



BLACK MOUNTAIN ROWING CLUB SAFETY POLICY

Introduction

Rowing is a sport widely enjoyed at a social and competitive level. There are up to 500 rowers participating in the sport in Canberra alone.

The sport is generally a very safe one but safety cannot be taken for granted. It is clear that the actions taken by individuals themselves significantly affect their own safety and those they are rowing with.

This document sets out the Club's safety policies, which in many cases rely on the law or the policies of rowing authorities, and indicate how any incident should be reported.

(I) Achieving A Safe Rowing Environment

There are many factors which may impact on safety. Key factors contributing to safety are:

1. Fitness;
2. observance of rules
3. water conditions;
4. ability to recover from an incident;
5. equipment; and
6. common sense and precautions

(1) Fitness

Like any sport fitness is important. The ACT Rowing Association website is an excellent resource for advice on [fitness and nutrition](#). It advises against relying only on rowing for fitness alone unless you row often.

There is a high level of personal responsibility for rowers, as in any sport, in ensuring that they can row safely from a personal fitness point of view. Where rowers are in any doubts as to their physical health, they should consult their doctor. Such assessments cannot be made by other rowers or officials. Even if you were to mention a condition, you cannot rely on anyone but a doctor to advise your fitness to row.

(2) Rules for Lake Burley Griffin

Rowing is like any other sport in that you must obey the law.

Canberra Lakes are controlled by the [Lakes Act](#). Key sections of that Act are *Control of a lake* (Part 3); *Use of a lake* (Part 4); and *Rules for preventing collisions on a lake* (Part 5). It is your responsibility to familiarise yourself with these rules and the comments below are simply advisory.

The ACT Government has been relying on boat licence tests conducted in other States and referrals are normally made to Queanbeyan. The NSW Maritime Authority has an online [Boating Handbook](#). In addition it has been willing to post a copy of the book on request. There clearly is a substantial overlap between the jurisdictions in the laws governing the use of boats. However, please note that the ACT Government requires a licence for operating a tinnie on ACT waterways, notwithstanding that such a licence may not be required in New South Wales.

One of the most basic requirements in operating a boat is to assess continuously the risk of collision and to take avoidance action. Even where the ACT police have found a particular boat to be at fault, it has tended to share the fault on the basis on the need to be alert to the risk of collision. Section 48 of the Lakes Act deals with the reckless or negligent operation of a boat.

Rowing has elevated risks because rowers are facing in the direction from which they have come, not the way they are going. This means that, in the absence of a forward facing coxswain, rowers need to turn around periodically to check their navigation and other traffic.

For this reason, rowing associations provide additional guidance which does not, necessarily, affect underlying liability arising from the operation of the law. However, observance of these rules is important for orderly rowing and rower safety and failure to comply may result in disciplinary action by rowing authorities or by the Club.

Generally speaking, rowers should follow an anti-clockwise track with the land. This reflects the general requirement to pass to the right of other boats - the land is only on the left because rowers are facing backwards to the direction they are travelling.

Where the Lake need to be crossed, it is important to stop and check that that the way is clear.

A [flow diagram](#) for the competing course on Lake Burley Griffin has been developed by the ACT Rowing association.

In addition, it has issued directions to help manage traffic around the Kingston Foreshore.

1. Boats travelling towards Kingston must go through the 1st or 2nd span on the Barton side of the lake.
2. They then row down the Barton/Kingston side of East Basin - finishing on the Kingston side of the Capital Lakes Rowing Club (CLRC) access channel.

3. After stopping, row towards the mouth of the Molonglo River, being careful of traffic going to and from CLRC, and only turning towards Kings Avenue Bridge once you are well past CLRC.
4. On the way to Central Basin, pass under Kings Avenue Bridge using one of the 3 spans on the Russell side of the lake.

There are some rowing protocols and expected behaviours.

For example, while an overtaking crew must by law give way to the vessel it is overtaking, powered or not, it is an expectation that the boat being overtaken will facilitate being passed. This is dealt with at Section 45 which states that:

- (1) *A boat that is overtaking another boat shall keep out of the way of the other boat.*
- (2) *A boat coming up with another boat from a direction more than 2 points of the compass, or 22.5o, abaft that other boat's beam is taken to be an overtaking boat.*

However, the Lakes Act provides for an exception to this at Section 47 for racing (Section 47 is in the same division as Section 45 for the purposes of interpreting this provision). That section states:

A boat on a lake taking part in a boat race is not required to observe, in relation only to another boat taking part in the race, a provision of this division that conflicts with a rule relating to the running of the race approved by the entity controlling the race.

For this reason, it is important that the race rules are read closely before each regatta or event, such as the Col Pantou Marathon.

The [Rowing Australia Member Protection Policy](#), to which all States and affiliated Clubs are bound, includes a Code of Behaviour requiring certain behaviours of its members. This includes refraining from abuse and harassment.

You are responsible for making yourself familiar with the water traffic requirements.

It is important not to assume that just because you are in a good position that you do not need to check. This is little consolation if there is an accident with resulting injuries. NEVER force another crew to stop just because you may technically have right of way.

When another boat is overtaking, you should not assume that they have seen you even if they have looked around. This is because lighting conditions can restrict the view and sometimes a quick look around while rowing is not sufficient to take in all the necessary detail. If a boat is approaching too fast or too closely, you need to alert them in a loud voice. The convention is to yell out the type of boat they are in. For example, if a quad is approaching in a manner that may cause an accident, you should yell out 'QUAD'.

You can land along most parts of the foreshore EXCEPT on the land surrounding the Governor-General's House. This is marked by signs and guarded 24 hours a day.

The Lake ends at Scrivener Dam and there is a well marked line of large triangular-shaped red buoys to warn you away from the dam wall. Do not go past these.

If you row before sunrise or after sunset or in conditions of poor light, you are required to attach a flashing white strobe light to the bow of your boat. These are best fixed to the bow number holder. Times for sunrise and sunset can be found in the "Canberra Times" each day. Please ensure that any times stated on television news are correct for Canberra.

Tinnies are allowed on the lakes for coaching purposes and they need to be driven with consideration to other rowers and crews.

If you are in a tinnie, you are required to reduce your speed and to take other measures to minimise the wake, to swamping boats or increasing safety risks.

(3) Water conditions

Canberra may experience micro-climates where it can be raining and cold in one part and dry and sunny in another and foggy in another. Use your own judgement but, as a general rule:

- ❑ Light rain is okay to row in. Weather (heavy rain) that looks like it will set in is "no-row" weather, particularly if this is accompanied by wind. Even if you are dressed for the cold, you can get chilled quickly if you get wet. Hail is a "no row".
- ❑ Strong wind conditions are a "no-row" situation. This is usually characterised by white caps on the water which make most parts of the Lake dangerous, particularly for less experienced rowers. Don't wait until these appear. Come into shore if you are in any doubt. Windy conditions on the Lake are sometimes difficult to gauge from home and we may not decide whether to go out until we are actually down at the shed. Depending on where you live, there have been occasions when it has been windy at home but okay down at the lake and vice versa. The best we can do in this situation is check the forecast the night before and see if there is a strong wind warning and small boat alert issued by the Bureau of Meteorology- this will mean 'no row'.
- ❑ Fog is one of the 'usual' Canberra conditions that may preclude us from rowing. There is no rowing in heavy fog. If you cannot see Weston Park, then you should not go out. Parts of the Lake can be really foggy and other parts quite clear. In foggy conditions it is very easy to become disoriented and you could injure yourself, your crew and damage your boat. If fog closes in on you while out on the Lake, make your way slowly to the nearest shore and follow this slowly until you reach the boat shed.
- ❑ Lightning also is a "no row" condition. Don't go out until the storm is well and truly passed. If you are caught out on the lake return to shore as quickly as possible.
- ❑ Sub-zero weather is a feature of rowing in Canberra in winter. It is okay to do this so long as you take a few precautions and are dressed for this. Some of

the best conditions on the lake occur in winter – beautiful sunny, clear and windless days, but cold and frosty mornings. The winter time trial series in Canberra are a testimony to this weather. Investing in some thermal underwear, and other external light and warm gear is essential. Be mindful that the water temperature drops dramatically. Do not go out alone because if you fall in, hyperthermia will set in quickly.

Remember to check the conditions before you go out and dress to match the conditions.

In all cases; when in doubt, don't go out. It is advisable to tell someone if you go out rowing and when you expect to return.

(4) Ability to Recover from an Incident

All rowers can expect, at some point, to be confronted by an incident which will put them into the water. It may be avoiding a collision with another boat, colliding with another boat, failure to set equipment properly, equipment breakages or some other unexpected obstruction. Such events should be very infrequent and are generally comfortably handled.

Rowers do not wear lifejackets although the expectation is that coxswains do.

You should be able to swim AT LEAST 50 metres in light clothing. The requirement is used as an indicator of your general competency in the water and does not rule out that swimming more than this distance may be required – clearly boats will be often more than 50 metres from shore. However, generally, rowers in the water are expected to stay with their boats for safety reasons and to re-mount those boats where possible. This requirement is not independently tested but is a required declaration when undertaking LTR and the expectation is that members will achieve or maintain that level of competency.

Boats with closed hulls – singles – can be righted and the rower can get back in as long as both oars are held in one hand. Boats with open hulls fill with water but rarely sink completely.

If your boat is swamped, stay with the boat. The boat and oars should still float. Keep as much of your body out of the water as possible. You should not generally try to swim ashore even if you are a good swimmer. This is because of your exposure to other boat traffic and, in cold water conditions, you may not be able to swim as far as you would otherwise expect.

If you cannot right the boat, lay on top of it until help arrives. You can use your feet to kick while holding onto the boat, and move yourself closer to the shore. Try to use as little movement as possible in cold weather, as you will lose heat and energy very quickly if you move around too much.

On the water you may also travel in the speed boats (tinnies) that are used by the coaches to facilitate coaching but also as a safety measure. A range of safety equipment is carried in these boats, in particular there are lifejackets for your safety

and to deal with incidents where rowers may fall out of their boat and need assistance.

If you see someone fall out of a boat, you should at least ask whether they need assistance and help if you are in a position to do so or obtain help where this is possible.

If a rower is left in the water for any length of time it is possible that hypothermia will result. This is an abnormally low body temperature (usually below 35 degrees). Symptoms include weakness, drowsiness irritability and poor coordination. The severity of hypothermia depends on age and physical condition, clothing, the temperature (of water or air), wind chill and the period of exposure. If a person is suspected of suffering from hypothermia, it is best to seek medical advice or treatment. However, there are steps that should be taken.

- Protect the person from the wind rain and the cold.
- if possible remove wet clothing and provide the person with warm dry clothing. Make sure to cover the head, hands and feet to prevent further escape of heat. Remember, common sense applies here as well and, where possible, this should be carried out by a person of the same sex.
- Provide the person with warm (not hot) fluids to drink (no alcohol).
- Put the person in a warm bath or shower so that they can warm up gradually.
- Do not attempt to rapidly heat the person using a hot bath or shower, too hot a water bottle or electric blankets.

(5) Equipment

Equipment problems can result in incidents on the water. It is more likely that the problems will be the result of rower carelessness than a failure in the equipment itself.

The most frequent rower error is to not secure the gate. In a single, a gate flying open in rough conditions, or as a result of simply rowing, will mean that the oar will come loose and capsizing will inevitably follow. This may happen even for crewed boats. It is important to always double check that that the gates have been firmly closed.

Sometimes, clip-on riggers are not secured properly and they can pop off.

Another problem with gates is that occasionally the oar is secured to the gate facing the wrong way (i.e. the gate should face the same way as the rower). This means that rowing is very difficult and could cause a problem with the stroke if not detected in time. Similarly, badly adjusted foot stretchers and incorrect heights of gates can cause problems, particularly if adjustments are attempted on water. It is the responsibility of individual rowers to check settings before they depart. If a rower is in any doubt, they should ask the Club Captain or other experienced rowers.

Equipment failure is rare but can happen. It is, by its very nature, more difficult to anticipate. For example, some riggers have been known to break in rough conditions, usually from accumulated fatigue over the years. Gates can similarly fail.

In some instances, oars have broken or the buttons (which stop the oar from passing through the gate) have broken resulting in the oar becoming loose.

(6) Common Sense and Precautions

There is no substitute for common sense. Going out in dangerous conditions, attempting to row without supervision less stable boats you have not rowed in before, not checking equipment, being careless with navigation, failing to be vigilant, are just some of the factors that can be avoided through a common-sense approach to rowing.

Always dress suitably when rowing. In colder weather wear, several layers to keep warm, particularly around the lower back and head. The layers are important as it allows a more flexible response to changing conditions including the amount of body heat being generated by rowers.

Many people find it is good idea to wear (polypropylene) thermal underwear. In Canberra this is readily available at camping stores. In summer, light clothing is essential as is a hat and sunscreen. If you are coxing you also need to have some windproof and waterproof clothing available as well as a lifejacket.

NEVER fasten any weight to yourself, or tie yourself to the boat.

Rowing involves considerable exertion. You need water to re-hydrate, even when you think you may not be thirsty.

A unique feature of rowing is the ability to “catch a crab”. A crab occurs when a rower does not get the oar out of the water at the end of a stroke and the boat’s momentum pulls the oar out of the rower’s hands and pushes it towards them. DON’T fight a crab by pushing against the oar. Instead DUCK and PUSH the HANDLE UP, lie down and let the handle of the oar go over the top of you. Once the boat has stopped, the oar handle can be retrieved and you can start to row again.

(II) Incident Reporting

Rowing is a sport with a relatively low incidence of injury. Nevertheless, the Club carries sports injury, boat and equipment, and public liability insurance on behalf of the members of the Club and those in short-term, learn to row programs. Some insurance cover may be provided for private boats on an individual basis negotiated with the Club. If such cover is not explicitly extended, members are responsible for insuring their own boats.

The Club is NOT responsible for injuries to people or equipment for people who fall outside of these categories, nor is it responsible for the loss or damage to person belongings. Avoid bringing large sums of money or valuables to the shed.

There is personal accident coverage provided through the Rowing Australia insurance policy, which will vary from time to time. For the 2007-08 policy, there was specified accident coverage respect of insured persons as defined below.

Insured Persons:

All registered participating members, officials, committee members, club directors or officers, all affiliated club members and branch members, state, regional and district associations, teachers and/or coaches, timekeepers, officials, technical officers, technical officials and any voluntary workers including co-opted volunteers and prospective members for up to four weeks after initial approach and guest rowers where applicable. Any office bearer or member of an unincorporated or incorporated social and/or sporting club, affiliated with the Insured and formed with the consent of the Insured but only in respect of claims arising from duties connected with activities of any such club or facility including:

Type 1

Registered National Rowers. This group includes competing junior, country, metropolitan members plus permanent members.

Type 2

Registered Association Members. This group includes Association Officers – rowing programme, boat race officials, accredited coaches, registered rowers at school/club (not National).

Type 3

Non-Registered Members. This group includes casual rowers – corporate and recreational – club and school volunteers assisting in activities, coaches/instructors not accredited. Association Officers – non-rowing programme

Scope of Cover / Operative Time

Cover under this policy shall only apply whilst the Insured Person is engaged in rowing or association competition events or associated training and the like or involved in any voluntary work, club/association business including meetings, presentation nights and/or any other organised functions including any travel to and from and/or between locations of the activities and/or events. Any activity must be authorised by the Association and/or Club.

Guidelines for incident reporting

The Club is obliged to report ALL accidents and serious incidents to our insurer. This is to offer assistance and advice as well as to log the report. The Club maintains a record of all accidents.

Failing to report accidents can have repercussions. Written reports should be filled in as soon as practical after the event and best practice would suggest within 24 hours.

A report form is available from the Club Treasurer. In the absence of a form you should prepare:

- ❑ a detailed summary of the incident, including date, time, names of boats and crew members, and light, wind and lake conditions
- ❑ a sketch, showing boats, obstructions, direction of travel
- ❑ a statement by witnesses, by those involved, in other boats or on the bank
- ❑ the signature, dated and timed of the person making the report
- ❑ if the accident requires first aid or medical treatment then the name of the first aider, doctor and hospital should also be recorded, and the treatment given.

Reports should be sent to the Club Captain, copied to the Secretary, by email, by posting it to the Club at GPO Box 3012 Canberra ACT 2601 or by handing to the Secretary.

ATTACHMENT - ROWER CHECKLIST

There are a number of checks that should be made before you take out a boat.

Make sure before you go on the Lake that you and/or your crew:

- know how to get in and out of the boat safely
- know how to stop a boat quickly and safely
- know how to move a boat forwards, backwards and around
- make sure the coxswain knows how to steer a boat
- know the Lake is in a safe condition
- know the direction for Lake traffic
- have checked the weather conditions particularly wind, rain and temperature
- are dressed for the weather conditions, but wearing close fitting clothing that will not get caught in oars, the seat or other parts of the boat.
- have checked that the boat you are using is in a safe condition
- (if you are in an inexperienced crew) you have a coach present BEFORE you go on the water
- have something to drink, wear a hat and sunscreen
- have told someone you are going out rowing.