



Leisure Users Advice- Safety of Navigation on the River Orwell

Please read the following relating to an incident reported by a Harwich Haven Authority Pilot within the River Orwell. The pilot was met with over 5 leisure users causing a close quarters situation. Such incidents are becoming more frequent and highlight safety concerns of leisure users in the river. All leisure users should familiarise themselves with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, also known as COLREGS. There are free copies which can be found online, or a small handbooks available for purchase.

We would like to address the misconception of "POWER GIVES WAY TO SAIL". Due to the Nature of the river it is deemed a Narrow Channel, meaning Rule 18- Responsibilities between vessels is no longer applicable and Rule 9- Narrow Channels applies.

Rule 9- Narrow Channels

"Vessels of under 20m or a sailing vessel shall NOT impede the passage of a Vessel that can only safely navigate within a channel or fairway".

The River Orwell is a narrow Channel. Therefore it is the obligation of the leisure user to keep well clear of all commercial movements. In the interest of safety, all yachts should pass astern of commercial vessels when crossing the channel. Leisure users must pass well clear due to magnetic-like forces, known as interaction. Interaction presents a real danger of smaller Leisure craft capsizing, and in the worst cases, leading to possible fatalities.

Rule 5 – Look out

"Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look out by sight and by hearing".

All Leisure users must keep a listening watch on VHF CH 68 for Orwell Navigation Service. South of the Fagbury Buoy this should be switched to VHF CH 71 for Harwich VTS. This is to ensure all users are aware of commercial movements within the River Orwell and Harwich Haven areas.

On the larger commercial vessels, the Master and Pilot have large 'blind spots' under their bow, these can be up to 1 Nautical Mile. In general Leisure users should keep to the Starboard side/edge of the channel.

Excellent further guidance can be found in the 'HHA Yachting Guide' produced by Harwich Haven Authority. Physical copies can be found in the Ipswich Beacon Marina Office, a PDF form can be found on the HHA website, go to Leisure > Safety in Haven.