

SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION

As a result of the increasing numbers of reported accidents on the tideway involving rowing boats, the Port of London Authority (PLA) employed the Salvage Association to undertake an independent risk assessment into rowing practices on the Thames between Putney and the PLA landward limit at Teddington.

The Salvage Association observed the way in which rowers used the tideway with particular emphasis on the practice known as “working the slacks”. The conclusions of the Salvage Association Report (the Report) were, in short, that the current system does not work, because the rules were not clear and because there is imperfect knowledge and application of said rules.

An implementation group, consisting of a cross-section of experienced river users, was formed to review the many recommendations of the Report. Its conclusion was that it was not the rules but imperfect application of them that was the main problem. As a result, this code of practice does not make many changes from the current system. Its aim is to make all the rules clear, as well as easier to teach and understand. What changes or additions have been made, are simply laying down as regulations what should have been applied as common sense in the past.

It is appreciated that the majority of rowers wish the current system to be improved and will welcome the simplification and regularisation of the current rules. Those who do not, should appreciate that if this code of practice fails to achieve the improvement in navigation, rowing practice and ancillary matters, for example, the reporting of incidents by rowers that the PLA is hoping for, it will be not be a case of simply rescinding it. Should this attempt at compromise fail, the next step will be a blanket implementation of the International Collision Regulations, which is likely to have a negative effect on the experience of rowing for all.

It is up to the rowing community to take individual and corporate responsibility for following the new rowing code and ensuring the traditional privileges historically enjoyed by the rowing community in this area are not taken away for good.

River Byelaws and General Directions

Note: The PLA regulates navigation on the tidal Thames in a number of ways, including through River Byelaws and General Directions. By its very nature, the code must, in part, refer to and recognise those various regulations. Where navigational regulations are quoted in the code they are enclosed in a box for ease of recognition.