Dear President/CEO

Polar Yacht Guide

In recent years, there has been an increase in yachts visiting the polar regions. For example, there have been more transits of the Northwest Passage in the last decade (193 transits between 2009 and 2019) than the previous ten decades since the first transit by Amundsen in 1906. Many of these transits were completed by yachts. The Antarctic and Southern Ocean has also become increasingly attractive to adventurous sailors.

Most of these expeditions have been successfully completed by well prepared yachts with competent crews. However there have been a number of exceptions which have resulted in search and rescue operations and potential damage to the environment. This is a cause of concern to search and rescue authorities with limited resources, environmentalists, and politicians.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is responsible for the regulation of craft of all sizes throughout the world, however it normally limits its legislation to commercial vessels. For the most part, private yachts and boats are not subject to detailed or extensive regulation. This has generally worked well, partly due to the efforts of organisations such as World Sailing (formerly ISAF) and the RYA, who have long, and successfully, promoted the concept of ‘Educate not Legislate. However some IMO delegations have proposed that the IMO Polar Code (1) Chapters 9 (Safety of Navigation) and 11 (Voyage Planning) should have the status of a mandatory instrument for “all ships on all voyages”. On the face of it, the requirements of these Chapters are much what you would expect for a well-prepared ship in polar waters, and those of Chapter 11 (Voyage Planning) are similar to the specifications of SOLAS Chapter V (34) that already binds every vessel in every voyage to the discipline of voyage planning. However, what concerns private yacht sailors is what may be seen as the creeping extension of mandatory power, into a size and type of vessel hitherto outside the scope of international shipping regulation.

A voluntary code, ‘Polar Yacht Guide’ (PYG) has been drafted by a number of experienced high latitude sailors (2). PYG is in three parts: Part A addresses general issues concerning safety of navigation and voyage planning in both polar regions. It covers the same subjects as the IMO Polar Code chapters 9 and 11 but is written for smaller vessels. Part B gives specific guidance for yachts navigating in the Arctic. Part C is largely a reproduction of existing safety and environmental advice for yachts produced by the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat (ATS).

The Polar Yacht Guide is being sponsored by World Sailing who are represented on the IMO working group considering this issue. World Sailing is proposing that education, in the form of specific yacht guidance, is likely to be more effective than legislation.
Attached is a copy of the draft PYG. We would like to consult extensively with high latitude sailors and relevant maritime authorities before publishing it. I would be most grateful if you could distribute this explanation and the draft PYG to interested members of your organisation. A list of the organisations being consulted is printed below(3). If you are aware of another organisation which you think should be on the list, please do let me know. I would be grateful if one person from your organisation could collate any comments and send them back to me by 5th August 2020.

With Best Wishes.

Sincerely,

(signed) Alan Green
World Sailing (International Regulations Commission) delegate to IMO

pp Polar Yacht Guide drafting group


(2) The initial draft of the Polar Yacht Guide includes contributions from: Ann Bainbridge, Steve Brown, Paul Bryans, Captain Ken Burton, Alan Green, Richard Hudson, Mike Jaques, Michael Johnson, Vincent Moeyersoms, Randall Reeves, Skip Novak, Rev Bob Shepton, Victor Wejer, and Andrew Wilkes.

(3) The proposed initial list of organisations to be consulted directly about PYG include: IAATO, ATCM, Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, US Coastguard, Danish Maritime Authority, Canadian Coastguard, Ocean Cruising Club, Royal Cruising Club, Cruising Club of America, Irish Cruising Club, Royal Yachting Association, Cruising Association, Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Danish Sailing Association, Sail Canada, Yachting New Zealand, Royal Norwegian Yacht Club, Trans-Ocean, World Sailing MNAs, World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, Pacific Environment, Royal Institute of Navigation, IAIN and SAR authorities in North Norway including Svalbard, SAR Canada Trenton and Greenland.