



# SAFETY BULLETIN

Incident  
#02-2026

## Towing Operations: Planning a Safe Tow

ISSUE DATE: 11 February 2026

**Subject:** *The potential risks associated with complex towing operations.*

**Recent Incident:** Marine Rescue NSW (MRNSW) recently experienced an incident while towing. The operation required a short tow from the bow while going astern, then in a 5-knot current reconfiguring to a line astern tow. During the reconfiguring a crew member became trapped by the tensioned tow line against the engine well bulwark of the vessel causing bruising to their body.

**Issue:** There is potential for significant crew injury when towing due to high loading of tow lines, and such operations must only occur after a thorough tow plan-based Operational Risk Assessment (ORA) and crew briefing, including consideration of who should rig the tow, and how, and appropriate vessel handling for the conditions. Situational awareness must be maintained during tow operations. Regular crew training must also incorporate strategies to mitigate the risks associated with crush, pinch, abrasion and entanglement injury when managing lines.

### Reference materials:

- SOP OP 03 Vessel Operations (and vessel SMS)
- SOP OP 06 Incident Response
- SOP OP 14 Work, Health and Safety

**Actions:** steps to be followed to avoid similar incident:

- **Risk Assessment**  
Conduct a tow plan-based ORA and crew briefing prior to towing so all crew know the plan and their responsibilities. Continue dynamic ORA and situational awareness.
- **Pinch/Crush Point Awareness and Crew Positioning**  
Identify and avoid pinch and crush points on deck, posts, bollards, bitts and cleats. Keep hands, feet and limbs clear at all times. Reinforce safe line-handling and awareness of pinch/crush-points and deck danger areas through regular training and communications. Maintain stable footing and three points of contact at all times.
- **Safe Line Handling and PPE**  
Do not place hands or limbs on loaded lines, especially near fixed attachment points. Never wrap lines around hands, arms or body and never stand or place limbs or hands in the bight of a rope. Instruct crew on how to safely secure lines and place eyes over posts, bollards, bitts and cleats. Be aware that vessels may behave differently when rafting, manage additional pinch points and ensure fenders are correctly positioned. Wear required MRNSW-issued PPE, locate the vessel's deck-knife in a visible/accessible position on the main weather deck. Consider having crew members carry a knife and wearing rope/sailing gloves
- **Environmental Conditions**  
Consider the effects of vessel manoeuvring, wind, current, waves and swell and the potential for sudden vessel movement, and ensure crew do not occupy dangerous deck positions when towing.
- **Communication**  
Maintain clear communication between the Master and all crew during all towing activities.



### Additional or related safety considerations

Routine tasks such as towing can quickly become high-risk. Sound planning, situational awareness and knowledge of the forces acting on vessels and lines is critical to crew safety. The crew involved in this occurrence are commended for their sharing of this experience and lessons learned.

**For further information:** Zone Duty Operations Manager