



DOCUMENT CONTROL

Category	Operations
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1. DEFINITIONS

RESCUE (SERM Act)

“The safe removal of persons or domestic animals from actual or threatened danger of physical harm”

MARINE RESCUE (State Rescue Policy)

“The locating of vessels in distress at sea or in sheltered waters and bringing the vessels and their occupants to safety. If that is not feasible, rescuing the occupants and bringing them to safety. Marine rescue also includes the rescue of persons who have fallen into the sea or sheltered waters from land or vessel”

2. PURPOSE

2.1 MRNSW responds to thousands of ‘rescue’ incidents per year. While the level of seriousness of each incident varies, the response of Marine Rescue Vessels (MRVs) to disabled vessels in need of rescue requires appropriate procedures to be in place.

2.2 MRNSW has a duty of care for the safety of its members and the boating public. The purpose of this SOP is to provide Unit Commanders, MRV Masters and crew with clear towing procedures.

3. POLICY

3.1 All ‘notifiable incidents’ shall be immediately communicated to NSWPF Marine Area Command and the relevant Regional Operations Manager (ref SOP OP06).

3.2 All towing operations must be conducted in line with MRNSW Training and SOPs, and the relevant regulations and policies under which MRNSW operate.

3.3 The MRV Master and/or Helmsman must be qualified and where a bar crossing is involved, have been inducted/trained in navigating the relevant bar by a qualified and experienced MR Coxswain.

3.4 Units must incorporate the procedures outlined in this document into their vessel SMS and relevant Unit LOPs.

3.5 The content of this SOP must be incorporated into member training and currency activities, including ‘marine drills’.



- 3.6 Towing by MRVs shall be undertaken following a risk assessment by the MRV Master, where the risks of undertaking a tow are deemed acceptable and any/all identified appropriate risk mitigating measures are implemented (ie transfer of occupants to safety etc).
- 3.7 No Unit LOP related to towing may conflict with or contradict this SOP and must comply with *Rule 24 Marine orders 30 IMO Marine Order 30 (Prevention of collision at sea) 2009 19.*
- 3.8 Vessels adrift (with no POB) may be secured if it is deemed that they pose a threat of physical harm to the public, and where the risk of such a response is determined as acceptable by the MRV Master (risk v gain).
- 3.9 The recovery of vessels (where there are no POB and there is no immediate threat of harm) should only be undertaken where minimal risk is identified, where such action has no adverse effect on a Units rescue-response capacity and where no alternative salvage operators are available. Consultation with the ROM (and endorsement from MAC) must be obtained before conducting any such operation.

4. PROCEDURES

4.1 Risk Management

- 4.1.1 The MRV Master shall undertake a risk assessment prior to conducting any towing Operations, which should include consideration of the following:
- Risk versus gain – whether the risk of undertaking the tow is acceptable and within the scope of MRNSW operations
 - Occupant transfer options – as an alternative to the tow or risk mitigation measure (transfer to shore, to the MRV or to another vessel)
 - PPE (lifejackets) worn by all occupants and crew
 - The seaworthiness of the vessel to be towed
 - MRV suitability to tow the disabled vessel (displacement/power) or whether alternative rescue assets are required
 - Time to complete tow, available daylight, tide and weather forecasts
 - Availability of Immediate or potential (additional) support.
- 4.1.2 The MRV Master shall make the final determination whether a tow can be conducted with their vessel.
- 4.1.3 When engaged in towing there needs to be a positive, safe and rapid means of quick release of the towline at, or near, the towing point attachment.
- 4.1.4 When towing a vessel astern from a single point, such as a Samson Post, the towline should be restrained by means of towing pins or gob-eyes located towards the stern in order to help limit the magnitude of the yaw angle whilst underway.
- 4.1.5 To maintain the towing vessel's stability, and to prevent possible girting, the towline, while under tension, should be kept to within 45 degrees each side of the centreline.



4.2 Communication

- 4.2.1 The Master of the MRV should seek from the skipper of the vessel requiring assistance, permission to undertake the tow. This should be recorded in the MRV log and signed, (where possible) by the skipper of disabled vessel.
- 4.2.2 Where practicable, the MRV Master must inform the skipper of the disabled vessel that MRNSW will not be liable for any damage that the vessel being towed incurs as a result of the assist process.
- 4.2.3 The MRV shall communicate to the MRB/SARCC immediately prior to and following any tow over a bar as a 'welfare-check' action.
- 4.2.4 A briefing should be conducted with all MRV crew and the skipper/occupants of the disabled vessel prior to taking any action (where practical).
- 4.2.5 Effective communication shall be established and maintained with the skipper of the disabled vessel throughout the duration of the tow.
- 4.2.6 The skipper of the disabled vessel may refuse the offer of a tow or assistance. Should a refusal to accept a tow and/or transfer occupants to the MRV in a threat-to-life situation be encountered, the MRV shall immediately inform and take instruction from NSWPF MAC, and stand-by near the vessel to render assistance if required.

4.3 PPE (Lifejackets)

- 4.3.1 Any assisted person shall wear lifejackets prior to any vessel transfer or towing activity.
- 4.3.2 The refusal of any assisted person to wear a lifejacket shall be noted in the MRV log and the MRV Master shall reassess the risk implications and action to be taken.

4.4 Transfer of Vessel Occupants (for Safety)

- 4.4.1 As a result of the assessment of risk, it may be determined to transfer the vessel occupants from the disabled vessel. Situations where this may be warranted include:
 - Where the vessel is at serious risk of sinking or capsizing, and a tow is not feasible due to insufficient time or dangerous ocean conditions (ie breaking waves on a bar).
 - Where conditions prevent a tow from occurring, but remaining on board the disabled vessel is unadvisable.
 - Where a vessel is to be towed across a bar or in adverse weather conditions, and it is determined that all occupants (or all occupants excluding the vessel skipper) should be transferred from the vessel.

Options include transferring to:

- the MRV (for the duration of the tow)
- the MRV and then immediately transferred to shore
- another MRV (or other vessel)



4.4.2 If deemed unsafe to affect a transfer, the MRV Master shall request the person(s) to don lifejackets and remain on the vessel. Consideration should be given to standing off until the change of tide when the bar may be less threatening and the risk is reduced.

4.4.3 Due to steerage/handling requirements it may be warranted for the vessel skipper to remain on board the towed vessel.

4.5 Additional Rescue Support

4.5.1 The MRV should consider whether additional rescue assets are required to assist in order to:

- Transfer some/all occupants
- Undertake the tow (if a larger vessel is required)
- Provide stand-off safety support particularly if towing across a bar

4.6 Roles and Responsibilities

4.6.1 As part of the briefing, the MRV Master shall allocate roles and responsibilities to the MRV crew – particularly a 'Lookout', who shall be an appropriately trained crew member assigned to face the stern and observe the tow line and towed vessel. This person shall also be responsible for controlling/restricting any entry or activities in the tow-area between the tow-point and the stern.

4.6.2 Communication between the helmsman and lookout must be established and maintained.

4.6.3 The MRV Master shall request the person(s) on the vessel be appropriately positioned (seated and/or standing) at all times during the tow so as to assist with keeping the vessel stable.

4.7 Rafting (towing alongside)

4.7.1 Rafting (towing alongside) should be restricted to short distances or close-quarters manoeuvring to and from a berth or in confined navigational situations where additional control is required.

4.7.2 Generally this should be restricted to enclosed and smooth waters.

4.7.3 Rafting should not be undertaken across bars.

4.8 Additional instructions when towing across a bar

4.8.1 In instances where a disabled vessel is being towed across a bar, the following will apply:

4.8.2 Following a risk assessment, the occupants may be left on the distressed vessel whilst towing across the bar. This would apply to such times that the bar is either flat or non-threatening - as risk assessed and deemed acceptable by the MRV Master.



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- 4.8.3 If the vessel being towed has steerage which requires a helm assist then the MRV Master shall advise the skipper of the vessel to remain on board, don a lifejacket and assist the tow by maintaining steerage for the vessel whilst under tow. Communications are to be established between both vessels by radio, mobile phone and/or hand signal.
 - 4.8.4 The final decision to tow across a river bar shall be made by the MRV Master.
 - 4.8.5 MRV Masters must ensure that all assisted persons are in an open area of the vessel and wear an approved life jacket when crossing a bar.
 - 4.8.6 Cabin doors of the MRV shall be locked in the open position, and the cabin doors of the vessel being towed should also be secured in the open position (if able).
 - 4.8.7 The MRV Master shall determine the most appropriate position of crew/passengers based on risk and vessel type.

4.9 Displaying of Red and Blue Lights

- 4.9.1 Red and Blue Lights may be activated by the MRV throughout the duration of the tow. It should be noted that the use of flashing lights conveys no special privileges nor do they allow ColRegs to be ignored.

4.10 Compliance with International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea

Whether in Open or Closed Waters:

- 4.10.1 Whilst engaged in towing/pushing ahead (daylight hours), the MRV shall display the required flag (D flag - manoeuvring with difficulty).
- 4.10.2 Whilst engaged in towing/pushing ahead (night time), the Master of the MRV shall ensure that both vessels (where possible) are displaying the appropriate navigation running lights in accordance with International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (Col. Regs.), Rule 24.