



BRITISHROWING

# HRSA Monthly Report

March 2022

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

## Incidents in March

### Take care at bends and corners

There were several head-on collisions at bends and corners as a result of crews straying onto the wrong side of the river by either cutting the corner or taking the corner too wide.

In one incident, a 2x was on the correct side of the river, returning to the club landing after an outing. An 8+ took the bend opposite the club too wide, at speed, into the path of the 2x. The 2x was too close to the bank to be able to change course. A member on the club balcony, and a member of the crew of the 2x, shouted to the 8+ to stop rowing. The 8+ slowed, the 2x backed down, and the collision was narrowly avoided.

In another incident, a 2x was rowing upstream midway between the bank and the middle of the river. There were two 4xs about to cross the river and travel in the opposite direction, they were on the correct side of the river. A 1x, travelling downstream, appeared from behind the 4xs and changed course to pass the 4xs on the wrong side of the river by cutting the corner. The crew of the 2x shouted to the 1x but there was no time to prevent the collision. The impact to the side of the 2x caused some damage, and resulted in snapping one oar in the 2x. The impact was partially absorbed by the oar. Both boats stayed afloat.

In a further incident, a J15 8x doing a racing piece was travelling downstream and a Masters 4x- was travelling upstream, both on the correct side of the river. Approaching the corner, the cox of the 8x underestimated the steering performance of the 8x and overshot the corner. When it was clear the two boats were going to collide, STOP was shouted from the bank, a minor delay from the crew of the 8x led to the boats colliding at low speed. The J15 squad, as a whole, had a debrief explaining that when STOP is heard from a coach or recognised voice then, they must immediately apply the emergency stop procedure. They must not wait for the cox to call it.

In yet another incident, a novice junior was put in the steer's seat of a coxless 4x. The conditions were blustery. The 4x steered wide around a corner whilst sculling downstream and collided with a 2x sculling upstream on the correct side of the river.

Please take care when rowing around bends and corners. Keep a good lookout and try to keep away from the centre of the river. If necessary, reduce speed. Stop and adjust direction if there is a risk of straying to the wrong side of the river. If someone shouts STOP, then stop immediately. Clubs should review their navigation plans and identify any corners or bends where it is unsafe to row at full speed.

### Take extra care in fast flowing water

There were three notable incidents in fast flowing water.

Two experienced scullers in 1xs were turning and became too close to each other and clashed blades and were then swept into a fixed obstruction. The ebb tide was flowing fast and the two scullers were pinned to the holding buoy and the chain. Both boats remained upright although one was swamped. The scullers were rescued by a launch within four or five minutes. The boats were retrieved later. The lesson learned is for scullers not to turn too close to moorings on a strong tide and not to get in each other's way.

A 4x was waiting to turn at a turning point but was delayed by the many other boats in the vicinity. Being aware of the flow and as no-one was attempting to turn, the crew thought it best to keep moving. The boat turned and was just about to set off when another 4x, that had been ahead in the queue, started to turn. The other 4x was allowed to row through and in so doing it meant that the flow caught the first 4x and it was drifted into a post. One rower managed to hold onto the post and the remainder of the crew kept their blades on the water. They were able to push away from the post. There were two learning points; one is that the 4x should have remained in the queue and waited to turn and the other is that in fast flowing water you must keep rowing in order to keep control of the boat.

Another 4x consisting of two relative novices with two moderately experienced oarsmen at bow and stroke was racing downstream in a time trial and was being pushed along by wind and stream when they clipped something, which sent them into the bushes where the bow became wedged. The wind and stream caught the stern, pulled it round and then it wedged again and the strength of stream started to push the boat over. The crew let go of downstream handles and capsized. Two safety launches were in attendance within two minutes. The crew was uninjured and the boat was undamaged.

Please take extra care in fast flowing water.

### **Stay away from weirs**

A 4- was moving off from the landing stage doing exercises. The boat had already been realigned as it was getting too close to the top of the weir. Course correction was quickly rendered ineffective and lack of boat speed and less experienced bowman led to the boat getting too close to the weir and subsequently being swept over it. The whole crew disembarked and straddled the boat until help arrived from the club. Three crewmen were taken to hospital, no adverse effects were reported. Please remember that boats will not respond to the rudder unless they are moving through the water and the surface water speed increases dramatically as you get closer to the weir.

Two stable 4x+s with a mixed experience crew were practising boat manoeuvring and navigation skills above a lock under bankside supervision. One boat approached the lock a little wide and was caught out by the strength of the stream towards the weir channel and became wedged against a pile upstream of the lock gates. The boat remained stable but the crew could not move it unaided due to the strength of the flow. The crew kept hold of the safety ropes while waiting for assistance. The situation was resolved by the lock keeper reducing the flow by closing off one half of the sluice gates. The crew were then able to manoeuvre themselves and row back upstream.

Please avoid getting close to weirs in any conditions and particularly when water flow is high. There is more information on flow over weirs in the Safety Alert, Keep Clear of Weirs, [here](#). Clubs may wish to establish rules to prevent their crews from approaching weirs. They may also wish to mark or sign the limits of safe navigation so as to avoid approaching too close to weirs.

## **Check the shoes too**

A 2x capsized and both rowers immediately clung to the boat above the water as they were trained to do. However, their feet remained in the shoes within the boat. Due to the old material used in these shoes, the heel restraint ripped the sole off the shoes rather than releasing their feet. The heel restraints were attached appropriately prior to boating. Both scullers managed to free their feet. There was no harm to either sculler and they didn't feel in danger. The club is checking that the shoes in all its boats and, all coaches will ensure that boats are checked thoroughly prior to crews boating. Please learn from the experience of others.

## **Examples of good practice**

There were several incidents that contained items of good, or best, practice.

In one incident, an experienced junior performance sculler took part in an open club session, rather than a junior performance session. The sculler heard a call from a slower double and believed it to be permission to overtake, moved out without taking a look and collided with a sculling boat coming in the opposite direction damaging his wooden boat. This was a popular open session with boats of differing speeds on a narrow river (one lane in each direction) and required both extra care, patience and tolerance. The junior was advised by her coach to take responsibility for overtaking and always ensure the way is clear before moving out. Other juniors have been similarly advised to prioritise safety over maximum performance. The CWSA sent a Safety Note to the members email group emphasizing that it is always the overtaking boat's responsibility to ensure the way is clear. A call from a slower boat must never be interpreted as meaning 'clear to overtake'.

Another incident occurred at the end of an outing; the crew of the 4x+ were tiring and stroke caught a crab then let go of his blades. The rest of crew panicked and also let go of their blades. Together with the strong cross wind, this caused the boat to capsize. All crew members able to get on top of upturned hull and boat was towed to bank by the coaching launch. This is the correct response. The club has learned to try to include one senior crew member in novice boats, especially when wind is forecast to increase.

The post incident actions in another incident were exemplary. A bow rower was ejected from an 8 whilst racing. The rower went into the water, and at some point hit her head. The race was immediately halted using klaxons. Event Medics in a launch following attended immediately and recovered the rower from the water. She was taken by medical launch to a medic station. She was warmed up and assessed by Event Medics, who recommended that she be taken to A&E so that she could be assessed there for possible concussion. She was transported to A&E. She was diagnosed with concussion so will have to make a gradual return to rowing.

## **One danger of overtraining**

There was an incident thought to be caused by overtraining and not recognising symptoms of overtraining. The rower was said to have suffered with Rhabdomyolysis; this is usually caused by an injury to a skeletal muscle. It is a condition in which there is a breakdown of muscle tissue that leads to the release of muscle fibre contents into the blood. The symptoms include dark, reddish urine, a decreased amount of urine, weakness and muscle aches. Early treatment with aggressive fluid replacement reduces the risk of kidney damage.

The rower had an overnight stay in hospital with intravenous (IV) support. The rower is taking some time to rest (as prescribed by the doctor) but there are no further consequences. The rower has a 9 week recovery plan.

I am advised that "Exertional rhabdomyolysis is a relatively uncommon condition but can have very serious consequences if not recognized and managed appropriately. The athlete will typically present with pain, tenderness, weakness, and swelling in the muscles affected after engaging in physical activity."

The club will review the training programme and communicate to members that additional training should not be undertaken. It will also raise awareness about the signs of overtraining. Please learn from this experience and take care with your training plan.

## **Broken bones**

There were two incidents that resulted in broken bones, in one, a rower rowed following the fracture.

In one incident, a junior fell and landed on her side and hurt her hip and elbow. Her 4x was ready to go and she completed the outing while in pain but struggled getting the boat out. She went to the hospital on the same day and, after an X-ray, it was confirmed that she had broken the humerus. I have been advised that it is surprising that she was able to do anything with a fractured humerus, let alone lift or rowing, and that further damage could be caused as she may displace the fracture further and/or damage the tissues surrounding the fracture (including nerves and muscles).

In another incident, a spectator at a head race slipped on wet grass and fell heavily on his leg. First Aiders provided pain relief and advised the casualty was taken to hospital by ambulance. This incident reinforces the need for adequate first aid cover at competitions. The injury required surgery to a broken ankle and the mobilisation of a dislocated knee.

In yet another incident, a highly experienced crew member in their 70s tripped over a trestle and fell, while helping carry an 8 from the stage to the boathouse. It is reported that this could be a career ending injury at this age. The crew was reminded to listen, heed and follow cox instructions, when moving the eight.

Please take care of your mates, if they are injured or ill then do not let them row. It is all very well being a rough, tough rower but nobody is invincible.

## Debris in the water when water levels are high

When water levels are high then debris, that was previously on the bank can float and be swept downstream.

In one incident an 8 was proceeding upstream on a lit section of the river when it collided with a floating tree. The boat was travelling at speed and came to an instant stop. The bows rode up on the tree and became stuck. The crew eventually managed to free the boat and paddle it back. The bows were very badly damaged and the paddling action resulted in the bow snapping off. All the parts have been recovered and are shown opposite. Afterwards the conditions were reviewed and it was agreed that it was reasonable to have the outing. There was nothing visible at the time to suggest there were any hazards. The river had returned to a near normal winter level following recent flooding and river conditions had been good all day. There was no physical injury to any crew member although the incident was a shock to all concerned. The repair is expected to cost about £3,500

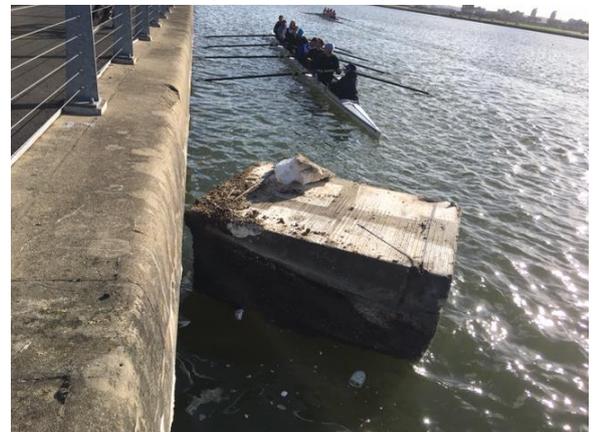


In another incident a 2x capsized when an oar was trapped under a large log.

In further incident a 4x hit a semi-submerged tree, the boat stopped immediately and pivoted around, becoming wedged under the bridge. It was trapped at bow and stern. A rescue launch attended and pulled the trapped stern free.

In another incident, an 8 hit one of several large polystyrene blocks (shown opposite, these appeared to be industrial waste, roughly the size of a fridge). There was a strong blustery wind and the blocks appear to have been blown out of the neighbouring dock and across the rowing course. The block deflected off the bows and into the bow rower's rigger, causing the rigger to snap.

Please keep an extra careful lookout when, and after, water levels have been high and when winds are strong.



## A simple bit of Physics

A J15 2x capsized and the crew tried, and failed, to right the boat and could not climb on top of the inverted boat. The coach, in a launch, then instructed the crew to swim the boat to the bank and directed them to aim the boat 45° into the stream in the mistaken belief that this would minimise the distance that they could have to swim. The quickest route to the bank across any stream is to aim directly at the bank and accept that the stream will take the boat downstream. The drift downstream does not matter providing there are no hazards downstream and exit from the water is not hampered by reeds or a wall, etc. The route through the water at 45° to the stream is 41% further than the route heading to the bank. If you need a more detailed explanation then please let me know.

## **Look after yourself and your crew mates**

A rower was warming up and began to feel heart palpitations ( reportedly common for the particular rower). Their heart rate rose to an unexpected level during the warmup, rower felt light headed and fainted shortly after being taken out of the boat. The rower was taken to hospital where the doctors suspected a Thyroid problem. They have undergone an ECG and blood tests. The club is waiting for the results of tests to fully understand the cause but subsequently the rower has been fine.

I have been advised that *“Heart palpitations need to be investigated and managed properly, not left until the rower feels unwell or collapses – by then it may be too late.”* Please take care of your crewmates.

## **The Incident Reporting system**

There was an enquiry about the possible purchase of the Incident Reporting software. The enquirer has used it on a number of occasions, and believes it to be an excellent piece of software - user friendly and simple to complete. He was impressed too by the multitude of reports in different formats in the annual analysis report.

The response was that we recognise the value that the Incident Reporting system brings to British Rowing and know that it is the envy of other sports NGBs. We have worked hard, over the years, to develop an ethos where people feel "safe" using the system. We have tried to develop a no blame culture. People submitting Incident Reports know that the information they provide will be treated with respect. They know that they are making a positive contribution to rowing safety.

This enquiry and response were shared with technical and commercial colleagues so that they can take this matter forward.

## **A correction**

Last month I wrote about the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AED) and Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) that the casualty should be in the prone position. This is incorrect, they should be in the supine position, i.e. flat on their back or face upwards (Thanks Noel).

Please remember the importance of CPR when someone has collapsed and is not breathing. It keeps blood circulating round the body, thus helping to keep the casualty alive. Please do not be distracted by all the hi-tech equipment, the basics are important too.

## RowSafe Updates 2022

The process of updating RowSafe is almost complete. There are still some minor corrections to be made, in particular to convert the Event Risk Assessment Template to a Competition Risk Assessment Template and correct the links to it in RowSafe. Links to the recent Safety Alerts will also be added and all links will be checked. As usual the changed text will be highlighted in light yellow. The changes that have been completed are as follows:-

The terms Barriers and Controls are used throughout RowSafe, in some areas (particularly in Chapter 9, Topics Covered in Risk Assessments, and in the example Risk Management Plans these have been expanded to “Barriers (to reduce the probability)” and “Controls (to reduce the severity of harm)”. This is in response to a request from Coach Developers so as to make the terms easier to understand.

There is an additional expectation of Club Officers and Competition Organisers to register for [Met Office weather warnings](#) in the following Sections:-

- 3.2, Club Safety Plans and Safety Rules
- 4.6 Alternative Arrangements Plan, (for Competition organisers) and
- 9.1 Weather, (for Clubs and Competitions).

Advice not to wear Dryrobes, denims, jeans or heavy cotton clothing at any time when afloat has been added to Sections:-

- 3.2 Club Safety Plans, under “Safety Rules should include”.
- 4.9 Touring,
- 7.1 Boats and Blades and
- 8.1 Cold Water Immersion and Hypothermia.

The following statement has been added to the Coaches part of RowSafe section 3.5, Training Camps and Rowing on Unfamiliar Waters.

- Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs before or while coaching. This could compromise safety.

Section 3.6, formerly “Swimming Competence”, now renamed “Competence in the Water”, is still being discussed.

In section 3.7, Capsize Training, Buoyancy aids have been introduced alongside lifejackets.

In Section 4.2 Competition Safety Plans and Safety Rules, the following has been added under Competition Officers and Organising Committees are expected to:

- Work with competing clubs and competitors to "discourage" them from allowing people to row in conditions, etc. that they cannot handle.

In Section 4.4 Competition Rowing Safety Adviser Job Description, the expectation for CoRSAs in relation to the incident reporting system has been changed to:-

- Promote and monitor Incident Reporting at the competition and the reporting of all incidents to British Rowing.

This makes it consistent with the expectation of Club Rowing Safety Advisers.

In Section 4.6, Alternative Arrangements Plan, the criteria that will cause the competition to be abandoned, suspended, or altered should be objective rather than subjective and include specifications for wind speed, wave height and steepness, temperature (high and low), etc.

The conditions should reflect the "exposure" of the venue and the capacity of the competitors.

In Section 5.1, Steering and Navigation, it was previously assumed that the understanding of sound signal, day shapes and lights was only relevant to rowers in coastal waters and on the sea. It is now recognised that these signals are also used in other areas so the expectation has been changed to specify that these should be understood where there are motorised vessels. This section contains links to learning materials for each of these types of signals.

In the following Sections-

- 2.2 Make up of Club Induction Pack
- 6.1 People new to rowing,
- 6.1.1 Safety Advice for People new to Rowing,
- 7.3 Safety Aids,
- 8.1 Cold Water Immersion and Hypothermia, and
- 9.10 Rowing in Floods Risk Management Plan

the concept of "floating" has been introduced alongside that of "swimming".

In Section 7.1, Transport and Trailers, the expectation to check "That the towing bracket and its fixings are in good condition" has been added. This will be linked to the relevant new Safety Alert.

## **The impact of Alcohol on Safety**

There was a request for guidance that referred to the case of a rower who died in an incident at a training camp in December 2004. Alcohol consumption by coaches was a contributory factor as it clouded the coaches' decisions. It is understood that the coroner said that this should not be allowed.

Alcohol is covered, to an extent, [in Safeguarding Handbook 3](#), but this is principally in relation to children and adults with needs.

The following statement appears in the UK Coaching Code of Practice for Sports Coaches, [here](#):-

- Do not smoke, drink alcohol or use recreational drugs before or while coaching. This gives a negative image and could compromise safety.

There is no mention of alcohol anywhere in the current version of RowSafe. In the case of training camps, the relevant section of RowSafe is 3.5, Training Camps and Rowing on Unfamiliar Waters although there are expectations for coaches in almost every section of RowSafe.

Section 3.5 of RowSafe has been amended to incorporate the UK Coaching advice in relation to safety. The issues relating to smoking and having a negative image are important but RowSafe is primarily concerned with safety.

## Why Swimmers Drown

There was a notification from the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) that the [Lifesaving Foundation](#) has produced a free e-book explaining why swimmers drown. A summary is available on the Lifesaving Foundation website. In the summary you will see that there are three reasons, as follows:-

Why do swimmers accidentally die by drowning?

1. They get into trouble unnecessarily.

This is from poor preparation, ignorance, or overconfidence.

2. They don't know what to do when they get into trouble.

3. They do the wrong things first because they don't know what to do.

The most common mistake is swimming when they should stay put.

They should also follow the advice in RowSafe and in the British Rowing Capsize and Recovery Training and **Stay with the boat**.

## Medical kits and prescriptions for Solo Ocean events

There was a request for advice from a doctor in Australia who is involved in outdoor events and support. He was looking for information on long-distance rowing (solo) events. He asked to be put in touch with appropriate medical resources to discuss common issues and a list of medical equipment and specific medications suitable for >100 day endurance events. I forwarded this request.

An internet search and revealed this:-

*"Common health issues and advised treatments reported in an ultra-endurance ocean rowing race"*

on the British Medical Journal website [here](#), it shows that the most common medical problems in events like these are Dermatological and Musculoskeletal disorders, and Seasickness.

I also explained our recent learning about the protracted time it takes to recover to full fitness following Covid and referred to the paper in the British Medical Journal [here](#), the Safety Alert ([here](#)) and the information in my January Monthly Report ([here](#)).

The doctor provided his proposed list of medical equipment and prescriptions. My colleagues at Atlantic Campaigns have kindly agreed to assist.

## Rules for wearing lifejackets

There was a request for information on the rules for wearing lifejackets. It was explained that this is normally a matter for clubs. Rowers are expected to take care of the safety of themselves and others and clubs are expected to ensure that they do. Clubs are expected to have rules to control the behaviour of their members.

The use of lifejackets when afloat is so fundamental and obvious that there should be no need for rules.

Rowers who cannot swim or float should wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid. This is explained in more detail in section 3.6 of [RowSafe](#). All coxes and people afloat in launches, etc. should also wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids. Please understand that RowSafe is a guidance document. Section 11 of the [British Rowing Regulations](#) deals with safety and tends to put pressure on clubs and others to act in conformance with this guidance. However, we seldom make this link.

I was then asked whether the guidance mentions any mandates on the provision of life jackets or buoyancy aids to junior rowers. I explained that the simple answer is no. It depends on whether they can swim (and now float) and not on their age.

In RowSafe it says:-

- Make lifejackets available to all rowers and ensure that they are worn by non-swimmers (and people who cannot float – see above).

There are many references to juniors, the most helpful in this case is:-

- Determine whether lifejackets should be worn by juniors who have not completed a capsize drill based on a risk assessment that includes the circumstances and their ability.

If, for example, the rowing is on a canal or shallow river where the advice to rowers could be "if you fall in then stand up and walk ashore" then there is little point in them having a lifejacket unless the water is cold.

In a several places RowSafe says:-

- *Promote a higher level of care for junior, beginner and adaptive rowers.*

## Rescue techniques for an adaptive rower

There have been protracted discussions on the best method to rescue a fixed seat adaptive rower (who is held in his or her seat by straps) in the event of a capsize. This question was referred to the GB Rowing Team as it contains coaches of athletes with disabilities. The team responded with the considerations from GBRT coaches when posed with the questions asked. This response was very detailed, and helpful, and is available on request (write to [safety@britishrowing.org](mailto:safety@britishrowing.org)).

It should also be noted that a member of the team will be conducting a much more thorough investigation later this year for World Rowing with a specialist search and rescue team. It is expected that this will lead to much more conclusive advice.

## Capsize Drills

There was a request for information about the Capsize and Recovery Training. Firstly, is the capsize drill training a 'drill' or an 'assessment' - i.e., does British Rowing consider that, when carrying out a capsize drill, there is a component of a 'test' that could theoretically not be passed along with the training provided?

Secondly, do you know whether the provider of a capsize drill would be covered by insurance if they had taken the Capsize Drill Training course ([Capsize and Recovery - British Rowing](#)) but didn't have the UKCC Level 2 Club Coach qualification and BR Coach membership.

Finally, do you know how long the UKCC Level 2 Club Coach has existed/included capsize drill training as a component?

The response was that the capsize drill, as delivered by clubs, etc. is best thought of as a technical training exercise, nobody fails but you may ask people to try again. A few people may need several attempts before they get it right. The objective of this exercise is to enable people to find out what it feels like to capsize by doing so in a safe and controlled environment.

If, for example, they find that they cannot climb on top of their inverted boat unaided then this is not a problem providing they can lie across it. There is an easy technique for getting on top of an inverted boat and that is to make your way to the bow, push the bow down until you can push it between your legs and then pull the boat towards you so that it slides under your body. It has to be the bow otherwise there may be a painful interaction with the fin.

Some clubs will combine the capsize drill with a swim or floating test. Depending on the club's judgement on the need to be able to swim or float, then that could be a test. Those people who cannot meet the club's specification will then have to wear a buoyancy aid or lifejacket, when afloat, until they can.

If a club believes that someone is capable of delivering the club capsize and recovery training, then they could consider them to be capable of coaching and fill in the form to enable them to obtain Coach Membership and all the insurance benefits that this provides.

It takes some finding but a link to the form can be found in the FAQs in the insurance microsite, [here](#). This is what it says:-

*I don't hold a coaching qualification. Where can I find the club endorsement form?*

*Please send this link to your school, university or club committee or relevant person i.e., Head of Rowing when you are a teacher, to fill out the form. It can be found [here](#).*

On your final point, I qualified as a coach in about 2006 and the capsize training was part of the course then. I think that it had been for some years prior to that.

## **Do not wear Dryrobes afloat**

Concern was expressed when a cox was seen wearing a dryrobe during a head race. This is dangerous as the coat is very heavy and it would be difficult to swim or float when wearing one. They have labels warning wearers not to wear them when afloat.

These coats are ideal for the purpose that they are designed to fulfill. This is to keep the wearer warm after activities such as cold water swimming or rowing.

A Safety Alert has been produced and issued; a copy is included with this report. The Safety Alert explains why it would not be safe to wear a lifejacket either under or over a dryrobe.

## **Restricted access to the water due to Avian Influenza**

The restrictions, in one area of the country only, continue and access to specified waters continues to be suspended. The clubs affected have made a Freedom of Information request and have been provided with the information they requested although much of it has been redacted. This has been shared with colleagues at British Canoeing and the Royal Yachting Association.

It appears that the suspension was initiated by one local official of the Health Security Agency based on a false belief that there would be a risk to life if boaters went afloat on waters containing birds that had died from Avian Influenza. This belief was not supported by objective criteria and the lack of criteria appears to be making it difficult for the authority to withdraw its suspension. The authority recognises the action taken by British Rowing to reduce the risk to rowers by issuing a Safety Alert. However, it did not comment on our quantified risk assessment (see last month's report) although this may have been redacted.

This continues to be a major irritation to many people in this area who would otherwise go afloat.