

PORT OF SOUTHAMPTON

MARINE LEISURE GUIDE

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

Issue 4 - May 2026



INDEX

Section 1 – Introduction & Getting Ready

Welcome.....	3
Best Practice.....	4–5
Before You Go Afloat.....	6
Safety Checklist.....	7
Staying Onboard Leisure Vessels.....	8

Section 2 – Core Rules & Responsibilities

Collision Regulations (COLREGs).....	9
COLREGs: Giving Way.....	10
General Directions.....	11
Byelaws.....	12

Section 3 – Navigation & Operating Safely

Navigational Safety: General.....	13
Speed Restrictions.....	14
Restricted Zones.....	15
Moving Prohibited Zone (MPZ).....	16

Section 4 – Communications & Enforcement

VHF Channels.....	17
Southampton Patrol.....	18
Reporting Suspicious Behaviour.....	19

Section 5 – Local Knowledge & Conditions

Calshot Watersports Area	20
Events on the Water.....	21

Section 6 – Environmental

Tidal Information	22
Environmental Information.....	23-25

Section 7- Signal Knowledge & Chartlet

Chartlet	26
Signal Knowledge	26-29
Useful Contacts.....	30

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



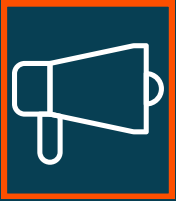
- Check intended passage, ensuring it is clear from navigational hazards (including current Local Notice to Mariners) and tides have been considered.

Crew



- It is essential for crew to have experience.
- Ensure crew are equipped for the passage 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

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

Vessel Operation & Backup Systems

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

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

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:

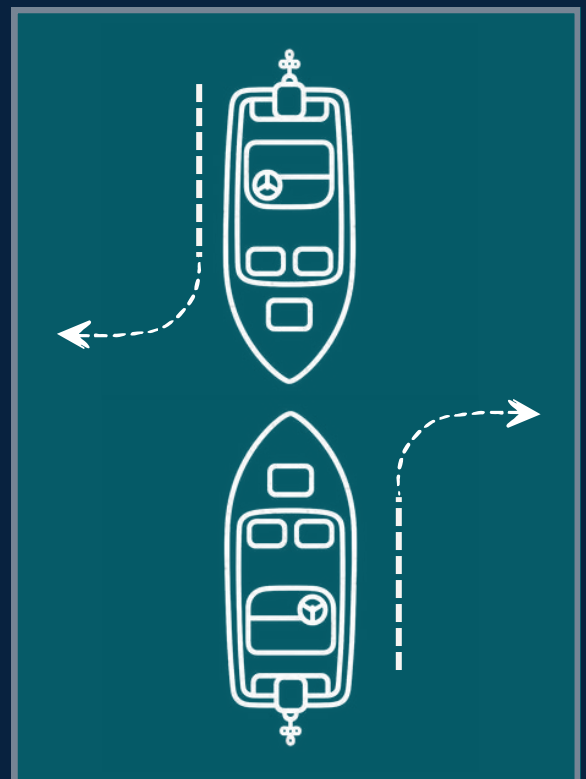


LEISURE ACTIVITIES

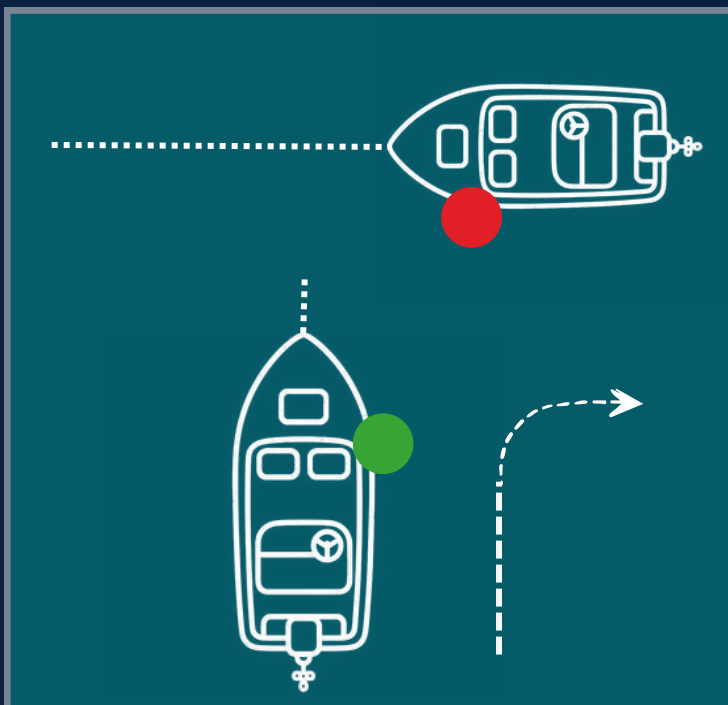
GIVING WAY (COLREGS 12-18)



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:



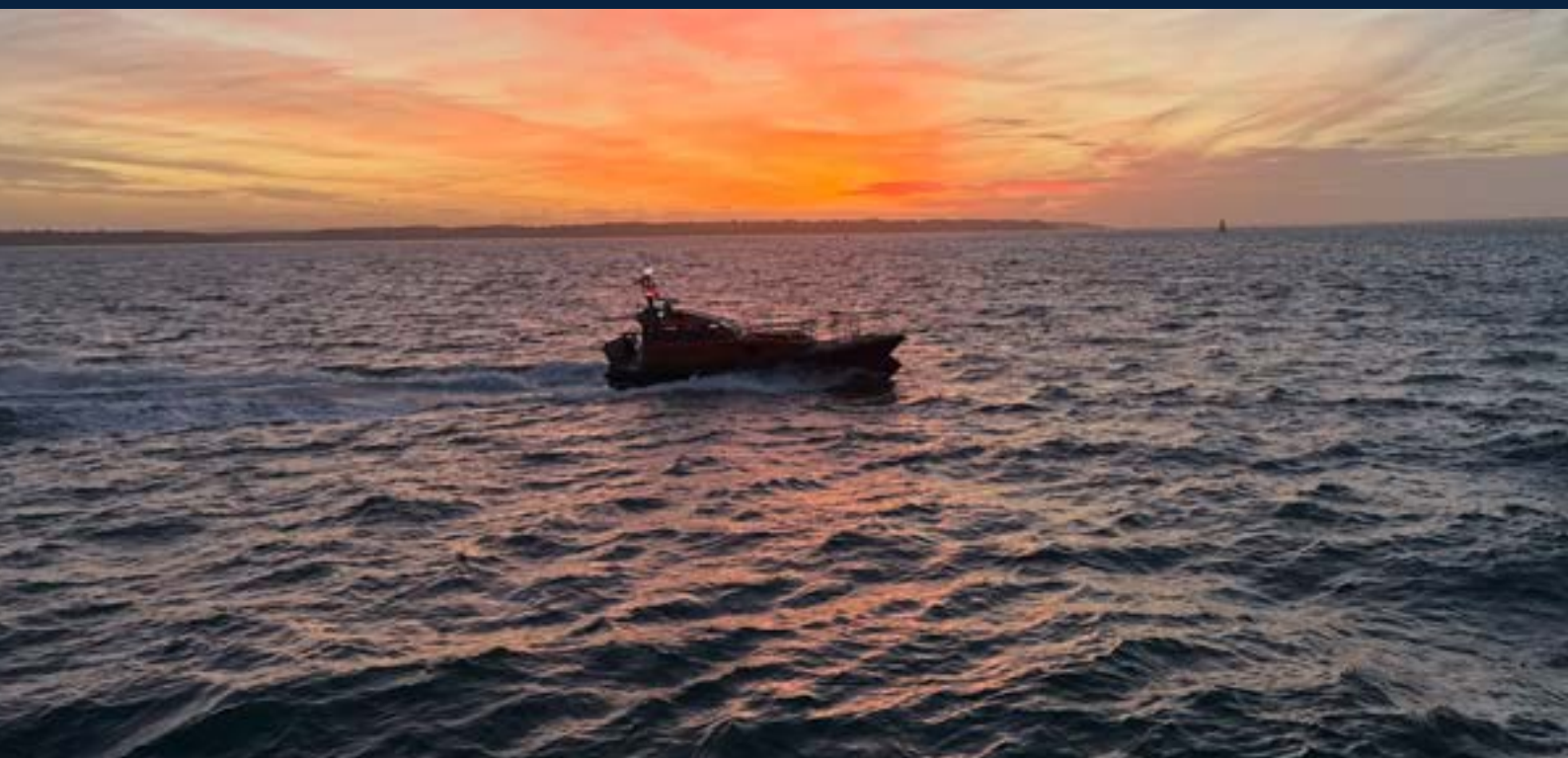
Any person who contravenes or otherwise fails to comply with any of the byelaws or any condition, requirement or prohibition imposed by the Harbour Master in the exercise of the powers conferred upon them by these Byelaws shall be guilty of an offence and be liable, on conviction before a court of summary 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 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:



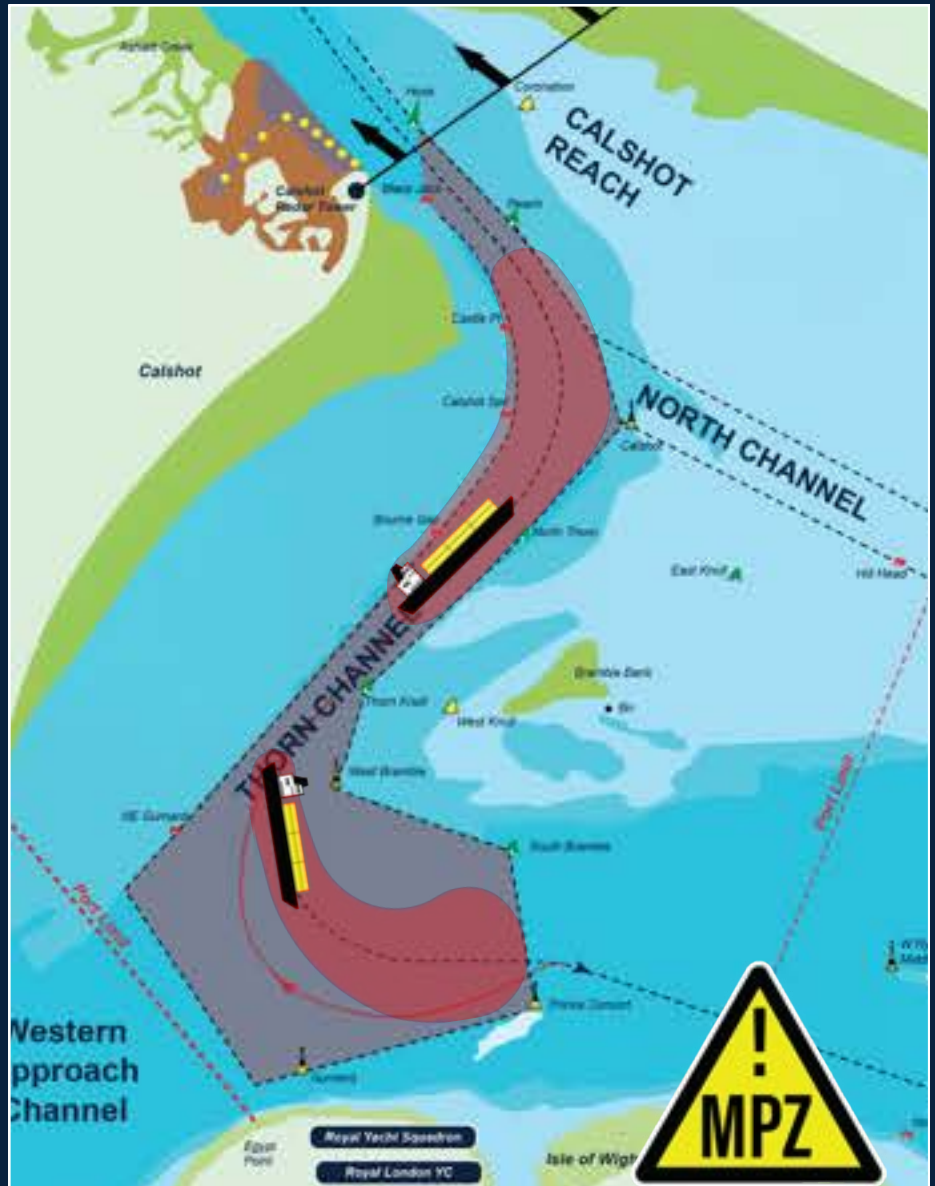
A restricted zone gives the Police the powers to arrest any person who fails to leave the area when asked to do so by Southampton Harbour Master or their representatives

MOVING PROHIBITED 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

SEEN SOMEONE WHERE THEY SHOULDN'T BE?

REPORT IT. LET'S SORT IT.

To report anonymously, call the Coastal Crime Line powered by Crimestoppers on 0800 011 3304. In an emergency, always call 999.

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.

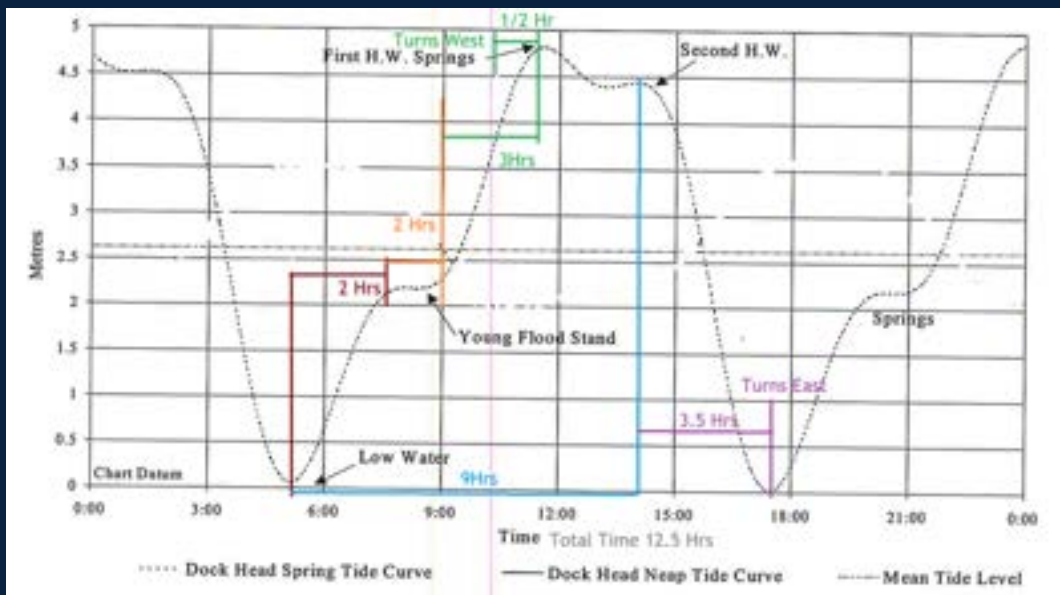
More information on recreational events and how to submit them, can be found on our website:
https://www.southamptonvts.co.uk/yachting_leisure/recreational_events

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

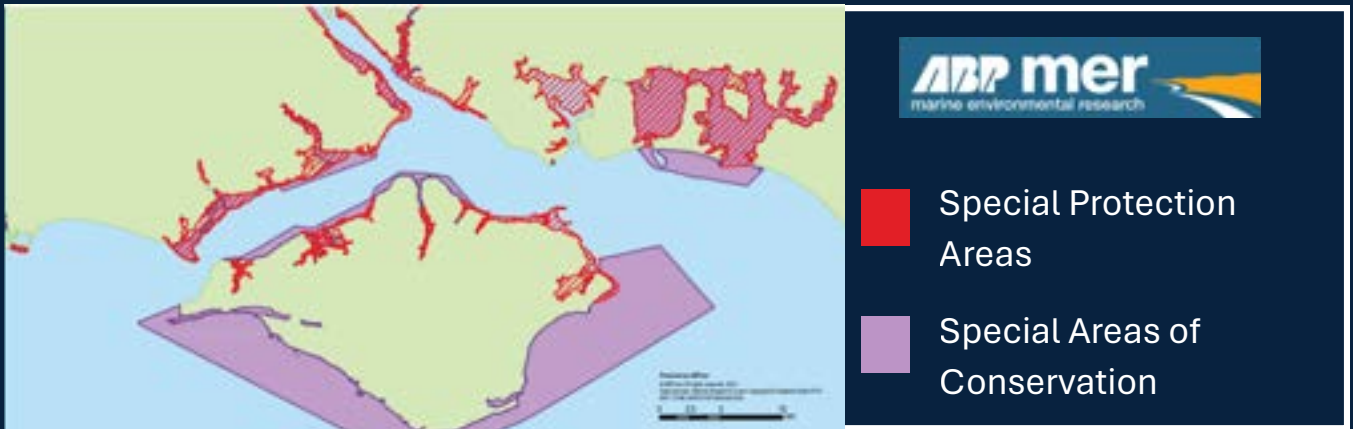


Always check tidal curves and weather conditions when planning a passage.

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 and 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](https://solentseascape.com), 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

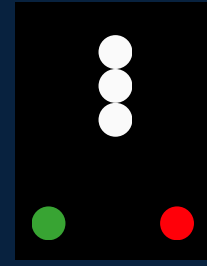


SIGNAL KNOWLEDGE

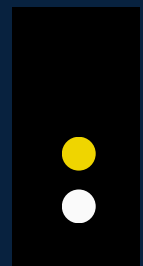
Towing Lights & Signals



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/ Underwater 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



R



I



Y

Pass me at slow speed



R

Engaged in survey work

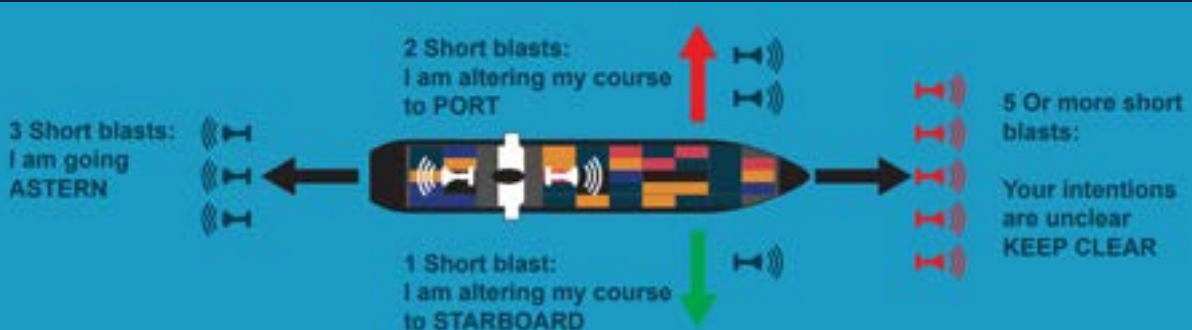
SIGNAL KNOWLEDGE

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

The Leisure Guide is produced by ABP as a reference and safety guide only and must not be used as a navigation chart. All numbers and information contained within were correct at time of publication. If your organisation needs additional copies of this publication, please forward your requests to ABP.

Images courtesy of Andrew Sassoli-Walker.