ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS

PORT OF SOUTHAMPTON

MARINE LEISURE GUIDE

A GUIDE TO SAFE WATERCRAFT OPERATION IN AND AROUND THE PORT OF SOUTHAMPTON

Issue 4 - May 2026





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WELCOME

Welcome to Southampton - one of the UK's busiest commercial waterways and the epicentre of British yachting. The Port of Southampton stands as a gateway to the Solent - and to the world.

Southampton Water is a major, well-established commercial port visited by over 18,000 vessels, including cruise ships, container vessels, tankers, ferries, cargo ships, and a wide range of leisure craft in 2025. Due to the size and frequency of vessels operating here, the Port of Southampton has implemented safety and conservancy measures to ensure that all users can coexist safely.

This guide outlines the essential safety rules, navigation advice, local restrictions, and good practice that all leisure users must follow. This applies to all water users regardless of craft type.

If in doubt: keep clear, slow down, communicate early.





BEST PRACTICE





Check Weather and Tides

- Consider how these elements will affect your entire time on the water.
- Prepare the vessel and crew accordingly.
- Ensure you have a passage plan prepared which takes into account contingencies in case of bad weather. Consult (MCA MGN 489 for further advice).



Safety Equipment

- Ensure you have all the correct and well maintained lifesaving equipment such as VHF radios and life jackets.



Navigation

- Check intended passage, ensuring it is clear from navigational hazards (including current Local Notice to Mariners) and tides have been considered.



Crew

- It is essential for crew to have experience.
- Ensure crew are equipped for the passsage ahead with enough fuel, food, stores and safety equipment.

BEST PRACTICE

Local Notices to Mariners (LNtMs)

- LNtMs give information about any local events or operations that may effect navigation, navigational safety, and, temporary changes.

Vessel

- Ensure the vessel is seaworthy with enough fuel, stores and safety equipment.

Byelaws & General Directions

- It is essential these documents are read and understood as they are tailored for the safety of all vessels in the Southampton Statutory Harbour Area.



Credit: Andrew Sassoli - Walker

BEFORE YOU GO AFLOAT



- CREATE A PASSAGE PLAN
- CHECK THE WEATHER & TIDE
- CHECK MECHANICAL & SAFETY EQUIPMENT
- CHECK & FIT LIFEJACKETS CORRECTLY
- BRIEF YOUR CREW
- CHECK SHIPPING TRAFFIC
- TELL SOMEONE ASHORE WHERE YOU'RE GOING & WHEN YOU'LL BE BACK

ABP SOUTHAMPTON

SAFETY CHECKLIST



Safety and Survival:

- ☐ Lifejackets or buoyancy aids
- ☐ Safety or throw lines checked
- ☐ Emergency flares in date
- ☐ Life raft prepared
- ☐ First Aid Kit
- ☐ Emergency rations
- ☐ Powerful torch

Navigation & Communication:

- ☐ VHF radio tested
- ☐ Charts and almanacs onboard
- ☐ Boat navigation chart
- ☐ Hand bearing compass
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ GPS/chart plotter
- ☐ Echo sounder
- ☐ Automatic Identification System (AIS)
- ☐ Radar
- ☐ Radar reflector installed
- ☐ Correct lights, shapes and signals set

Vessel Operation & Backup Systems

- ☐ Kill cord and spare available
- ☐ Alternative means of propulsion
- ☐ Auxiliary engine (oars)
- ☐ Water bailer/bilge pump

Fire & Hazard Prevention

- ☐ Fire extinguishers
- ☐ Carbon monoxide monitor

STAYING ONBOARD LEISURE VESSELS

Commercial shipping operates throughout the Southampton Statutory Harbour Authority (SHA), including within the River Itchen up to Princes Wharf.

Leisure vessel owners intending to remain onboard vessels overnight, anywhere within the SHA must carefully consider the position of their vessel in relation to established navigation channels. Large commercial vessels can generate significant interaction and wash, even at reduced speeds, which may pose risks to smaller craft.



Owners should carry out an appropriate risk assessment before staying onboard, ensuring their vessel is secured in a location that minimises the potential interaction with passing traffic.

Particular attention should be given to:

- Proximity to main shipping channels
- Likely vessel movements
- The potential for wash, surge, or interaction forces
- The adequacy of mooring arrangements for expected overnight conditions

Unexpected technical and mechanical failures can lead to commercial shipping not always behaving as expected. This should be considered when determining if it is safe to remain onboard your vessel overnight.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES
COLREGS

Be sure to know all the COLREGS (International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea), here are a few which are key to note:

Rule 5 - Lookout
Maintain a proper lookout at all times using sight, hearing, and all available means.

Rule 6 - Safe Speed
Always travel at a speed where you can stop or turn safely, considering visibility, traffic, wind & tide, manoeuvrability, and nearby large ships.

Rule 7 - Risk of Collision
If another vessel's bearing stays the same, a collision risk exists. Take action early.

Rule 8 - Avoiding Collision
Make early, bold, and obvious alterations of course or speed. Small changes cause confusion.

Rule 9 -Narrow Channels
Keep to starboard. Do not impede large vessels. Cross at 90° only when safe.
Avoid blind spots and the Moving Prohibited Zone.

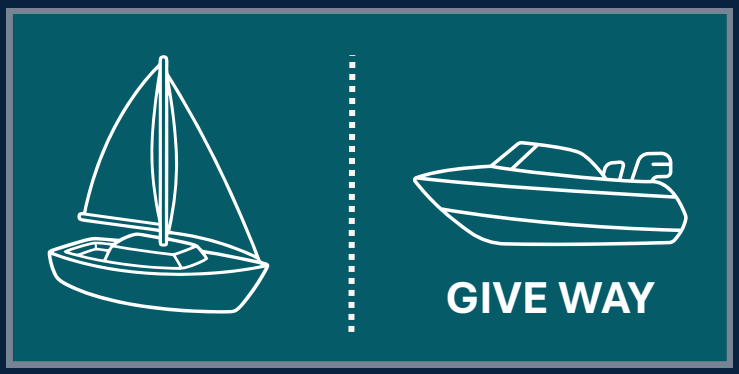


For full information on COLREGS, visit https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/colreg.aspx or scan the QR code:

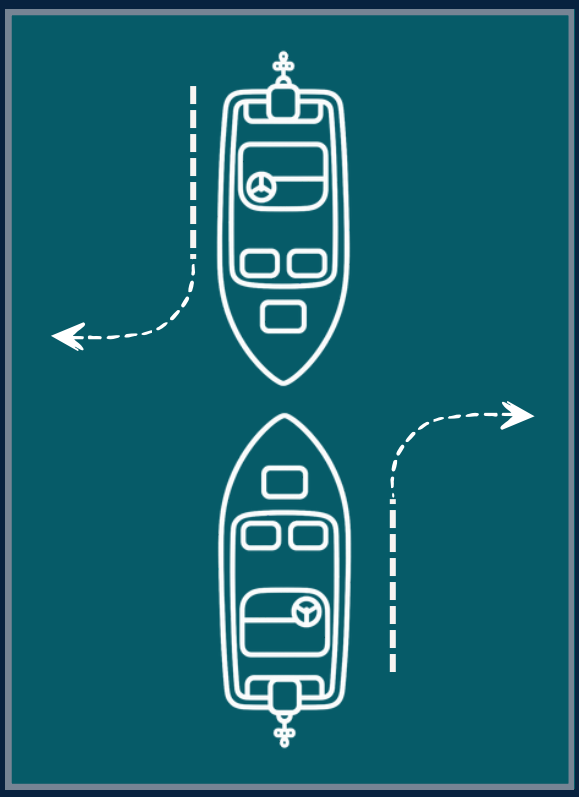


LEISURE ACTIVITIES

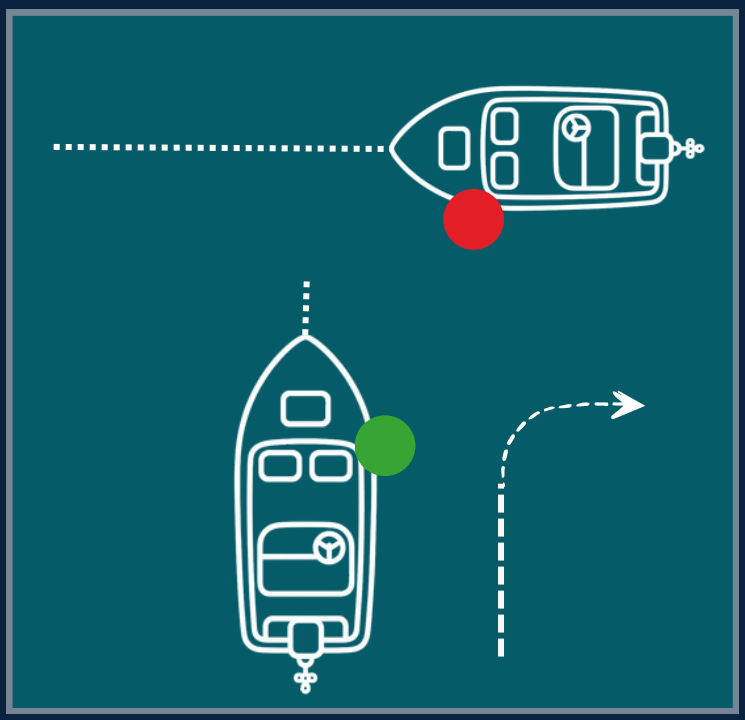
GIVING WAY (COLREGS 12-18)



A power driven vessel gives way to a vessel sailing, except in narrow channels.

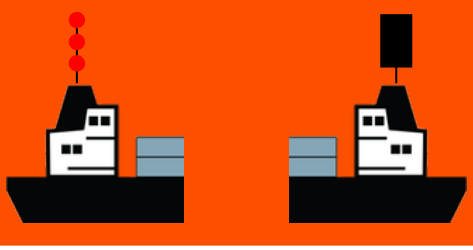


When head on, both should turn to starboard.



When crossing, give way to vessels on your starboard side. Seeing **RED**, give way.

Remember: a ship constrained by draught has right of way over ***all*** vessels.



LEISURE ACTIVITIES
GENERAL DIRECTIONS

To maintain order and safety, the Port of Southampton operates under local legislation. Key General Directions (GD) for leisure are as follows:

A few relevant **GDs** include:

- **GD 02: Speed Restrictions.** (See Page 14)
- **GD 05: Calshot Watersports Area.** Rules for designated dinghy and paddle zones
- **GD 06: Safe Swimming Areas.** Seasonal exclusion zones to protect swimmers
- **GD 10: Clear Channel Vessels.** Giving way to ultra-large commercial ships
- **GD 12: Anchoring Limits.** 36 hour maximum stay at anchor without permission from the Harbour Master



For full information on general directions, visit www.southamptonvts.co.uk or scan the QR code:



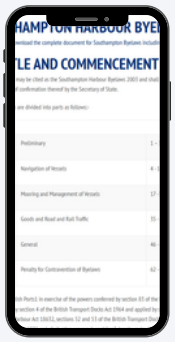
Any person who contravenes or otherwise fails to comply with any of the General Directions or any condition, requirement or prohibition imposed by the Harbour Master in the exercise of the powers conferred upon them shall be guilty of an offence and be liable, on conviction before a court of summary jurisdiction, to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES
BYELAWS

Byelaws are legally binding rules issued by Associated British Ports and are designed to keep all water users safe. Key Byelaws for leisure are as follows:

- **Byelaw 7 (Speed of Vessels):** See page 14.
- **Byelaw 9 (Buoys and Marks):** Small craft are strictly prohibited from tying up to, or mooring on navigational buoys or marks.
- **Byelaw 10 (Navigation in Fairways):** Vessels that can navigate outside of the main fairway must not obstruct vessels that can only navigate in the fairway.
- **Byelaw 11 (Moving Prohibited Zone)** : See Page 16.
- **Byelaw 14 (Notification of Collisions):** If you are involved in a collision, you must report it immediately to VTS (VHF Channel 12 or VTS 02380 608 208).
- **Byelaw 16 (Navigating Whilst Under the Influence of Drink or Drugs)** No one may operate a vessel while impaired by alcohol or drugs, and masters or owners must not allow anyone unfit to do so to navigate their vessel.

For full information on Byelaws, visit www.southamptonvts.co.uk or scan the QR code:



Any person who contravenes or otherwise fails to comply with any of the byelaws or any condition, requirement or prohibition imposed by the Harbour Master in the exercise of the powers conferred upon them by these Byelaws shall be guilty of an offence and be liable, on conviction before a court of summary jurisdiction, to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale, except in the case of Byelaws 13 & 16 where level 4 will apply.

NAVIGATIONAL SAFETY

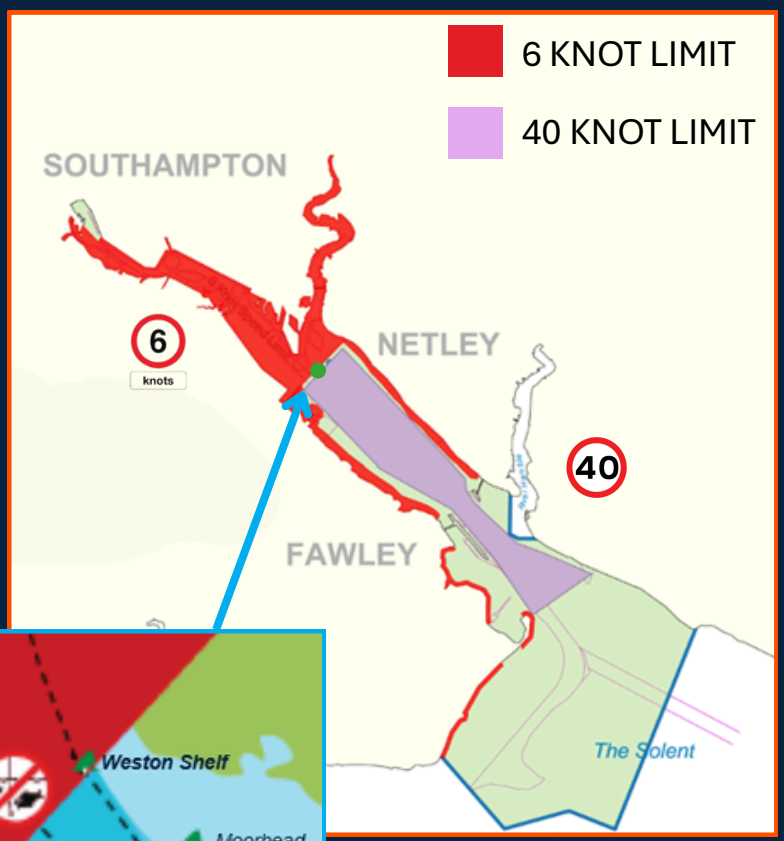
General

- When a boat sailing under racing rules rules meets a vessel that is not, she shall comply with the **International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea** (COLREGs).
- Small craft are **prohibited** from anchoring in the main navigation channels.
- Small craft are **prohibited** from mooring to navigational buoys/marks.
- If your vessel is adrift or dragging anchor, you must take action immediately and, if unable, notify VTS **(VHF Channel 12)**.



SPEED RESTRICTIONS

- A speed limit of **6 knots** over the ground applies north of a line drawn between Hythe pier through the Weston Shelf Buoy to the Weston Shore.
- A speed limit of **6 knots** over the ground applies within 200 metres of the shoreline (either side of Southampton Water).
- A maximum speed of **40 knots** applies to the remainder of Southampton Water.





Location of Weston Shelf Buoy.

SEE BYELAW 7 & COLREG RULE 6

Always Remember to reduce speed and wash for:

- Diving operations
- Survey Vessels
- Dredging
- Marinas
- Jetties





RESTRICTED ZONES

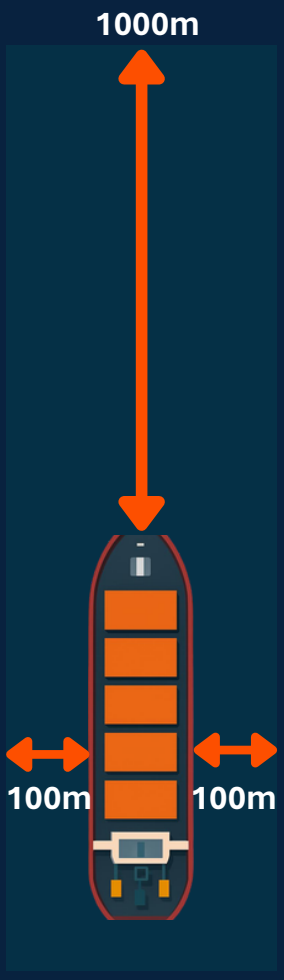
- Keep a minimum distance of **130 metres** off jetty faces when at Fawley and BP Hamble Jetties.
- Keep a minimum of **50 meters** from all other quaysides, jetties or berths.
- For further detail, please see ***Local Notice to Mariners 15.***

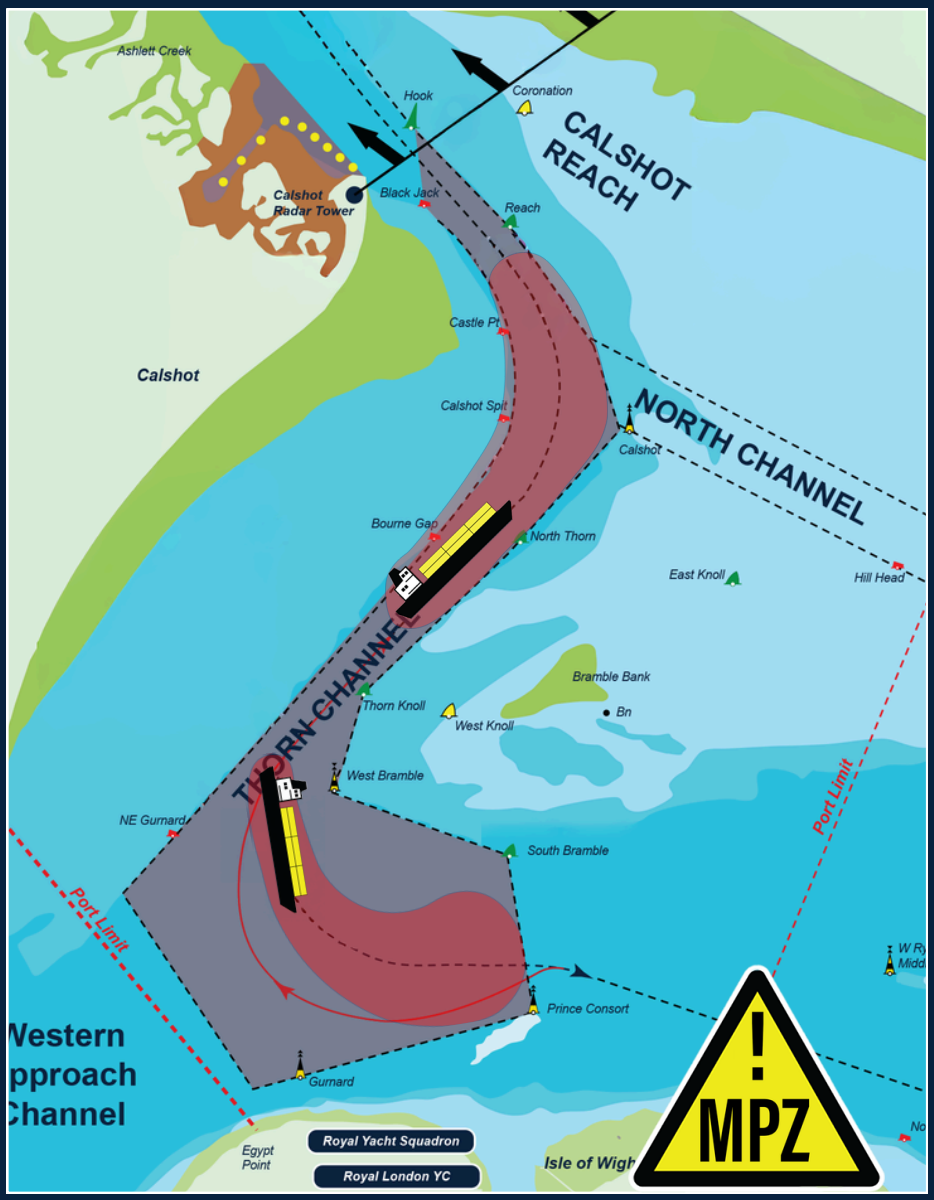
Local Notice To Mariners (LNtM):
https://www.southamptonvts.co.uk/vessel_traffic_services/notices_to_mariners_master or scan the QR code below:



A restricted zone gives the Police the powers to arrest any person who fails to leave the area when asked to do so by Southampton Harbour Master or their representatives

MOVING PROHBITED ZONE





All vessels over **150m** in length, whilst navigating this area will have a MOVING PROHIBITED ZONE (MPZ) **1000m** ahead and **100m** to either side.

All vessels are to remain clear of this MPZ.

SEE BYELAW 11

Southampton Patrol
VHF Channel 12

VHF CHANNEL OPERATION



Safety & Calling

16 - Distress, Safety & Calling
67 - Solent Coastguard Routine Calls
65 - National Coastwatch (NCI). Use this for radio checks and local info

Port & Traffic Management

12 - Southampton VTS / Southampton Patrol
11 - Portsmouth VTS / Kings Harbour Master

Recreational

06 - Inter - ship working (also used by pilots/tugs)
77 - Recommended leisure working channel
80 - Marina Working channel (duplex)

VHF Use Tips:

- Monitor Ch12 & Ch16 (COLREG Rule 5)
- Make your calls short, clear, and relevant.
- Always switch to a working channel if calling on 12 or 16

For More information on the appropriate VHF channels, scan the QR code, or visit: https://www.southamptonvts.co.uk/Port_Information/Port_Operation_Channels/

SOUTHAMPTON PATROL



The Harbour Master's patrol launch is known as **Southampton Patrol**, or simply **'SP'**.

- By Day, **SP** is clearly marked 'Southampton Harbour Master'.
- By Night, **SP** shows a blue all-round light at the masthead.

SP's primary role is to ensure the safe movement of large commercial ships through the **Moving Prohibited Zone (MPZ)** and responds to incidents on the water (See Page 16).

The Harbour Master patrol launch may also use **Swift**, a rib used as a secondary SP vessel during busy leisure periods.

This is the Harbour Master's on-water presence and carries the delegated authority to enforce local rules.





Southampton Patrol
VHF Channel 12

REPORTING OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

Project Kraken is a national initiative to raise public awareness of terrorism and criminal or suspicious activity around our coasts and borders.

This may include locations such as:

- Marinas
- Moorings
- Smaller ports
- Docks
- On water

Common types of coastal crime include:

- Theft
- Smuggling
- Criminal damage



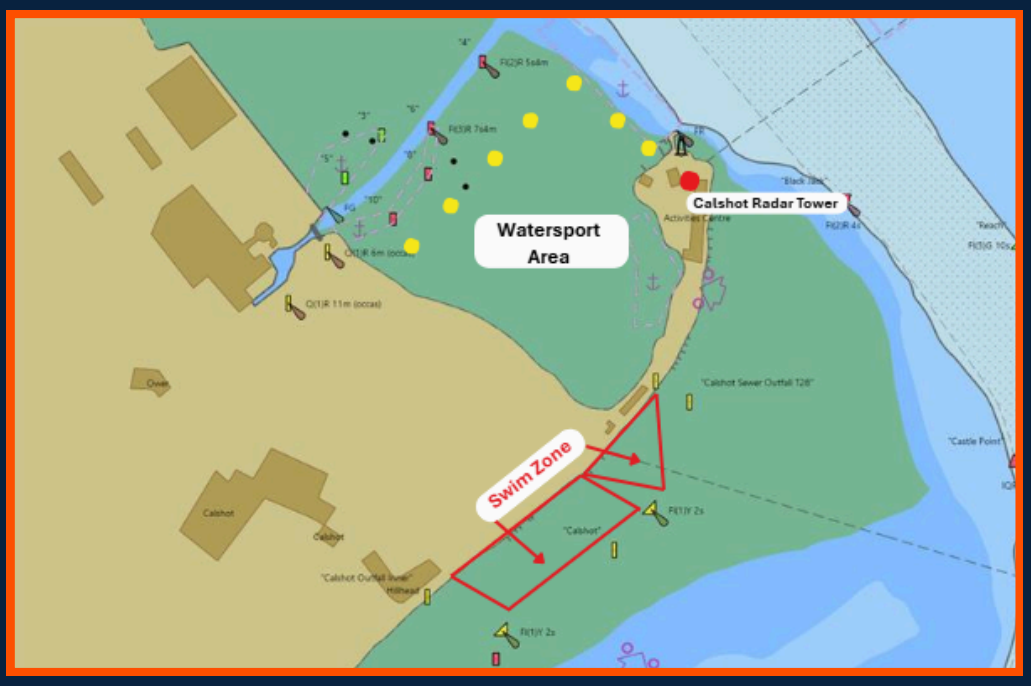
CALSHOT WATERSPORT AREA

The Calshot Watersports area (GD05) between Calshot Spit and the Fawley Power Station channel, is marked in yellow.

- No kitesurfing between 1 April and 31 October.
- Support and rescue craft may operate inside the area.
- All other powered craft must keep to 6 knots unless providing safety cover.
- No towing activities (e.g., waterskiing or inflatables) are allowed in this area.

A designated swimming zone is established between Calshot Spit and Stansore Point.
This area is easily identifiable, bordered by the shoreline and a line of yellow cone shaped buoys (GD 06)

- No entry or mooring: You must not navigate or moor any vessel or watercraft within the safe swimming area.
- No powered craft: The use of all powered watercraft is strictly prohibited inside this zone.



EVENTS ON THE WATER



If you wish to run an organised event on the water, such as a yacht race, rowing event, paddleboard meet up or powerboat rally, it is important to plan ahead. Events can affect other marine users and commercial vessels, so ABP needs time to review your plans and make sure the area stays safe (GD 08).

What should you do?

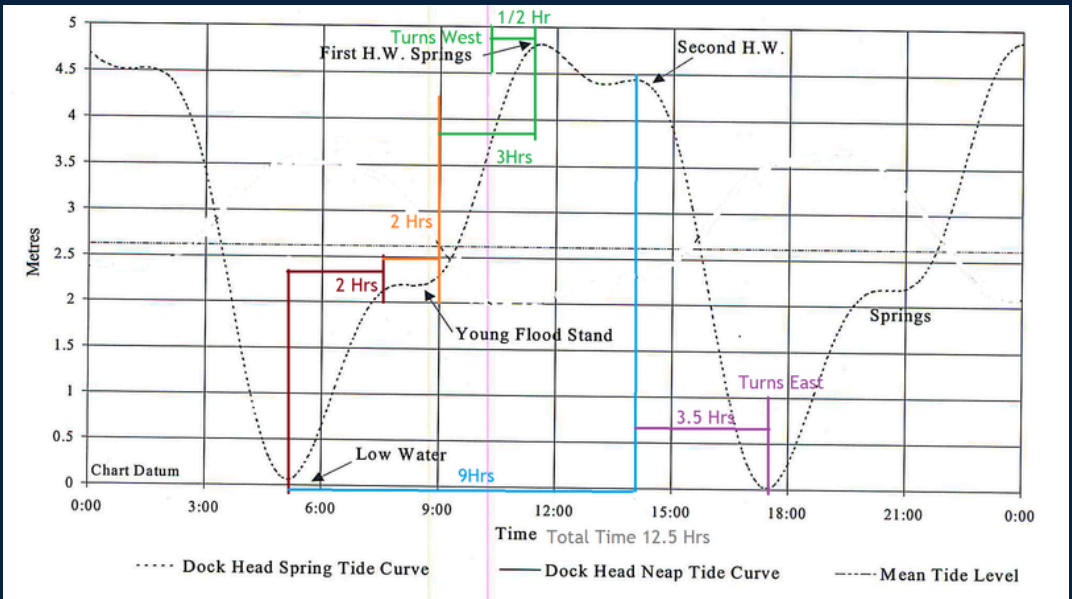
- ✓ Contact ABP at Least 4 weeks before events.
- ✓ Submit event plan, routes, timings, safety plan, comms and contacts.
- ✓ Follow all guidance from ABP and VTS.
- ✓ Keep people safe and clear of commercial ships.

More information on recreational events and how to submit them, can be found on our website: https://www.southamptonvts.co.uk/yachting_leisure/recreational_events

SOUTHAMPTON WEATHER AND DOUBLE TIDES

Southampton experiences a double high tide, providing extended high-water windows but causing:

- Very strong ebb flows around Cowes and The Needles
- Complex tidal timing - always check tides



Always check tidal curves and weather conditions when planning a passage.

Live weather information is published on the ABP VTS webpage, measured at local weather stations. Scan the QR code or visit https://www.southamptonvts.co.uk/Live_Information/Tides_and_Weather/ for more information.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION



Southampton Water, the Solent and the surrounding harbours are of international importance for nature conservation. The mudflats and other habitats support a wide variety of birds throughout the year. In recognition of this, Southampton Water is designated as part of the Solent European Marine Site, with Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Special Areas of Conservation (SACS) for habitats snd other species.

ABP, in its role as the Statutory Harbour Authority for the Port of Southampton has a strong commitment to protecting the local environment

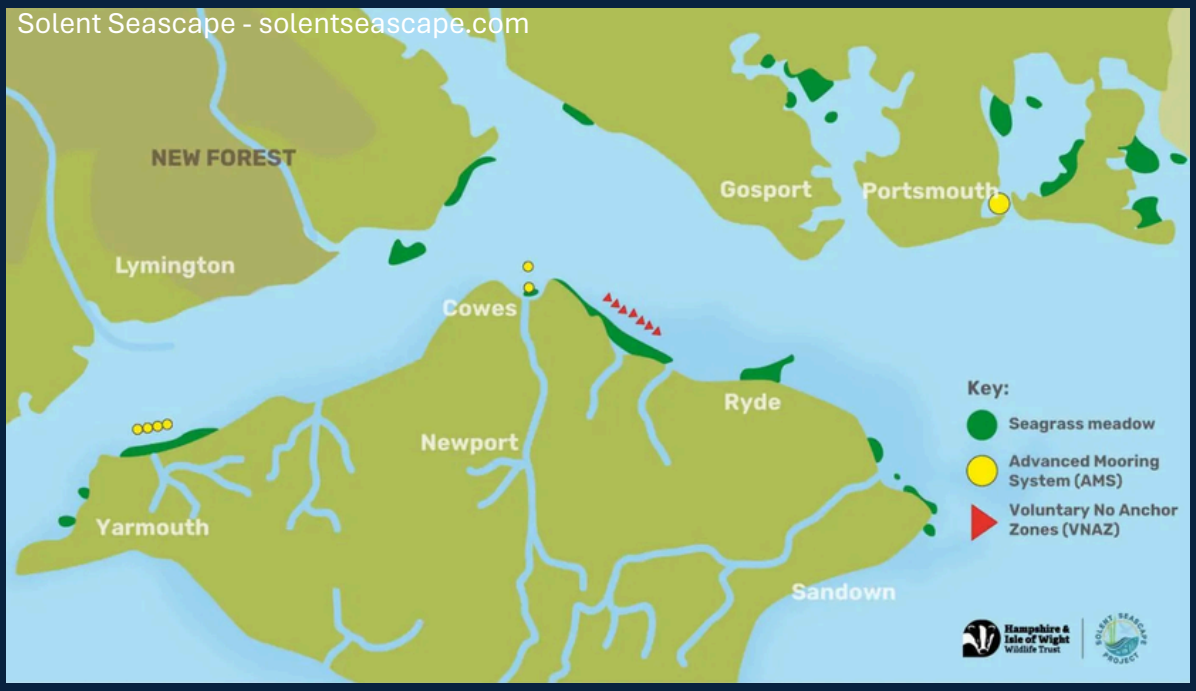
We play an active role in the management scheme for the marine environment.

Recreational sailors are well known for enjoying and taking care of the environment in which they spend their leisure time. In order to maintain the Port of Southampton as a pleasant place to sail, please retain all rubbish on board and dispose of it safely in the appropriate facilities once you return to shore. There can be substantial penalties for offenders, in line with UK law.

For more information on sustainable boating, you may wish to visit: https://thegreenblue.org.uk/

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Sea Grass Conservation



- Seagrass meadows are vital marine habitats that support wildlife, protect coastlines, improve water quality, and store significant carbon. They are increasingly under threat and can take years to recover once damaged. Boating impacts - such as anchoring, propeller scars, and pollution, are major causes of loss.
- By navigating carefully and avoiding shallow or sensitive areas, boaters can help protect these important ecosystems.
- Please refer to the map above for known seagrass locations in the Solent, and report any unlisted areas using the QR code.

Report Seagrass here, or visit solentseascape.com for more information:



ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

The discharge of untreated sewage is prohibited within the Port of Southampton harbour area. Discharges from approved and certified sewage treatment plants is permitted provided the discharge is clear with no solid material.
Partially treated or disinfected sewage (grey water) discharges are also prohibited within the harbour area.

Black Water Pump Out Facilities

- Hythe Village Marina - Pump Out
- Lat: 50.88 Long: -1.40 SO45 6DY

- River Hamble Harbour Authority - Pump Out
- Lat: 50.85 Long:-1.31 SO31 9FR

- Swanwick Marina - Pump Out
- Lat: 50.88 Long: -1.33 SO30 1ZL



CHARTLET

This guide is produced by Associated British Ports for people enjoying recreational activities afloat.

Commercial traffic in Southampton Water and the Solent is increasing, as is the number of leisure craft, so avoiding close-quarters situations is essential. Most large vessels carry a UK Pilot and monitor VHF Channel 12.

Ships typically travel at 10–15 knots, or faster when light or unevenly trimmed, to maintain control. A ship can reach you from the horizon in under 10 minutes - much less in haze. At 10 knots it covers a mile in 6 minutes; at 15 knots, in 4.

Large ships cannot easily manoeuvre around small craft in narrow channels. When slowing or going astern, their steering response reduces significantly, and they require long distances to stop.
Be aware of other traffic as well - ferries, fast catamarans, fishing vessels, and tugs towing barges, especially at night when tow cables may be hard to see

What can you do?

- Avoid commercial shipping channels when possible, especially in poor visibility. If absolutely necessary, observe rule 9 of the COLREGS by keeping to the starboard side of the channel and crossing, at right angles, and only when this does not impede the passage of a vessel that can only navigate safely in that channel.
- Do not underestimate the speed of ships - if your vessel is slow, allow sufficient time to take action.
- Be visible, and make sure navigation lights can be seen at night.
- Be alert, be on lookout at all times, especially astern.
- Ensure you comply with the Moving Prohibited Zone.
- Recognise whistle signals. 5+ short blasts means your intentions are unclear and the ship is concerned. 1 short blast means the ship is altering its course to starboard, and to port by 2 short blasts. 3 short blasts and the ship is putting engines astern.
- Know ship signals - a ship displaying a black cylinder in daylight, or three red lights at night indicates she is constrained by her draught - give her a wide berth.
- Know your VHF channels - keep your channel to 12, the port working frequency used by VTS and shipping.

Personal Watercraft (PWC's)
PWC's, otherwise known as jet skis are required to exercise with caution with due regard to other water users in the Port of Southampton. In particular, when close to the shoreline, keep a look out for swimmers.
he 6 knot speed limit applies to all powered craft.
Be aware of your speed, keep clear of other craft, always wear the kill cord.
The 6 knot speed limit applies to all powered craft.

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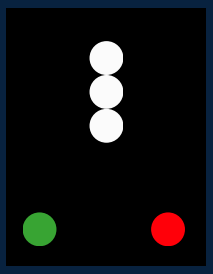


SIGNAL KNOWLEDGE

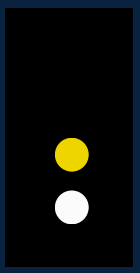
Towing Lights & Signals



Port side view



Bow view



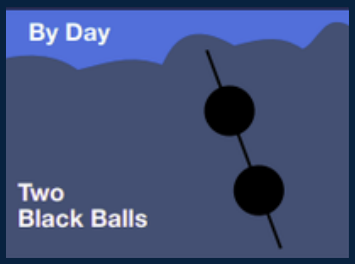
Stern view

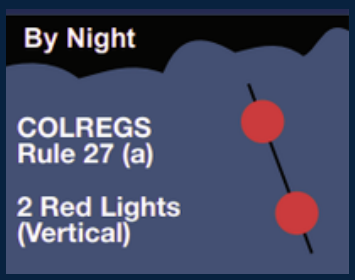
Constraint by Draught





Vessels Not Under Command



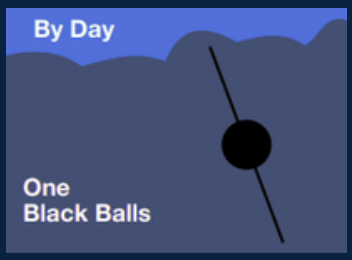


Sound signal



COLREGS Rule 35 (c)

Vessels at Anchor





Sound Signal



COLREGS Rule 35 (G)

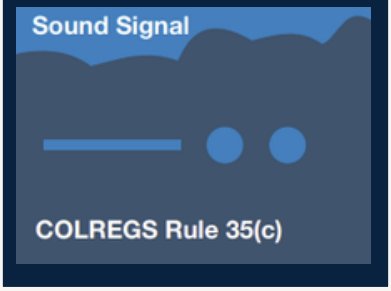
COLREGS:

International Regulation for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 - As amended

Power Driven Vessels

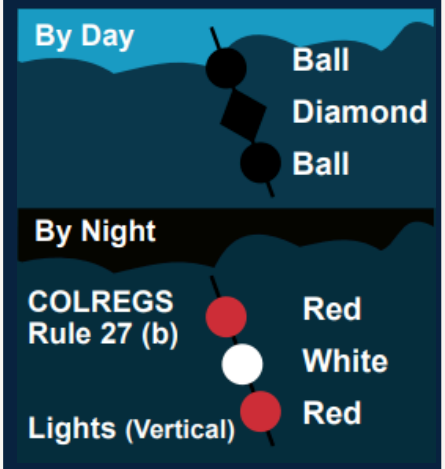


Sailing Vessels



SIGNAL KNOWLEDGE

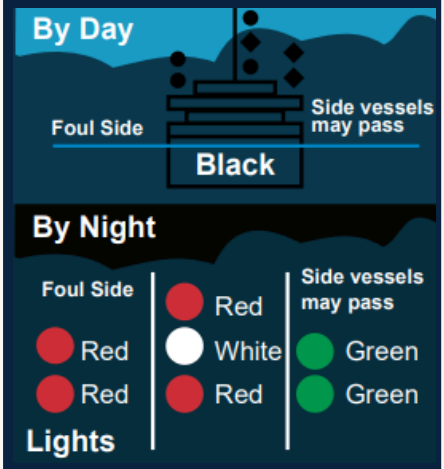
Vessels Restricted in Their Ability to Manoeuvre



Sound Signal

COLREGS Rule 35 (c)

Vessels Engaged in Dredging/ Uunderwater Ops



Sound Signal

COLREGS Rule 35 (c)

Vessels Engaged in Diving Ops



COLREGS Rule 27 (e)



Diving Operations



Flag A-Alpha is displayed when diving operations are taking place - this may be on a vessel or quayside. Vessels should maintain a safe distance and reduce their speed when passing.

Common Flag Signals







Pass me at slow speed



Engaged in survey work

SIGNAL KNOWLEDGE

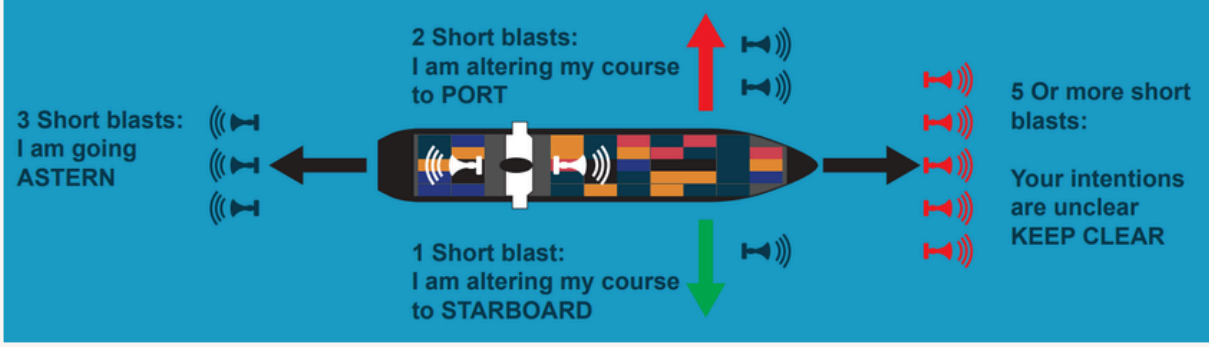
Caution 1 (Precautionary Area)





- All Vessels over 150m will have a Moving Prohibition Zone
- For the purposes of indicating a MPZ the master shall display a black cylinder by day and three vertical all round red lights in by night.
- The Southampton Harbour Master's Patrol Launch will escort vessels over 150m in length overall - The absence of a patrol launch does not invalidate the implementation of a vessel's MPZ (See LNtM: No.8)
- (See Page 6-7 for more)

Sound Signals Vessel Maneuver



Marina Entry Signals

Lights	Meaning	Lights	Meaning
Fixed	Vessels shall not proceed	Fixed	Vessels may proceed with caution One way traffic
Fixed	Vessels may proceed with caution Two way traffic	Flashing	Serious Emergency all vessels to stop or divert according to instructions

Only ONE GROUP of lights to be shown

USEFUL CONTACTS

Associated British Ports
(ABP) Ocean Gate, Atlantic
Way, Southampton
Hampshire. SO14 3QN
Tel:.....02380 488800

Vessel Traffic Services
Centre (VTS)
Tel:.....02380 608208
(24hrs)
www.southamptonvts.co.uk

HM Revenue and Customs:
Yachtline.....0300 123 2012
Customs Helpline.....0300 200 3700
www.hmrc.gov.uk

Harbour Masters of the Solent:
Beaulieu River.....01590 616200
Cowes.....01983 293952
Hamble.....01489 576387
Portsmouth.....02392 723694
(Harbour Control, KHM)

Port Health:
Southampton.....02380 226631
Portsmouth.....02392 688653

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Images courtesy of Andrew Sassoli-Walker.