



# SAFETY BULLETIN

Incident  
#3-2026

## Coastal Bar Crossings

ISSUE DATE: 19 May 2026

**Subject:** *Potential risk associated with coastal bar crossings and beach launching*

### Issue:

Coastal Bars are among the most dangerous environments in which to operate a vessel, particularly in adverse conditions. The primary risk arises when breaking waves in shallow water impact a vessel. Factors such as darkness, and the associated reduced visibility, can heighten the risk and likelihood of an incident occurring.

Marine Rescue NSW data indicates that our rescue vessels respond to more than 200 missions annually during the hours of darkness. A small proportion of these rescues may involve crews going to sea via a coastal bar crossing or conducting a beach launch, where there is the possibility of encountering breaking waves.

### Reference materials:

SOP OP 03 Vessel Operations

Vessel Safety Management System (SMS)

Bar Crossing Awareness Course

SMS Addendum (attached)

### Actions:

1. Review Directive and SMS addendum
2. The crew on any deployment should consider:
  - Conducting a comprehensive briefing of the overall mission
  - Deploying to investigate and assess the situation, before forming an agreed plan
  - Implementing the plan and continually reviewing its effectiveness as factors and conditions change
  - Discussing what to do should things go wrong (e.g. mechanical or electrical failure, fault finding and restart actions)
3. All crew associated with a coastal bar crossing or beach launch are to complete the theory (online) component of Marine Rescue NSW Bar Crossing Awareness Course

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



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## **Additional or related safety considerations:**

### **Safety Management System - Addendum**

As an interim precautionary measure, pending the outcomes of Marine Rescue NSW's independent review of operational processes, the following directions apply immediately;

#### **The Direction**

##### **1. Night-time coastal bar operations**

Marine Rescue NSW will pause all non-essential night-time coastal bar crossing operations and training. Crews will only be activated for rescues involving a coastal bar or beach launch at night where there is an imminent need to protect life at sea. Prior to any night-time coastal bar crossing or beach launch, a joint assessment will be conducted between the rescue vessel, the Zone Duty Operations Manager and Marine Area Command. This assessment will determine whether the risks of proceeding outweigh the need to protect life at sea, with any initial deployment focussed on assessing conditions, prior to determining whether the rescue is safe to proceed.

##### **2. Bar crossing awareness training**

All boat rated members operating in areas where there are coastal bar crossings or beach launches are to complete the theory (online) component of Marine Rescue NSW Bar Crossing Awareness Course as soon as possible.

##### **3. Crew numbers**

Rescue vessel skippers should consider responding to heightened risk taskings with the minimum number of crew required to safely perform the rescue. It is acknowledged that this number may not always be known prior to deployment. All crew members on a vessel must maintain a stable position with the ability to keep three points of contact at all times.

##### **4. Helm experience**

During vessel operations in heightened-risk environments, consideration must be given to assigning the most experienced and competent helmsperson, to perform duty on the helm, operating the vessel, ensuring the safety of both rescuers and those in need of rescue.

**Zone staff will be liaising directly with each unit to support these changes, including updating vessel safety management systems.**

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