



## Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron

# Interim Incident Report on the Nolex 25 *SERIOUSLY* on Wednesday 7 December 2022

### Executive Summary

On the race of Wednesday 7 December 2022, 23 boats entered, 16 finished and 7 retired.

The wind and sea-state were considered suitable for running the race. In the middle and latter parts of the race the actual wind conditions were substantially higher than predicted by the Bureau of meteorology (BOM).

An incident occurred late in the race where the Nolex 25 *SERIOUSLY* broached, causing a Man Overboard (MOB) and the yacht was washed up on Middle Park Beach. There was no injury or damage to the crew or yacht and the yacht was successfully recovered around 0600 Saturday 10 December 2022.

## Introduction

This report focuses primarily on an incident involving the Nolex 25 *SERIOUSLY* which following a MOB washed up on Middle Park Beach during 'Summer Mid-Week Twilight 1 Race 7' on Wednesday 7 Dec 2022.

It covers decisions made before and during the incident relating to:

- weather conditions
- incident management

It concludes with lessons learned and recommendations.

## People Involved in the Incident

The Race Management Team (RMT) were:

- David Taylor – Race Officer (RO) and Incident Manager in the tower
- Ashley Shoup – tower
- Kayli Seemer – tower + workboat
- Ann Rogers – office
- Greg Blackwood – incident management and on-water support with callsign "LIFE'S GOOD"

The RMT was further assisted by:

- Adrian – workboat
- Tom Ely – onshore support
- Monica Jones – onshore support

The skipper and crew of *SERIOUSLY* (a Nolex 25 trailer-sailer):

- Neil McClure – owner/skipper
- Sterling Garbler – sail-pass member

Outside parties included:

- "RCC Melbourne" – Water Police Squad and Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) located in Williamstown [03 9399 7500]
- "VP10" – Victoria Police Vessel #10 from Williamstown

## Weather Conditions

### Predictions

The BOM had a strong wind warning current for Port Phillip. The BOM MetEye model was predicting 25-30kts in the race area at 2000hrs.

BOM site and Windy.com app were both checked prior the race at 1500, 1700, and 1745. They were also checked after the race.

The Windy models (ACCESS, ECMWF and GFS) had been suggesting gusty conditions all day in contrast to the BOM observations which were showing minimal gusting above the reference 10min average.

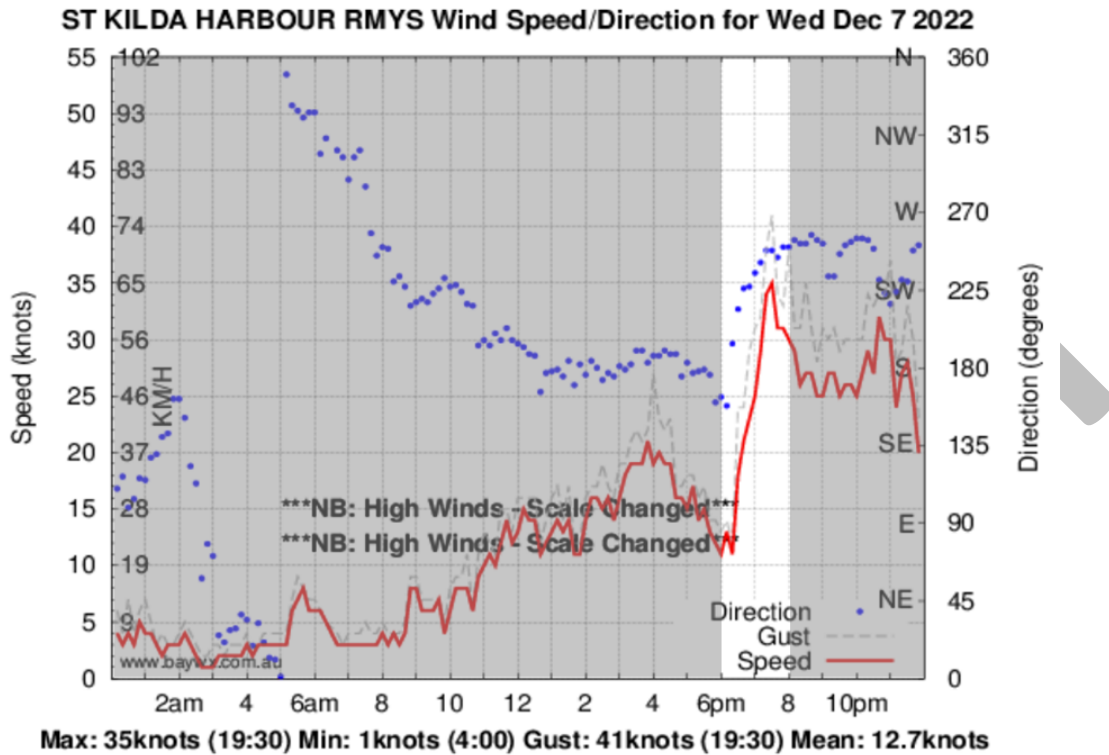
The aerodrome reports for Avalon airport and Essendon airport were both predicting 15-18kt averages gusting 25kts or thereabouts for the duration of the race. Note that these were revised up a few knots with special reports around 1900.

Checking the CAPE index there was no indication of instability in the atmosphere that may lead to thunderstorms etc.

### Observations

The sea-state was at about 1m at the start of the race although it grew to around 1.5m throughout the race.

The winds recorded by the BOM at the RMYS tower were as shown in the following graph.

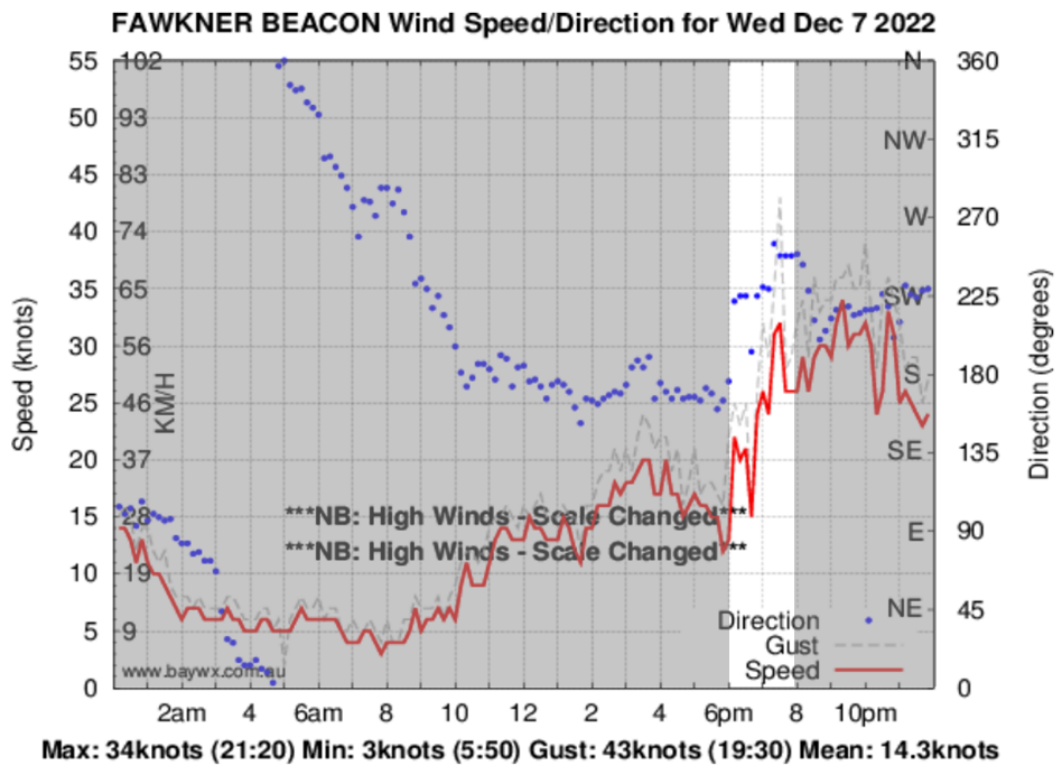


The wind strength was hovering around 15kts in the decision-making period leading up to the start. At the first start and through most of the start sequence it was around 11-12kts.

The average wind strength built over the course of the race and peaked at 35 kts average (41kt gust) around the time of the first finishers. It remained above 30kts for the full finishing sequence.

The winds recorded by the BOM at Fawkner Beacon were similar as shown in the following graph. The peak 10 min averages were slightly lower (by about 3kts) but the peaks were roughly the same.

**Note:** Wind readings from the instruments in the tower were around 5kts lower than those reported by the BOM from virtually the same location.



The aviation weather predictions from the BOM for Avalon and Essendon airports were consulted before the race and were updated during the race as shown below:

**AVALON YMAV**

```
TAF AMD YMAV 070759Z 0707/0806
25018G28KT 9999 -SHRA SCT020 BKN035
FM071400 24012KT 9999 -SHRA SCT035
FM072100 22015G25KT 9999 -SHRA SCT030
FM080400 21018G30KT 9999 -SHRA SCT030
INTER 0707/0711 5000 SHRA SCT020 BKN030
RMK
T 18 12 10 09 Q 1004 1008 1010 1010
```

```
SPECI YMAV 070800Z AUTO 25019G29KT 6000 -SHRA SCT031 SCT046 BKN053
13/11 Q1006 RMK RF00.2/000.2
```

While the original Avalon airport forecast was around 2-3kts lower, this one issued at 1859 (0759Z) says 18G28KT (18kts gusting 28kts) and updated automatically a minute later with a SPECI report to 19G29KT.

### ESSENDON YMEN

TAF AMD YMEN 070522Z 0706/0718  
 19014KT 9999 -SHRA BKN030  
 FM070700 23014KT 9999 -SHRA BKN030  
 FM070800 24015G25KT 9999 -SHRA SCT020 BKN030  
 FM071500 23012KT 9999 -SHRA SCT040  
 RMK  
 T 17 15 11 10 Q 1004 1006 1009 1010

SPECI YMEN 070805Z AUTO 24019G31KT 9999 // BKN061 BKN089 17/07 Q1005  
 RMK RF00.0/000.0

The forecast from Essendon was issued at 1622 (0522Z). This predicted 14kt and reaffirmed that from 1800. It then predicted the winds to increase to 15G25KT from 1900.

So, both the Avalon and Essendon airport forecasts were for well below RMYS' gale force (34kt) limit for club racing. They are even well below a strong wind (25kt) level.

### *SERIOUSLY*- the vessel and crew

*SERIOUSLY* is a Nolex 25 trailer sailor set up for short handed sailing, having a self tacking jib and jackstays. She is owned and skippered by Neil McClure. Neil is relatively inexperienced sailor but keen to learn and had recently had some start practice training.

The crew on the day was Sterling Garbler, a sail-pass member who was also relatively inexperienced.

The skipper advised lifejackets were worn.

### The *SERIOUSLY* Incident – A Timeline

At **1910** *SERIOUSLY* radioed to advise they were retiring. In discussions after the race with Jason McCutcheon (Club Captain), the skipper indicated they realised the conditions were too strong for them. They had trouble re-starting the outboard and some time was spent trying to get the engine running. This took attention away from boat handling. When the motor started, the skipper had their head down to engage forward, when *SERIOUSLY* was hit by a wave and broached, causing Neil McClure to roll over the lifelines and into the sea. *SERIOUSLY* was close to the no boating zone north of the marina.

The other sailor on board was less experienced with the yacht and had trouble turning *SERIOUSLY* around. The recovery of the MOB was also hindered by the stern ladder which did not go far enough into the water to allow easy retrieval. However, within 20 seconds Neil found the bottom and he walked *SERIOUSLY* in.

Kayli called Ann at **1922** to arrange to launch the workboat to assist any yachts that may need it.

Shortly thereafter a call from another vessel was received indicating that *SERIOUSLY* may be in trouble and in need of assistance.

At this moment it was clear that there was an incident unfolding:

- David Taylor took on the role of Incident Manager.
- Kayli Seemer was assisting with incident management as required.
- Ash Shoup was to finish the race, note any retirees, and ultimately to ensure that all boats were accounted for.

At **1924** Kayli updated the request to get a boat out “ASAP” to help provide assistance to *SERIOUSLY*. (the timeline is unclear as to whether this occurred before or after *SERIOUSLY* was on the beach).

At **1926** Kayli provided additional details to Ann. Kayli was immediately dispatched from the tower to assist Andre to ensure that there were at least two people on board any rescue vessel.

One or more police cars were noted on Beaconsfield Parade near the scene with lights flashing.

At **1930** *SERIOUSLY* notified the tower:

*“We are on the beach. Just near the toilet block. All ok.”*

“RCC Melbourne” attempted to call “Vessel *Serious* (sic)” a number of times from **1932** to **1935** with no response heard. At the time it was not clear who RCC were (later determined to be water police) or whether these were related to the police cars in the area.

At **1935** *LIFE’S GOOD* called RCC Melbourne offering to relay. It was communicated that the boat was on the beach, that there were no injuries, and that all persons were safely on shore. Later (at **1950**) *LIFE’S GOOD* also checked the number of people on board with the office and confirmed that it was two.

At **1937** David Taylor called Monica Jones to ask her to attend and assist as a formal representative of the club.

At **1938** *LIFE’S GOOD* advised *SERIOUSLY* to lift their keel to avoid damage to the boat.

At **1945** it was determined that *MARTILSE* was the only boat not accounted for. They were identified and all boats accounted for before the call from WatPol.

At **1948** “VP10” called the Tower from just off the breakwater. They had information that there was one boat on the beach and that there may be a second vessel in trouble. We confirmed that all vessels in our race were accounted for including the one on the beach. They signed off and headed back to Williamstown.

## Other Matters

Minor issues that followed from around 2000 include:

- *BUSHIDO* advised that they had engine failure (later found to be no fuel) and needed assistance to berth.
- *MATADOR* advised that they could help but then withdrew the request when they realized they did not have sufficient power to tow them safely. *Matador* was very difficult to hear probably because they were using a handheld on deck in the wind.
- *PANACEA* made a similar offer to assist.
- Greg Blackwood and three crew on *ALBATROSS* to tow *BUSHIDO* back to the end of the T-arm on E-row.
- *MARTILSE* had trouble berthing but found their way safely to *HAZZAR’S* pen which was temporarily vacant. There were one or two others who took the safe option of berthing overnight on the ends of the T-arms.

## Discussion

It was also noted that most yachts had full mainsails at the end of the race. The Tower personnel were surprised that almost no one had reefed.

The number of crew wearing lifejackets is unknown, and some may have donned them as conditions worsened. The Tower could perhaps have put up the Y-flag at the beginning of the race but the conditions and predictions at the time did not dictate this. Under RRS #3 and Transport Safety Victoria requirements it's ultimately up to the skipper. However, there was a strong wind warning current.

Ann Rogers sensibly started an audio recorder at the onset of the incident. This helped immensely in compiling this report.

The Tower's anemometer on the tower seems to read about 5kts lower than that recorded by the BOM anemometer only 4m away. This apparently is a known issue but not reported to the volunteers.

Hand-held radios do not work well when used on deck in the wind.

The RMT could have abandoned the race to potentially free up one more person but it was safer to continue the race thus allowing that person to simply record all finishers and retirees to ensure all boats were accounted for.

The club's workboat was (briefly) deployed as a rescue boat. However, it could not safely leave the marina and moorings area due to the sea state. It safely turned back without putting itself at risk. William Paterson could tow a keelboat, but other RMYS vessels may not be able to. In any case, it was unclear who could drive these vessels. Previously RMYS has been inconsistent in how it utilised its vessels for rescue or recovery (eg *REMEDY* in about 2019 was not assisted, but *MATADOR* in 2016 had William Paterson search for her).

Wednesday racing has a mixture of experienced and new sailors, while Saturday racing has a greater number of more experienced crew.

There is a general observation made that the crews are generally not as skilled in difficult conditions as they were a generation ago, most likely due to lack of experienced in heavy conditions (due to a more risk averse approach by clubs and government). This is problematic for crews caught out by sudden and unexpected weather changes.

## Conclusions

The predicted and observed weather conditions and sea state in the lead up to the race were well within RMYS' racing limits. The actual winds observed during the race were significantly higher than predicted, with several yachts experiencing difficulties. A number of recommendations follow.



## Items for consideration

1. Consider the purchase of voice audio recording devices to aid in the recording of the incident.
2. Y-flag criteria need to be better articulated, perhaps when a strong wind warning is current.
3. We should probably remind skippers that other factors including whether full/short-crewed, level of experience, etc should all be carefully considered before leaving the pen.
4. replace the tower anemometer (it is not possible to calibrate).
5. Update the SOPs
  - a. If equipment is not fully functional (eg. anemometer, lightbox, missing mark, etc) then this needs to be included on an alert sheet to the RO & RMT before every race.
  - b. RCC is referenced
6. Radios. Advise Skippers and Crews:
  - a. about the limitations of hand held VHF radios, especially around range and wind noise.
  - b. Radio communications need to be minimised when an incident is active.
  - c. Short-form communication in an incident is preferred:  
"Squadron Tower, Squadron Tower, Squadron Tower, *DUNKME*, *DUNKME*, *DUNKME*" --- "go ahead *DUNKME*" --- "Squadron Tower, *DUNKME*, is retiring from the race" ... etc is not preferred.  
If you know you are using a well-configured radio in good communication range then RMT want to hear "Squadron Tower, *DUNKME* is retiring due to XXX" and we respond with "Thank you *DUNKME*, we have you retiring with XXX" ... is preferred.
7. Club vessels
  - a. Develop policy on when the club's vessels should be used for rescue or recovery and who can use them.
  - b. Consider whether additional volunteers be trained in the use of club's vessels
8. Those who retire from racing need to actively inform the Race Management Team.



9. Consider restrictions on less experienced crews in challenging conditions. Perhaps this could be
  - a. abandoning the aggregate race and running a non aggregate
    - i. with or without a higher safety category requirement
  - b. length, weight, crew experience limits
  - c. Self nomination on whether you fit into a beginner or seasoned sailor/ crew and set different limits for both
  - d. Racing to continue for the spinnaker fleet (which generally has more experience)
  - e. No change, as it is always the skipper's responsibility to start or continue to race<sup>1</sup>.
10. As part of MOB practice, encourage crews to practice getting into their yacht (not just picking up an object- noting the stern ladder on *SERIOUSLY* was not long enough)
11. Training sessions for skippers in conducting a risk assessment to improve decision-making- namely a process to decide on whether to race, and reducing the impact of more difficult conditions (eg reduced sail plan, more conservative sailing approach, recap of safety procedures with crew before departing etc.)

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Report written by

David Taylor (Race Officer on the day and Risk Committee Chair) and  
Jason McCutcheon (Club Captain)

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<sup>1</sup> Racing Rules of Sailing fundamental rule 3 DECISION TO RACE. The responsibility for a boat's decision to participate in a race or to continue racing is hers alone.

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## Appendix 1 – Useful Contacts and Web Pages

Purpose	Contact Details
Water Police	tel: 03 9399 7500 (24 hours) addr: 100 Nelson Place, Williamstown 3016 web: <a href="https://www.police.vic.gov.au/water-safety">https://www.police.vic.gov.au/water-safety</a>
Rescue Coordination Centre Melbourne	VHF callsign: 'RCC Melbourne' on channel 16 tel: 03 9399 7503
Windy – free weather site	<a href="http://windy.com">windy.com</a>
BOM Aerodrome Forecasts	<a href="http://www.bom.gov.au/aviation/forecasts/taf/#30">http://www.bom.gov.au/aviation/forecasts/taf/#30</a>

## Appendix 2 – Wind Warnings and Gusts

Some sailors don't seem to understand the meaning of the forecasts available from the BOM.

The following is taken from the BOM's knowledge centre.

Wind is made up of gusts and lulls. The Bureau's forecasts of wind speed and direction are the **average** of these gusts and lulls, measured over a 10-minute period at a height of 10 metres above sea level. The gusts during any 10-minute period are typically 40% higher than the average wind speed. For example, when the average wind speed is 25 knots, it is normal to experience gusts of 35 knots and lulls of lighter winds. Thunderstorm and squalls may produce even stronger gusts.

Based on the 40 per cent rule of thumb, the table below shows the potential gust you could expect for different forecast average wind speeds and associated wind warning category.

Average wind speed (knots)	Gust strength that should be planned for (knots)	Wind Warning thresholds
10	14	
15	21	
20	28	
26 - 33	36 - 45	<b>Strong wind warning issued</b>
34 - 47	48 - 65	<b>Gale force warning issued</b>
48 - 63	67 - 88	<b>Storm force warning issued</b>
64 or more	90 or more	<b>Hurricane force warning issued</b>