



**PRESIDENT'S EMAIL**

**JUNE 2019**

## **Dear Members**

On behalf of the Committee, I want to update all members on some very important considerations relating to paddling risk management. Many of you will be aware that recently one of our members was rescued by AMSA while attempting a solo Bass Strait crossing. Whilst this was a private paddle and it led to some important points of reflection for the paddler involved, it is important that our Club restates its expectations of members relating to paddling risk assessment more generally.

The Committee is keen that **all** members are very clear on the collective expectations and principles we hold as a Club when it comes to planning and conducting committing paddles.

## **Committing paddles**

This can mean different things to different people, but fundamentally a paddle that is committing requires the paddler/s to fully embrace what the paddle entails and be capable of doing it with a reasonable level of safety. This does not mean conducting the paddle in a way that is so devoid of risk that it is boring. Sea kayaking involves risk, but as a Club we want all members to manage that risk in proportion to their own risk appetite.

So, a short paddle on the Bay in light winds is unlikely to be committing to most paddlers. But, increase distance and dial the wind up over 20 Knots, then it will be very committing for quite a few paddlers – unless they have the skills to handle it.

## **Self-assessment**

Fundamentally, the Club operates on the principle that all members, regardless of grade must therefore self assesses whether they can commit to a paddle. This means reviewing everything the paddle entails (i.e. weather, sea state, paddle route and distance, exit options, etc.) and making an critically honest **personal** decision as to whether you can handle it.

If in doubt, talk it through with the Trip Leader, but committing to a paddle that stretches you too far beyond your current skill level, to a point of potential danger to yourself and others is strongly ill advised.

## **Risk management**

Consistent with the principle of self-assessment, members need to clearly map out **all** foreseeable risks associated with a paddle and the proposed actions to deal with such risks. This needs to be done **before** any committing paddle is undertaken (and at times even trips like a lengthy paddle on the Bay may warrant this). Trip Leaders have a responsibility to do this as a matter of course, but all paddlers must educate themselves as to the risk planning that is relevant to any given trip they join.

If the proposed actions to deal with foreseeable risks are outside your capabilities as a paddler, then do **not** commit to the paddle.

## **Solo paddling**

It can seem exciting and challenging to get out and test yourself on a significant paddle, but solo paddles greatly increase the difficulty of managing risks if they materialise. Your options for rescue or dealing with unforeseen issues are greatly enhanced in pairs or more. You require excellent preparation, bombproof self-rescue skills and exemplary paddling capability on solo paddles. So prepare every aspect of the paddle very, very thoroughly before embarking on such endeavours.

## **Safety equipment and protocols**

The Club has clear requirements for boat set up, but on committing, high-risk paddles and by law when operating more than 2.5 NM off shore, you must carry a registered EPIRB/PLB. It is imperative that you use a registered and GPS enabled EPIRB/PLB. The Club recommends wearing a PLB on your life jacket or having an accessible EPIRB at all times when on the water. You must know how to wear it, access it and use it properly if required.

For each trip that the registered PLB/EPIRB is carried the required AMSA registration details should be completed/updated online, prior to the journey. This is so AMSA have correct contact and identification details in case of emergency.

Your designated emergency contact persons (i.e. as registered with the device) must be fully competent to communicate with AMSA in the case of rescue. You must have a robust communications and emergency management process in place, and all onshore support must be fully conversant with this. For committing paddles, the Club strongly recommends that the paddling group have an onshore contact that they can consult on weather, sea conditions and any change of trip decisions.

Your risk management must be thorough, including viable plans to manage all foreseeable risks. Only when all else fails and there is threat to life should you activate your EPIRB/ PLB. You should **not** rely on rescue by AMSA as your primary response to foreseeable risk. The club is in the process of formally confirming with AMSA our mutual expectations relating to sea kayak rescues in this regard.

The Club understands that AMSA does have the prerogative of charging for rescue, and will consider the track record of the paddler being rescued in deciding this. If the paddler has irresponsibly undertaken the paddle, been subject to previous rescue by authorities or called for rescue in non-life threatening situations then the option of charging might be taken up.

In addition to a registered EPIRB/PLB, for committing paddles it is highly recommended you carry a satellite phone, VHF radio, SPOT (or similar) tracker beacon and mobile phone in waterproof case - and be fully versed in how to use these devices in an emergency situation.

You should also carry a paddle float at all times and know how to use it to effect a float assisted rescue and/or re-enter and roll.

Recognise that using a sail, especially in strong wind can exacerbate risk factors. If you want to use a sail then practice using it in conditions that you are likely to encounter, do not sail at night and know how to quickly recover from a capsize in rough conditions with a fully rigged sail.

There are a number of very experienced people in our Club who can assist with these safety requirements, but if you are at all unsure whom to contact, then please email [president@victorianseakayak.club](mailto:president@victorianseakayak.club) for assistance with contacts.

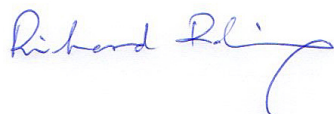
### **Private paddles**

As a Club we want all our members to be active and safely enjoy their paddling. We understand though that Club run events are not the only paddling our members undertake. Through relationships developed in the Club, often more committing paddles will be undertaken by invitation only due to the experience required and therefore run as private paddles.

The Club strongly advocates any such private paddles be run to the same high safety standards expected for Club paddles. So, if you are planning to run a private paddle, prepare well, make use of all the resources that the Club provides, proactively communicate to access the best information and follow all VSKC and Marine Safety recommendations. Our core goal remains - to support all members through education and training as to how to enjoy their paddling adventures safely.

**I look forward to all members applying these important principles and procedures to their sea kayaking endeavours.**

**Very best regards**



**Richard Rawling, President, VSKC**