

## **Hong Kong, China Rowing Association**

### **Report of the Panel of Enquiry into the Swamping of Boats in Tolo Harbour on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2007, immediately prior to the Long Distance Race planned to be held on that day.**

#### Introduction

A long-distance race for eight and four-oared boats over a course of approx 5.5 km between Wu Kai Sha and Sha Tin Rowing Centre was scheduled to be held at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2007. Whilst making their way from the boathouses in the Shing Mun River to the starting point at Wu Kai Sha, three eight-oared boats encountered rough water at the mouth of the Shing Mun River and were swamped; another boat was swamped when returning from the starting point to the boathouse. 36 competitors (including coxswains) were involved. Rescue boats deployed by HKCRA were inadequate to assist all of the competitors. Marine Police were called by an observer (a rowing member on a bicycle) to assist the rescue. All competitors were subsequently rescued with no serious injury reported and the equipment returned to the boathouses, although one eight oared boat was damaged.

Statements were provided to the Association by members of the affected crews, from others who witnessed the incident, and from the officials in charge of the race. A Panel of Enquiry was commissioned to investigate the circumstances of the incident and to issue recommendations on improvement actions to be taken.

#### The Panel of Enquiry

A Panel of Enquiry was established, comprising:

Mr. Michael TANNER, Chairman of HKCRA  
Mr. David SORTON, a Director and Chairman of the Safety Committee of HKCRA  
Mr. IP Chi Kin, Chairman of the Competition Committee of HKCRA.

The Panel of Enquiry convened at 0900 on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2007, at Shek Mun Rowing Centre.

#### Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the Panel of Enquiry were:

- To better understand the cause of the incident;
- To determine whether the HKCRA guidelines for Water Safety were followed;
- To determine whether the HKCRA guidelines for Water Safety were adequate, and, if not, to recommend improvements;
- To identify areas for further improvement in both safety and operational management of the rowing competition programme;

- To review whether or not to continue with the scheduled Head of Shing Mun (Sculling) on 11 February 2007 and, if so, to review the Racing Course and safety procedures to be taken in the event;
- To review other actions suggested in the Incident Report, namely:
  - the mandatory wearing of life jackets by rowers;
  - confirmation of the updated Safety Code as soon as possible;
  - review overall safety procedures and provision of safety equipment/measures by the Association;
  - consider any appropriate action to promote the concept of safety in rowing to Clubs and rowers and to the media.

#### Documents Considered by the Panel

The Panel considered the following documents (all of which are appended to this report):

- The Incident Report – prepared by the Organiser (HKCRA), and including statements from the involved crews;
- A location plan of the Racing Course;
- Chief Umpire’s Report;
- Newspaper clippings;
- List of the crews involved;
- Race Notice, Notice to Competitors, Guidelines to Competitors, Start List and Entry Summary;
- Statement from a member of RHKYC, witness of the incident, but not a victim.

#### Conclusions of the Panel of Enquiry

1. The Panel notes that no Safety Officer had been appointed for this competition, and that the Chief Umpire had assumed the role of Safety Officer, a role that he was, nevertheless, fully qualified to assume. However the Panel considers that, as the Association has trained a number of Safety Officers, every effort should be made to appoint a Safety Officer for every event and that the Safety Officers who have been trained be advised that this is the Association’s intention. If more trained Safety Officers are required in order to meet this target, then further training courses should be arranged.
2. Other than the matter of the Safety Officer, the Panel considers that the Association’s Code of Practice for Water Safety was followed by the organizers and officials on this occasion.
3. The Panel considers that the Association’s Code of Practice for Water Safety does not adequately cover situations such as those experienced on this occasion, particularly in respect of the adequacy of safety boat cover, the emphasis on monitoring of changes in weather and water conditions and the actual responsibility for taking decisions to delay or cancel an event.
4. The Panel considers that the cause of the incident was rough water around the area at the mouth of the Shing Mun River where it flows into Tolo Harbour. The Panel noted that wash from large motorised boats occurs in Tolo Harbour, but it was not clear whether such wash added to the normal wave action on this

- occasion. It is noted that the boats were swamped in the area around the mouth of the Shing Mun River and that this indicates that the build up of waves was at its maximum in this area. What is also apparent is that water conditions at the river mouth appear to have deteriorated between the time of first inspection and the time of the incident. The decision to cancel the race could have been made earlier, judging from water conditions in the river channel prior to the event, as reported by witnesses, if additional condition checks had been made.
5. The Panel **recommends** that, whenever the conditions are in any doubt at the time of the initial course inspection, or if weather forecasts suggest that a deterioration of conditions may occur in the period leading up to or during the event, than further inspections should be conducted at closer intervals prior to the start of the race and during the race and if there is any doubt about the suitability of the conditions, the race should be abandoned and any crews that are in danger should be closely escorted back to their boathouse. This is particularly the case for Head races which require boats to go outside of the Shing Mun River where there is less protection from wind and where there is also wash from large boats.
  6. The Panel **recommends** that Race Organisers should position officials at the pipe bridge (2000m start point) and at the river mouth, to monitor water conditions and to immediately instruct crews to stop and turn back in the event that the race is abandoned or conditions are found to have deteriorated. This will prevent additional crews going out into Tolo Harbour when conditions are found to have become dangerous or risky.
  7. The Panel notes that, although crews should take responsibility for their own safety, in some cases they do not have the experience and watermanship to do so, and therefore an event organizer must be prepared to take the decision to abandon a race as soon as this becomes necessary. The Panel **recommends** that at all regattas and races a **3-person Group** should be formally responsible to decide if racing should be postponed or cancelled. This Group should comprise the Chairman of the Organising Committee\*, the Chief Umpire and the Safety Officer jointly. (\*-In the case of races organized by HKCRA this may be a Director or nominated staff member.)
  8. The Panel does not consider it necessary to cancel the planned event starting at Wu Kai Sha on 11<sup>th</sup> February. Nor does the Panel consider it necessary to abandon this racing format from Wu Kai Sha in future. However, the Panel **recommends** that a number of **immediate** measures must be taken in order to improve the safety of events conducted outside the confines of the Shing Mun River.
  9. **Recommendations:**
    - (1) In addition to the safety and rescue boats mobilized by the Association, at least two additional motorized boats, capable of carrying up to 10 passengers (likely to be the type hired normally for the HK Rowing Championships and for sea trips), are mobilized for all events that involve boats leaving the Shing Mun River. These boats should be manned by a member of the Organising Body or an Umpire equipped with walkie-talkie and mobile phone communication, and stationed in pre-agreed locations alongside the racing course such that they may be called to assist any crew

in difficulty within a minimal period of time. The boats should be equipped with rescue equipment including buoyant rope (30m), safety buoys (rings – at least 2 on each boat) and thermal blankets (6 on each boat).

- (2) ALL persons on HKCRA motor boats, including staff, umpires and boat drivers shall wear life jackets at ALL times whilst aboard. This recommendation applies at all times in all circumstances, and not just for regattas or other competitions.
- (3) The Safety Committee shall carry out a review of Safety Equipment to be carried on motor boats (by March 07);
- (4) All rowing boats used in Hong Kong under the jurisdiction of HKCRA shall comply with FISA Buoyancy Guidelines from 1 January 2008. The Association shall provide advice to its members on the retrofitting of buoyancy to comply with these guidelines. With immediate effect eight- or four-oared boats not meeting FISA buoyancy guidelines shall not leave the confines of the Shing Mun River. (Note: pair oared and double and single sculling boats are not included in this mandate, owing to their inherently superior buoyancy when compared with longer boats)
- (5) Wearing of Personal Flotation aids (life jackets) shall be compulsory for all coxswains of crews rowing outside the Shing Mun River;
- (6) Personal flotation aids should be made available on loan to any rower at any time, however the wearing of such aids shall not be made compulsory for rowers owing to the restrictions they impose on mobility when rowing. (Note: This aligns with the rules of most other national rowing federations around the world); The Association should make further investigations to find such aids of a design which can be worn by rowers should they wish to do so.
- (7) The Association should liaise with Marine Department and the Marine Police to advise them of the details of all events being held outside Shing Mun River, including the time, number of crews and destination. The Association shall obtain emergency telephone numbers from Marine Department and Marine Police and shall make these available to all crews, officials, marshals and umpires of the event. (This shall apply to all Adventure Rowing events as well as races.).
- (8) To improve the awareness of competitors to safety issues, the Association shall:
  - a. Publish posters, on a cyclic arrangement, focusing on various specific safety aspects of rowing;
  - b. Consider the production of a Safety Video;
  - c. Display a Safety Notice Board at all Rowing Centres, displaying messages such as:
    - i. Check your Boat Carefully BEFORE an outing
    - ii. All Hatch Covers MUST be in place
    - iii. All boats must have BOW BALLS fitted
    - iv. All shoes must have HEEL RESTRAINTS fitted
    - v. Check the weather forecast before an outing

- vi. STOP and DO NOT ROW if you feel at all unsafe
- vii. If your boat swamps, ALWAYS stay with the boat until help arrives
- d. Organise a Water Safety Month each year
- e. Organise Capsize Drills (discuss with Technical Director and Coaching Committee)
- f. Reinforce the '50m in light clothing' swimming requirement by checking that each participant (or parent/guardian of minor) has declared swimming ability, but do not extend to conducting swimming tests at this time;
- g. Arrange Rescue Drill for Staff, Safety Officers, Umpires and other Race Officials;
- h. Produce Safety Checklists for Association Safety Management and for Regatta Safety Officers

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