

5. SAFETY ISSUES AT KERRS REACH

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the progress on addressing the safety issues for users of Kerrs Reach and the Avon River training and competition area.

BACKGROUND

The Avon River downstream from Kerrs Reach has been used as the primary training area for rowing for many years. In recent times there has been a significant increase in use by the rowing community and by other users including Waka Ama, Kayaking, Outrigging, Dragon boating and many other casual users of all types of watercraft.

Over the years there have been a few accidents and many close calls between various craft on the water, but in recent times concern has risen as the amount of use of the facility also rises.

These concerns have resurfaced again as a result of the progress and discussions around the proposed alternative flat-water course project.

The Community and Recreation Unit Sports Adviser met with representatives of the formal groups who are current river users in April 2004 to discuss the problem. The April meeting was the first time the majority of users had got together to come to an agreement on these rules.

ISSUES

There were a number of issues raised at the user meeting in April which can be summarised under the following headings:

- Number of users
- Type of users
- Rules and regulations
- Signage
- Dispute resolution

(A) Number of users

As previously alluded to there has been a significant increase in recent times in the number of people who use this stretch of the Avon River.

Rowing is one of the major regular users and is in itself a strong and growing sport. The number of other formal groups using the river such as kayakers, dragon boaters and outriggers has swelled in the last 5 years. As well as the clubs and other sporting groups there are a number of commercial operators who take groups out onto the river at irregular intervals. Then there are the casual users and people training for all manner of sport who can all create extra pressure on a limited waterway space.

There are no accurate figures for the number of people who may have used the river in any peak period but consideration of the total number of members represented by the list of formal user organisations below can give an indication of the potential for accidents and incidents to occur:

Canterbury Rowing Association	800 (including registered and unregistered)
Arawa Canoe Club	270 (registered members)
Whitewater Canoe Club	60 (registered members)
Outrigger Club/Dragon Boaters	<u>175</u>
	1405

(B) Types of Craft

With such a wide variation in the skills and experience of the operator and differences in vessel velocity, manoeuvrability, mass and direction of travel, the risk of collision is relatively high. Further, when an accident does happen the consequences can potentially be significantly harmful to people and property. The consequences become more serious should a river user become unconscious in the water from a collision.

(C) Rules and regulations

The main concern is the fact that the rowers are generally the quickest craft on the water but actually travel facing backwards and obviously cannot always see what is behind them. They often come up behind another user and can be on top of them before the other user knows they are there and before each can take evasive action to avoid the other.

The maritime safety authority has long-established rules and regulations for all watercraft which have historically been the fallback position when navigating the river. These rules are not always appropriate or practical for all situations and this is one case where common sense shall prevail. The users at the meeting agreed that the rules as per the "Agreed Solutions" section below will form the basis for all users of the Avon river training and racing area.

(D) Signage

There are a few key areas of confusion for all users where provision of signage to give direction and remind users of the give way rules would be well received. These mainly concern the four road bridges along the way (especially the narrow bridge at Bassett Street) and the narrower sections of the river itself. There is currently no such signage to inform or direct river users.

There was also no riverbank signage at all and it was suggested that the possibility of erecting some at key put-in points be investigated. This signage would outline the user rules and some basic safety information for all users.

(E) Dispute resolution

From time to time there may be collisions which may involve injury or damage to equipment which can result in a dispute over responsibility. A system has been proposed whereby a representative from two user groups not involved in the incident and a Council representative will hear the arguments and provide a ruling.

AGREED SOLUTIONS

It was agreed that Kerrs Reach and the lower Avon River required specialized traffic guidelines on top of the generic Marine Department regulations.

(A) Direction of Travel

For the purposes of addressing safety issues, the user groups can generally be broken up into two main categories:

- Large fast less-maneuvrable craft (rowers, dragon boats, surfboats and six-man outrigger)
- Smaller more manoeuvrable craft (kayakers, two-man outriggers).

It was considered safer to have those forward facing and relatively manoeuvrable craft paddling in the opposite direction to the larger less manoeuvrable and backward-facing craft. The reasoning behind this decision was based on the fact that a forward-facing kayaker will be able to see and avoid a backward facing rower coming towards them instead of the two craft closing on each other unsighted and back-to-back.

Therefore the rowing sweep and sculling craft plus the 6-man outrigger, dragon boats and surfboats will travel in an anti-clockwise direction whilst all other small paddled craft travel facing oncoming large craft above.

(B) Rules and Regulations

During passing manoeuvres, paddled craft will adhere to the bank while larger craft will pass toward the river centre.

Craft travelling downstream must give way at bridges to crews travelling upstream.

(C) Dispute Resolution

Should a dispute over responsibility for a collision occur, a panel made up of a representative from the Rowing, Canoeing and Outrigger groups plus a Council representative will meet and resolve the dispute.

(D) Signage

Signage detailing traffic rules be placed at launching ramps at Kerrs Reach, Bower Bridge ramp, New Brighton Power Boat Club at Owles Terrace ramp and on the bridge supports if possible.

(E) Visibility

A request was made to Council to investigate the possibility of trimming of some of the toi toi at the narrow section of river below the Bassett Bridge which obscures the trainers' vision of the crews for a time.

(F) Lighting

A forward facing, red flashing light, worn either on the athlete or fitted to the boat must be shown at all times from dusk to dawn.

It was agreed that the solutions would apply from 1 May 2004 with a review in December 2004.

The Community and Recreation Unit have discussed this with the Greenspace Unit and the Greenspace Unit has agreed to investigate the trimming of the toi toi near the downstream section of the Basset Bridge in order to improve sight lines for coaches from the path to the river. It will also investigate the erection of signage at the points outlined in the report.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Community and Recreation Unit continue to monitor the effectiveness of the agreed solutions above, assist with the review in December 2004 and assist with the dispute resolution process outlined in (C) above.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the recommendation be adopted.