

From: Kaimes Beasley

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UNORTHODOX CROSSING OF THE DOVER STRAIT TRAFFIC SEPARATION SCHEME

1. General

- 1.1 In the past, many attempts have been made to cross the Dover Strait by unconventional means and/or in unorthodox craft. It is true to say that few of these attempts have ended in tragedy and many have been made for the most laudable reasons. Nevertheless anyone thinking of making such an attempt in the future should take into account the following factors before proceeding with their plans and perhaps incurring unnecessary expense.

2. The Dover Strait

- 2.1 The Dover Strait is the busiest shipping lane in the world. Many of the ships passing through the Strait carry dangerous cargoes. These cargoes, if accidentally released into the sea, could have disastrous effects on the environment, marine life and the coastlines of England, France and the North Sea States.

- 2.2 The passage of ships through the Dover Strait is further complicated by the presence of strong tides, sandbanks, shoals and a great deal of concentrated cross-channel traffic. Much of the crossing traffic is made up of high-speed ferries carrying as many as 2400 passengers.

- 2.3 The very large vessels passing through the Strait can be difficult to manoeuvre. They may take several miles to stop or turn. Some new container vessels are 318 metres long, 42 metres wide and service speed is 24 knots (35 mph).

They have to commit themselves to a course of action long before they can see a swimmer or detect on radar his escort boat, a small rowing dinghy or any other small craft.

- 2.4 Weather conditions in the Strait are liable to rapid change. Even in comparatively light winds, the strong tides can give rise to rough seas with steep breaking waves. Visibility is often poor, changing quickly to dense fog, even in strong or gale-force winds, rendering navigation difficult.

3. Traffic Separation Scheme

- 3.1 Recognising the dangers of navigation in the Dover Strait, a Traffic Separation Scheme, approved by the International Maritime Organisation, has been established. Two lanes akin to motorways run through the Strait for inward and outward-bound traffic.
- 3.2 The Rules for navigating in or near a Traffic Separation Scheme are internationally agreed. The basic guidelines to be followed are set out in Rule 10 of the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions)(Amendment) Regulations 1991.
- 3.3 Taking into account that the word 'vessel' includes every description of watercraft used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water. Rules 10(c) and 10(j) of the Regulations are particularly relevant to any plans to cross the Strait in an unorthodox craft or by unconventional means.
- 3.4 Rule 10(c) first requires that a vessel shall so far as practicable avoid crossing traffic lanes or a Traffic Separation Scheme. Secondly, it requires that if a vessel is obliged to cross traffic lanes it should do so steering at right angles to the direction of traffic flow.
- 3.5 Rule 10 (j) requires that a vessel of less than 20 metres in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the safe passage of a power-driven vessel following a traffic lane.

4. National Laws

- 4.1 The National Laws of both France and the United Kingdom require compliance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (see para 3.2).
- 4.2 In addition, according to French law, vessels are classified according to their characteristics, such as beach amusement craft, which in French waters are not allowed to sail more than 300 metres from the coast.

Moreover French Law makes it compulsory for organisers of any regattas, racing events, etc., to inform the French Administration in advance.

5. Unconventional Crossings of the Dover Strait in Unorthodox Craft

- 5.1 Most of the unorthodox craft used in attempts to cross the Dover Strait are very small and have limited speed and ability to manoeuvre. They are not adequate for deep-sea navigation in a heavy traffic area. Their presence, or that of a group of them in the Dover Strait, will dangerously impede the vessels in the traffic lanes and may lead to a marine casualty.

- 5.2 It is the view of the Anglo/French Safety of Navigation Group that such crossings are highly irresponsible, and that potential participants must be persuaded to look for a challenge elsewhere, in areas where they do not constitute a hazard to other people going about their lawful activities.
- 5.3 As clearly stated in 4.2 above the Maritime Prefect of the Channel and the North Sea has issued an order (No 14/93) expressly forbidding swimming and associated activity of an unorthodox nature within the Dover Strait Traffic Separation Scheme, within French territorial waters. The sole events excluded from the prohibition are those Cross Channel swimming attempts organised and approved by the Channel Swimming Association (CSA) and the Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation (CS&PF).
- 5.4 Unorthodox craft, which are characterised by slow speed and poor or non-existent manoeuvrability, such as tyres, bathtubs, rafts and pedalos, are not authorised to proceed more than 300 metres from the French coast. As a consequence they do not have the right to sail in French territorial waters within the Pas de Calais Traffic Separation Scheme. The French Maritime Authorities prohibit crossings of the Pas de Calais by unorthodox craft setting out from the French coast. The same applies to beach pleasure craft. However, in exceptional cases the French Maritime Authorities may grant authority for unorthodox craft to cross French territorial waters within the Traffic Separation Scheme when these craft set off from the British coast. On condition that the request for authorisation is sent to them with the opinion of the British Maritime Authorities.
- 5.5 If however, after the above advice you still intend to proceed with an unconventional crossing, for example by swimming in or under the water or in any craft, structure or floating object other than a vessel adapted or intended to be used for a sea voyage, you should:
- a be aware you may contravene French Law and be subsequently apprehended and charged by the French Authorities;
 - b be aware that you could be faced with liability for damages if you contributed to an incident involving other persons or vessels, and should consider obtaining insurance cover against such events;
 - c inform both Dover MRCC or CROSS Gris Nez of the plan;
 - d use an escort boat properly equipped to ensure the safety of your crossing and which complies with the Merchant Shipping (Small Work Boats and Pilot Boats) Regulations.
- E be aged 16 or over on the date of the attempt.

IMPORTANT ADDRESSES ARE:

UK COASTGUARD

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency
HM Coastguard,
Langdon Battery
Swingate
DOVER
Kent CT15 5NA

Tel: +44 (0)1304 218500 (Office hours)
 +44 (0)1304 210008 (H24)
Fax: +44 (0)1304 218505 (Office hours)
 +44 (0)1304 202137 (H24)

Email: channel.navigation@mcga.gov.uk
 wm.dover@mcga.gov.uk (H24)

Web site: www.mcga.gov.uk

FRENCH MARITIME AUTHORITY

Chef du service interministériel de la mer et du littoral (AIML)
Direction interrégionale des affaires maritimes
92 quai Gambetta
62230 Boulogne-sur-mer
France

Tel : (00 33) 3.21.30.27.27
Fax : (00 33) 03.21.30.08.23

FRENCH COASTGUARD

CROSS Gris-Nez
Audinghen 62179
Wissant
FRANCE

Telephone: (00 33) 3 21 87 21 87
Fax: (00 33) 3 21 87 78 55

Channel Swimming & Piloting Federation (CS&PF)

Secretary: Michael Oram

Tel: +44 (0)1843 852858

Email: michael.oram@btinternet.com

Website: <http://www.channelswimming.net>

Channel Swimming Association (CSA)

Secretary: Julie Bradshaw

Tel/fax: + 44 (0)1509 554137

Email: swimsecretary@ntlworld.com

Website: <http://www.channelswimmingassociation.com>

Channel Crossing Association (CCA)

Secretary: Andy King

Tel: +44 (0)1622 207134

Email: seakingboat@btinternet.com

Website: <http://www.channelcrossingassociation.com>



CNIS Manager

Dover MRCC

DDI: 01304 218536

MOB: 07786 855262

FAX: 01304 218505