DCA Safety Recommendations

These safety recommendations are intended as a brief guide to safe cruising in small boats. However, DCA members' boats vary from sailing canoes and very light dinghies to day boats and pocket yachts. 'Cruising' may vary from an afternoon sail on sheltered waters to a long, open sea crossing. It is difficult, therefore, to give 'one size fits all' advice. Please read these recommendations and consider how you can apply them to make your cruising safer. **The safety of a boat and all those aboard is always the responsibility of the skipper.**

1. The boat.

1.1 Should be insured with at least third party liability cover (both personal and property cover). Some sailing clubs and sailing events will not accept uninsured boats.

1.2 Stability. Each skipper should know their boat and its limitations and sail responsibly. Small, lightweight dinghies may capsize if the crew is not positioned correctly. Adding ballast in a fixed position may help the stability. Bigger boats are less likely to capsize but are more difficult to right if they do. If you cannot right your boat after a capsize, stay with the boat and call for assistance (see 3.9 and 3.10).

1.3 Buoyancy. Must be sufficient to support stores and crew when flooded. Test the buoyancy of your boat and practise capsizing and righting it in controlled conditions. Also practise re-boarding from the water. If the boat cannot be righted after a capsize, mast head buoyancy may be helpful.

1.4 Hull, mast and rigging must be strong enough to withstand cruising stresses. Check all fittings, rigging and lines regularly. Test your outboard motor before each trip.

1.5 Reducing sail. Ensure that while afloat, you can quickly reduce sail by 50 % (reefing). Practise 'heaving to' and anchoring so that you can reef your sails while afloat. Consider carrying storm sails for very windy conditions.

1.6 Mooring lines. Minimum fore and aft plus additional lines as 'springs'. Ensure that there is a rope for towing attached to a strong point and that these can easily take the load of your fully swamped boat.

1.7 Register your boat as required by national, regional, state or local authorities and comply with their requirements. (see 4.1).

2. The Skipper and Crew.

2.1 Should be sufficiently experienced and skilled for the conditions expected. Even on a sunny afternoon the weather can suddenly turn against you. Physical fitness is important for both skipper and crew. When needed, a crew member should be able to help the skipper – including anchoring, knowing basic right of way rules, collision avoidance and basic capsize recovery.

2.2 Regulations. Be aware of your responsibilities under SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) regulations (especially chapter 5) and local regulations like Maritime and Coastguard Agency for the UK.

2.3 Weight of crew adequate for the boat (at least 20kg./metre of water line length as a rule of thumb) but as with 1.2 and 1.3 each boat must be considered separately. For powerful, lightweight dinghies, combined crew weight should match that of the all-up weight of the boat.

3. Minimum equipment for cruising

3.1 Personal buoyancy for each crew member.

3.2 Wet weather gear and warm clothing for each crew member and a complete change of weather-appropriate clothing in a waterproof bag or compartment.

3.3 Anchor. Minimum 5kg. Anchor cable – minimum 30metres of non-floating material, with 2metres of chain (more for bigger boats) between it and the anchor, secured to a strong point inside the boat with a fairlead at the bow.

3.4 A strong bucket for bailing. Bucket and bailers attached to the boat with lanyards and ready for use. A bilge pump (manual or electric) may be useful but not as the only way of bailing.

3.5 Two oars and metal rowlocks secured by lanyards, plus a spare rowlock. A rowlock on the stern (or sculling notch) if you can scull. Paddles are not an adequate substitute for oars (except in sailing canoes) but can be useful in a dock or marina.

3.6 Drinking water and food, sufficient for all on board. Consider 1.5 litres of water per person per day (more in hot weather) – it is important to maintain hydration levels, especially in hot weather.

3.7 Navigation aids. Orienteering compass and marine chart (in a waterproof case) or large scale local map for inland waters. A waterproof GPS which can give you an exact 'fix' on the chart.

3.8 Fire blanket and/or fire extinguisher.

3.9 Waterproof VHF radio, preferably with DSC. It is useful even for short trips and DCA meetings – to keep in touch with other boats.

3.10 Smartphone in a waterproof pouch for communication and weather forecasts. If you use a phone for navigation, you should have another for calling. Carry powerbank(s) for recharging devices.

3.11 A powerful waterproof light (and a spare). Spare batteries.

3.12 First aid kit

3.13 Fog horn or whistle to give warning in foggy conditions.

4. Additional equipment for more extended cruises outside sheltered waters and open sea crossings

4.1 Registration. Comply with the registration requirements of your sailing area and always carry your registration documents. In the UK you are advised to register your 406 MHz beacon (EPIRB, PLB, or ELT) with the UK Beacon Registry managed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

4.2 Reliable steering compass, kept in one position and checked for deviation, preferably lit for night use .

4.3 Additional navigation equipment. Charts covering the whole passage, pilot book, almanac, tidal atlas, leadline, handbearing compass, waterproof GPS, navigation app. on phone or chartplotter.

4.4 Log book for passage planning notes and for recording the passage in progress. Make detailed passage plans, including places of safety (bolt holes) in case of deteriorating weather conditions

4.5 Emergency radio beacon – EPIRB or PLB.

4.6 Repair kit and spare parts.

4.7 If feasible a mast-mounted radar reflector.

4.8 Day and night flares (pyrotechnic and/or electronic). Consider smoke flares also.

4.9 An outboard motor. It may not be possible to row to safety outside sheltered waters. Enough fuel or spare battery power to complete a planned crossing or reach a safe refuge.