

# Boating Safety Communications & Education Strategy 2012-15

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Transport  
for NSW

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## 1. Overview

The Office of Boating Safety and Maritime Affairs (OBSMA) provides the strategic and policy direction on boating in NSW. OBSMA works closely with Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) which is the operational delivery agency.

OBSMA is responsible for this Boating Safety Education and Communication Strategy and RMS assists in delivery. The Strategy follows a three-year cycle and underpins education, communication, regulatory and compliance activities that promote a culture of safe and responsible boating statewide.

Recreational boating is a popular pastime for hundreds of thousands of families in NSW. Each year an estimated 1.8 million people go boating along the NSW coastline and on inland lakes, rivers and estuaries.

There are more than 500,000 people who hold a licence to operate a recreational powerboat and almost 250,000 people with a registered recreational vessel.

Too often, lives are tragically lost in boating incidents, with an average of 17 fatalities a year. Whilst the loss of a single life is tragic for families and friends, the cost to the public of each fatality is estimated at \$2.7 million (ref. Maritime Safety Tasmania).

Of the total number of fatalities the most common denominator is the failure to wear a lifejacket. Drowning was the major cause in 67 per cent of boating fatalities recorded since 1999, of which more than 95 per cent were not wearing a lifejacket. The vast majority of these fatalities involve males, aged 35-55, in small boats.

Incident statistics, analysis and anecdotal evidence point to the complacency of experienced skippers and boat owners, and a lack of water-safety awareness amongst the general public as important issues which will be considered across all elements of this Strategy.

The principal focus of the Strategy is skipper responsibility, with secondary themes related to lifejacket use, safe navigation, trip planning, and alcohol restrictions. Maritime stakeholder feedback supports this focus and themes, and is particularly supportive of an emphasis on education before regulation.

The Strategy identifies campaigns under each theme, targeted at varying boating demographics and using a range of communication and education tools. Reflecting the rapid evolution in communications technology and the mobility of the boating public, the Internet has been targeted as a channel for significant expansion.

The Strategy and supporting Action Plans are subject to regular review for both cost effectiveness and success in delivering safety messages. The Strategy seeks to capitalise on the new organisational arrangements being realised through the formation of Transport for NSW and the integration of the former RTA and Maritime Authority of NSW into RMS. The Maritime 'safety brand' will be used across all products outlined in this Strategy.

This is a living document. Comments and suggestions are welcomed and should be forwarded to the Office of Boating Safety and Maritime Affairs, PO Box K659 HAYMARKET NSW 1240

## 2. Statistics and trend analysis

Vessel incidents normally result from a number of factors. However, one factor that contributes strongly to incident outcomes is lifejacket wearing behaviour.

An examination of fatal incidents reveals that many of these people could have survived, had they been wearing a lifejacket. It has become apparent that while most people have lifejackets on board, if the lifejacket is not worn at the time of the incident occurring, it may have limited utility.

Between 1992 – 2012, 347 people died in NSW waters. Of these fatalities:

- 89% were male, and 60% of these were aged between 20-54yrs
- 44% were the vessel operators
- 41% were passengers or crew
- 64% were caused by a capsized or a fall overboard
- 66% were in boats less than 5m in length

In relation to the fatalities since 2000:

- 67% were the result of drowning.
- Less than 7% wore lifejackets
- Less than 5% of the people who drowned wore lifejackets.

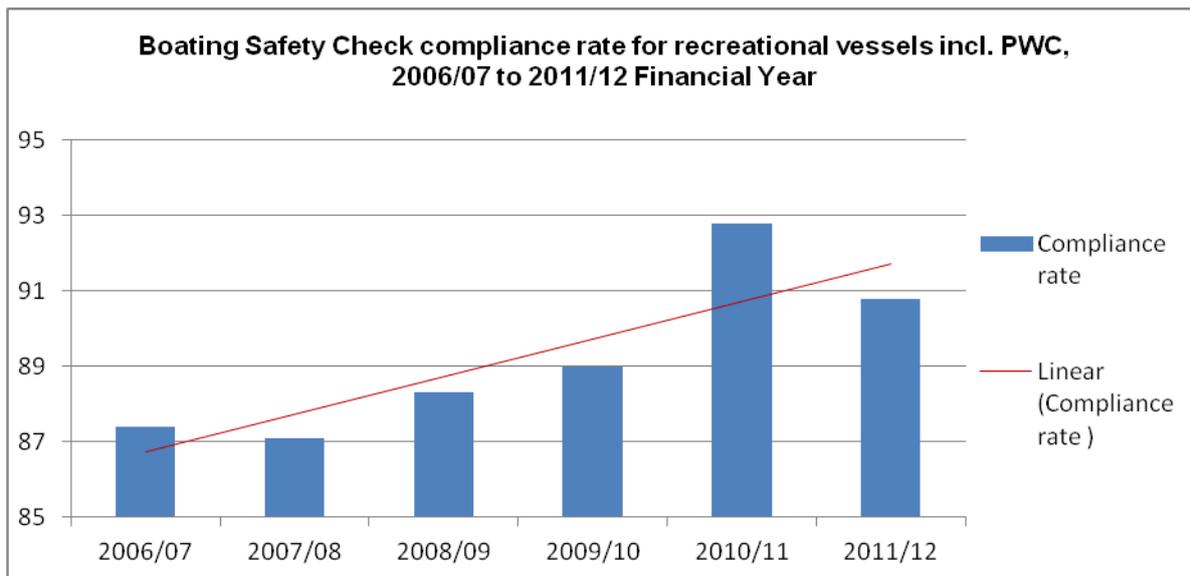
These figures suggest that up to 64% of all fatalities may have had a better outcome if all victims had been wearing a lifejacket.

New lifejacket wearing requirements were introduced on 1 November 2010, however since then and up to 31 June 2012 (TBC) there have been 24 fatal incidents resulting in 29 fatalities. Only 3 of these deceased were wearing lifejackets and all died from severe trauma incidents where lifejacket wear would have had little or no safety benefit for the victim.

For 2011-12, reported as at 7 July 2012, there have been 19 fatalities (up 72.5% on the previous financial year), 62 serious injuries (up 52.5%) and 64 minor injuries (down 41.5%).

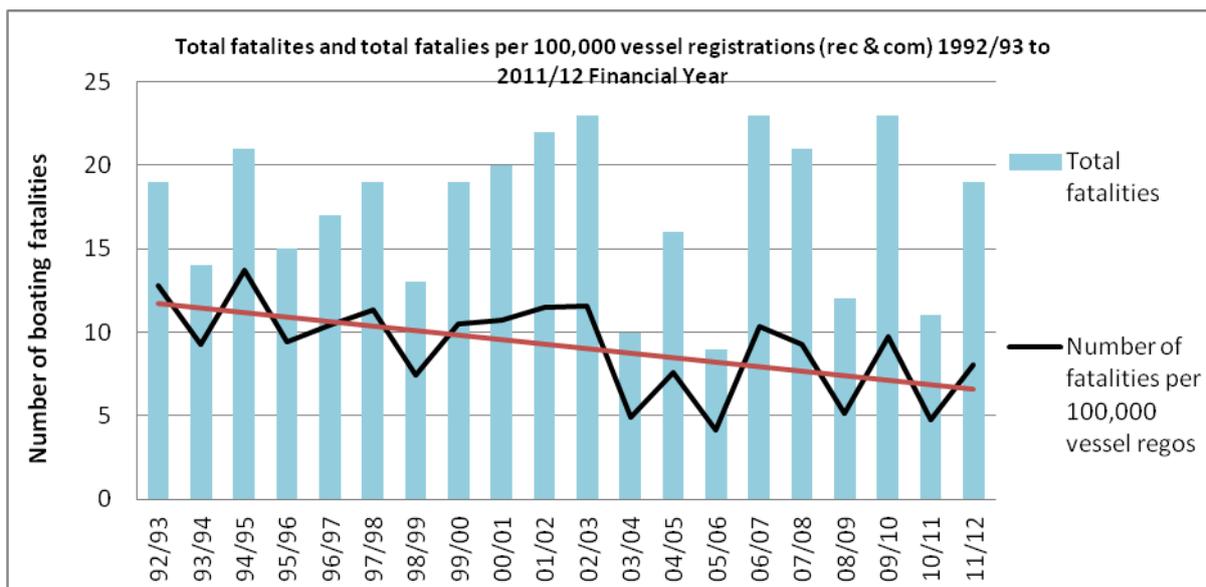
### **Compliance rates**

Graph 1 shows the compliance rate for boating safety checks conducted between 2006/07 and the 2011/12 financial year to 30 April. The compliance rate has shown a statistically significant improvement over this period.



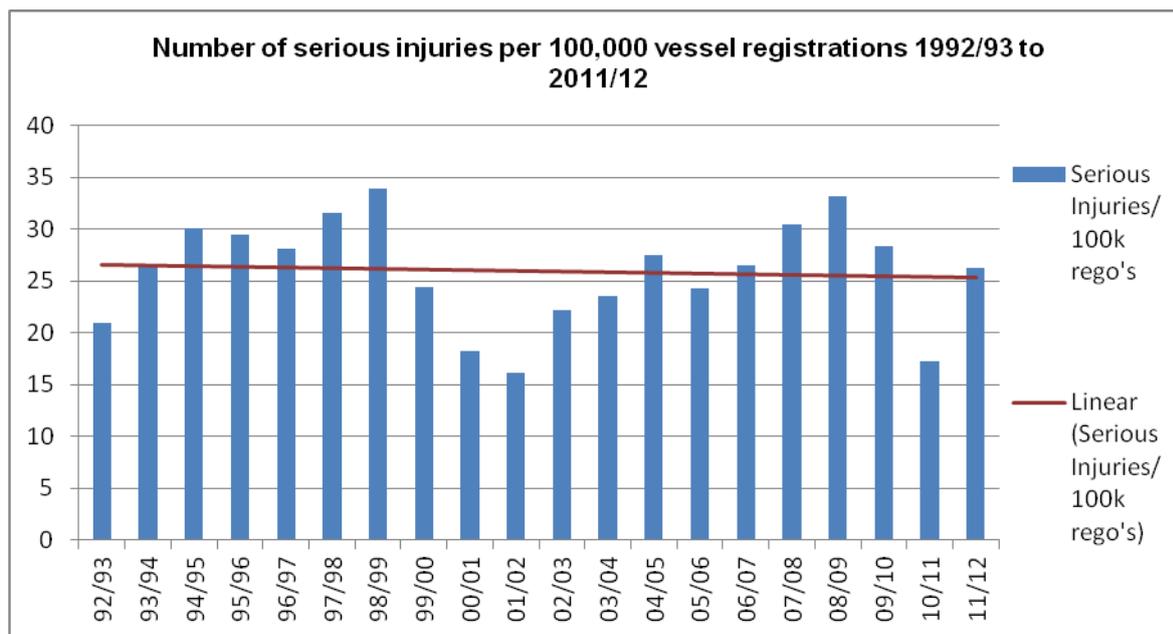
### Fatality rates

Graph 2 shows the number of fatalities, and the number of fatalities per 100,000 vessel registrations, between 1992/93 and the 2011/12 financial year. Although numbers of fatalities have fluctuated, there is a significant long-term downward trend in the rate of fatalities.



### Serious injury rates

Graph 3 shows the number of serious injuries per 100,000 vessel registrations, between 1992/93 and the 2010/11 financial year. The serious injury rate has fluctuated, with no significant long term trend. The 2011/12 result is close to the long term average.



### 3. Safety messages and target audiences

For most Australians, boating is a leisure activity rather than a profession or a transport necessity. The boating community is diverse in age and background, and may have limited contact with professional boating organisations or peak bodies.

To be effective, safety messages must be clear, easily remembered and positive, with a focus on acceptable behaviour and skipper responsibilities for their passengers or crew.

In April 2012, OBSMA held a stakeholder forum which was hosted by the Minister. This forum allowed stakeholders to have their say on a wide range of safety-related boating issues and to help set the policy and education agendas going forward.

Stakeholders at the forum supported an appropriate balance of regulation, education and personal responsibility to ensure safe waterways. Key themes that emerged from Forum discussions on safety included:

Overall, boating safety **regulation** needs to be reasonable, practical and simply understood.

Enhance **education and awareness** programs to target young boaters, non-traditional users and other target groups.

**Personal responsibility** requires a focus on lifejacket compliance, comfort, convenience and cost.

More discussion is needed on whether to make **lifejacket wear** compulsory in small boats.

**Other issues** include paddlecraft, Boating Safety Officers and general safety.

## Regulation

There was general consensus at the Forum that boating safety education is a major priority and it was perceived to be a more effective approach than the current reliance on enforcement strategies. Across the groups, there was consistent support for achieving the right balance between education and regulation.

## Education and awareness

The current program of training young boaters, especially in schools, was considered a very effective strategy. Suggested program enhancements included a focus on speed, alcohol, and weather conditions. Another suggested approach was to develop a travelling roadshow, particularly in regional areas. There was also recognition of the potential benefit in focusing boating education and awareness on youth – that well trained and aware young boaters can directly and indirectly educate their parents.

While many participants considered safety messages are not getting through to non-traditional water users, it was suggested targeted education strategies also need to focus on:

- “older” experienced boaters;
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); and
- non powered watercraft users.

Stakeholders provided the following suggestions to improve education and awareness of boating safety:

- more signage and information in strategic locations such as boat ramps;
- a greater Boating Safety Officer presence at boat ramps;
- multi-language apps for smartphones to assist NESB boaters;
- advertising campaigns using industry stakeholders and positive role models;
- establishment of an education and awareness working group, with representatives from Maritime Agencies, Boating Industry Association, Recreational Vessels Advisory Group, Office of Boating Safety and Maritime Affairs and the Maritime Division; and
- development of education and awareness mentoring roles involving Marine Rescue, ramp marshals, yacht clubs and associations.

## Personal Responsibility

### Lifejackets

Stakeholders overwhelmingly identified the need to educate boaters on lifejacket wear rules, types of lifejackets available and how to maintain and dispose of lifejackets.

Lifejackets need to be more comfortable to wear, easy to get on and off, cost effective and convenient to encourage increased and consistent use. It was recognised that continued improvements in design will increase lifejacket wear.

Lifejacket maintenance is an issue which is compounded by inconsistency in servicing requirements. A perception therefore exists that many people don't know when to service lifejackets. Extending inflatable lifejacket expiry periods was considered to have possible benefit; however, there was also recognition of the danger associated with cheap lifejackets not working properly. A suggested strategy to overcome these difficulties is to collaborate with lifejacket retailers to assist compliance and servicing requirements. Another suggestion

discussed amongst groups was exploration of a 'Swap n Go' system (following further discussion with industry), similar to the system adopted for LPG cylinders.

### **Other issues of personal responsibility**

Other personal responsibility issues raised by stakeholders included:

- The need to develop a code of responsibility for all waterways users.
- Reinforce "Stay safe – keep right" rule.
- Owner's changes to vessel designs (ie modifications) are causing issues.
- Speed/wash on water is a safety issue – greater awareness and education is required.
- Interaction of smaller vessels (ie sail vessels) with larger vessels.

### **Lifejacket wear**

Stakeholders also provided the following suggestions to improve education and awareness in relation to lifejacket wear:

- Apply a lifejacket 'scare campaign' – similar to seatbelt safety campaigns;
- Install lifejacket signage at boat ramps;
- Create further awareness that Maritime Officers are always checking if lifejackets are worn;
- Reminders for lifejacket servicing to be sent with licence and registrations;
- A need to research why people are resistant to wearing life jackets;

It is recognised that there is a need to strike a balance between having lifejacket wear requirements cover all situations of elevated risk and keeping the rules as simple as possible. Keeping the rules reasonably simple whilst covering all of the major circumstances of elevated risk inevitably means that some low-risk situations are captured by regulation. This is a major source of discontent amongst some boaters.

### **Other Issues**

#### **Paddlecraft**

Improvement of safety measures for paddlecraft was seen by participants as a critical issue.

There was strong consensus for implementing enhanced visibility measures through the mandatory introduction of LED lights, orange flags and reflective tape combinations.

It was also suggested that a paddlecraft code of conduct be developed and made available at the point of sale.

#### **Boating Safety Officers**

The role and visibility of Boating Safety Officers (BSOs) was identified as a potential area for improving boating education and safety for all boating users. This included an increased presence of BSOs at night, during high risk weather and at peak use times.

Potential also exists for BSOs to play an important role in skill sharing and face to face education – particularly at boat ramps.

#### **General Safety**

During the Forum, stakeholders raised the following issues surrounding general safety:

- unlit vessels;
- Need for expanded involvement of volunteers;
- poor awareness of safe recreational fishing;
- need to review competing usage in busy areas; and.

- the possibility of using ramp marshals at some boat ramps.

#### 4. Objectives

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The objectives of the Strategy are to save lives through the following:

1. encourage a culture of boating safety in NSW;
2. improve boating safety;
3. improve the reach of safety messages through contemporary technology, media and partnerships; and
4. support Boating Safety Officers in their on-water duties, by ensuring the boating community is well-informed regarding boating rules and requirements.

The overarching safety theme of this Strategy is *You're the Skipper – You're Responsible*. This is supported by the following sub-themes:

1. Wear Lifejackets
  - a. Know when to wear it
  - b. Make wearing a habit
  - c. Proper care, maintenance and (for inflatables) servicing
2. Navigate Safely
  - a. Keep a proper lookout
  - b. Keep to the right
  - c. Safe speed/watch your wash
  - d. Tow safety (incl., prop strike)
  - e. Paddle safety
3. Plan and Prepare
  - a. Blue water safety (incl., bar safety)
  - b. Cold Water
  - c. Night safety
4. Limit Alcohol
  - a. Reinforce the 'Go easy on the drink' campaign

Each of these sub-themes is in turn supported by various messages and campaigns, targeting particular boating demographics throughout the year.

Target audiences for the Strategy include:

- Boat licence holders
- Registered boat owners
- Other boaters not requiring vessel registration or a boat licence:
  - esp., kayakers/ paddlers, dragon boaters, rowers, off-the-beach sailors e.g., catamarans and kite boarders etc
- Family and friends of boaters:

- esp., partners and children
- School children:
  - primary and secondary school age
  - statewide in popular boating areas
- Commercial vessel operators:
  - Including people who hire and drive.

## 5. Education tools

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Tools to reach the various target audiences include:

- Internet – to maximise potential reach to an ever expanding public through tools such as:
  - You Tube (using low budget in-house videos for specific safety issues),
  - Social sites such as Facebook and Twitter,
  - and mobile phone apps etc.
- Email and SMS – explore opportunities to maximise the reach and effectiveness of these tools.
- Traditional media outlets (TV, radio, newspaper & cinema ads):
  - Best used for broader safety messages, where the same theme applies to an entire community and to reach friends and family of regular boaters. More cost-effective in summer (peak boating season) and in regional media outlets in boating areas.
  - Work with other agencies (e.g., TfNSW, Fisheries and Police) where appropriate to maximise reach and impact of safety messages.
  - Support a network of regional spokespeople capable of promoting campaigns and general boating information in the media.
- Maritime publications – including specialist marine publications and maritime mailouts and newsletters. Most effective at reaching commercial operators and boat licence or registration holders, and capable of conveying a more detailed or technical message than traditional media:
- School curriculum – working with the Department of Education and Communities to promote boating safety and training in Marine Studies courses, as well as formal marine safety advice for primary school children in areas with high boat ownership and recreational boating activity.
  - Support the Marine Teachers Association of NSW to deliver and expand, where appropriate, a network of Marine Studies ‘hubs’ in High Schools across NSW
- Accredited Training Providers – ensuring safety messages are included in all formal training materials and courses, for TAFE (provider of commercial boating qualifications) and boating colleges (providers of basic boat licence training).
- Marine industries and stakeholder groups – working with peak boating groups to disseminate and reinforce boating safety messages throughout their networks of members and supporters.

- Formal Partnerships:
  - Expand the current network of partners to develop 'champions' of boating safety and extend the reach of traditional campaigns
  - To ensure strong relationships with boating clubs and associations to extend the reach of boating safety awareness
  - To ensure the commercial vessel sector, particularly hire and drive, help to extend the reach of boating safety awareness
  - Provide a Local Boating Community Support Program to encourage and provide financial support for local safety initiatives
  - Investigate and, where appropriate, deliver 'Refresher Courses' in boating skills and knowledge by exploring:
    - partnerships with Marine Rescue NSW
    - partnership with the Mens Sheds network
    - Online products (eg., North American online model)
    - Smart phone app
- RMS staff –
  - ensure staff are aware of the key themes of this Strategy
  - lead by example in on-water safety esp., Maritime division Boating Safety Officers; and
  - take every opportunity to communicate and reinforce a safe boating culture.

## 6. Measuring success

The Strategy will be evaluated annually by OBSMA in conjunction with RMS to ensure effectiveness. Where changes are required, these will be published as updates to the Strategy.

OBSMA should consider the following when reviewing the Strategy:

- Current research activities at RMS and TfNSW;
- Emerging technology in liaison with RMS and TfNSW;
- Input from other agencies esp., RMS and TfNSW.

Evaluation methods will include the following:

- Analyse key performance indicators such as incident rates and causes, fatality rates, lifejacket wear rates, and penalty notices against specific campaigns and messages;
- Analyse the number of hits of safety websites, participation in online polls/SMS-email alerts, online subscriptions to services and public feedback and enquiries regarding safety campaigns;
- Consider national and international boating safety trends
- Benchmark and monitor awareness levels of key safety rules and regulations
- Monitor on-water compliance check statistics against registration rates

*NOTE: KPI to be based on 10-year periods to align with TfNSW systems*

In addition to specific campaign evaluations, the overall direction of the Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Maritime Advisory Council.

## **7. Partnerships**

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To expand reach of the Strategy, OBMSA and RMS will:

- Engage with industry partners and key stakeholders to identify their specific role and opportunities in the delivery of the strategy through avenues including:
  - Boat Shows, community events, festivals and aquatic events
  - Schools, both primary and secondary
  - Boating industry networks
  - Water safety networks (e.g., Marine Rescue NSW, Surf Life Saving etc)
  - Boating clubs and associations
  - Maritime and boating media
  - Joint communication and/or education campaigns
- Regularly engage with national and international organisations to seek perspectives on new and existing safety trends by expanding relationships and effectiveness through avenues including:
  - Australia and New Zealand Safe Boating Education Group
  - Australian Recreational Boating Safety Council
  - US Coast Guard
  - Canadian Safe Boating Council
  - US National Safe Boating Council
  - Maritime NZ
  - Royal National Lifeboat Institute (UK)

## **8. Budget**

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The 2012-15 Strategy budget is \$5 million over three years.

*NOTE: This allocation is from the Waterways Fund which is derived from revenue raised through boating service fees for licences, registrations and moorings, and does not rely on funding from Treasury.*

### **Summary of key messages:**

#### **You're the Skipper, You're Responsible**

The skipper is responsible for the safety of their vessel and all on board.

## **1. Wear Lifejackets**

- a. A lifejacket will only save your life if you wear it
- b. Know when to wear it such as when boating alone or the conditions get rough
- c. Make wearing a habit by choosing a modern, comfortable style of lifejacket
- d. Make time for the proper care, maintenance and (for inflatables) servicing of lifejackets.

## **2. Navigate Safely**

- a. Keep a proper lookout at all times in all directions.
- b. Keep to the right side of the waterway
- c. Keep to a safe speed for the conditions; that can mean slowing down at times of reduced visibility like at night or on a busy waterway. Watch your wash, the waves your vessel generates can cause a nuisance, annoyance and danger to others.
- d. Tow safe when waterskiing or wakeboarding and especially keep the boat and person towed well clear of other vessels and the shore.
- e. Take care be prop aware especially anytime there are people in the water.
- f. Paddle safe and especially do not cross in front of larger vessels and make sure you can be clearly seen.

## **3. Plan and Prepare**

- a. Blue water safety
  - i. Make sure your vessel and crew are up to the challenge. Study the conditions and only go offshore when it is safe. Log on and off using your marine radio.
- b. Cold Water
  - i. Exposure to cold conditions can be fatal. Ensure your boat is suitable, wear appropriate clothing and a lifejacket.
- c. Night safety
  - i. Be bright at night and make sure your navigation lights are working appropriately. Take time to understand the system of nav lights and keep a proper lookout.

## **4. Limit Alcohol**

- a. 'Go easy on the drink' campaign
  - i. Keep under the 0.05 limit. Random breath testing applies to skippers underway. When at anchor, appoint a designated driver in case the conditions become adverse and you need to move.