Seaford Sea Support Skipper (4S) Policy and Guidance

Revision	Date	Change By	Description of Change
5.0	16.03.24	GSH	Content copied from **Seaford Sea Safety Skipper's Handbook**
6.1	06.02.26	JR/WR/Sailing Committee	Full review, update and layout changes. Change of "safety" to "support" in line with RYA preferred terms

Introduction

Newhaven & Seaford Sailing Club (NSSC) is committed to promoting continuous safety improvement. To maintain high safety standards and mitigate risks to sailors and boats, this policy establishes enhanced training, guidance and assessment for support skippers.

Key policy requirements:

- **Qualification:** Sea support boats must only be skippered by individuals over 18 years of age who hold a minimum of the RYA Level 2 Powerboat Handling (PB2) qualification *and* are certified by a club training assessor to have completed the 4S assessment to a satisfactory level.
- **Annual refresher:** All 4S approved skippers must undertake an annual 4S refresher.
- **Practical assessment retake:** If a skipper has not performed at least one support boat helm duty within the last two seasons, a practical assessment must be retaken.
- **Training & development:** This policy supports helms in building confidence in boat control and handling, improving skills and knowledge to carry out safe and efficient rescues, and progressing towards further RYA qualifications.
    - To support further development of cadets and youth members, a person aged 16 or 17 may helm a support boat if they hold a PB2 certificate and are accompanied by a 4S qualified skipper over 18 years.
    - Any crew over 18 years of age may helm the boat under direct supervision of a 4S skipper for purposes of learning and development, however any responses and rescues must be helmed by the qualified 4S skipper only.
- **Management:** This guidance is managed by the NSSC Sailing Committee. Acknowledgement is given to the numerous club members that have contributed to this guidance since its inception. Any suggestions for improvements are welcomed and should be directed to the Committee.

Areas for skill development:

⚓ anchoring;
🚤 towing;
🛟 safe mark laying and retrieval;
🛟 assisting with capsize of boats and recovery of persons in the water.

Practice sessions for the above skills will be facilitated throughout the season and attendance is highly recommended.

General order of safety

1. Personal safety
2. Safety of all crew, event participants and any other persons on the water
3. Prevention of damage to vessels
4. Recovery of boats and property

The overriding concern should always be for the preservation of life and prevention of injury.

Roles and responsibilities

Support boat skipper - responsible for ensuring:

- ⚠ The kill cord is correctly attached to the leg of the helm at all times;
- ⚠ Buoyancy aids are worn by all on board at all times whilst on the water;
- ✓ The support boat is seaworthy and equipped with all necessary safety gear;
- ✓ The support boat has sufficient fuel and the radio is functioning;
- ✓ The crew is capable, appropriately dressed, and prepared for water-based rescues;
- ✓ The crew is given a safety briefing before departing berth and supported with clear instruction and guidance throughout the duty;
- ✓ Effective radio communications with the Race Officer (RO) throughout the event;
- ✓ Notification to the RO that the event should be called off if conditions become unsafe;
- ✓ Rescues are carried out in a safe and timely manner;
- ✓ Reporting of all incidents and near misses to RO;
- ✓ They have read and comply with all requirements of this document;
- ✓ Any concerns are communicated to the Sailing Committee.

Race officer (RO)

- ✓ Has overall authority over the event. Refer to Race Officers' Handbook for further information

Support boat crew

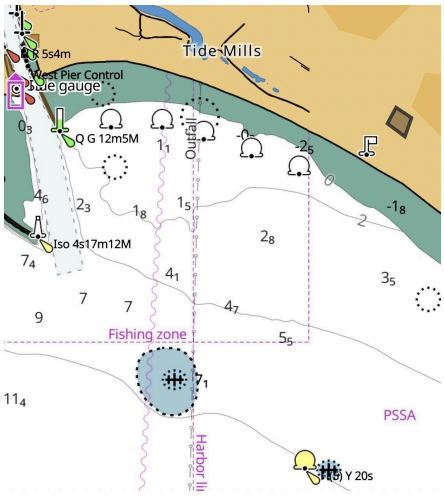
- ✓ Be prepared and appropriately dressed to enter the water;
- ✓ Following direction of skipper when undertaking tasks;
- ✓ Maintaining a lookout and alerting the skipper of any concerns.

Seaford Bay - our bit of sea

Our sea events take place mostly within Seaford Bay, although expeditions may venture further along the coast.

The tidal stream on the flood (rising) tide is east, towards Eastbourne. Max rate is approx. 1.5 m/s (3 kt) in spring tides.

The tidal stream on the ebb (falling) tide is west, towards Brighton. Max rate is approx. 1.5 m/s (3 kt) in spring tides.



The tidal stream turns direction approx. one hour before high/low water.

There is a tide gauge at Newhaven Harbour east pier which provides readings in relation to chart datum (-3.52m ODN). The mean spring tidal range is 0.7m to 6.7m and the mean neap tidal range is 2.2m to 5.2m. The lowest recorded tide is 0.18m and the highest is 7.37m.

The maximum depth in our area is approximately 11m.

The sea is flatter with an offshore wind (north or north-east).

When the sun shines, an onshore sea breeze starts about 11:00, but this does not generally generate big waves.

On a flood tide the west harbour arm causes an eddy in the bay.

Pre-planning & preparation

As a support boat skipper you should ensure that you are aware of the tide times, tide directions and the weather conditions for the period of racing and to keep an eye on any changes. It will help the RO to know that you will be attending. To do this, skippers should ensure that they have confirmed their duty on Dutyman and be aware the RO will likely contact you in the run up to your duty to confirm your attendance.

 Prior to racing (at Seaford club house)

Prior to the racing period the RO will conduct a support team briefing to outline:

- Course lay out;
- Start times and sequences;
- Weather conditions and sea state;
- Plans for the racing;
- Emergency procedures/calling off the race.

This is the support skippers opportunity to raise any safety concerns about the proposed racing and the plans for the day such as conditions, crewing and equipment. Briefings should be open and honest and all concerns should be acknowledged, discussed, mitigated where possible and, if serious enough, due consideration will be given to postponing or cancelling the race.

Fuel, keys, and codes

🕐 **Ark (diesel):** Tank topped up by the Bosun.

⛽ **RIBs (petrol):** Retrieve fuel from the fuel store. **Do not smoke** when refueling. Take one full tank per RIB (should last 2-3 hours). If an expedition or long distance race, ensure spare fuel for the RIBs is placed on Ark.

🔑 **Keys & access codes:** All keys for the fuel store, Ark, and RIBs are in the **Race Box** (unlocked by RO). Marina gate codes are written on the lid of the plastic safety container (keg).

🅿️ **Parking:** If parking at Newhaven Marina, you must park within the designated area and display a parking permit or you may be liable to a parking charge (PCN). The permit does not cover any part of the road. Parking permits are stored in the race box and must be returned to the RO at the end of your duty.

Getting support boats ready for sea (at Newhaven Marina)

Support boats are maintained by the Bosun, however prior to each launch it is the skipper's responsibility to ensure that the boat they are using is safe and that all required equipment is present and functioning correctly.

On arriving at the boat, the skipper should:

- inspect the hull for damage and correct inflation of sponson on RIBs (there is a manual pump stored in the cabin cuddy on Ark if re-inflation required);
- check safety equipment is present, functioning and ready for use;
- (RIBs) connect the fuel tank, being sure to open the vent on the cap. Prime the fuel line;
- turn on battery isolator and confirm operation of VHF radio;
- (RIBs) check the propellor is clear of obstruction such as fishing line and lower engine into water;
- ensure neutral is selected (lever position on RIBs, green light on dash on Ark);
- start engine and check water is being ejected from the cooling system (tell-tale) at the engine (from stern of Ark);
- check operation of bilge pumps.

Use action cards for each boat to locate and check safety equipment.

These will be located at the end of this document and in each RIB safety tub.
On Ark, this can be found under the seat. Coming later in 2026.

If any safety critical items are missing, damaged or otherwise not suitable for use, the boat MUST NOT be launched. Report immediately to the RO.

Prior to leaving the berth, skippers should provide a brief to the crew, especially if new to the duty or inexperienced, on the following:

- the expectation of the session ahead;
- fitment and operation of the kill cord;
- location and use of safety equipment;
- how to send an undesignated DSC distress call;
- operational limitations of the vessel (when to quit!).

It is essential to safety that crew feel that they can speak up. This applies to notifying the helm about any hazards, capsize, person overboard or any other incident, as well as being able to highlight safety concerns before, during or after operations. Always work as a team with your crew, providing clear instructions where needed but listening to feedback and observations.

When travelling through the harbour area, be mindful of the speed restrictions of 5 knots on the inner channel and 8 knots in the entrance area. Watch out for fishing lines from harbour walls on both sides!

VHF Radio Communications

VHF radios are fitted on all support boats, the race control box and held by the winch operator. Any person can use these radios whilst on channels 37A or M1, which are the channels used by the club to co-ordinate race activities. Many sailors will also carry VHF radios on the racing channels. **Remember all radio communication is public and can be heard by any other person on that channel.**

To make sure all radio users understand who is making contact, each radio has a unique call sign. Every radio message should be structured using the form:

- 'Callsign being called';
- This is 'callsign making call';
- Message;
- Over (if expecting a reply), or;
- Out (if not expecting a reply).

For example:
"Arrow, Arrow. This is Grey RIB. All buoys deployed, commencing patrol. Out."

Boat / Location	Callsign	VHF Channel
Race Box	Arrow	37A or M1
Ark	Ark	37A or M1
Grey RIB	Grey RIB	37A or M1
Orange RIB	Orange RIB	37A or M1
Winch Operator	Beach	37A or M1
Newhaven Harbour	Newhaven Radio	12
Coastwatch	Newhaven NCI	65
Emergency	All Stations	16

Leaving and entering the Harbour

Newhaven Harbour is a commercial port, with regular movement of large vessels including passenger ferries. In order to navigate safely and to not interfere with port operations, permission must be obtained from the port control before commencing any movement within the harbour limits. Prior to departing berth or entering the harbour arm, contact the control room on VHF channel 12, using the message:

"Newhaven Radio, Newhaven Radio. This is '*your callsign*'.
Request permission to enter/leave the harbour. Over."

Wait for permission and follow any instructions given by the port control. Be aware that you may not be granted immediate permission to continue. If delayed due to port operations, make contact with the RO to keep them informed.

Emergency calls (Mayday)

In the event of an emergency which presents an immediate or imminent danger to life or boat, a Mayday call should be initiated. In most circumstances, the skipper should liaise with the RO who will place the Mayday call, however if necessary you may initiate a DSC distress call from the support boat. Press and hold the red DISTRESS button on the radio for at least 5 seconds. Ensure the volume is turned fully up and listen out for Coastguard. If life is immediately at risk, DO NOT HESITATE to initiate a Mayday call. It can always be cancelled or downgraded.

Marker buoy laying and retrieval

The RO will likely decide the layout of the course prior to the safety team's departure from Seaford, with consideration to the guidance provided in the Sailing Instructions. Skippers should provide feedback to the RO whilst laying marks as to the conditions on the sea and suitability of the mark locations for the intended racing course.

- **Only RIBs are to be used to lay and retrieve marks. Ark must not be used for this task.**
- **Crew must always lay and retrieve marks forward of the helm position.**
- **Ensure marks are not impeding the harbour entrance and that there is sufficient distance from the inshore bathing area.**

⚠ Marks present a high-risk of wrapping ropes around the propeller

Stop after leaving the harbour to confirm course with the RO and lay marks by the harbour first to prevent having to return back on yourself.

Procedure for mark laying:

1. Come up to proposed position into the prevailing wind/tide;
2. Once in position, ensure neutral gear selected;
3. Crew to place the mark anchor into the water over the windward/up-tide side of the boat, to drift off the mark naturally (if wind and tide are opposing, be cautious);
4. Lower the mark anchor chain and rope in a controlled manner until fully deployed;
5. Place mark over side of boat;
6. Pause to allow the boat to drift from the position;
7. Check the rope is clear of the propeller before engaging drive gear.

Procedure for mark retrieval:

1. Do a 'pass-by' at a safe speed and distance to check the direction that the rope is flowing;
2. Come up to the mark from the opposite side of the rope to keep the propeller furthest away;
3. Once in position, ensure neutral gear selected;
4. Crew to take hold of mark by the rope and bring the rope and chain into the bucket;
5. Once the anchor is lifted into the bucket, the mark should be brought aboard;
6. If anything goes wrong, drop the mark and either allow the boat to drift away or check the propeller is clear of the rope and drive away;
7. Re-assess, re-approach and try again;
8. If the sea conditions are too rough or unsafe to retrieve the marks, leave them in place and report to the RO who shall notify the Bosun and Rear Commodore.

Large marks can be towed alongside the RIB sponson after lifting the anchor and rope. Ensure they are secure and travel at an appropriate speed.

Patrol

The patrol area of the support boat(s) team should be strategic and there are several options available. This becomes easier to manage with multiple support boats.

Sectors

Support boat skippers may agree specific areas for each boat to be in (for example east/west or north/south). At the start or end of a session where dinghies are launching from or recovering to the beach, it is a good idea for a support boat to operate closer to the shore, with caution, in case quick intervention is required. The RO may request a support boat on the start line at the beginning of each race. Usually the more experienced support boat team will position themselves where capsize is more likely, such as near the gybe mark.

Shadowing

A support boat may be assigned to shadow or mark an individual dinghy or to travel in front of, behind, or in the middle of the fleet. This is particularly helpful during expedition style sailing or where there is concern for an individual dinghy helm/crew due to conditions, fatigue, multiple capsizes, inexperience or other factors.

Single support boat

Where there is one support boat it may be prudent to remain in the middle of the course. It may be advantageous to 'offset' - position the support boat closer to an area of higher risk but to remain within the confines of the course in order to respond to incidents elsewhere.

Regardless of what approach is adopted, support boat crews need to be dynamic. Helm and crew need to maintain a 360 degree watch at all times and be prepared to move position either to respond to an incident or to cross cover the other support boat who are responding to an incident. Good communication is key. Do not assume that the RO or other support boat crew can read your intentions. Ensure you know how many boats are taking part in the activity and continually count masts.

Rescues and assistance

A rescue for the purposes of this document is defined as any physical engagement with a person or vessel beyond normal patrol.

Your primary role is to rescue the sailors; their boat comes after. Remember the general order of safety detailed on page 1.

It should be noted that once physical help is given, a sailor may be disqualified from the race. Make your own assessment - if the situation allows, ask the sailor if they want help and how you can assist, but if a sailor is in obvious need of immediate help (injured, cold, confused etc) then give assistance without hesitation.

General procedure

- Approach the casualty person or vessel at a safe speed, maintaining awareness of your own position and route of egress if required. Stop at a safe distance.
- Select neutral gear and pause to assess the situation:
    - can you see the sailor?
    - is there more than one?
    - are all persons accounted for?
    - think about possible entrapment under hulls, catamaran trampolines or in rigging;
    - be mindful of fatigue - being in the water for even a short amount of time can be exhausting.
- Kill the engine if you get too close to persons, limbs or rope.
- Try to maintain situational awareness:
    - effect of tide and wind;
    - be aware of lee shore situation (wind blowing onto the shore);
    - be ready to anchor.
- For a dinghy, position the support boat bow to bow, use the dinghy painter or support boat bow line to secure the dinghy;
- Being aware of ropes clear of the propeller, slowly reverse the dinghy until it's pointing into the wind. This should make it easier for the dinghy helm to bring it upright;
- If using the person overboard ladder, the support boat crew must hold the ladder whilst it is over the side. Once the casualty has hold of the ladder, the crew should pull upwards and inwards to assist the casualty out of the water.

Additional considerations for catamarans

- Always take instruction from the cat's helm (where their safety and wellness allow)
- Approach from windward, throw a long line to the cat crew, keeping hold of the end at the support boat. This should be passed over the furthest hull and secured to the **mast base (NOT the shroud)**. Reverse the support boat at 90° to the cat hulls. As the cat rights itself, be ready to let go of the line quickly.
- Safety crew can be put aboard the cat to assist where they are capable and willing.

Injuries and illness

In the case of injured sailors, the priority for the safety skipper should be to:

- Ensure the casualty is recovered from the water;
- Summon additional help through the RO, providing a situation report.
    - If emergency assistance is required, the RO can initiate a Mayday call or 999 call to the Coastguard.
    - RO may decide to abandon the race if the situation is severe or if appropriate safety cover can no longer be maintained for the remaining sailors.
- Follow the first aid action cards which can be found in this document and in the safety tubs (coming later in 2026).
- Render first aid for life threatening conditions - catastrophic bleeding, not breathing, unconscious.
- Get casualty to a place of safety. This will likely be the slipway at Simpson Marine in Newhaven Marina. When making contact with Newhaven Harbour control, you should ensure to state “entry to marina at speed due to critical emergency requested”.
- Render first aid for less serious conditions.

Please consider undertaking the RYA First Aid at Sea course, provided by the club, to enhance your first aid skills. This is taught by a Doctor using scenarios from real-life incidents.

Entering the water

Support boat crew members should only be expected to enter the water if they are willing, able and there is no other option. Boarding a dinghy to assist with righting or rescue where the situation/conditions allow is considered acceptable. However, as skipper, you should consider other options first. Your responsibility is to the safety of your crew as well as to any casualty.

Towing

Towing can be a necessary part of support boat duties and can be achieved astern or alongside. Tows can be secured in a variety of ways.

⚠ Towing is inherently dangerous. There is a risk of entrapment, injury, lines parting under load and fouled propellers. Exercise extreme caution at all times whilst engaged in towing tasks. If in doubt, stop and anchor.

Before undertaking any type of tow:

- establish contact with the casualty and discuss the proposed plan;
- you must brief your crew and inform the RO/support team of your intentions;
- if assisting towards shore it may be necessary to establish a beach party to assist recovery. Inform the RO to arrange.

Throw lines in the white bucket must not be used for towing but can be used for pulling tow lines and for throwing to a person overboard.

Dinghy helms will have varying levels of ability and experience. It is important to establish that the helm knows what to do during a tow and coming ashore after the tow has been disconnected. Do not assume that they know and offer guidance as appropriate.

Dinghy tow astern - preferred option

Dinghies being towed astern can secure the towline around their mast as low as possible with a couple of turns and holding the line aft of the mast. This will provide a strong point for attachment as well as a way for quick release of the tow. Dinghy must be actively helmed and centreboard at least half way raised.

Ensure the tow rope on the support boat is aft of the boat and not across the A frame. Crew must manage the line and monitor its location in the water to ensure that it does not come into contact with the propeller. This is especially important when coming to a stop and the line becomes slack as the towed vessel catches up.

Dinghy tow alongside - only if necessary

Dinghies can also be towed alongside by crews holding onto the dinghy/RIB and slowly motoring forward. This can be good for getting a dinghy to shore and letting go at the last possible moment without the need for setting up towing lines. Otherwise the painter can be secured to a cleat within the RIB. Secure the towed boat as far forward as possible so the towing boat's propeller is well behind the towed boat's transom to aid steering. Ensure the main sail is dropped before commencing the tow.

RIB towing RIB astern

Use the throw line from the casualty boat to throw to the rescue boat. Rescue boat attaches their tow rope to the throw line and the casualty boat pulls the tow rope back aboard. Disconnect the tow rope from the throw line and attach the tow rope to the casualty boat's bow. Tow rope on the rescue boat must go aft of the boat and not across the A frame. Crew must manage the line to prevent slack becoming entangled with the propeller.

RIB towing RIB alongside

Using bow and stern lines, secure the casualty boat as far forward as possible so the rescue boat's propeller is well behind the towed boat's transom to aid steering.

RIB towing Ark astern

Tie the tow line from the rescue boat through Ark's bow roller and cleat off. Watch for slack in the tow line to prevent it becoming entangled in the propeller.

RIB towing Ark alongside (only within confines of harbour)

Ensure RIB engine is behind the transom of Ark to assist with the steering. Secure with a bow line, bow spring, stern line and stern spring. Lines should be tight to ensure maximum control.

Ark towing RIB astern

Run the rope through astern fairlead and cleat off on the bow cleat of the RIB. Crew to manage the line to keep clear of Ark's rudder/propeller.

When retrieving the towing line, it must be fed back into the red bucket, never coiled.

***THERE WILL BE PHOTOS OF EACH OF THESE SETUPS ONCE ALL BOATS ARE BACK IN THE MARINA AND WE CAN TAKE THEM

⚓ Anchoring

Your anchor is a critical safety item and must be ready for deployment at all times.

Anchoring RIBs:

1. Approach the area coming up into the weather (wind blowing the boat backwards);
2. Pick up the anchor from the tub in the front of the boat and place it in the water - do not throw;
3. With the anchor held just in the water, slowly reverse the boat;
4. When the boat is going backwards, let go of the anchor and feed out the warp (rope) until it ends;
5. You need to put out about 4x the depth of water to set the anchor;
6. Although not normally necessary, you may need to gently reverse the engine to pull the warp and set the anchor into the sand;
7. Check shore positions (bearings or transits) to ensure you are not drifting and maintain a watch.

Retrieving RIBs Anchor:

1. Take hold of the anchor warp and pull it in. As you pull the warp, feed it into the tub. Do not coil the rope;
2. If the warp is difficult to pull in go gently forward with the motor but be cautious to not go over the warp;
3. When you get to the chain and anchor, feed them on top of the warp in the tub.

Anchoring Ark:

1. Approach the area coming up into the weather (wind blowing the boat backwards);
2. Take the anchor from the tub and lower over the side with the chain. Do not lower the anchor yet;
3. Make sure the chain from the anchor is not going to foul the fittings on the foredeck;
4. The chain from the anchor to the foredeck fairlead should be outside the boat;
5. Get Ark slowly into reverse and when moving astern, let go of the anchor;
6. Allow the warp to feed out through the front fairlead. Make sure the retrieving ring line is fed out with the warp (one end of the retrieving ring line is tied off in the cabin);
7. The anchor and warp should now be going off the bow fairlead;
8. Let out anchor warp to 4 times the depth of water;
9. Tie off on the winch and adjacent cleat;
10. Check shore positions (bearings or transits) to ensure you are not drifting and maintain a watch.

Retrieving Ark's Anchor:

1. Make sure Ark's engine is started and in neutral. The capstan must not be operated without the engine running;
2. Undo the anchor warp from the cleat and take one turn clockwise around the capstan;
3. Press the lever on the switch beneath the capstan (not the button);
4. With the capstan running, pull the warp to put pressure on the capstan and the warp will start to come in. Feed the warp into the tub, do not coil the rope;
5. As the rope comes in make sure the retrieving ring is not trapped by the foredeck fairlead. If it is trapped, then go slowly forward on the engine until the ring drops. Do not go over the warp;
6. When the chain appears at the front fairlead, stop pulling on the capstan and cleat off the warp;
7. Pull on the ring retrieving line and pull the anchor and chain to the side of the boat. It can then be brought into the boat and fed into the tub. It sometimes takes quite a pull to achieve this.

If there is any sort of problem or doubt, lower the anchor. This prevents drifting and allows you time to think and request assistance if needed

Berthing and packing up

Before entering the harbour, gain permission to proceed from the port control - see VHF Radio Communications section.

Enter the harbour on the right hand side. Be aware that fishing lines from the east pier can extend quite a way into the channel.

Observe the speed limits as signed on the harbour walls.

***THE MARINA IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING WORKS. ONCE THESE ARE COMPLETED AND BERTHS CONFIRMED, PHOTOS OF WHERE AND HOW TO BERTH WILL BE PROVIDED.

Packing up

- Raise the RIB engine
- Isolate the battery
- Remove the fuel tank and secure the fuel line connector off the bottom of the boat, facing downwards to prevent water ingress
- Ensure all equipment is left tidy and in the correct positions for the next user
- Check for fishing lines around the propeller
- Dispose of all litter
- Take keys, fuel tanks, safety tubs and parking permit back to Seaford
- Debrief with the RO
- Report any faults with the boat or equipment to the Bosun.

 Debriefing and feedback

NSSC is a safety conscious club that believes in open and honest feedback and takes all safety concerns seriously. To that end, when all activities are completed, it is a good idea to debrief the session to discuss what went well, what can be improved on, any equipment defects that need raising to the bosun, and if anyone has any safety concerns.

Safety
- What were the incidents that occurred?
- Were there any other situations where people felt unsafe? (eg. helm forgot kill cord, conditions were too rough)

Performance
- What went well?
- What didn't go so well?
- How could we improve for next time?

Equipment
- Did anything break?
- Was anything found broken?

People
- Is everyone ok?
- Does anyone need support after any incident?

Findings from the debrief should be reported via email to safety@nssc.org.uk (there will also be a QR code to scan on the support boat helm consoles and in the race box, coming later in 2026).