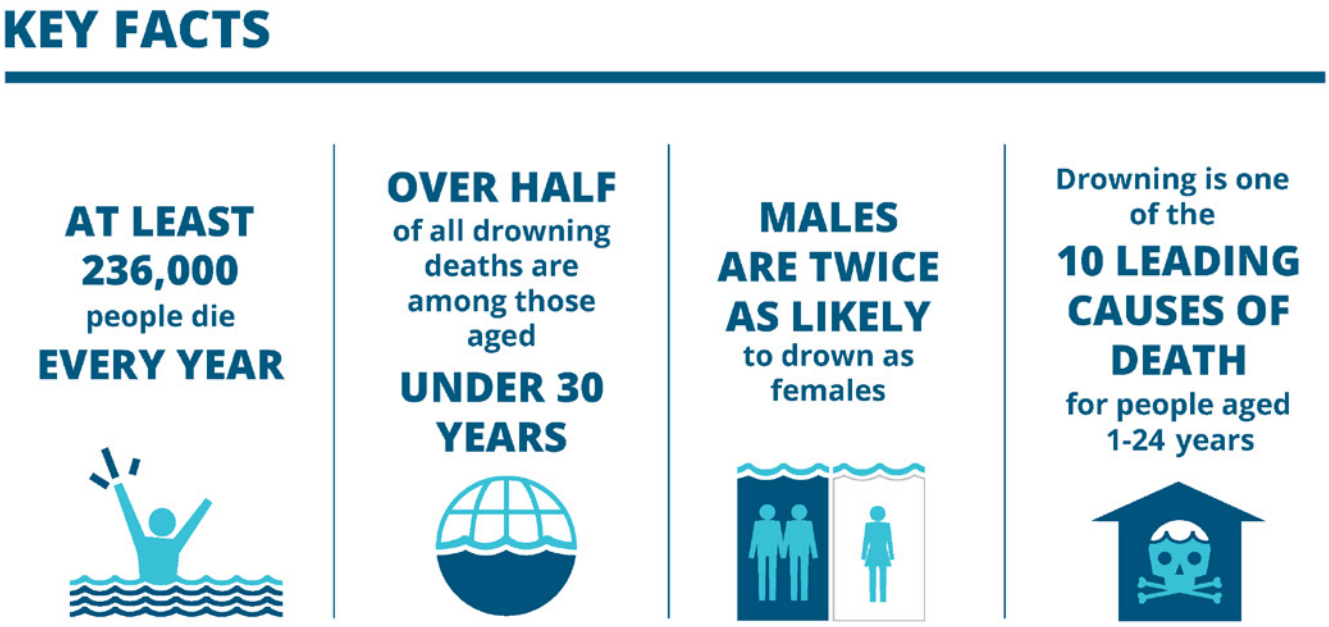
In 2018, 39 million people globally were engaged in fisheries work. Most of this workforce is employed in low and middle income countries (LMICs) and the majority are small-scale artisanal fishers in Asia (85%), followed by Africa (9%).

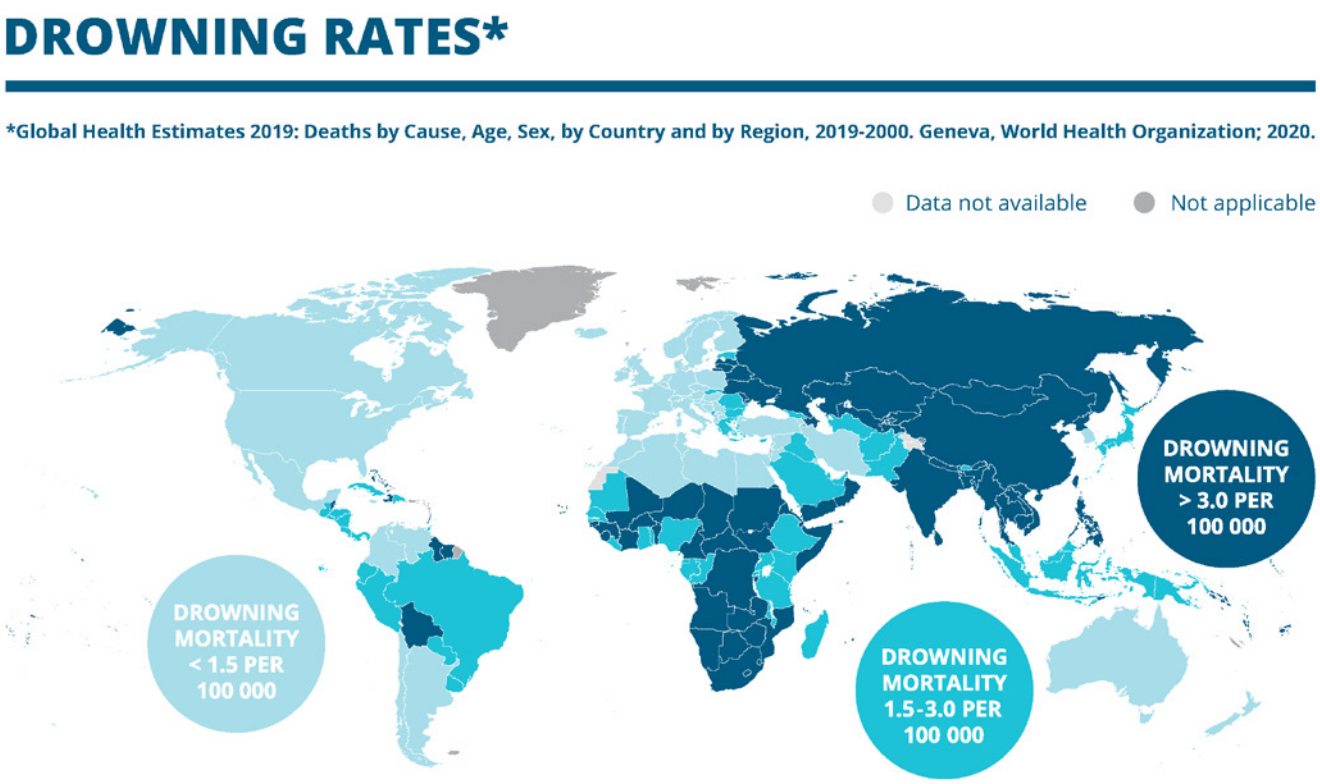
Currently, most data on drowning of fishers comes from high-income country (HIC) settings, but it is widely acknowledged that fishing globally is a high-risk profession and that most workplace deaths happen by drowning. The most recent estimates for deaths in the fishing industry come from the FISH Safety Foundation, who estimated 100,000 deaths take place each year.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that drowning is responsible for the loss of an around 236,000 lives each year (2020). This figure is likely to be a significant underestimation as it excludes drowning deaths due to flooding, transportation, and intentional drowning deaths. The WHO estimation also relies on data collected from poor reporting systems, which often under-represent or misrepresent drowning deaths.

Despite the scale of the problem, drowning is barely recognised as a public health problem – a silent epidemic that is significantly under-resourced.

The WHO created the following information in 2021 on global drowning:





1.2 Fishing related drowning problems

Drowning in fishing communities around the world is a regular occurrence. Research into drowning amongst fishers on Lake Victoria (in both Uganda and Kenya) has shown that most fishers drown when their boat capsizes or sinks in bad weather (69% of deaths).

The underlying causes of these drowning deaths include:

- the use of unseaworthy and poorly maintained vessels
- a lack of awareness of the weather conditions
- limited use of personal flotation devices (PFDs) by fishers
- financial pressures to fish to make a daily income.

These are underpinned by more complex drivers of risk including:

- poor fisheries governance
- illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
- environmental and ecological changes including those resulting from climate change
- poverty.

Examples of traditional fishing communities from around the world

1.3 Sustainability and illegal fishing

From ancient times, fish from oceans, lakes, and rivers have been a crucial food source and economic benefit. Initially, ocean productivity seemed limitless. However, with advances in fisheries and aquaculture, it became clear that aquatic resources are finite and require proper management to sustain their contributions to global nutrition, economy, and social wellbeing.

Pollution, abusive fishing techniques, and illegal fishing have led to shrinking catches and declining fish stocks. This depletion negatively impacts food security, economic development, and social welfare, especially in countries heavily dependent on fish. Proper management of aquatic resources is essential for sustaining their societal benefits.

It is important that fishing stocks are sustained and no fishing takes place during the closed season or in prohibited areas.

Do not use illegal fishing nets.

Photo: Harrison Bates

Photo: Mike Lavis

Learning outcomes

2.1 Understand the hazards associated with the environment.

2.2 Understand the hazards associated with equipment.

2.3 Understand the different roles and responsibilities.

2.4 Understand how to assess risk over benefit.

2.1 Environmental hazards

The fishing environment can have many different types of hazards, these include environmental hazards such as the weather and tides and equipment hazards such as boat overloading and poor maintenance.

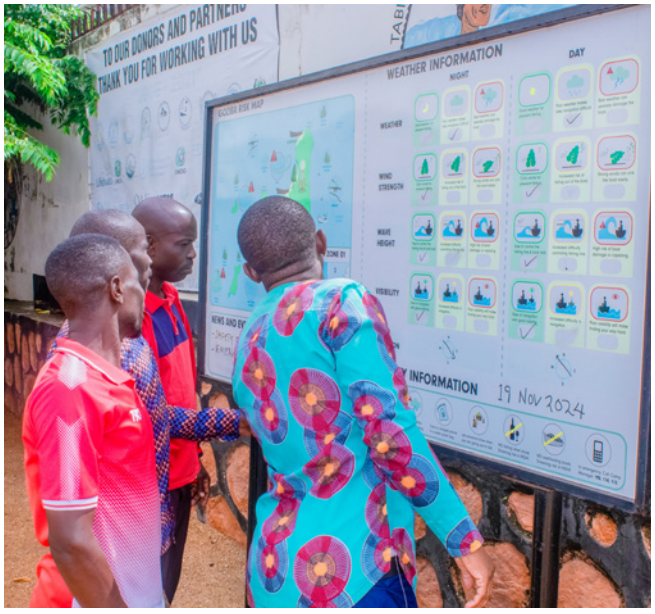
Weather

Prior to going to sea, you should always check the latest weather forecast.

An understanding of wind strength, direction, and what effect it will have on your boat is essential. Increased wind generally indicates bigger waves.

Rain and fog can cause reduced visibility. This increases the risk of collision and may restrict your ability to fish safely. Prolonged exposure to the elements such as the sun, can cause dehydration, resulting in reduced concentration. Exposure to the cold can lead to the inability to perform tasks effectively.

Ensure you reduce the risks by wearing the appropriate clothing to suit the weather conditions. (See page 24/25).



Sources of weather information

- Television and radio.
- Mobile phones.
- Newspapers.
- VHF radio.
- Internet.
- Local community sources:
  - beach management units (BMUs)
  - community leaders
  - fishing officers
  - weather board.

The Beaufort Scale

The Beaufort scale is an internationally recognised system, used to estimate and describe wind speed based on observed conditions at sea or on land. It has been widely adopted for its practicality and ease of use.

Beaufort Scale					
Force	Description	Sea characteristics	Wind speed		
			Knots	mph	km/h
0	Calm	Like a mirror.	<1	<1	<1
1	Light air	Ripples like scales are formed.	1–3	1–3	2–6
2	Light breeze	Small wavelets, still short but more pronounced, not breaking.	4–6	4–7	7–11
3	Gentle breeze	Large wavelets, crests begin to break; a few white horses.	7–10	8–12	12–19
4	Moderate breeze	Small waves growing longer; fairly frequent white horses.	11–16	13–18	20–28
5	Fresh breeze	Moderate waves, taking more pronounced form; many white horses, perhaps some spray.	17–21	19–24	29–38
6	Strong breeze	Large waves forming; white foam crests more extensive; probably some spray.	22–27	25–31	39–49
7	Near gale	Sea heaps up; white foam from breaking waves begins to blow in streaks.	28–33	32–38	50–61
8	Gale	Moderately high waves of greater length; edge of crests break into spindrift; foam blown in well-marked streaks.	34–40	39–46	62–74
9	Strong gale	High waves with tumbling crests; dense streaks of foam; spray may affect visibility.	41–47	47–54	75–88
10	Storm	Very high waves with long overhanging crests; dense streams of foam make surface of sea white. Heavy tumbling sea; visibility affected.	48–55	55–63	89–102
11	Violent storm	Exceptionally high waves; sea completely covered with long white patches of foam; edges of wave crests blown into froth. Visibility affected.	56–63	64–73	103–117
12	Hurricane	Air filled with foam and spray; sea completely white with driving spray; visibility very seriously affected.	64+	74+	118+

Tides

A tide can be defined as 'the movement of a body of water'. This movement of water results in a regular and repeated rise and fall of the sea levels caused primarily by the gravitational forces exerted by the moon and the sun, combined with the rotation of the Earth.

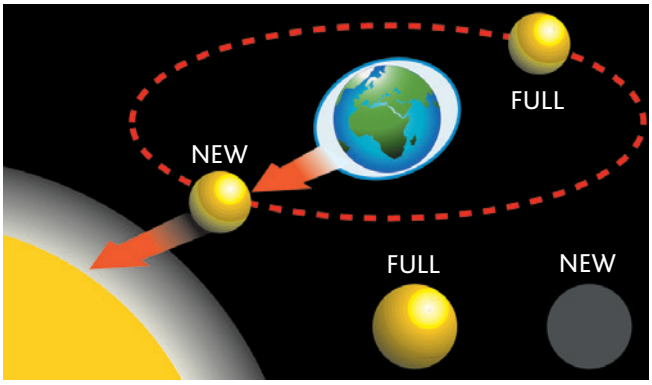
Types of tide

Tides can be classified into two main types based on the positions of the Earth, moon, and sun: spring tides and neap tides. In a lunar month there will be two spring tides and two neap tides separated by approximately seven days.

Photo: RNLI/Aram Atkinson

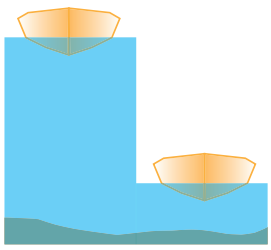
Spring tides (Full and New Moon)

When the sun, moon and earth are in line, we get a spring tide. With spring tides we get higher high waters and lower low waters.



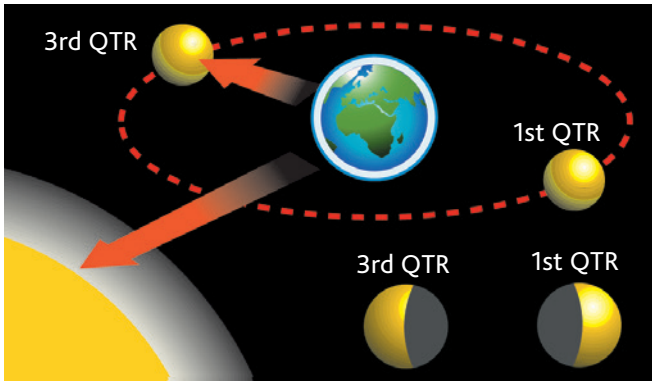
The gravitational pull of the sun and the moon are in line. This will give a linear pull on the water over the earth's surface resulting in:

HIGH high water
LOW low water



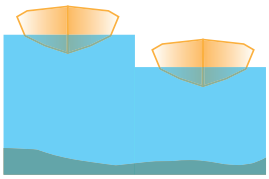
Neap tides (1st and 3rd Quarter Moon)

When the sun and moon are at right angles to the earth we get neap tides. With neap tides we get lower high waters and higher low waters.



The gravitational pull is now at right angles. This will evenly spread the water over the earth's surface resulting in:

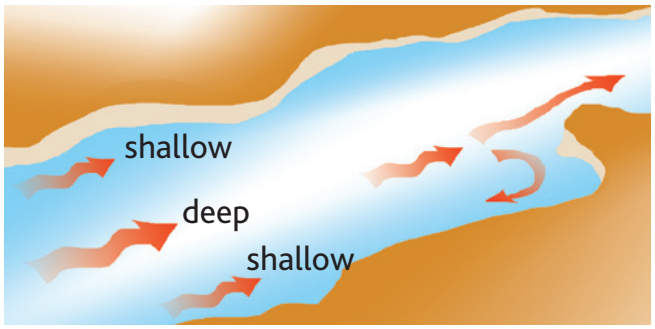
MODERATE high water
MODERATE low water



Tidal streams

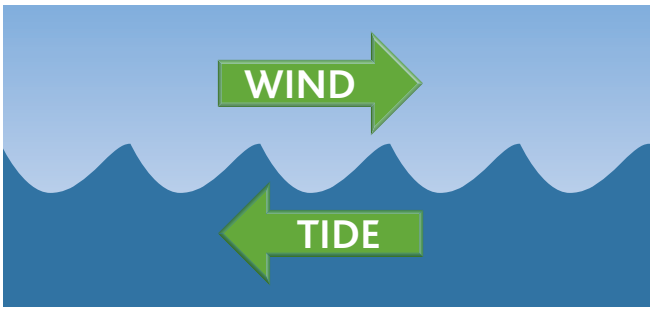
Tidal streams are horizontal movements of water. They are affected by the shape of the land and the depth of the water. Generally, tidal streams:

- are strongest in deep, narrow channels and around headlands
- can make the sea rougher
- mean that boats operate on a moving carpet of water which means that they may not be travelling in the direction it is moving through the water.



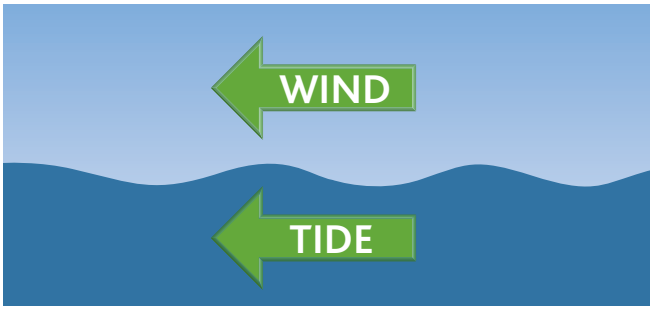
Understanding local tidal streams and their effects is crucial for safe fishing. Tidal streams can significantly impact fishing conditions and you should be aware of the potential dangers associated with strong tidal currents, especially if you're fishing from a small boat.

Wind over tide



When wind blows against the direction of the tidal current, it can create steep, choppy waves and rough water conditions. This is because the wind opposes the flow of the tide, causing the water to pile up and form larger waves.

Wind same direction as tide



When the wind blows in the same direction as the tidal current, the waves can become longer and smoother, creating more manageable conditions.

By understanding the effects of wind over tide and adjusting your plans accordingly, you can improve your safety and success while fishing.

Water speed

Fast flowing water in rivers and harbour entrances can be dangerous to fishing boats, make sure you are familiar with your local environment and any known fast flowing water locations and the times these are likely to occur based on the type of tide and the predicted tide times.

Water temperature

When your body hits cold water, "cold shock" can cause dramatic changes in breathing, heart rate and blood pressure. The sudden gasp and rapid breathing alone create a greater risk of drowning even for confident swimmers in calm waters.

The fishing environment

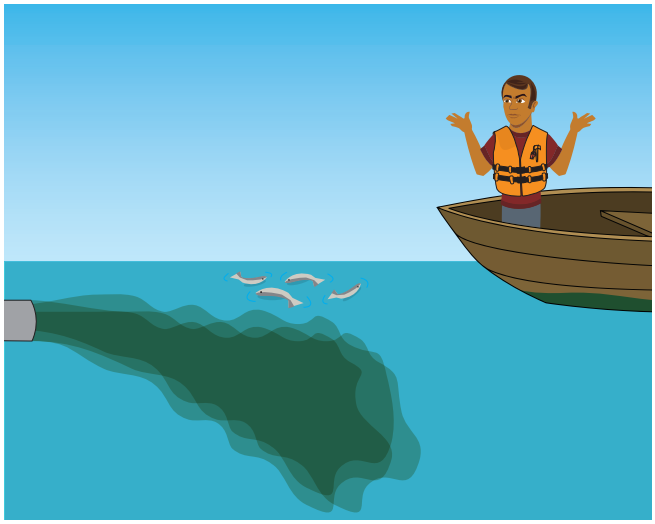
Water depth

Ensure you are familiar with your location and wear a personal flotation device if you are going to be working in or around the water.

Entry and exit points

Steep, slippery and unstable banks can limit access and exit from the water, and be a danger to fishers, especially when loading and unloading equipment and fish. Consider the most safe and effective locations to board and load your boat.

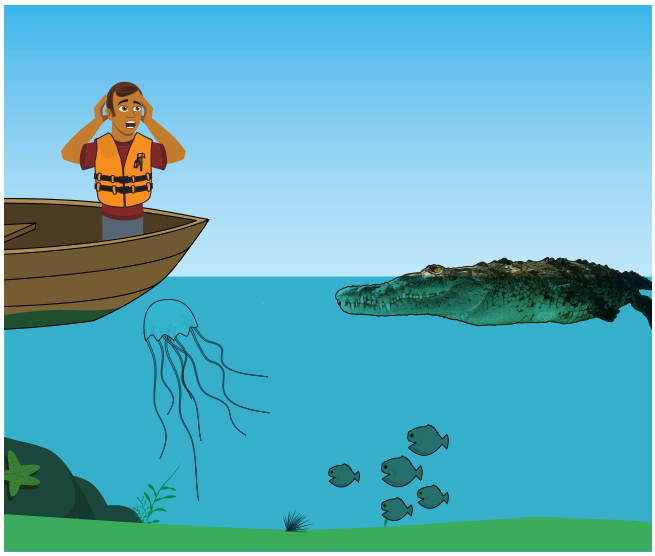
Pollution



Polluted water can be found in a fishing environment. This may include sewage water or industrial chemicals. Some pollutants can be very dangerous and can also harm human health.

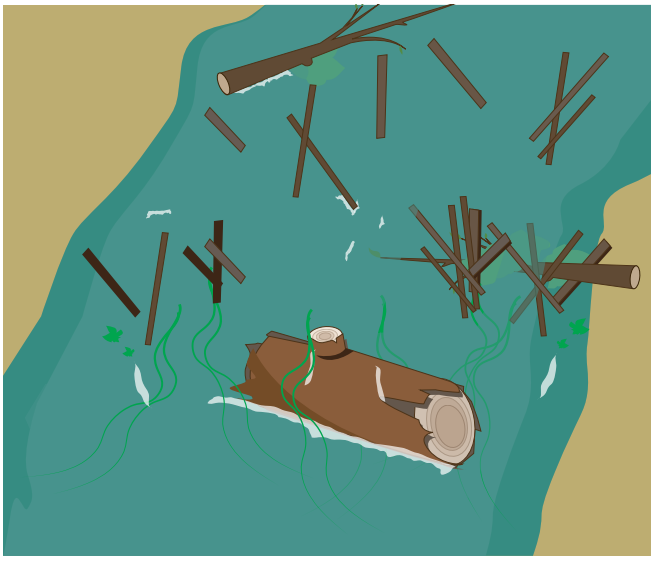
Open wounds should be covered if possible. People should wash after being in polluted water and equipment should be cleaned after use.

Animals



Dangerous animals may be found in the aquatic environment. Stay alert and keep away if you see any. Warn others if you can.

Floating debris



Floating debris, such as logs, rubbish and discarded containers can be found in the water. These may not always be visible, as they could be submerged and have the potential to become hazards. Whilst navigating, especially at high speed and during the night keep a good look out.

Underwater objects

Fishers should be aware of injuring themselves on dangerous objects such as sharp rocks, broken glass or underwater debris. Foot protection or shoes should be worn where possible.

Night fishing

Darkness or poor visibility can make fishing conditions challenging and increase the possibility of becoming lost or disorientated as well as increasing the risk of collisions.
Some considerations for fishing at night or in poor visibility:

- Carry a light/torch.
- Use reflective material.
- Use a light on the boat mast or high point.
- Check local illuminated landmarks and visible lights on land (eg. radio masts).
- Keep a good all round lookout at all times.

Piracy

Be aware there may be groups of armed bandits attempting to hijack your boat and steal your fish. Do not fight back and comply with their request. Your life is more valuable.

2.2 Equipment hazards

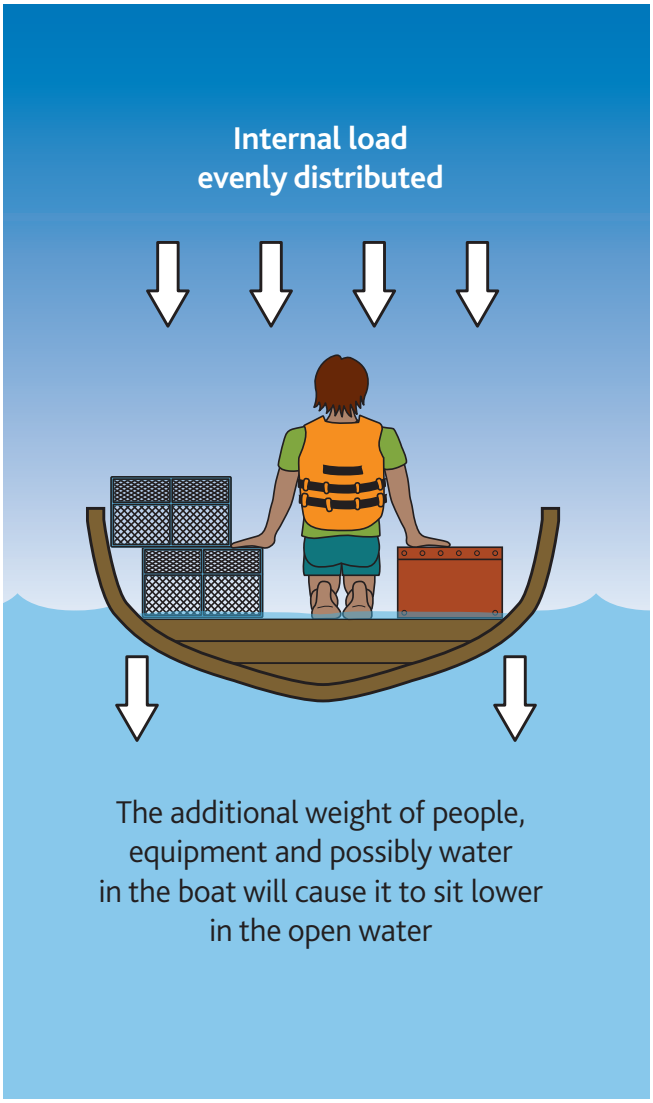
Fishing often involves using a variety of tools, equipment, and gear, all of which can present significant hazards. It is essential to eliminate or minimize these risks to ensure safety whilst fishing.

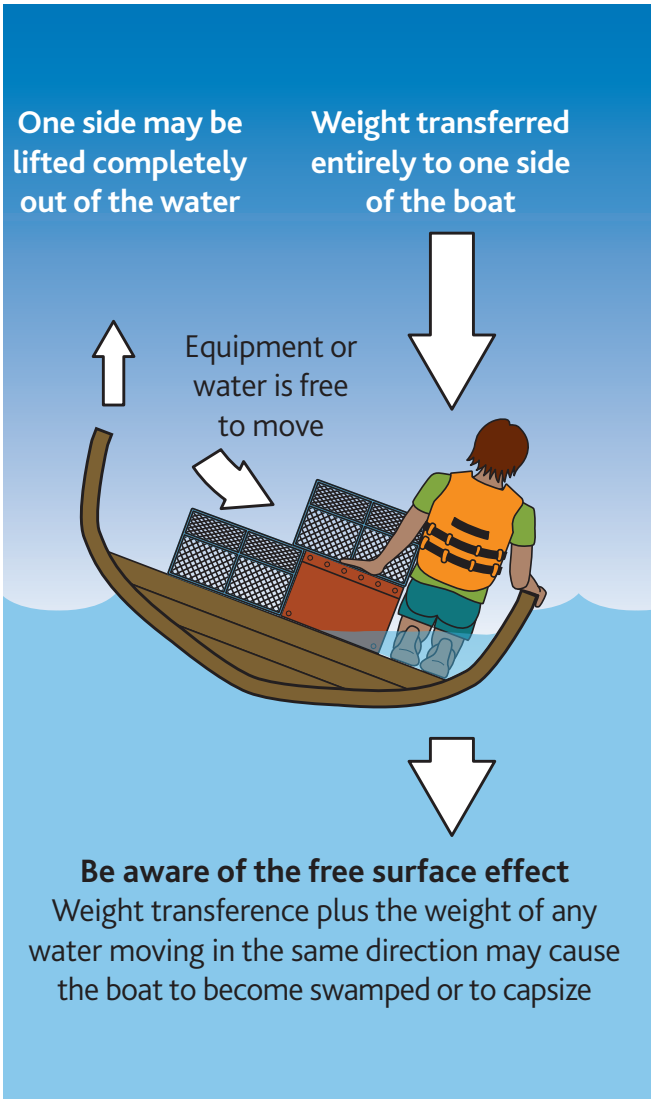
Given the typically limited space on a fishing vessel, careful management and organisation of equipment are crucial to maintaining a safe working environment.

Boat overloading

When you load too much in your boat, the boat sinks lower in the water and the extra weight affects the buoyancy reserves. It is more likely water will come in over the sides or into the hull and once there is water ingress, the boat is likely to become unstable and can more easily swamp or capsize.

A boat can be overloaded with people, equipment and/or fish. Make sure you do not overload your boat. Be aware of the free surface effect when water in the boat can move quickly and effect stability.





Poor maintenance

Equipment should be maintained and checked before going fishing.

Check there are no leaks or ingress of water into the boat. Check nets, ropes and fishing gear to ensure they are not damaged. Keep all equipment tidy and safely stowed when not in use.

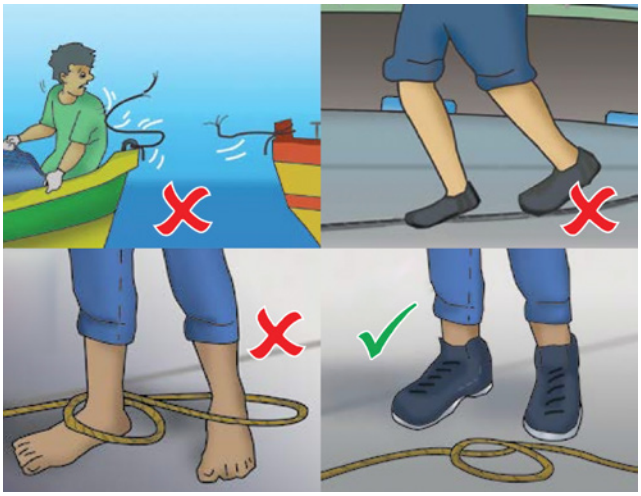
If using an engine, ensure the engine is maintained and you have sufficient fuel for the trip.

Lack of safety equipment

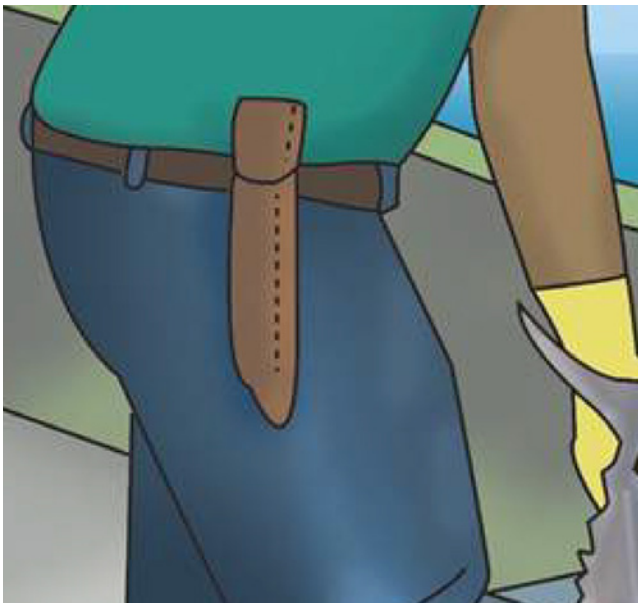
Ensure you carry appropriate safety equipment for your fishing trip and know how to use the equipment, safety equipment such as:

- Personal flotation devices (PFDs)
- Means for calling for help
- Clothing to keep you warm

Entrapment with equipment/lines



Be mindful of any lines or equipment in use or stored on the boat. Never stand in the bight of a rope or wire, as sudden tightening can cause serious injury. Avoid standing in line with tensioned wires and ropes; if they break, they will snap back in the direction of the pull and can cause severe harm. Always wear proper footwear to prevent slips and foot injuries; do not wear flip-flops.



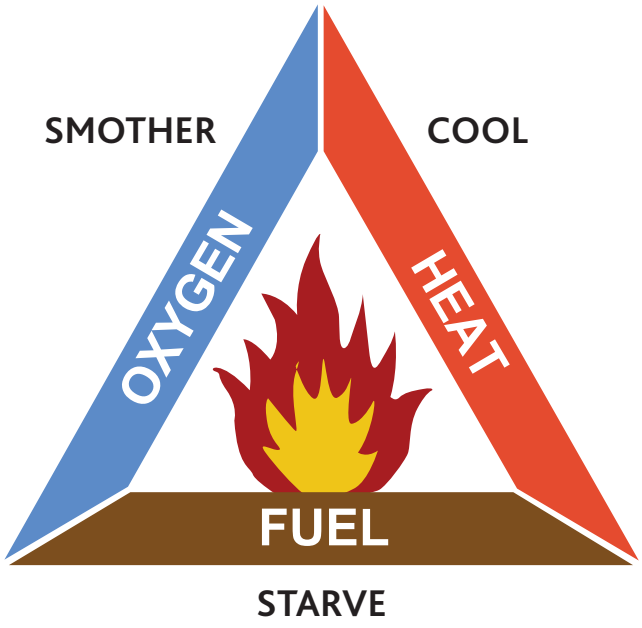
Carry a knife as this can be used to cut any lines that may become entangled. Always keep your knife in a cover to prevent accidental cuts.

Fire onboard

On a boat, fire is a dangerous and life-threatening hazard.

The fire triangle

Fire is a chemical reaction between oxygen in the atmosphere and a fuel source. A fire requires three elements to start as shown in the graphic below.



Oxygen (Air)

Oxygen is abundant in the air around us and is therefore present at all times for fire to begin.

Heat sources

Heat sources include naked flames, hot surfaces and electrical sparks.

Fuel sources

Any combustible material, such as wood, oil, paper, etc.

Fire will continue to burn for as long as the three elements, oxygen, fuel and heat, are present. Remove any one of the elements and the fire will go out.

However, before attempting to remove any one element, the nature of the fire must be understood.

2.3 Roles and responsibilities

The health and safety of the crew must be considered at all times and clear roles and responsibilities should be established.

- A nominated captain, as the owner's representative, should have overall responsibility for ensuring the safety of the vessel and crew while out fishing.
- Crew should cooperate with the captain and boat owner to maintain their own health and safety, as well as that of other crew members on board.
- Considerations should be given to any medical conditions the boat crew may have, ensuring sufficient medication is available for the duration of the trip.
- The crew should ensure they are fit and well to carry out their duties; any crew member suspected of being ill should not be enlisted for the fishing trip.
- Crew members should notify the captain of any ongoing medical condition that could affect the fishing trip.
- Strict no alcohol and no drug consumption policies should be enforced.
- Nobody suspected of being intoxicated should be allowed to go out fishing on the boat.

Ensure the boat is operated in a safe manner

2.4 Risk over benefit

Risk versus benefit

Before undertaking any fishing activities, the captain must decide whether the risk to the fishers is worth the likelihood of a successful fishing activity.

When planning fishing activities, your priorities are:

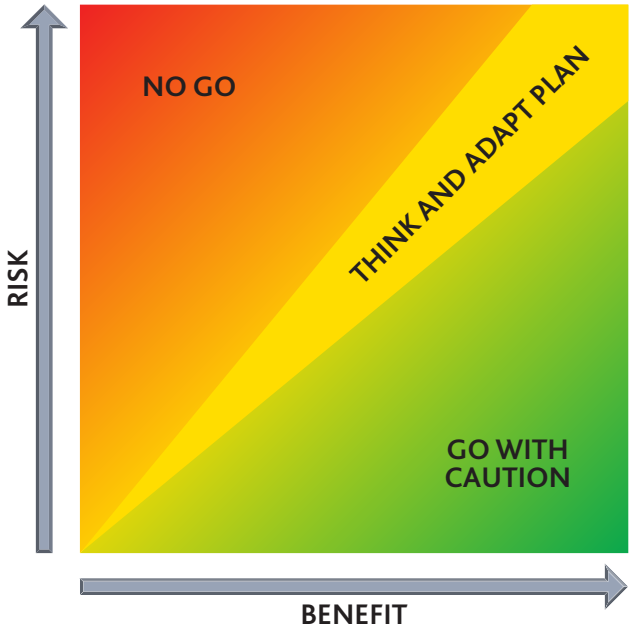
1. **You.**
2. **Your Crew.**
3. **Your Boat.**

The captain should:

- take account of the hazards and potential risks when considering any fishing activity
- develop a plan that minimises the risk to both crew and boat.

This chart can be used to plot the level of risk, from low to high on the vertical axis. The degree of benefit to be gained from effecting a successful fishing activity should be plotted from low to high on the horizontal axis.

This process can be completed as a mental model before any fishing activity, and re-evaluated during fishing on the boat.



Risk over benefit in a fishing environment

You need to consider the risks versus benefits before you make the decision to go fishing.

For example, if the weather conditions are predicting very strong winds (creating dangerous conditions for fishing) the chance of catching fish will be low. This means that the risk is high and the benefit is low, therefore you should consider not going fishing.

Learning outcomes

3.1. Understand the importance of protection from drowning, the environment and the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

3.2. Understand the importance of boat safety equipment.

3.3. Maintenance and care of safety equipment.

3.1 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment (PPE) will protect you against health and safety risks. Due to the high risk of drowning in an aquatic environment, it is important that a fishers wear appropriate PPE.

To be effective, it is important that all PPE is the correct size and adjusted to the individual wearing it.

Heavy clothing that absorbs or catches water should not be worn.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

PFDs of an approved type should be available on board for each crew member and should be worn when out fishing, as these will increase your chances of survival should you fall in the water.

Photo: Irwan Zahuri

Different types of PFDs

Buoyancy aid

A buoyancy aid has inherent buoyancy and will help you to stay afloat if you enter the water, but it will not keep your head out of the water should you become unconscious. It needs to be a bright colour to help with being located should you end up in the water.

Buoyancy aids come in a wide variety of designs. Some can be put on like a jacket, while others are put on over the head and adjusted at the side.

The most important features of any buoyancy aid are:

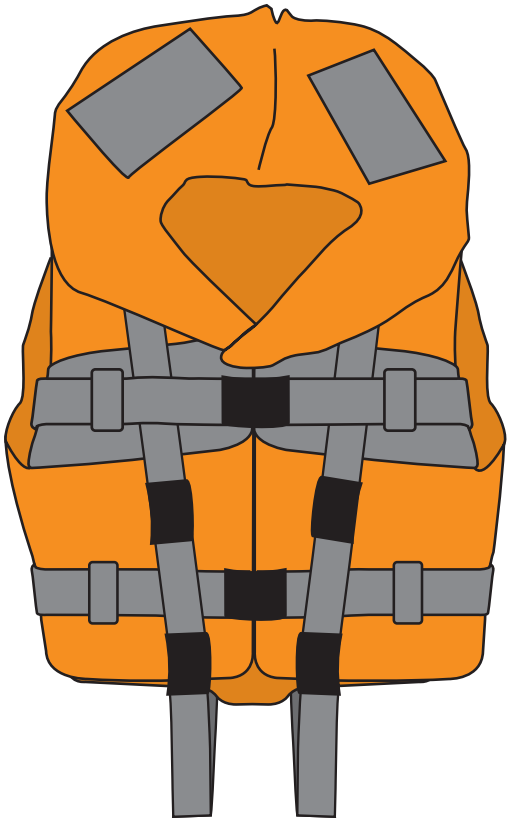
- that it fits comfortably
- allows freedom of movement
- gives you flotation, especially if you enter the water.

Make sure that any buckles are done up and straps are pulled tight so that the buoyancy aid fits properly.

Lifejackets

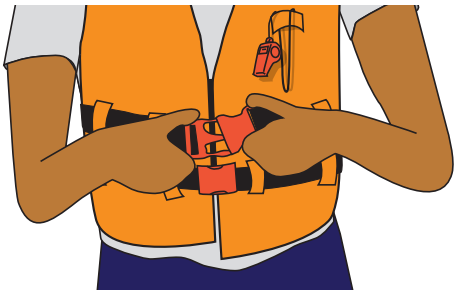
There are many different types of lifejackets, including those with manual and automatic inflation. There are also foam lifejackets.
A lifejacket is designed so that if you become unconscious, it should keep your head above the water.

Ensure that all straps and buckles are done up tightly and care should be taken to minimise the amount of loose ends.



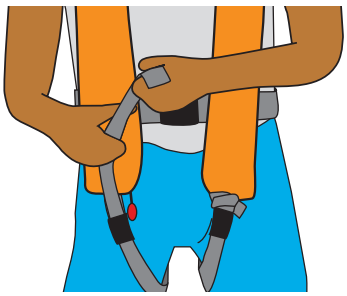
When wearing a lifejacket;

- it is vital that you fit it correctly, otherwise there is a danger that it may come off if you enter the water
- ensure that any buckles are done up and any webbing straps are tightened



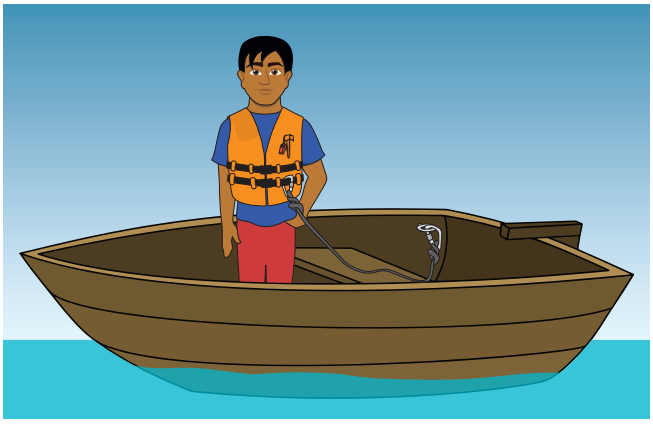
- tuck away any excess webbing, so it does not become a snag hazard.

If your lifejacket is fitted with crotch straps, ensure you fit these correctly.



Lifeline

Some PFDs come with a 'lifeline'. This allows for the fisher to be attached to the boat via a rope or webbing . The lifeline **MUST** be able to be released quickly if necessary.



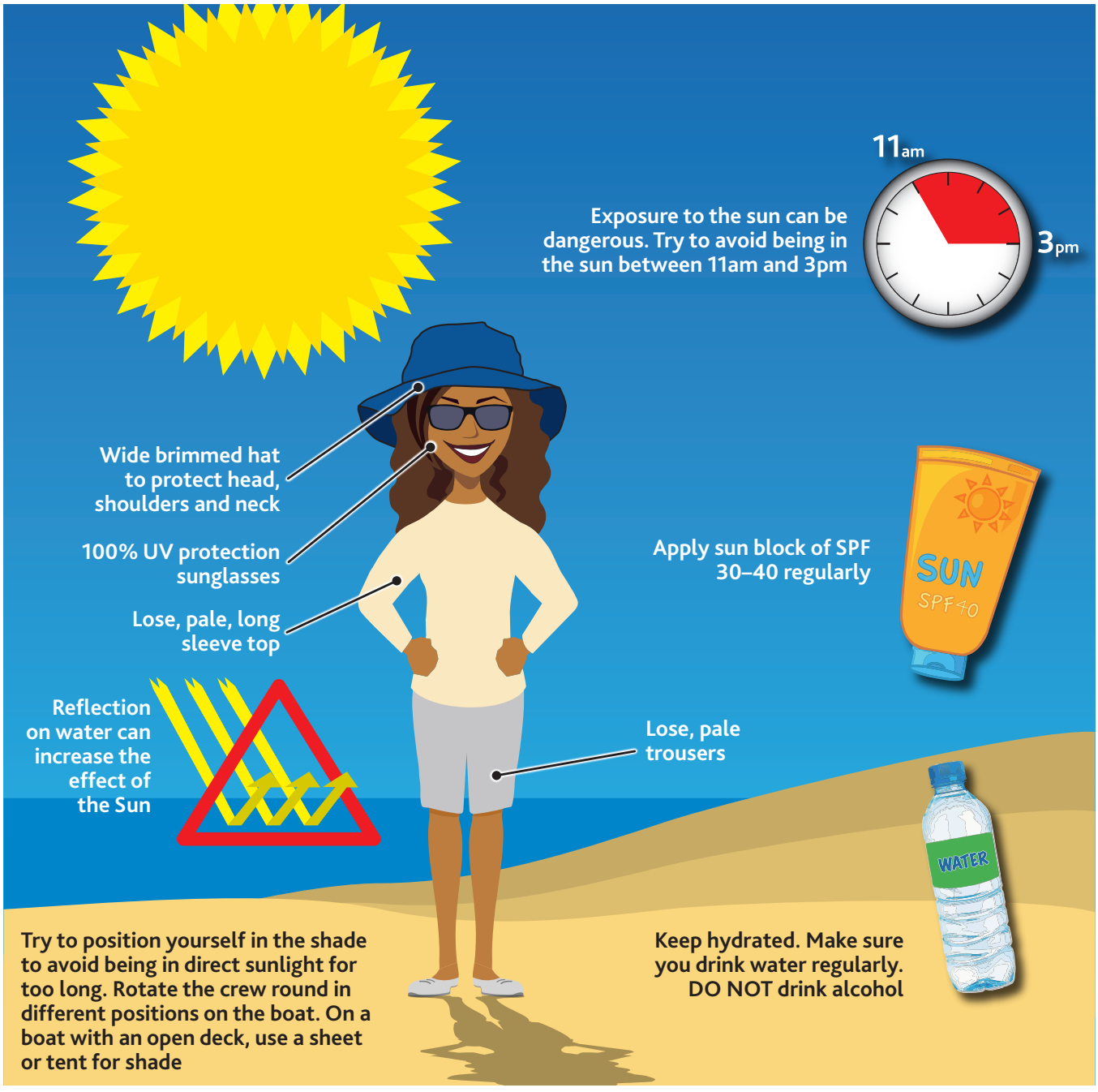
PPE to protect you from the environment

Staying cool

If the conditions are particularly warm, then the user will want to wear clothing to try and keep them cool. The main function of this clothing is to keep the skin shaded from the sun.

Dehydration symptoms

Thirst, dry lips, dark urine colour are all signs of dehydration; rehydrate using water. Be aware, dehydration can lead to more severe medical issues, such as heat stroke or heat exhaustion.

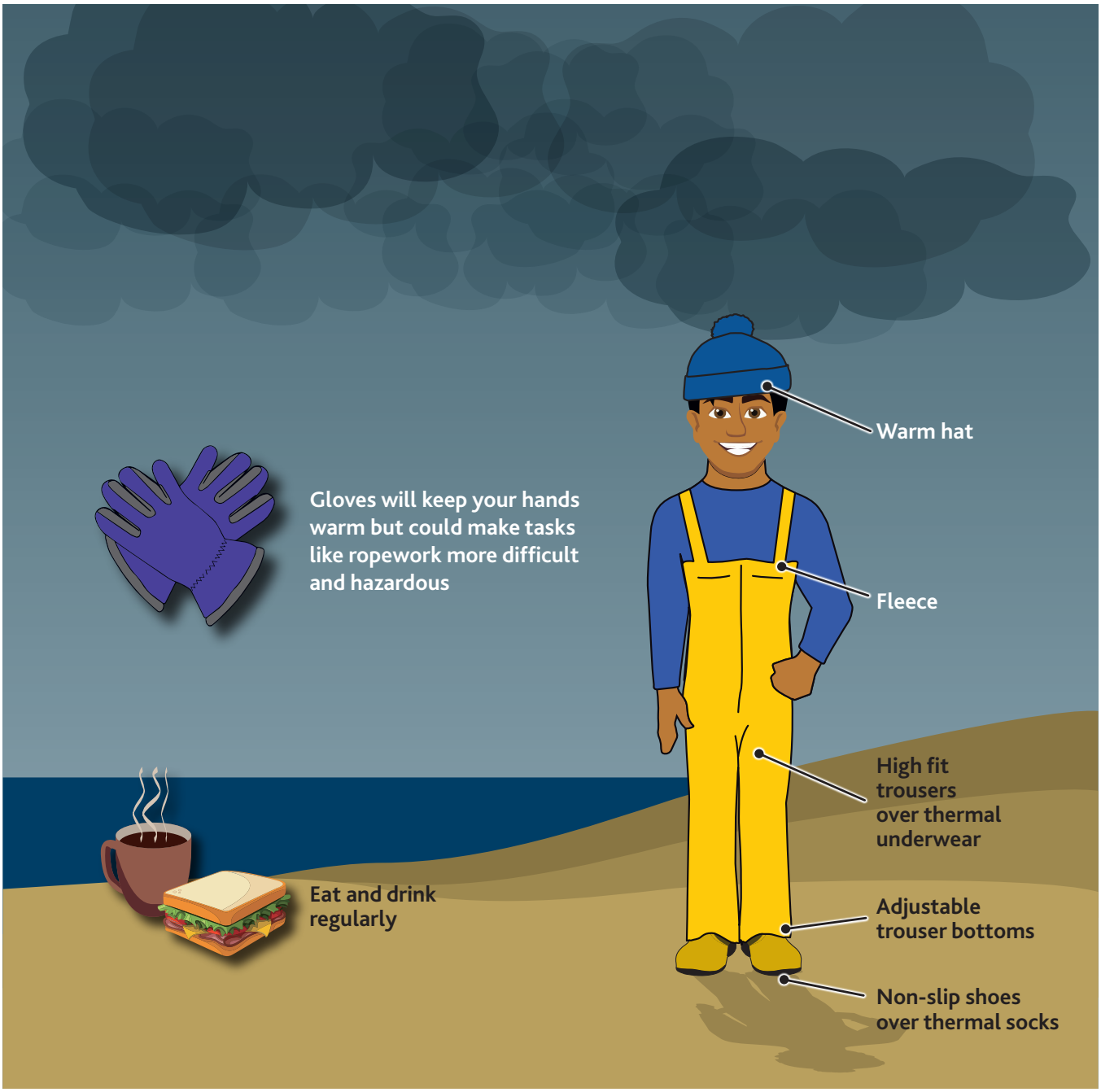


Staying warm and dry

If you are operating at sea in cold conditions, it is important to stay warm and dry. You can use different types of clothing and PPE, adjusting them to the environment, as necessary.

Tips for staying warm

Wear layers; more layers will trap air between them and keep you warmer. Eating hot food and drinks can help combat the effects of the cold.



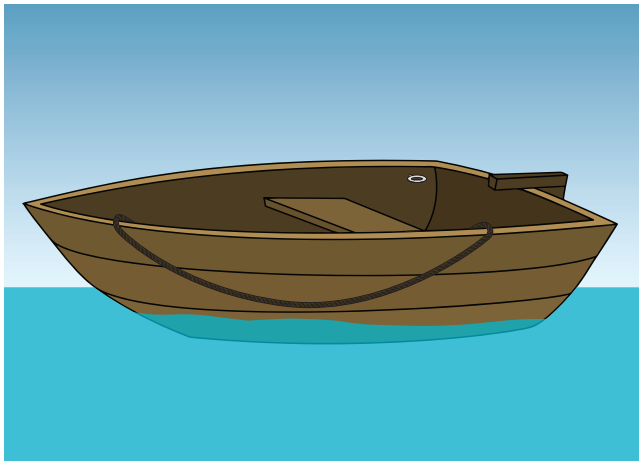
3.2 Boat safety equipment

There are some considerations to equipment you should have on your boat which can help you in an emergency situation.

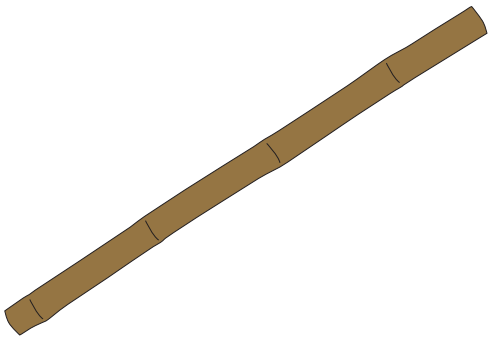
Rescue equipment

Grab lines on side of boat

It is useful to have some lines on the outside of the boat, that can be used for casualties to grab should they end up falling in the water and can assist with getting back in to the boat.



Rescue pole



A pole can be used to reach somebody in the water from the shore or inside the boat, avoiding the need to enter the water. A paddle, bamboo pole or wooden sail mast could be used for this purpose.

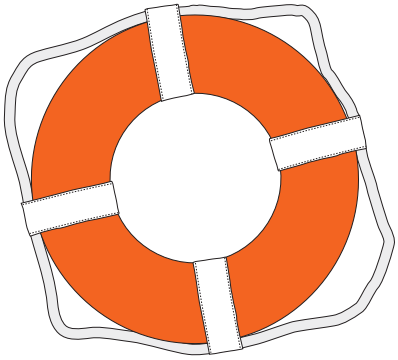
Throw bag

A throw bag consists of a length of rope (a throw line) stored inside a quick-release bag. It is used to rescue casualties in the water. It is recommended that anybody working in the fishing environment has access to a throw bag, both in the boat and on the shore.

Rope

Try to use brightly coloured rope that will float as this will help the casualty and rescuer see the rope on the surface of the water.

Floating objects



Floating objects can be used to help a casualty in the event of them entering the water.

In some countries, specialist floating objects have been developed that are specifically designed for rescue. However, in areas where specialist equipment is not available, alternative locally sourced equipment may be used.

A floating object should be:

- easy to hold on to
- easy to move through the water
- capable of keeping a person afloat.

An empty water container (at least 5 litres) can easily hold the weight of an adult. Most containers have a handle that a casualty can hold onto in the water.

Equipment can be made locally out of low-cost materials. Below is an example of a 'Bottle Ring' that can be made from five 2 litre drinks bottles and some brightly coloured material stitched together.

First aid kit

A first aid kit should be able to deal with most minor injuries onboard.

Fire extinguisher

If available, a basic fire extinguisher should be carried in case of a fire onboard.

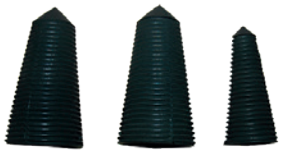
Boat and engine spares

Fishing boats should consider carrying spares for the equipment and type of boats that are being used. Some examples are:

Spare fuel

Spare oil

Basic tool kit (spanners, screwdriver)



Bungs – for repairing holes in own boat

Do not dispose of oil, fuel, used equipment or items of rubbish overboard

When carrying out maintenance such as oil changes or applying anti-foul coatings on the hulls, consider the protection of the environment and follow appropriate regulations.

Spark plugs

A sail, mast, paddles or oars should be carried onboard to in the event of engine failure.

3.3 Maintenance and care of equipment

It is essential that all equipment is regularly maintained. Prior to going fishing, check that the equipment is in working order and shows no signs of damage.

PFDs

PFDs should be checked on a regular basis. This includes checking the webbing and the stitching, zips, buckles and other fasteners.

After use, wash down with fresh water and allow them to dry naturally before returning to stowage.

Unit 4: Communication and Location

Learning outcomes

4.1 Understand some of the pre- departure considerations. (Manifest/location records/logs).

4.2 Know the different ways of calling for help. (Information to give -MAYDAY).

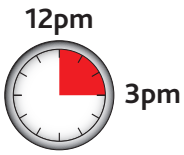
4.3 Understand the different options on who to call for help.

4.4 Understand different ways to improve the chances of being found.

4.1 Pre-departure checks

Inform others

Tell someone where you are going and what time you will be back.



A community should keep a record/log of the time and boats which have gone out fishing and the ones that have returned.

Carry a means for calling for help

Make sure you can get to your or mobile phone, also make sure it is in a waterproof pouch.

Wear a PFD or carry a means of staying afloat

Brief your crew of the fishing plan so that everyone is aware of what is happening:

- Check boats for damage and water tightness.
- Check safety equipment is working and available.
- Ensure there are enough PFDs for all crew and they are in working order.
- Carry enough food and water for the duration of the trip.
- Carry spare warm clothing and any other items relating to the weather conditions.
- Check torches have batteries and spares.
- Store items in a drybag if available.

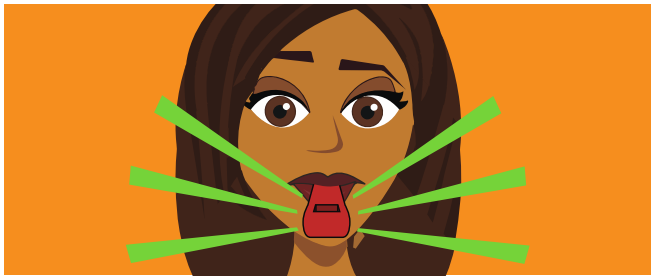
4.2 Calling for help

Audible signals

Yelling or Shouting

Use your voice to yell loudly and repeatedly. If there are other boats or individuals nearby, they might hear your calls for help.

Whistles or horns



If you have a whistle or a horn on board, use it to produce a loud and distinctive sound that can attract attention.

Visual signals

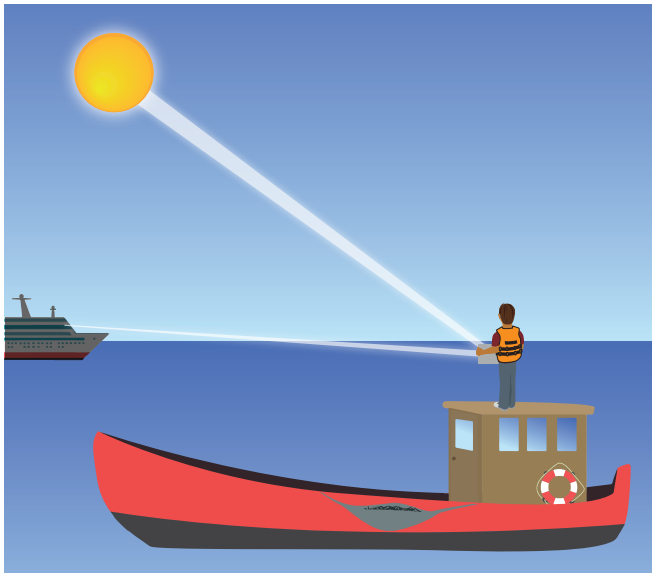
Waving arms

With outstretched arms, slowly and repeatedly raise and lower your arms, standing on top of the wheelhouse or another visible place on the boat. This can be effective during daylight hours when visibility is good.

Brightly coloured objects

Wave or display brightly coloured clothing, flags, or any other visible objects to attract attention.

Reflective surfaces



If you have reflective materials, such as a mirror or reflective tape, use them to catch and reflect sunlight. This can be effective during daylight hours for attracting attention from a distance.

Flashing lights

If you have a torch or any other source of light, use it to signal for help during low-light conditions.

Mobile phones

Mobile phones can allow for good communications between fishing boats and the shore. They enable a crew to give regular updates to the boat owners and other groups. If using mobiles phones, make sure they are carried in a waterproof pouch and that they are fully charged prior to going fishing.

VHF Radios

VHF radios are a good way to communicate if they are available. However, ensure you are familiar on how to use them and understand the limitations of their use. Follow the international protocol for their use which includes the following:

Channels

Radios can operate on different frequencies, which are often called channels. To ensure you can communicate clearly it is important to make sure that the channel you use is not being used by others in the area. Identify alternative channels in advance so that you can switch to them if necessary.

Call signs

A call sign is a name or number given to each person, team or equipment. Team members should only use allocated call signs. This helps to identify the correct resources and reduces confusion. Using the wrong call sign can result in the message being unnecessarily repeated and also increase the length of the message.

Voice procedure

A voice procedure is used to ensure clarity of spoken communication and reduces misunderstanding. It involves using words with specialised meanings.

The "MAYDAY" distress call

If you have access to a VHF radio, you can send out a MAYDAY distress call. This is an internationally recognised procedure for calling for help, with the top priority rating.

It is a transmission made when:

"A vessel, aircraft, vehicle or person is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance."

The key information you want to transmit in a MAYDAY are:

- **Position**
  (where you are).
- **People onboard**
  (how many people including yourself).
- **Problem**
  (what is the emergency (fire/sinking/flooding/ life threatening situation)).

The word 'Mayday' comes from the French 'm'aidez - meaning 'assist me!

The format of a Mayday call is always as follows:

M • **MAYDAY repeated three times**

I • **Identification repeated three times**

R • **Repeat MAYDAY and identification once only**

P • **Position - latitude and longitude or range and bearing from a known position**

D • **Distress, nature of**

A • **Assistance required**

N • **Number of persons on board**

I • **Information**

O • **Over**

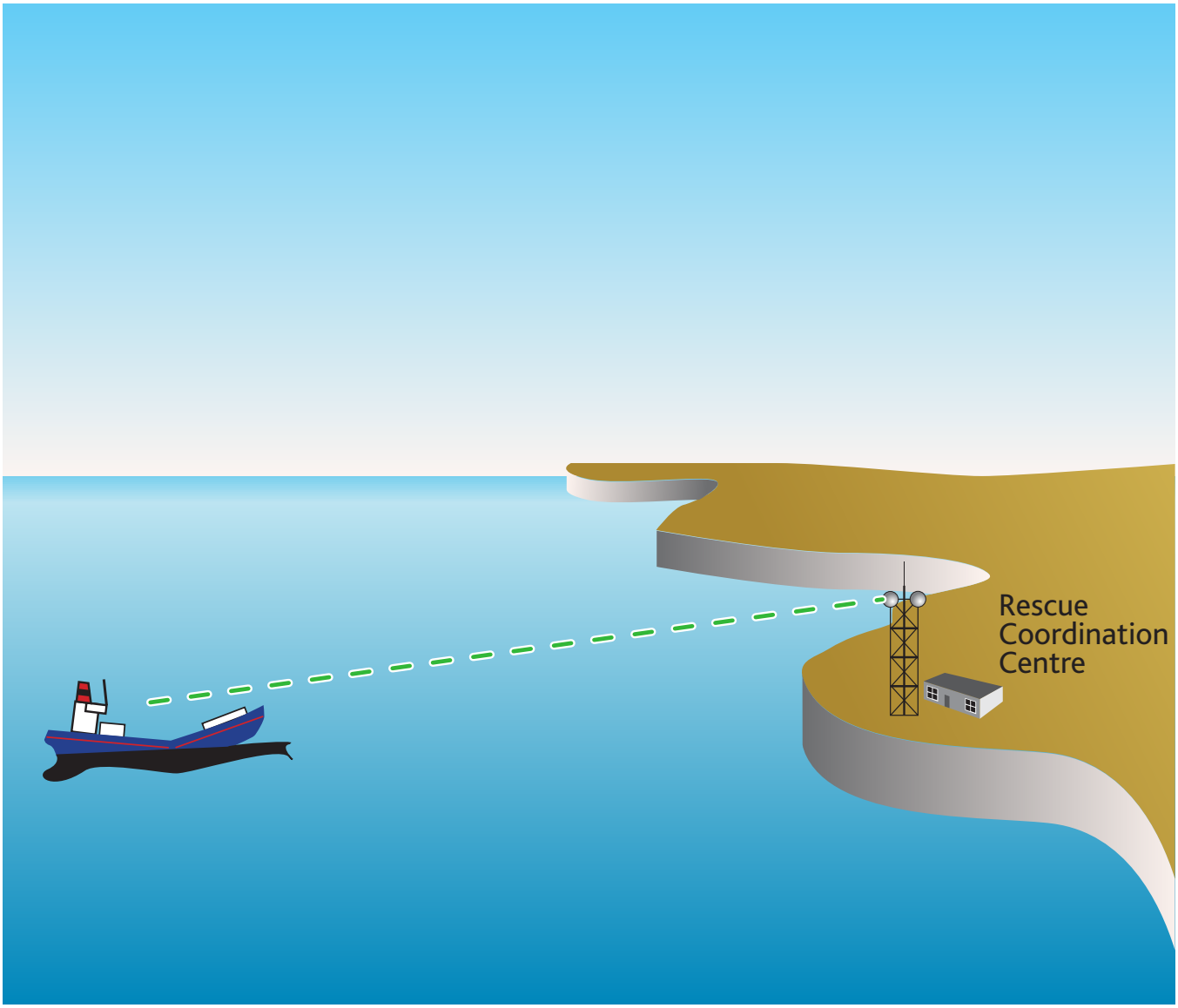
All radio messages concerning a distress alert must start with the word 'MAYDAY'

4.3 Who to call for help

Before you leave make sure you know who to call for help and the telephone numbers.
Follow your local protocols:

- Coastguard/fire service/police
- Fishing community emergency response plans
- Other fishing boats in the vicinity of your location

See the example of an emergency response plan in Unit 7.



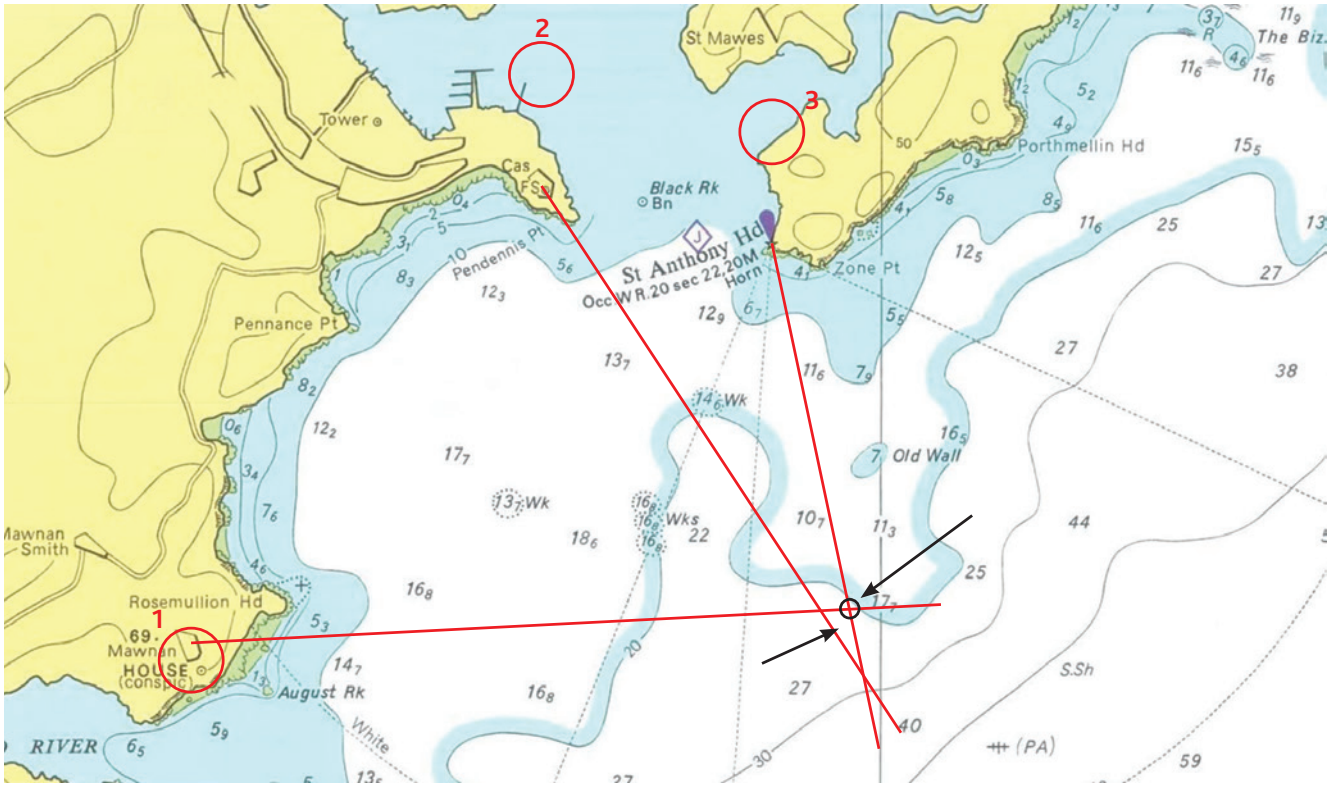
4.4 Being found

- Do not enter the water unless necessary- always try and stay with your vessel.
- Stay together- do not try and swim unless very close to land (less than 20 metres).
- Stay calm and preserve energy- make yourself visible.
- Know your location – use a chart/map if available and local knowledge. (landmarks)

A visual three-point fix

This technique is used to quickly confirm current position. To use this technique first identify three fixed charted features, preferably on shore. On the chart below the three features are a prominent house (1), a castle (2) and a directional light (3).

If available, use a hand compass to take your bearings



Learning outcomes

5.1 Understand what to do if you or your team end up in the water. (Personal/team actions)

5.2 Know how to carry out a basic rescue.

5.3 Know how to recover yourself and your team on to the boat.

5.4 Know how to deal with flooding on the boat.

5.1 Entering the water

If you found yourself struggling in the water unexpectedly, your instinct would tell you to swim hard, but cold water shock could make you gasp uncontrollably. This could lead to you breathing in water and drowning. If you're not wearing a PFD, you should try to stay afloat by using the following technique.

Tilt your head back
with ears submerged

Relax
and try to breathe normally

Move your hands
to help you stay afloat, spread your arms and legs out to improve stability

It's OK if your legs sink
we all float differently

Spread your arms and legs
to improve stability

Once your breathing is under control, call for help or swim to safety.

What to do should you end up in the water if you are wearing a PFD...

Adopt the H.E.L.P. position when alone in the water

- Ensure all the straps on your lifejacket are done up and secure.
- Heat, Escape, Lessening, Posture.
- Cross the legs and bend them up towards the body.
- Cross the arms and hold onto the shoulders of the lifejacket.
- At night, activate the lifejacket emergency light if fitted. Try and place this at the highest point to ensure good all round visibility.

Adopt the "huddle" position when all together in the water

- Everyone huddle together.
- Try to attach to each other using a safety line if available. Thread the harness around the waist bands or lifting strops of the other lifejackets, NOT around the lifejackets stole.
- Being linked together keeps the crew closer together which helps to retain body heat and maintain morale. It also increases the chance of being spotted.
- At night, activate an emergency light if available.
- Constantly monitor each other.

Benefits

- Larger target to be spotted by rescuers.
- Group morale.
- 360-degree lookout.
- Keep injured person in the middle to reassure and look after.

5.2 Basic rescue techniques

Shout and signal rescue

When?

- When the person in trouble is close to the boat or the shore.

Why?

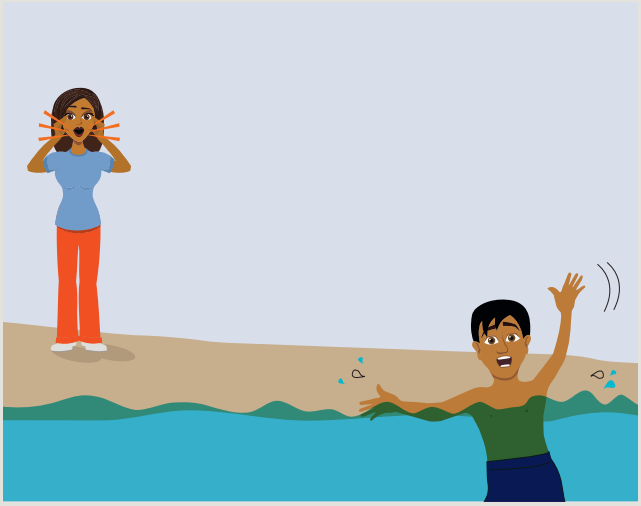
- It requires no equipment and the rescuer stays out of danger.

How?

- Follow steps 1 and 2 below.

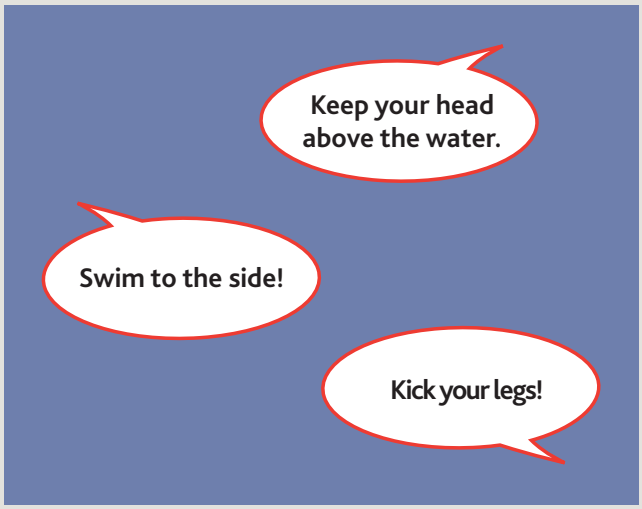
Type of rescue	Level of risk
Shout	Low risk
Reach	
Throw	
Swim	Highest risk

Entering the water puts you at a higher risk.



Step 1

- Get the attention of the person in the water.



Step 2

- Use your voice and hand signals to encourage the person to swim to the side.

Reach rescue

When?

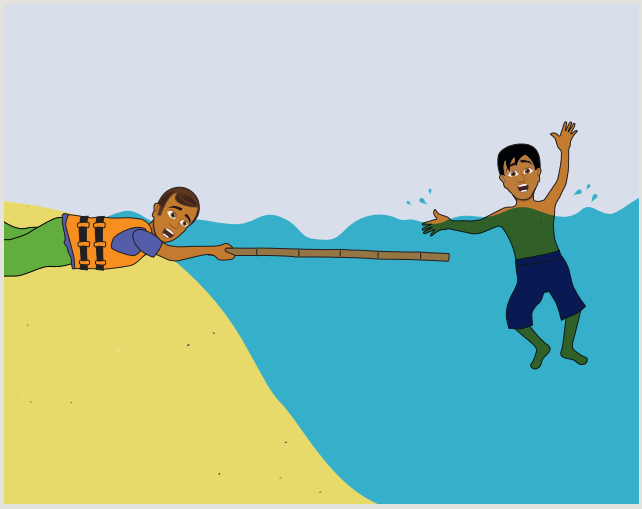
- When the person in trouble is close to the boat or the shore.

Why?

- It is the safest type of rescue when the person cannot swim and you have equipment.

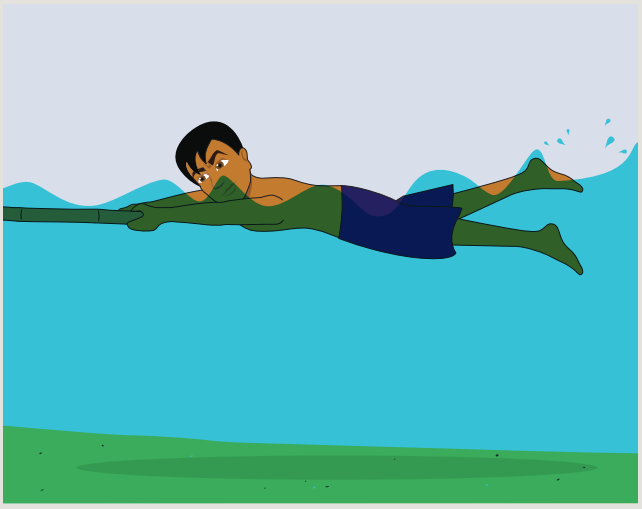
How?

- Follow steps 1 and 2 below.



Step 1

- Reach the person using a long rigid object, such as a stick or pole.
- Stay low on the ground so that the person cannot pull you into the water.



Step 2

- Pull the person to the side.

Throw rescue – with a floating object

When?

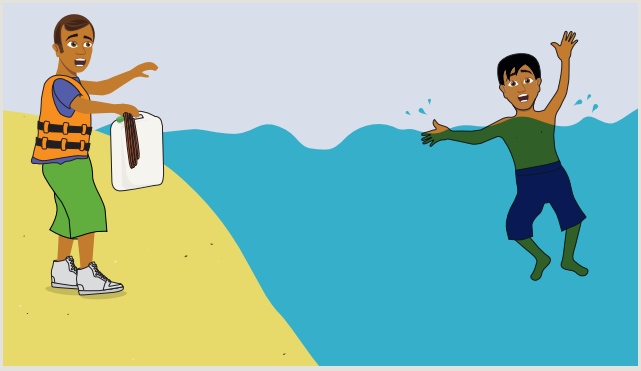
- If the person in trouble is close to the boat or the shore, but too far away to conduct a reach rescue.

Why?

- Reduces the risk to the rescuer – there is no need to swim.

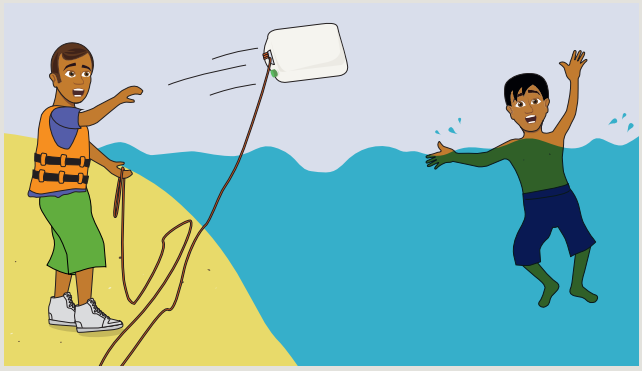
How?

- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.



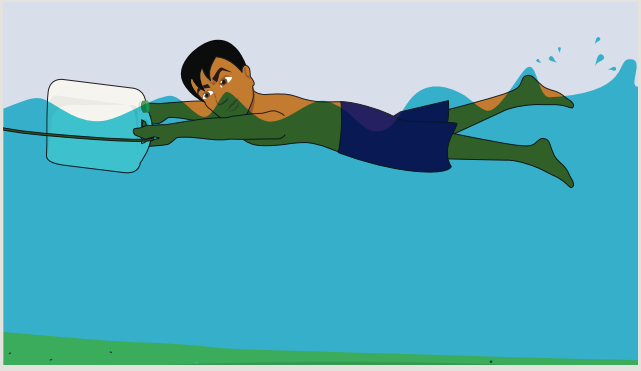
Step 1

- Attract the attention of the person in trouble.
- Remember to adjust your throw to take into account the wind and flow of water.



Step 2

- Throw a floating object, such as a rope or water container, to the person. If possible, attach a line to the floating object to help pull the casualty to the bank.



Step 3

- Tell the person to kick their legs and swim to the side.

Step 4

- Help the person out of the water.

Throw rescue – with a throw bag

When?

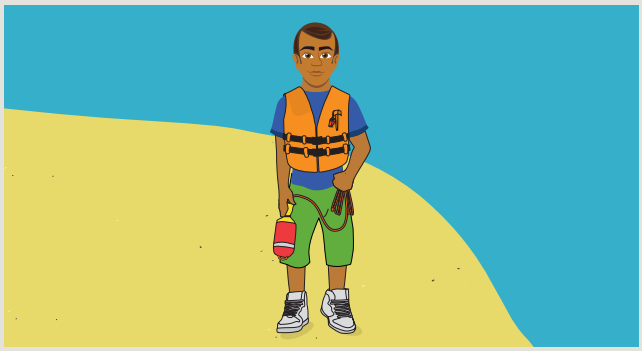
- If the person in trouble is close to the boat or the shore, but too far away to conduct a reach rescue.

Why?

- Reduces the risk to the rescuer – there is no need to swim.

How?

- Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.



Step 1

- Remove some line from the throw bag.
- Hold the end of the line in one hand and hold the throw bag in the other hand.

Step 2

- Identify a suitable area to land the casualty.
- Make eye contact with the casualty and shout: "Hold the rope!"

Step 3

- Throw the bag, aiming beyond the casualty.
- Be prepared for the pull on the rope and brace with your feet.

Step 4

- If needed, repack the rope into the bag quickly and throw again. Otherwise, help the person out of the water.

5.3 Man overboard

Here are some considerations to prevent a man overboard situation:

- Always be on guard against falling overboard as it is a major cause of fatality at sea.
- Excessive use of alcohol or misuse of drugs is a threat to the safety of the vessel and the crew and can increase the chances of falling in.
- In the event of a change of course or speed, warn the crew, as the change in motion may catch them unaware.
- Lifelines should be set up, as appropriate to the type and size of the vessel to prevent crew members from falling or being washed overboard in bad weather. Lifelines with manropes should be rigged on the working deck.
- When work is carried out where there is a risk falling overboard, or when work is carried out on the deck in bad weather, a safety harness with a safety line attached should be used. The length of the safety line should be adjusted to prevent falling overboard.
- Do not sit on the railing to avoid falling overboard.

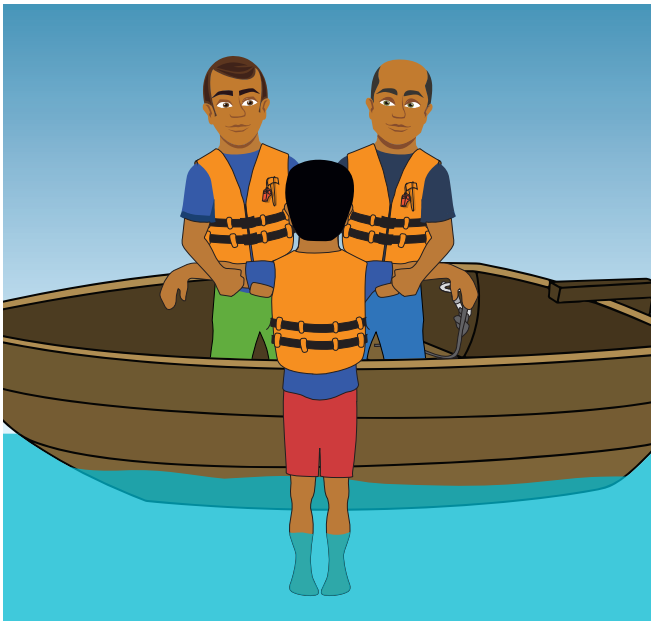
Should you end up in the water, ensure you are familiar with different methods of how to recover yourself and others back onto your particular boat.

If necessary, try to create a 'step' to help you climb out of the water and into the boat.

When recovering a casualty onboard, it is important to ensure that we reduce the risk of injury to rescuers through appropriate manual-handling techniques and positioning.

Utilising the lowest deck point to the water surface, the rescuer should keep themselves low with a minimum of three points of contact with the boat, wherever possible.

The following images are some example options for recovering a casualty. Ensure that you are familiar by regularly practising the recovery methods specific to your boat.



Facing towards the boat

Facing away from the boat

NOTE

It is important that you regularly practice person recovery drills to ensure you and your crew are familiar with the various methods.

5.4 Flooding

If your boat starts taking in water, the first thing to do is ensure everyone on board has their PFD on and that it is properly fastened, then:

- Make a distress call and head towards shallower water.
- Try to locate the cause of the leak and reduce the flow of water by pushing something into the hole.
- Bail the water out as best you can.
- Should the boat submerge or turn over, stay with the boat - you have a much greater chance of being found.
- Never attempt to swim to shore unless you are wearing a life jacket.
- If you are in the water with floating objects such as an upturned boat, then raise as much of your torso out of the water as possible.

Always have a suitable means for removing any excess water in the boat, such as a bucket.

Unit 6: First Aid

Learning outcomes

6.1 Understand what first aid is.

6.2 Know how to carry out a primary survey and how to deal with an unconscious casualty.

6.3 Know how to carry out CPR.

6.4 Know how to control bleeding.

6.5 Know how to deal with broken bones.

6.6 Know how to deal burns.

6.7 Know how to deal with environmental effects.

6.8 Understand how to carry out post-incident procedures.

6.9 Mental health and wellbeing.

6.1 What is first aid?

First aid is the immediate care given to an injured or sick person.

First aid involves the steps you can take before the person gets further medical help. First aid can sometimes save a person's life; but more often it is help given to an everyday accident or illness.

A casualty may have;

- cut their foot on a sharp object
- been stung or bitten by an animal
- slipped over onto a hard surface
- got something stuck in their eye
- gone underwater for a long period of time.

The aims of first aid

The specific aims of first aid are to;

- preserve life
- prevent the injury or illness getting worse
- promote recovery.

Cultural awareness

Always be concerned for the dignity of your casualties and any cultural differences.

You should always ask for permission before providing care, unless the casualty is unconscious or unable to provide permission.

Preserve life

For any human being to stay alive the following three things are needed:

- **Oxygen (lungs)**

If a casualty is lacking oxygen a rescuer needs to think about their breathing.

- **Blood**

If a casualty is bleeding it needs to be controlled.

- **Pump (heart)**

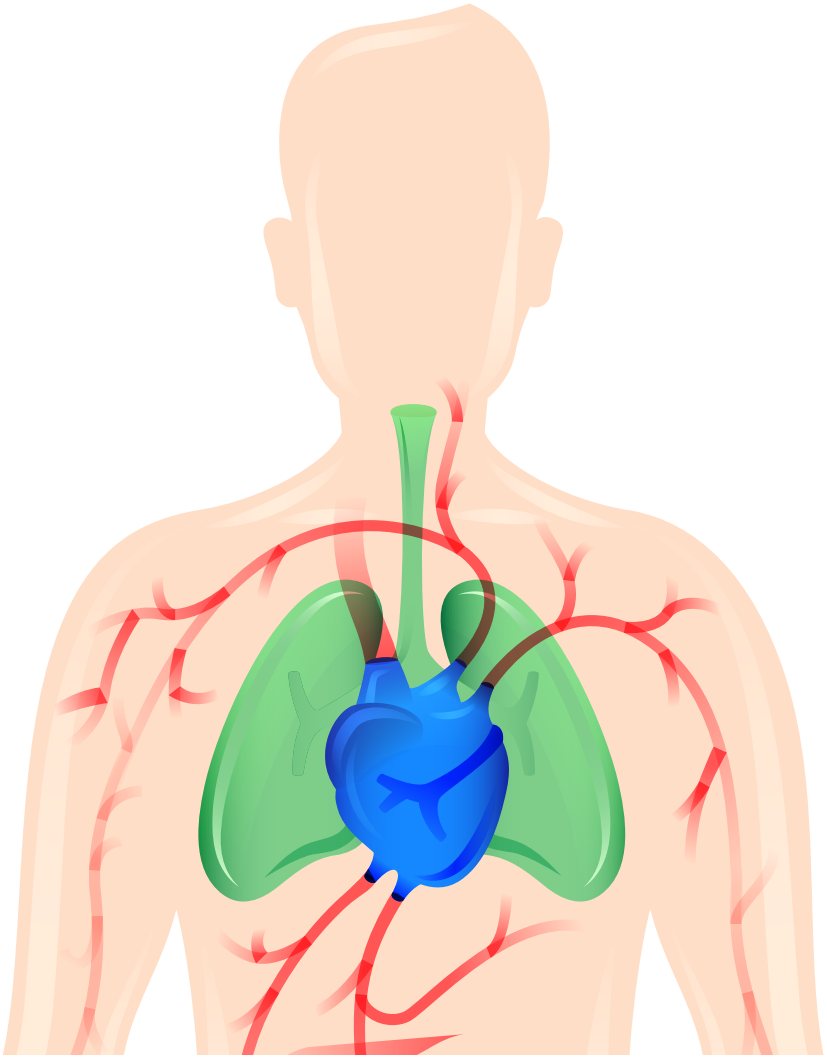
If a casualty's pump (heart) stops, the rescuer may need to pump for them.

Prevent the injury or illness getting worse

The rescuer should constantly monitor the casualty for any improvement or to see if they are getting worse.

Promote recovery

The condition of a casualty could get worse at any time. Correctly treating a casualty may stop them from getting worse and help towards their recovery.



6.2 Primary survey

A primary survey is the first check of the area and the condition of the casualty.

It is important to consider what has happened, as it can help the rescuer understand the injuries and the likely signs and symptoms.

A sign is something you can see. A symptom is something the sick or injured person tells you they feel.

Check for dangers

The rescuer must consider the dangers on arrival at the location of an incident.

Some examples include;

- weather, tide/sea and conditions at the scene
- craft that are sinking or out of control
- loose/unstable debris or casualty craft breaking up
- fire, smoke, gas or electrical dangers
- unstable surfaces such as rock falls
- people, crowds, aggression and emotion
- blood that may contain a virus.

DRAB Action Plan		
D	**Danger** Check for danger. Ensure the surroundings are safe for you and the patient.	
R	**Response** Check the casualty's responsiveness. (AVPU, see p50)	
	NO ↓	**YES** • Make comfortable • Monitor • Check for injuries
	Call for help	
A	**Airway** Check the casualty's mouth. Is there an obstruction?	
	NO • Place on their back • Tilt head and lift chin. • keep airway open.	**YES** • Place on their side • Allow the block to drain.
B	**Breathing** Look, listen and feel for breathing. Is the casualty breathing?	
	NO • Start CPR	**YES** • Place in recovery postion

Blood – risk of infection

The rescuer should protect themselves from blood at all times, as it may contain a virus.

To reduce the risk of contact with blood the rescuer should use a barrier (such as gloves or a plastic bag).

Step 1 – Assess response*

- Talk to the casualty to see if they respond to voice.
- Tap the shoulder of the casualty to see if they respond to touch.

If the casualty can talk, they are responsive. If the casualty does not respond to voice or touch then they may be unconscious.

CALL FOR HELP

*The levels of response can be broken down into AVPU:

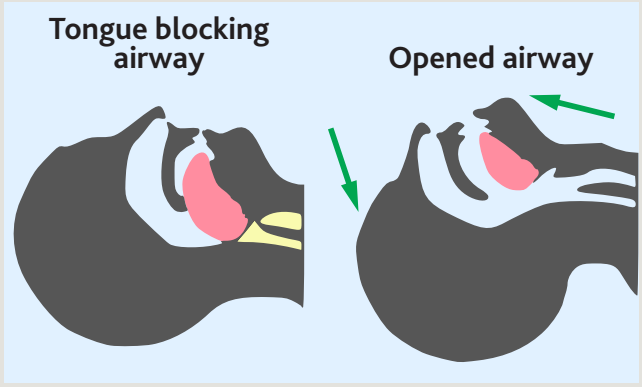
- **Alert**
- **Voice**
- **Pain**
- **Unresponsive/unconscious**

Step 2 – Open airway

If the casualty is unconscious or unresponsive:

- Check that the casualty has an open, clear airway.
- Tilt the head backwards.
- Lift the chin with two fingers.

By providing a clear airway the casualty may be able to breathe.



What blocks an airway:

- Tongue
- Foreign object, such as food
- Fluid, such as water, blood or vomit
- Swelling from allergic reaction or burn

NO AIRWAY = NO PATIENT

Step 3 – Check breathing

Whilst maintaining the airway open:

- Look, listen and feel for the casualty's breathing for 10 seconds.

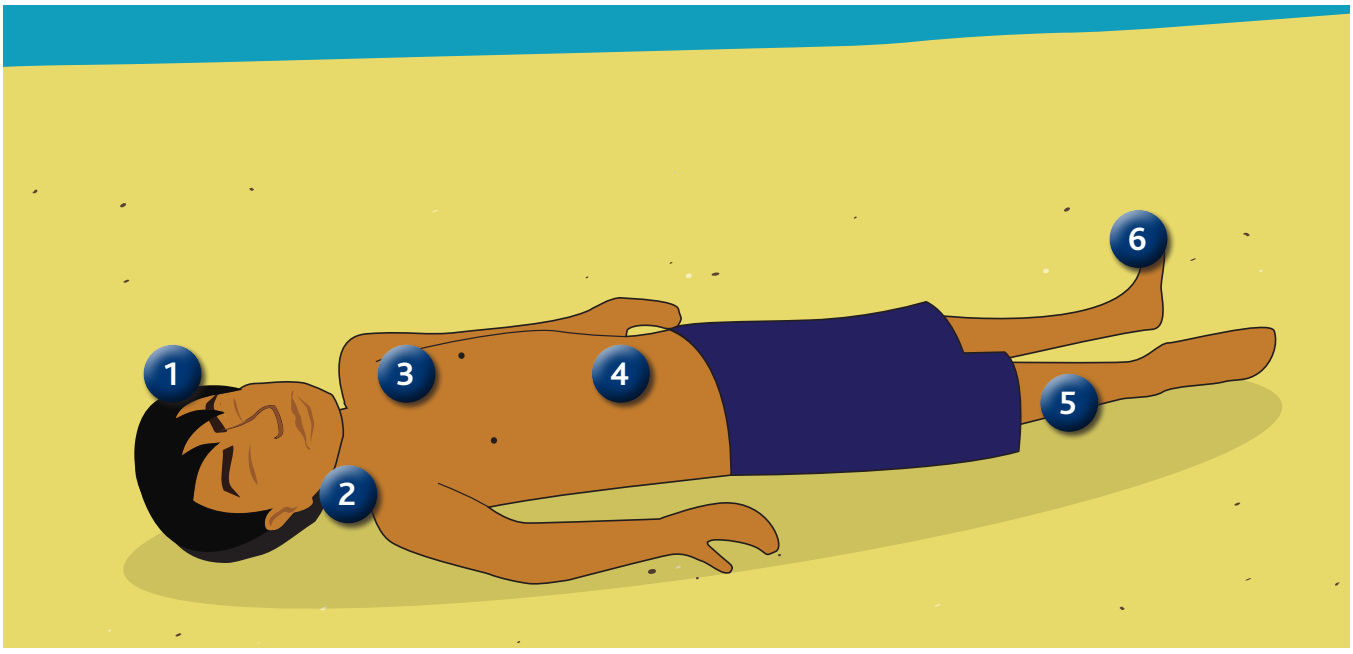
Head-to-toe check

Only if the casualty is breathing normally and the airway is clear and open, complete a head-to-toe check.

Starting from the head and ending at the feet, check for any injuries or bleeding and treat where possible.

Areas to check:

1. **Head and face**
2. **Neck**
3. **Shoulders and chest**
4. **Stomach**
5. **Arms and legs**
6. **Feet**



Unconscious casualties

Unconscious casualties should be given particular care and attention, and monitor the casualty's airway.

Their airway should be monitored regularly to ensure it is clear and open, as unconscious casualties can choke on their own tongue.

Vomit and other fluids

Roll the casualty onto their side immediately to reduce the chance of them choking.

Support the head, check the mouth and attempt to remove any vomit and other fluids.

Recovery position

This position is for an unconscious casualty. In this position gravity will also help vomit to drain out of the mouth.

Step 1

- Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to the body, elbow bent with the palm of the hand facing upwards.
- Bring the far arm across the chest, and hold the back of the hand against the cheek nearest to you.

Step 2

- With your other hand, grasp the far leg just above the knee and pull it up, keeping the foot on the ground.
- Keeping the hand pressed against the cheek, pull on the far leg to roll the person towards you onto their side.

Step 3

- Adjust the upper leg so that both the hip and knee are bent at right angles.
- Tilt the head back to make sure that the airway remains open.
- Check breathing regularly.
- Keep warm and reassure.

If the casualty is concious, consider treating in a position of comfort

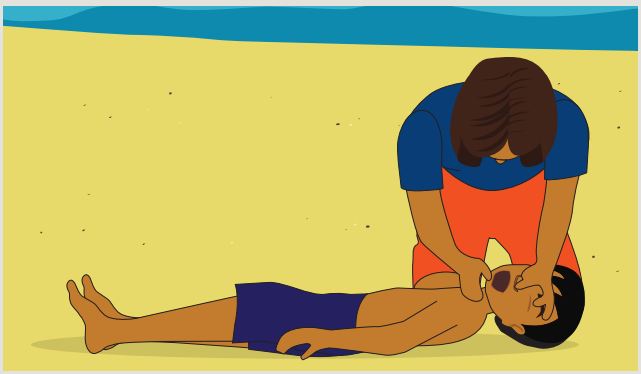
6.3 Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

If the casualty is not breathing, CPR is used by the rescuer to take over the job of a casualty's heart and lungs. Chest compressions are given to manually pump blood around the body and breaths are given to provide oxygen.

DO NOT START CPR when:

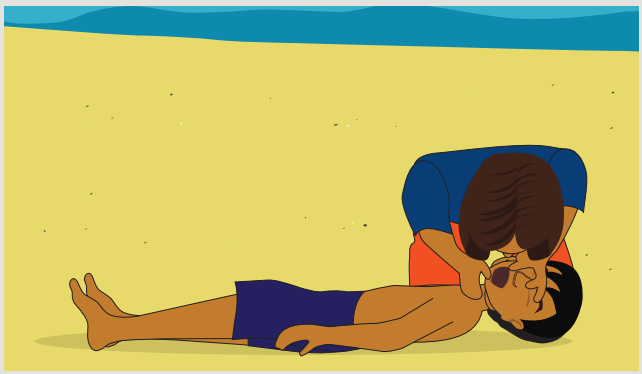
- the casualty is decomposed
- the casualty cannot survive the injury
- it is too dangerous to start.

CPR for adults



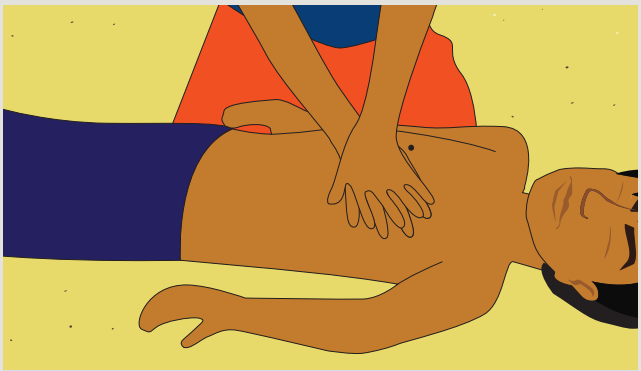
Step 1

- Tilt the head back and lift the chin using two fingers.
- Pinch the nose to stop air escaping.



Step 2

- Put your lips around the casualty's mouth and blow gently until the chest rises.
- Give another breath after the chest falls. Repeat until you have given 5 breaths.

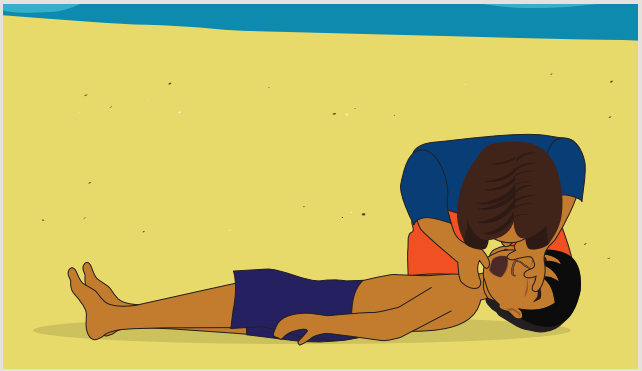


Step 3

- Put the heel of one hand in the centre of the chest.
- Place your second hand on top of the first and link your fingers.

Step 4

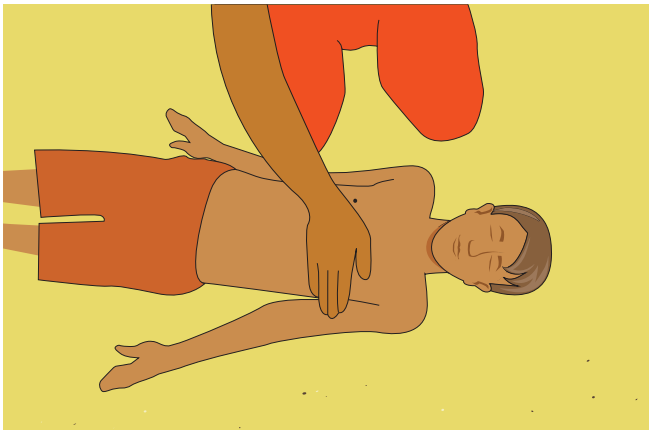
- Compress the chest 5–6cm by keeping your arms straight and using the weight of your body.
- Repeat this 30 times doing 2 compressions per second.



Step 5

- After 30 compressions give 2 breaths.
- Then give another 30 compressions.
- Continue this cycle for 30 minutes.

CPR for children (1-8 years old)



- Use only a single hand to compress the chest to approximately one third of the chest depth.

CPR for babies (up to 1 year old)

- Use only 2 fingers to compress the chest to approximately one third of the chest depth.

STOP CPR when:

- the person is breathing normally
- after 30 minutes, if no help has arrived.

If your are unwilling to give rescue breaths (mouth-to-mouth), carry out chest compressions only.

6.4 Control of bleeding

It is important to control and manage major bleeding quickly.

- To stop heavy bleeding, apply direct pressure.
- An injured casualty should sit or lie down, as at any point they may collapse.

Cuts and grazes

Direct pressure

Direct pressure is when pressure is applied directly to the wound. Apply pressure to the wound so that the bleeding stops.

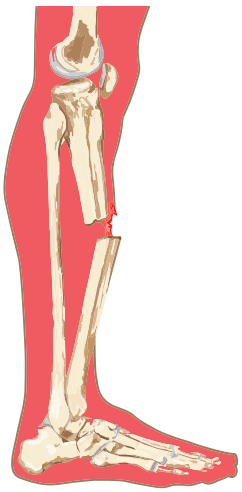
Direct pressure can come from the casualty's own hand, the rescuer's hand or a bandage.

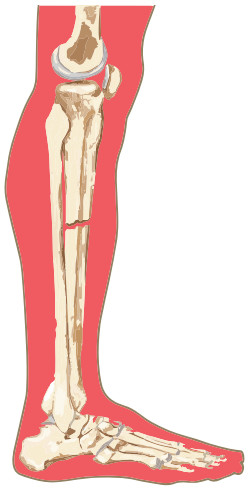
Removing an object from a wound may make it bleed more. If possible, leave the object in the wound and go to hospital.

Applying pressure around the object can slow the bleeding.

6.5 Broken bones

A closed fracture has no bone visible, whereas an open fracture has bone visible. The casualty will be in pain, may have swelling, deformity or bruising. When dealing with the casualty, keep the limb as still as possible and handle broken bones gently.





Open fractures

If a casualty has an open fracture, stopping bleeding is the first priority. Major bleeding must be controlled by direct pressure and bandages.

- Do not put any pressure onto the broken bone.
- Continue treatment the same as for closed fractures.

Closed fractures

Remove watches and jewellery as the limb may swell.

- Support the upper limb close to the chest in a comfortable position using the free arm or material for support.
- Tie the legs together for support. Put padding between the legs. Place a straight object between the legs to stop them moving.

Example of an leg immobilisation

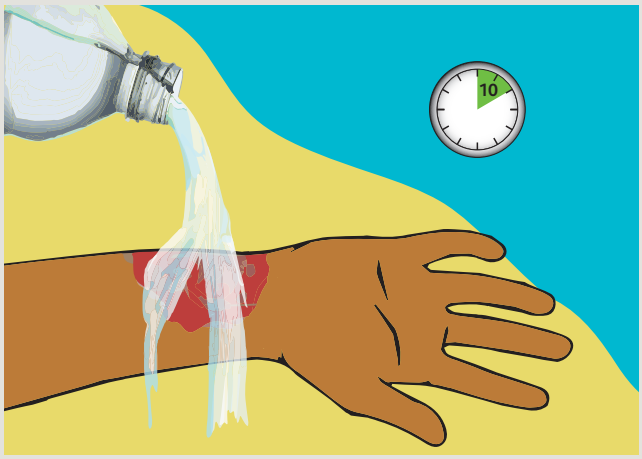
Example of an arm immobilisation

6.6 Burns

Burns are damage to the skin caused by heat.

Step 1

- Remove the casualty from the cause of the burning to a place of safety.
- Remove any watches or jewellery as the area around the burn may swell.



Step 2

- Burns must be cooled as soon as possible using cold water. Seawater or freshwater may be used.

Step 3

- The burn should be cooled for at least 10 minutes. If the pain has not been reduced, continue cooling.
- Cover the burn with cling film or a clean plastic bag.

6.7 Environmental effects

Hypothermia – Too cold

Hypothermia is the condition of low body-core temperature. This results from prolonged heat loss due to immersion in cold water or insufficient clothing or covering when in cold weather, wet and windy conditions. Someone suffering hypothermia may not realise their condition, so it is important to be aware of the signs.

Hypothermia symptoms include:

- Shivering of the body in order to produce more body heat.
- Discomfort, tiredness, poor coordination, numbness, impaired speech; disorientation and mental confusion.
- Sense of touch is poor, speech may be slurred and lips, hands and feet may swell.

Treatment:

- Remove casualty from the water
- Slowly warm casualty by using blankets/clothing
- If casualty is not too cold, provide a warm and sweet drink
- If casualty is very cold and unresponsive, seek medical assistance

Heatstroke – Too hot

Heatstroke is usually the most severe of the heat related illnesses. Symptoms should be treated as soon as they appear to prevent the condition getting worse.

Heatstroke symptoms include:

- Hot, red, dry skin.
- Confusion and disorientation.
- Muscle cramps and headaches.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Fitting, collapse or unconsciousness.

Treatment:

- Remove casualty from sun
- Cool casualty with cool water or material soaked with water
- Encourage the casualty to sip water
- If casualty is very hot and unresponsive, seek medical assistance

NEVER drink sea water when you are dehydrated, no matter how desperate you feel.

6.8 Post-incident procedures

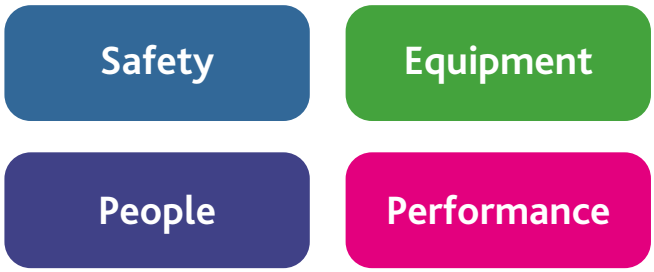
Following an emergency event, it is important that fishers follow the post-incident procedures in order to make their boat and themselves ready for the next fishing activities.

Debriefing

Debriefing helps us to:

- Ensure the welfare of those involved after any incident, exercise or training.
- Ensure that equipment is accounted for, operationally ready and any defects reported.
- Ensure any lessons learnt from the event are recorded.
- Develop the team to improve performance should there be another incident.

The debrief can be structured around the following headings:



Post-incident checks

- Refuel and check all engine fluid levels.
- Check the engine for damage and service if necessary.
- Check boat engine spares and ensure that any equipment used is stowed correctly.
- Replace any consumable items such as first aid equipment.

Keeping records

Recording incidents is important to measure and record success. It also helps to improve the service and identify any patterns of people getting into difficulty, as well as help to build support from local government and other agencies.

Some of the information you may be asked to gather may include:

- name and age of any casualties
- what the incident was
- where the incident was
- what assistance you provided
- other rescue organisations or boats involved.

It is important to maintain the privacy of casualty details and not release them to the media. Please be aware and adhere to local data protection laws.

6.9 Mental health and wellbeing

Crew welfare

After any emergency event, the overall welfare of the team is critically important. The captain can play a crucial role in ensuring the physical and emotional welfare of their team or crews after an incident.

After involvement in traumatic incidents, you should be vigilant that procedures are followed to ensure crews are able to discuss the incident and to access support and counselling.

Crews should have an awareness of the signs and symptoms of stress, post-traumatic stress (PTS) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Stress

Acute stress reactions can occur within minutes of being involved in a stressful event. They normally disappear within 2-3 days but usually within a few hours.

They can include:

- disorientation
- confusion
- inability to comprehend instructions
- agitation
- anxiety
- withdrawing into oneself.

They are the visible signs of the brain processing traumatic information that it has suddenly received.

Post Traumatic Stress (PTS)

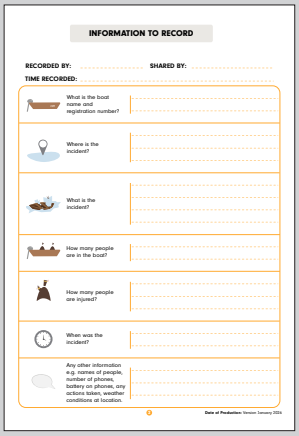
Sometimes, reaction to trauma can be delayed or may not subside. It is thought that the brain does not 'process' the memory in the normal way and can lead to a variety of symptoms

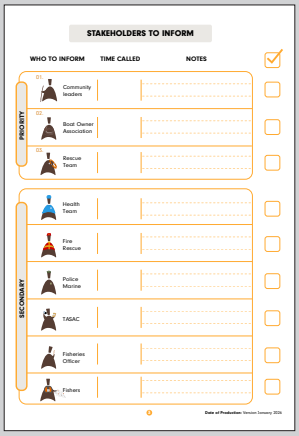
Symptoms of PTS include:

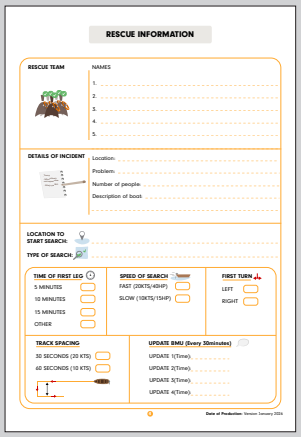
- recurrent dreams
- intrusive thoughts of the event
- cues that remind one of the event
- difficulty sleeping
- difficulty concentrating
- irritability or outbursts of anger
- avoidance of situations.

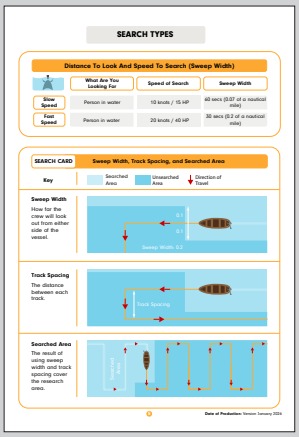
If left unchecked, PTS can lead to PTSD, a medical condition where disturbances become obtrusive and severely affect a person's personal and work life.

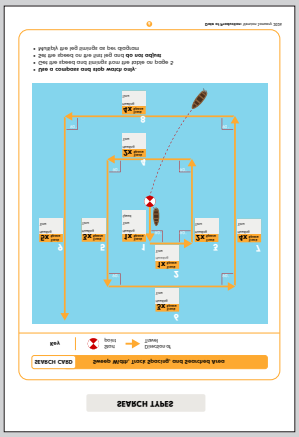
Unit 7: Fishing Community Emergency Response plan

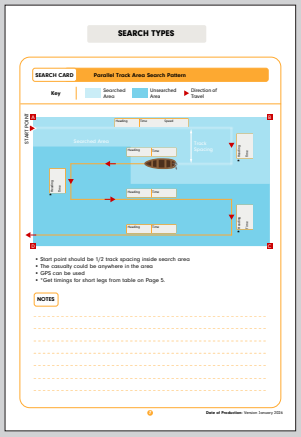


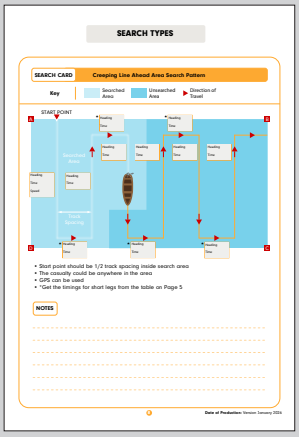


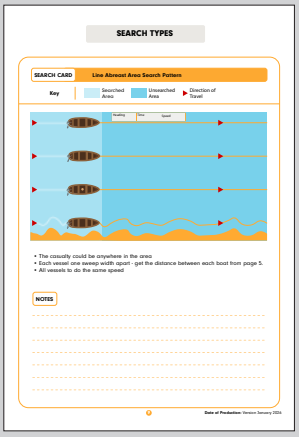












This unit contains an example of a fishing community emergency response plan, developed by the fishing communities on Lake Victoria in Tanzania. This can be used and adapted by fishing communities around the world to suit their local needs and environment.

Learning outcome

7.1 Understand what are the components of a fishing community emergency response plan.

FISHING COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

1 CALL FOR HELP

Use a whistle or other available means to call for help

Call the camp manager or the boat owner

If camp manager is unavailable, contact other fishers to relay the emergency call

The camp manager or the boat owner then notifies the BMU

WHAT TO SHARE (See page 2)

Name of caller

Boat name & registration number

Location of the incident

Incident

Number of people in the boat

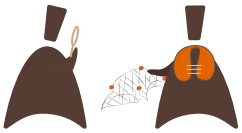
Number of injured people

Time of incident

2 ALERT RESCUERS (See page 3)

BMU informs the group of stakeholders shown above about the incident

BMU then informs government response teams



Lastly, BMU informs the group of stakeholders shown above

3 MOBILIZE RESCUE TEAM (See page 4)

BMU briefs rescue team

Rescue team selects members to go

Rescue team gathers torches, blankets, first aid kits and spare fuel

Rescue team records the information about emergency

4 CARRY OUT SEARCH AND RESCUE (See page 5 to 9)

Rescue team remember to :

Select an experienced team

Take the right equipment

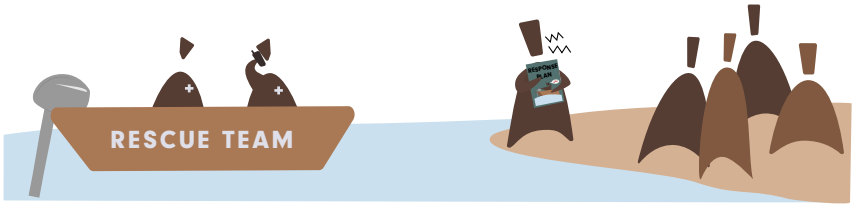
Observe the weather

Use sea worthy vessels

Know how to conduct a search

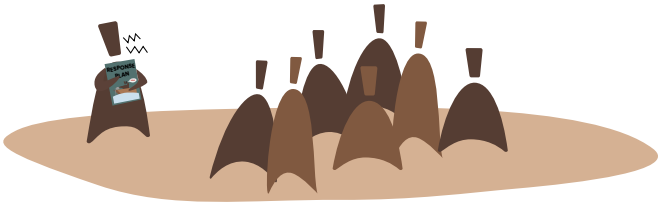
5 COMMUNICATE

The rescue team communicates with BMU who updates key stakeholders hourly or as significant changes happen



6 UPDATE COMMUNITY

BMU holds a meeting with all stakeholders in the community to share information and lessons



Date of Production: Version January 2026

INFORMATION TO RECORD

RECORDED BY: _____ **SHARED BY:** _____

TIME RECORDED: _____

What is the boat name and registration number?

_____

Where is the incident?

_____

What is the incident?

_____

How many people are in the boat?

_____

How many people are injured?

_____

When was the incident?

_____

Any other information e.g. names of people, number of phones, battery on phones, any actions taken, weather conditions at location.

_____

Date of Production: Version January 2026

STAKEHOLDERS TO INFORM

	WHO TO INFORM	TIME CALLED	NOTES	✓
PRIORITY	01.  Community leaders			☐
	02.  Boat Owner Association			☐
	03.  Rescue Team			☐
SECONDARY	 Health Team			☐
	 Fire Rescue			☐
	 Police Marine			☐
	 TASAC			☐
	 Fisheries Officer			☐
	 Fishers			☐

Date of Production: Version January 2026

RESCUE INFORMATION

RESCUE TEAM

NAMES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

DETAILS OF INCIDENT

Location: _____

Problem: _____

Number of people: _____

Description of boat: _____

LOCATION TO START SEARCH: _____

TYPE OF SEARCH: _____

TIME OF FIRST LEG

- 5 MINUTES ☐
- 10 MINUTES ☐
- 15 MINUTES ☐
- OTHER ☐

SPEED OF SEARCH

- FAST (20KTS/40HP) ☐
- SLOW (10KTS/15HP) ☐

FIRST TURN

- LEFT ☐
- RIGHT ☐

TRACK SPACING

- 30 SECONDS (20 KTS) ☐
- 60 SECONDS (10 KTS) ☐

UPDATE BMU (Every 30minutes)

UPDATE 1(Time): _____

UPDATE 2(Time): _____

UPDATE 3(Time): _____

UPDATE 4(Time): _____

Date of Production: Version January 2026

SEARCH TYPES

Distance To Look And Speed To Search (Sweep Width)

	What Are You Looking For	Speed of Search	Sweep Width
Slow Speed	Person in water	10 knots / 15 HP	60 secs (0.07 of a nautical mile)
Fast Speed	Person in water	20 knots / 40 HP	30 secs (0.2 of a nautical mile)

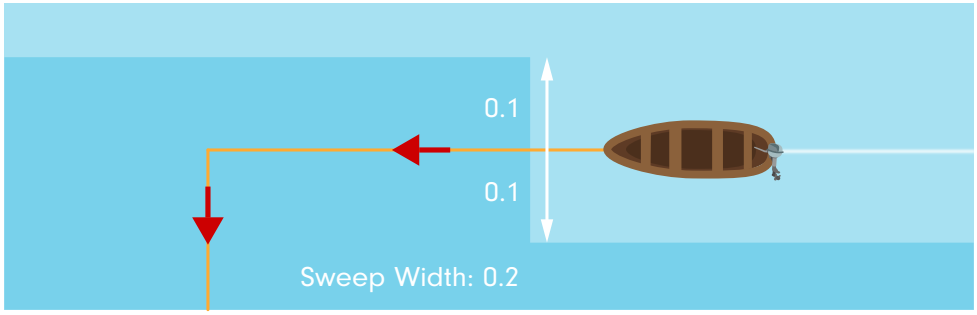
SEARCH CARD — Sweep Width, Track Spacing, and Searched Area

Key

Searched Area | Unsearched Area | Direction of Travel

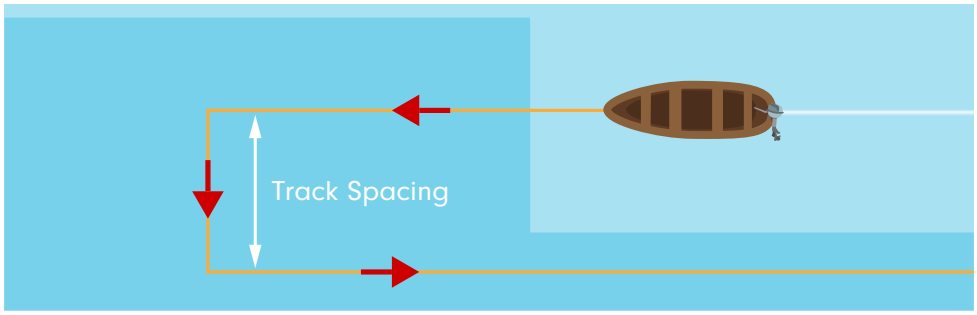
Sweep Width

How far the crew will look out from either side of the vessel.



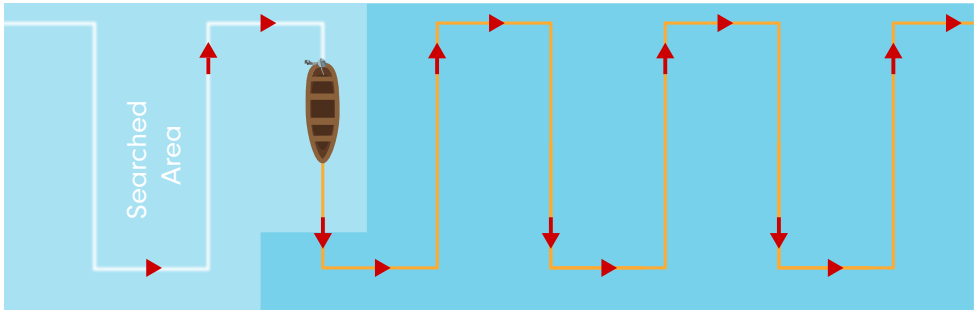
Track Spacing

The distance between each track.



Searched Area

The result of using sweep width and track spacing cover the research area.

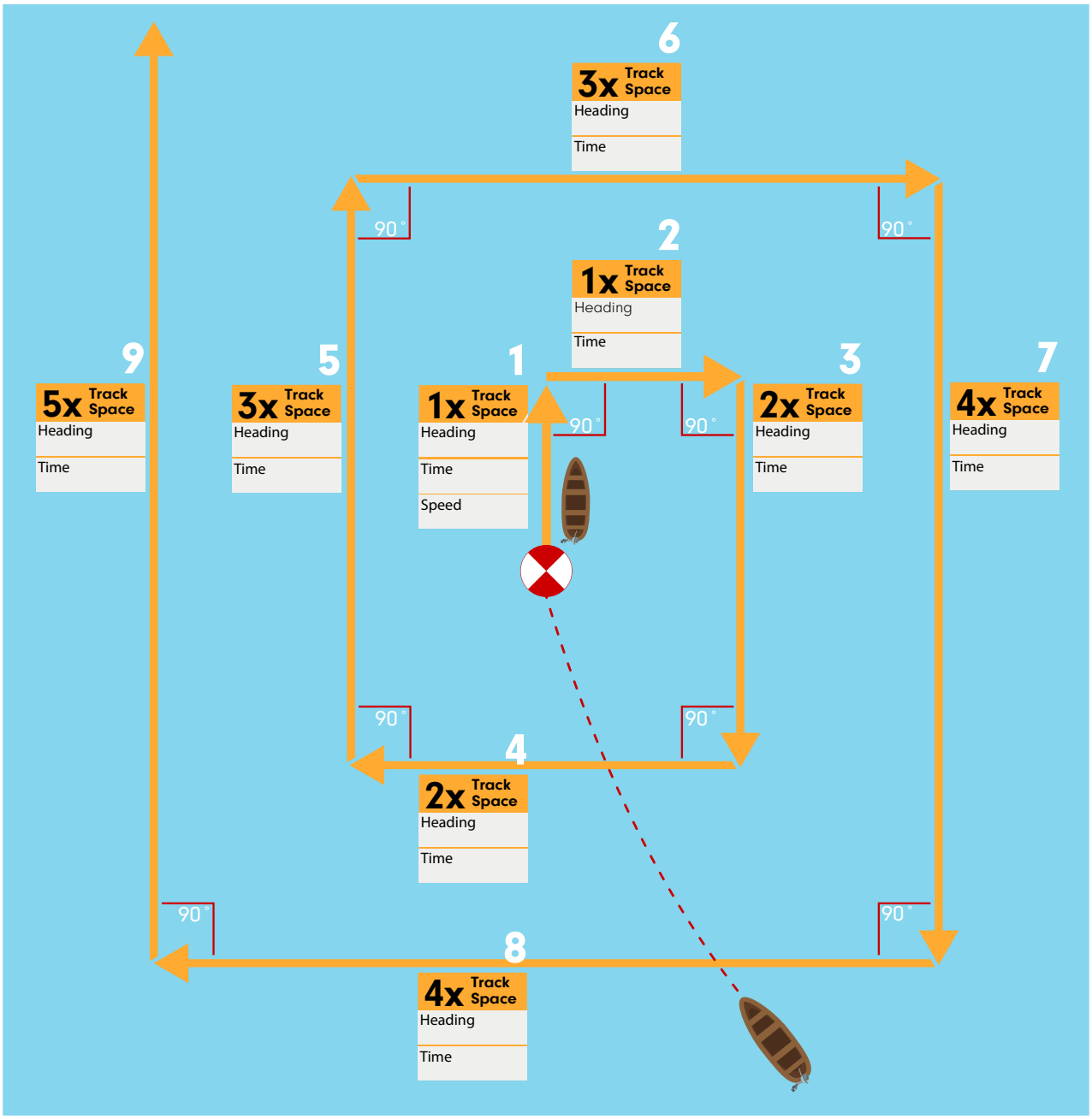


Date of Production: Version January 2026

SEARCH TYPES

SEARCH CARD | **Sweep Width, Track Spacing, and Searched Area**

Key | Start point | Direction of Travel



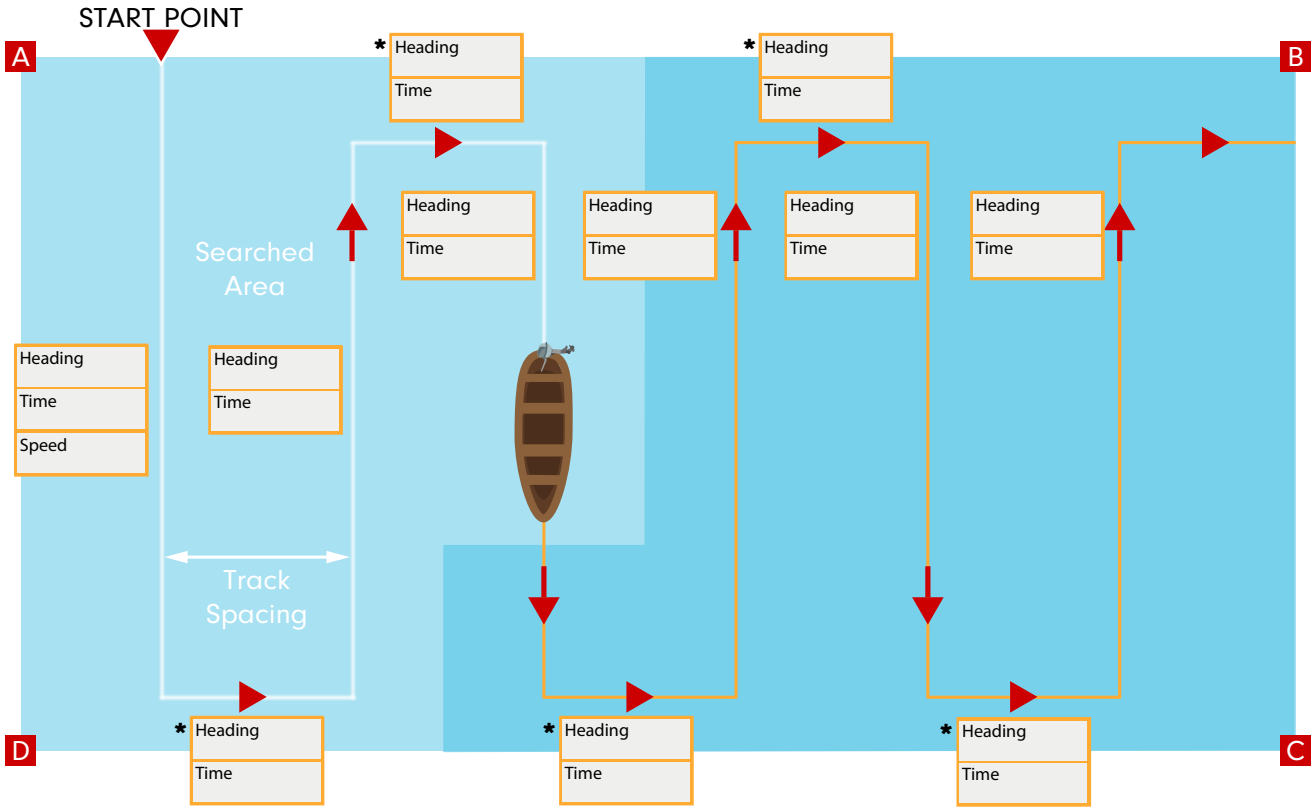
- **Use a compass and stop watch only.**
- Get the speed and timings from the table on page 5
- Set the speed on the first leg and **do not adjust**
- Multiply the leg timings as per diagram

Date of Production: Version January 2026

SEARCH TYPES

SEARCH CARD **Creeping Line Ahead Area Search Pattern**

Key Searched Area | Unsearched Area | Direction of Travel



- Start point should be 1/2 track spacing inside search area
- The casualty could be anywhere in the area
- GPS can be used
- *Get the timings for short legs from the table on Page 5

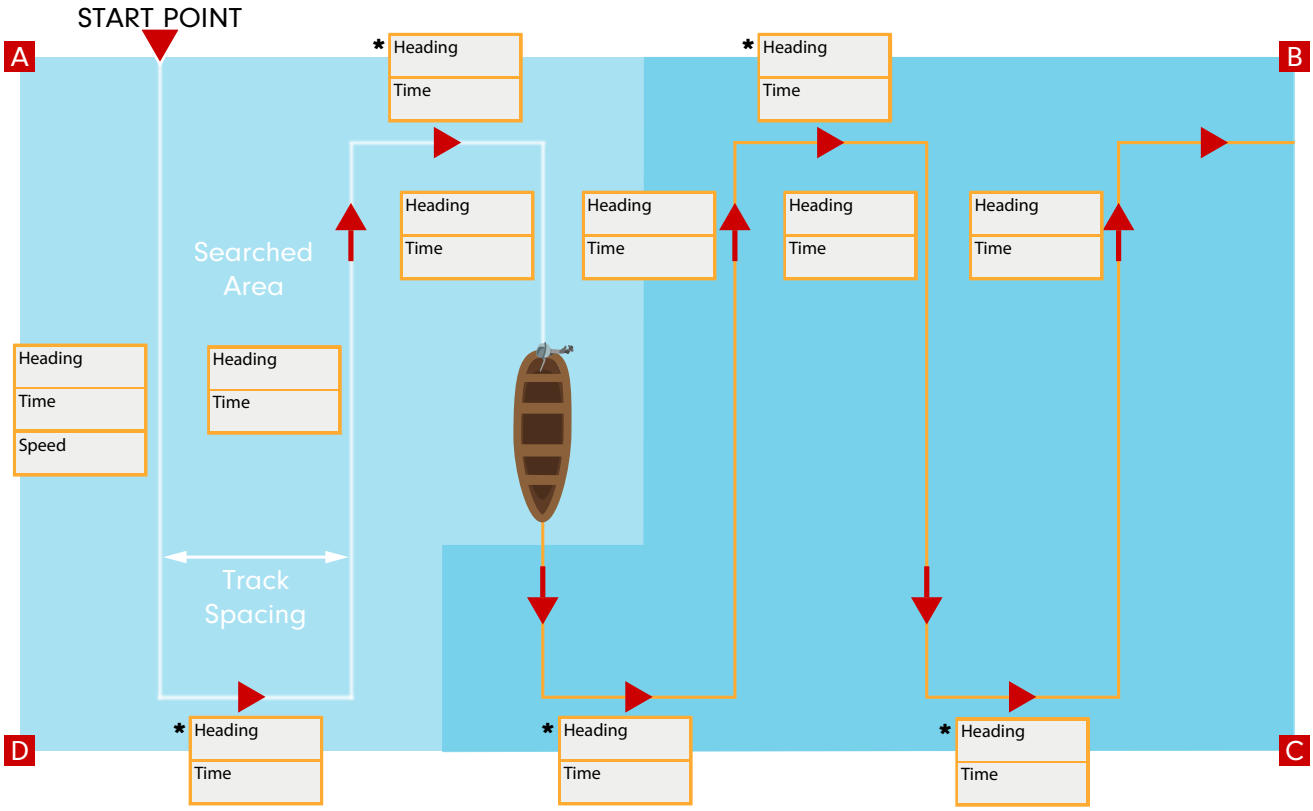
NOTES

Date of Production: Version January 2026

SEARCH TYPES

SEARCH CARD **Creeping Line Ahead Area Search Pattern**

Key | Searched Area | Unsearched Area | Direction of Travel



- Start point should be 1/2 track spacing inside search area
- The casualty could be anywhere in the area
- GPS can be used
- *Get the timings for short legs from the table on Page 5

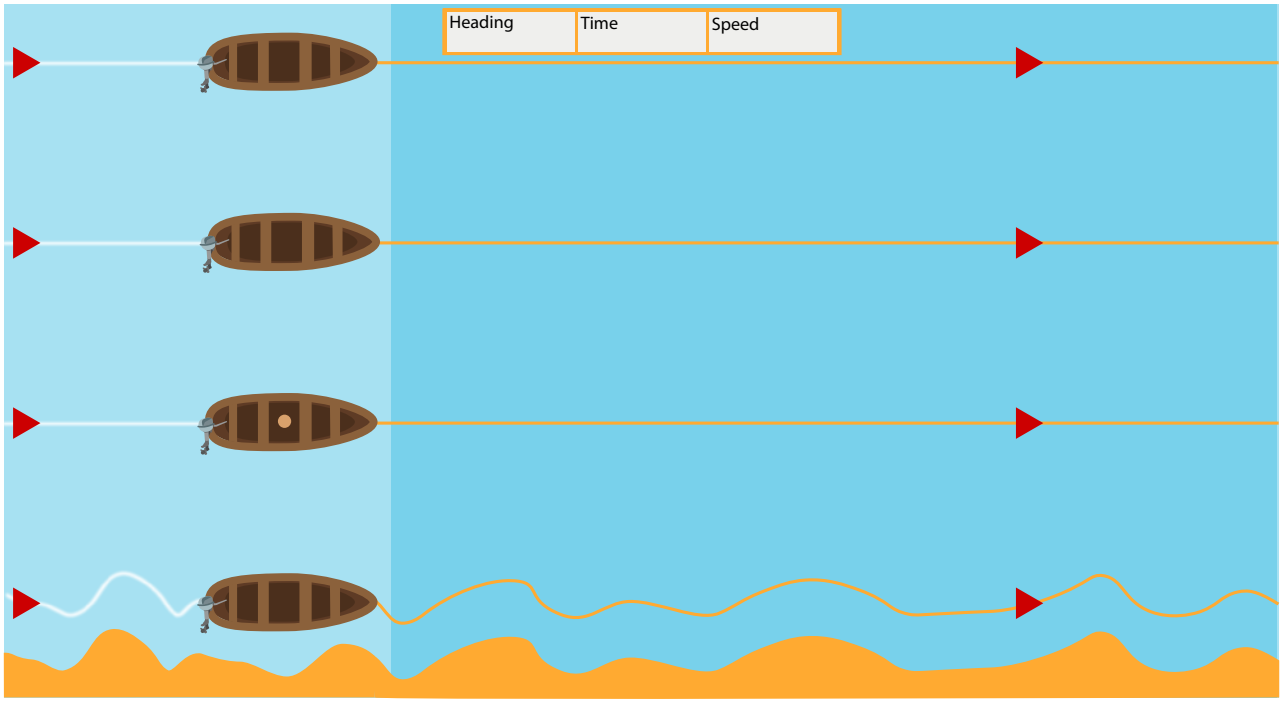
NOTES

Date of Production: Version January 2026

SEARCH TYPES

SEARCH CARD **Line Abreast Area Search Pattern**

Key Searched Area | Unsearched Area | Direction of Travel



- The casualty could be anywhere in the area
- Each vessel one sweep width apart - get the distance between each boat from page 5.
- All vessels to do the same speed

NOTES

Date of Production: Version January 2026

TP-INT-17

Produced by RNLI Learning Experience