



## **DRAGON BOAT SWEEPS GUIDELINES AND SAFETY PROCEDURES**

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## **1.0 SAFETY PROCEDURES GUIDELINES**

The following safety procedures are guidelines for DBSA members and may be amended and/or added to account for the local conditions. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with: South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook – “Respecting our Waters”.

### **The Sweep is responsible for:**

- The safety of the crew.
- The safety of the boat.
- The safety of other water users.
- The image your boat presents to the public.

### **Assume nothing:**

- Do not assume your crew knows what they are doing.
- Do not assume your crew knows what you are doing.
- Do not assume skippers of other boats know what you are doing.

### **As a sweep, you must:**

- Always do a quick check of the sweep arm, sweep oar, and sweep rowlock to make sure there is no obvious damage. Also check bungs, seats and ensure you have bailers before taking the dragon boat out for training. (When there is a drummer get them to check the drum tie-down as well as the drum seat).
- Inspect the dragon boat and all related gear to ensure all is in good condition before taking it out on the water.
- Know how many people are in your boat; know who is in the boat.
- Ensure the water and weather conditions are safe to go out in and will remain safe for the duration of the training session. **NEVER TAKE A CREW OUT ONTO WATER DURING A THUNDER STORM.**
- Be aware of the changing currents, tides, and wave conditions that may arise and how to manage your training in accordance with these conditions.
- Always read your latest tide & time and weather report before taking a dragon boat out onto the water.
- If unsure or not confident with taking a crew out in inclement weather, either abort the session or let someone more experienced take over sweeping duties.
- Ensure all crew members understand the chain of command.
- Ensure all crew members know the command calls and the expected response.
- Be aware of any special conditions that may apply to an individual paddler.
- Be able to manage the team and exercise authority over team members.



- Ensure all people on the boat who need to wear PFDs {Personal Floatation Devices} and that they are properly fitted.
- Ensure all team members understand the numbering off or buddy system and how to use it.
- Ensure all crew members are aware of and understand safety procedures and what to do in the event of a capsize or emergency.
- Make sure the boat is balanced before heading out on the water, If not swap people around as an unbalanced boat only makes your job harder and the boat easier to capsize.
- Head count (count the number of people in the boat).
- Don't carry out an exercise immediately you are told to (by anyone, including the coach) if you are not happy with your boat's position. You are the one that will get the blame if anything goes wrong!
- Remember the sweep is the one giving the commands.

**The sweep overrules the coach, the captain and the sweep examiner as the sweep is the one responsible for the boat.**

## 2.0 Land Procedures

There are a number of procedures to be undertaken on the land to ensure the safety of a crew before heading onto the water. The following sections provide a guideline as to what should occur on land they are not extensive, but provide an outline on what can assist in preventing accidents.

### Initial Safety Procedures

Accidents can occur at the most unlikely times. As a sweep, you must provide the necessary precautions both on and off the water. The following are some guidelines from the time paddlers have stretched prior to training and getting into a dragon boat:

- Paddlers must always ensure when lifting and carrying a Dragon boat they use safe techniques, such as bending at the knees when lifting and not bending their back.
- Always ensure there are enough paddlers to lift and carry a dragon boat (suggested of a minimum of 10 paddlers) are required to lift and carry a dragon boat). If there are not the minimum required number, ask other crews (when available) for help.
- When lowering a dragon boat ensure it is put down slowly with paddlers bending at the knees.
- Decide the seating positions of paddlers before entering the dragon boat. Have paddlers of similar weight seated with one another.

- A dragon boat must not be pushed into the water whilst paddlers are standing. If a dragon boat is to be moved advise those standing to be seated and only then move the dragon boat.
- Paddlers should wear suitable footwear in a dragon boat.
- Paddlers unable to swim 50m fully clothed must wear a life jacket (PFD)
- After sunset and on waterways other than West Lakes all paddlers must wear a PFD
- Sweeps and juniors under 18 years must wear a PFD at all times

## 2.1 The Conditions

As with any water sport, and because of the environment itself, there is always an element of danger. Because of the size and design of the dragon boat and the water conditions in which training and racing takes place (that is placid water) dragon boating is generally safe and capsizing, especially in such conditions and unless the crew is at fault, is a rarity. However, people are people and eventually an accident may occur. Dragon Boat Racing is no exception to the rule and it is the duty of all who participate in the sport – competitors, race organisers, coaches and officials alike – to be aware of the potential dangers inherent in the sport, be safety conscious – not safety extreme – and ensure that Dragon boat racing is conducted in a responsible manner. In addition, keep to waters within the capabilities of your sweeping ability. Be aware of weather forecasts – you must NEVER be on the water during a thunder or electrical storm. If training before sunrise or after sunset, it is the sweeps responsibility to ensure the dragon boat does not go on the water without lights – this is a legal requirement and failure to observe may result in a substantial fine as well as place your crew in danger. Some instructions for sweeping at night:

- A White Light must be on the front of the dragon boat, at least 1 metre above the water line and clearly visible for 360 degrees (not obstructed by paddlers). Please make sure you are familiar with the relevant requirements within South Australia. Refer to: South Australian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook – “Respecting our Waters”.
- A Red Light must be on the rear of the dragon boat.
- Ensure you use a loud voice – with clear instructions.
- Be extra observant!



## 2.2 The Buddy System

The crew should number off from the front of the dragon boat and be made aware that they are responsible for the person they are paired with (seated next to in the dragon boat) and that, in the event of capsize; their first responsibility is to ensure that their partner (buddy) is accounted for and safe. This is called the “buddy system” and it gives each person in the dragon boat a specific responsibility for another. The first paddlers – number 2 left and 3 right in row 1 of the dragon boat are responsible for the drummer (1) and the rear paddlers 20 left and 21 right in row 10 are responsible for the sweep (22)

## 2.3 Water Procedures

In any sport, because of the environment itself, there is always an element of danger. On the road, the rule is to keep to the left, on the water it is the opposite: keep to the right. The general rule is if it is bigger and faster than a dragon boat – keep out of its way! In training areas and in shipping channels the rule is to keep to the right (ie the opposite the Australian Road Rules). As a Sweep you should comply with navigation rules and keep as far to the right as practical (the opposite of road rules). Remember, that there is an obligation to avoid a collision even if you happen to be in the right. Ferries have right of way on the water so don't take them on under any circumstance. Rowing sculls are moving faster than a dragon boat and the rower is facing backwards, so always give way - be particularly careful of powerboat drivers. If at any time you think it necessary, report any problems with powerboats to the local Waterways or Maritime Authorities. Safety is the prime concern for sweeps and in all instances it a matter of COMMON SENSE.

Remember: while on the water the sweep is in control of the dragon boat and has the ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew. Also, everyone associated with a crew should ensure that dragon boating is conducted as SAFELY AS POSSIBLE

## 2.4 On the Water

In all water conditions, good or bad, the key to safety is the application of good COMMON SENSE by all those taking part in the activity. Playing around in a dragon boat and deliberately capsizing it, even in warm sunny conditions, can be dangerous to both the crew on the water and other users alike. In certain circumstances it could be lethal; a dragon boat moving at speed through the water cannot easily be stopped and a crew in the water from a capsized dragon boat cannot easily be seen!

## 2.5 Water Safety Precautions

The most likely time a capsize will occur is when paddlers are loading into or getting out of a dragon boat and the following guidelines should be observed:

- The back or front of the dragon boat should be in the water
- Two paddlers hold the front or back of the dragon boat steady
- Paddlers load and unload from the front or back of the dragon boat
- When loading and unloading, the paddlers should avoid erratic movements
- Paddlers should keep their weight low and when moving through the dragon boat.
- Once seated, a paddler must sit on the seat in the middle of the dragon boat. Only when their paddling partner is about to sit down should they move to their paddling side.
- The strokes (front row) and the drummer should be the last to enter and the first to leave the dragon boat or vice versa if loading from the back
- All paddlers should know their buddy seated next to them. The drummer is looked after by row 1 and the sweep by row 10. Remember you and your buddy's safety is dependent on each other.
- When paddlers are seated, they should have their paddles in the "Paddles Flat Position"
- Once all paddlers are seated, the sweep must complete a head count. As mentioned previously, number 1 is the drummer followed by number 2 left, number 3 right, number 4 left, number 5 right and so on till the sweep at number 22.
- Finally, the sweep must ensure the dragon boat is balanced before leaving the shore. If after leaving the shore the dragon boat is still unbalanced, stop the dragon boat and make adjustments i.e. swap the paddlers from left to right and vice versa.



## 2.6 Calls

Call	Action
RACE START – Are you ready	The first call from the starter. Drummer holds up both hands if crew not ready
RACE START – Attention	Move the paddle to the start position (paddles up). Paddles can be placed in the water (not moving) ready to take the first stroke
RACE START – Go	Start Paddling - In a race, the starter usually fires a gun or blows a horn or megaphone siren, they may even shout the word "GO"
Back 2/3/4 rows	Only the paddlers in the designated rows paddle under the sweeps instruction. Other paddlers have their paddles out of the water. This can be used to manoeuvre to the start position.
Dig it in / Stop the boat / brake the boat	Paddlers stop the dragon boat quickly by holding the paddle vertically in the water
Draw front left or right	Is used by the nominated seats to pull the front or back of the dragon boat in line. The opposite side should hold their paddles flat.
Draw back left or right	Is used by the nominated seats to pull the front or back of the dragon boat in line. The opposite side should hold their paddles flat.
Ready to take me Forward/Backward	Move the paddle to the start position of either forward or backward.
Go	Start Paddling
Head Count	At the beginning before leaving the beach, bank, pontoon
Hold Water	This is when the paddlers hold their paddles still in the water to halt the dragon boat motion and to keep the boat stationary.
Let it Run	Paddles come out of the water and the Dragon boat glides to a stop
Paddles behind	Paddles are placed in a backward position for paddling backwards
Paddles Flat	Paddlers press the blade of the paddle flat on the water to stabilise the dragon boat
Paddles Out	Paddles come out of the water and the Dragon boat glides to a stop
Paddles Up	Move paddle to the start position (paddles up). Paddles can be placed in the water (not moving) ready to take the first stroke.
Rest/Relax	Crew members lean forward with arms straight, resting on the gunwales and the paddle at 90-degree angle, nearly touching the paddler in front of them.



## 2.7 NAVIGATION SOUND SIGNALS

**The type of signal used depends on the length of your vessel.**

- 100 m or more—use whistle, bell and gong.
- 12 m to less than 100 m—use whistle and bell.
- Less than 12 m—use any effective sound.

**Manoeuvring and warning signals—vessels in sight of one another.**

- I am altering my course to starboard—one short blast.
- I am altering my course to port—two short blasts.
- I am operating astern propulsion (in reverse)—three short blasts.
- To another vessel, when their intentions are unclear, or you doubt they're taking enough action to avoid a collision—at least five short and rapid blasts.

**Warning signals—vessels in narrow channels**

- I intend to overtake on your starboard, please alter your course to permit me to pass—two long and one short blast.
- I intend to overtake on your port, please alter your course to permit me to pass—two long and two short blasts.
- Agreement by the vessel being overtaken— one long, one short, one long and one short blast.
- A vessel in doubt about the intentions or safety of the overtaking vessel's manoeuvres — five short and rapid blasts.
- A vessel nearing a blind bend in a channel— one long blast.
- Response from vessel on the other side of bend—one long blast.

**Restricted visibility signals**

All vessels operating in limited visibility should drive slowly and be prepared to stop or alter course. If you hear another vessel's warning signal forward of the beam, stop or reduce speed to a minimum until the other vessel has moved away from your course.

**The following signals are used in restricted visibility and at night.**

- Power underway and making way—one long blast every two minutes.
- Power underway and not making way—two long blasts about two seconds apart at least every two minutes.
- A vessel that is: not under command; restricted in her ability to manoeuvre; constrained by her draught; a sailing ship (not under power); fishing; or towing or pushing— one long and then two short blasts at least every two minutes.
- Vessel towed (if manned) immediately after the signal from the vessel conducting the tow—one long and three short blasts at least every two minutes.
- Pilot vessel on duty—may also sound four short blasts in addition to applicable signals as above.
- Vessels at anchor: — to warn approaching vessel—one short, one long and one short blast — vessels less than 100 m long—one short, one long and one short blast, plus ring bell rapidly for five seconds every minute — vessels 100 m or longer—one short, one long and one short blast, plus ring bell for five seconds every minute from the bow and then immediately hit gong for five seconds every minute from the aft.



- Vessels aground: — as for ‘Vessels at anchor’ above, but preceded and followed by three separate and distinct bell strokes — vessels less than 12 m long, if unable to make the appropriate signals, must make another effective sound signal at least every two minutes.

## 2.8 WATER RULES

On the road, the rule is to keep to the left, on the water it's the opposite: keep to the right i.e. move in an anti-clockwise direction.

- The general rule is if it's bigger, faster and more expensive than a dragon boat; keep out of its way.
- In training areas and in shipping channels the rule is to keep to the right (*i.e. the opposite of Australian road rules*).

As a Sweep you should comply with navigation rules and keep as far to the right as practical:

- Watch for rowing sculls as the rower is facing backwards and other personal craft such as kayaks, Outriggers etc.
- If the boat capsizes, remember the buddy system and stay with the boat until help arrives.
- Remember stay calm and don't panic.
- Remember while on the water the sweep is in control of the dragon boat and has the ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew.
- Also everyone associated with a crew should ensure that dragon boating is conducted as **SAFELY AS POSSIBLE**.

It is common throughout maritime law that a system be used to distinguish the direction of a moving vessel. Below is a brief outline of common terms used on all boats. It is important to know them as they come into play when operating a boat.

### **PORT (Left) (RED): STARBOARD (Right) (GREEN)**

**When another vessel is approaching you, your port side will always pass the port side of the other vessel. This is called PORT to PORT PASS**

**BOW** - Front or forward portion of a boat (The very front tip of the boat.)

**STERN or AFT** - Back or Back end of the boat

### **General water safety:**

- Always keep the bank on your right side (Starboard side) of the boat
- Paddlers should be aware of what is around them; safe practice is to keep a good look out - if in doubt stop.
- Stationary crews should be as close as possible to the bank as practical, out of the way of passing crews. Show courtesy to other crews
- Official competition organizers must ensure that all other local users and authorities are notified of their competitions and that water permits have been granted”.

**Remember we are smaller and far more tender (tippy) than a lot of other vessels on the water - so never expect anyone else to get out of your way!**



## **2.9 Balancing a Dragon Boat**

Before leaving the embarking area, the sweep should ensure that the dragon boat is well balanced. That is each pair of paddlers is similar weight or height and that generally, the heavier pairs are seated in the middle section of the dragon boat. The sweep should ALWAYS know the number of people in the dragon boat, both at training and on regatta days.

## **2.10 Reversing a Dragon Boat**

All sweeps should be comfortable reversing a dragon boat. Sweeps should practise reversing a dragon boat regularly. Always reverse towards your new line and not away from it. Point the back of the dragon boat towards the direction you intend to go before reversing. Never have the sweep oar in the water when reversing. This is a sure way of loosing control and falling off the back of the dragon boat. Only dip the sweep oar in the water as and when required. Too many sweeps loose control of the dragon boat when reversing. There are three things to remember when reversing a dragon boat namely:

- Always look behind to ensure there are no craft (especially another dragon boat) behind; and
- Reverse slowly as this is one of the more difficult aspects of sweeping.
- Keep the sweep oar out of the water except for light “flicks” to keep direction – do not reverse with sweep oar in the water.

## **2.11 Steadying a Dragon Boat**

A dragon boat will feel “tippy” if the crew is out of balance or moving about in an uncoordinated manner. To steady the dragon boat in such circumstances (and when sideways on to the wind or a wave pattern) the crew should be instructed by the sweep to lean softly over the side of the dragon boat and place their paddles flat on the water at arms length. With all of the paddles on the water in this manner (10 either side) the dragon boat is effectively stabilised. This is called “paddles flat”.

## **2.12 Stopping a Dragon Boat**

When manoeuvring, turning or racing a dragon boat it may be necessary to stop the dragon boat suddenly to avoid a collision with another vessel or dragon boat. It is important that the crew reacts quickly but safely. An unbalanced crew over-reacting can capsize their own dragon boat! The initial command should be “Stop the boat” or “Dig it in” followed immediately by “paddles flat” of the dragon boat is unstable and there is no immediate danger of collision. If there is a danger of a collision the command “stop the boat” should be given and the crew instructed by the sweep to do a reverse paddle stroke; that is all paddlers take a backward stroke with their paddle instead of a forward stroke. In a race situation when a collision is imminent, the sweep must immediately tell the crew to “Stop the boat”. Failure by the crew to stop the dragon boat in such circumstances can result in disqualification. Practise



stopping a dragon boat during training. Crew should know what to expect when a sweep calls "Stop the boat" or "dig it in"

### **2.13 Safety Equipment**

All clubs should have a First Aid Kit available during the training sessions. As a minimum, the kit should have, in a waterproof container:

- 50mm bandage
- Adhesive tape
- Adhesive bandages
- Tweezers
- Scissors or knife
- Exposure bag or emergency blanket; and
- 10m of rope (6mm diameter minimum)

### **2.14 Racing at a Regatta**

AusDBF holds regattas at venues throughout Australia. Not all courses have lanes marked down the course such as the Sydney International Regatta Centre. At venues where there are no markings all sweeps should talk to one another and let each other know the landmark they are heading for at the other end of the course. At a regatta, safety comes before results. If you lose control of the dragon boat that you are sweeping and look likely to hit another dragon boat then you must stop the dragon boat under your control. If you don't stop the dragon boat, your crew can be disqualified.

SAFETY FIRST in all instances. Some pointers for racing:

- Before sweeping at a regatta always check the race rules and ask question at the briefing for sweeps.
- Move to the start line promptly. Crew can be left behind!
- If at the start line you are not ready or experience a problem, ensure your drummer and you hold up your hands when asked "Are you ready". This ensures the Starter / Water Judge is aware of your difficulty.
- Brace yourself for the surge at the start of a race. Sweeps have been known to fall off the back of a dragon boat.
- If during a race collision is about to occur, instruct your crew to stop the dragon boat. Race controllers may have more sympathy if you stop dragon boat, than if you continue and have collision.
- Keep your crew calm and balanced once the race has finished. This is when capsizes can and often do occur.

## 2.15 What to do in the event of a Capsize

As mentioned previously, because of the size and design of the dragon boat, and the water conditions in which training and racing takes place, (that is placid water), dragon boating is generally safe and a capsized, especially in such conditions unless the crew is at fault, is a rarity.

In the event of a dragon boat capsizing:

- Each paddler should immediately account for their buddy
- The sweep should immediately ensure that all the crew are accounted for by calling out their numbers and noting the response or if this not possible by a head count.
- The crew must initially stay with the dragon boat and leave it in the capsized position or if water logged, in the upturned position
- When a dragon boat has over-turned no one should swim underneath it, but in such circumstances, it can be used as a floating platform, provided the crew space themselves evenly around the dragon boat.
- Alternatively, under the instructions of the sweep the dragon boat may be rolled back to the upturned position and used to support the paddlers by individuals holding onto the gunwales.
- In all situations the sweep should remain in control of the crew and, in a race situation, await the arrival of the rescue boats
- On the arrival of the rescue boats, any injured participants should be loaded onto the rescue boat and given first aid. The crew should move as directed by the sweep and paddle the boat to shore if practical. If not practical the rescue boats should load the crew (in shifts if necessary) and take them to shore. Collect the boat once all crew are safe and accounted for.
- Swimming the boat to shore should only be done under the control of the sweep and when the swimmers are capable and not at risk.
- Once the crew is safe, a rescue boat may be used to recover the dragon boat and equipment

## 2.16 Where there are no rescue boats

If in a competitive situation, there is no rescue boat available then in calm conditions, the whole crew may attempt to swim the dragon boat to the nearest safe landing point, as directed by the sweep. If conditions are not suitable for swimming the dragon boat, then as a last resort, the crew may leave the dragon boat and swim to shore in pairs, using the buddy, again under the control of the sweep. As with other methods, the crew must be accounted for at all times during the any attempts to swim the dragon boat or as pairs under the buddy system. However, in a training situation crew members are advised not to attempt to swim to shore unless they are wearing PFDs. Should there be no alternative but to swim for the shore then any crew member who is not wearing a PFD should join a buddy pair

with PFDs or make up a group (or groups) of three, to provide mutual support and assistance during the swim.

## **2.17 Recovery of a Dragon Boat**

As soon as the dragon boat is alongside the waters edge, all crew members must again be accounted for on the land and any injuries dealt with immediately. The dragon boat if upturned may then be turned right way up (in the water) and bailing commenced. The Dragon Boat SHOULD NOT be dragged out of the water unless there is only a small amount of water left in it, as this puts a considerable strain on the hull of the dragon boat. Once the dragon boat is almost empty of water it may be lifted on to the bank and checked for damage and all the equipment of the dragon boat accounted for.

## **2.18 The Paddler**

The following are some quick tips about paddlers, they must:

- Be a minimum of 12 years old
- Be able to swim, confidently 50m in clothing (with a shirt, shorts, sandshoes as a minimum)
- Be honest about his/her ability
- Be aware of hypothermia and other dangers, and take the appropriate precautions
- Practise capsizes, rescues and first aid, and be able to use all equipment in all likely conditions

## **2.19 Clothing**

All paddlers should dress for the conditions. In the summer months – a paddler's wardrobe should include:

- Race shirt or singlet top
- Shorts or paddling shorts
- Boat shoes or the like
- Hat, sun glasses, sunscreen
- Water bottle

However in the winter months, paddlers should dress for the conditions remembering that hypothermia can kill. As such a paddlers wardrobe should include:

- Wetsuit (without sleeves)
- Woollen or thermals leggings and top
- Windproof jacket
- Wetsuit booties (socks etc)
- Woollen beanie

Note: Cotton should not be worn when dragon boating in cool conditions. Jeans should never be worn on the water.

## **2.20 Swimming**

Ideally, all members in a dragon boat crew should be able to swim 50m, but as a minimum they must be water competent in cold and moving water and when



dressed in light clothing, that is, racing dress (shorts and race top) plus a waterproof top and trousers and light footwear (trainers, crocs, thongs, water shoes or similar)

## **2.21 Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)**

In a formal competitive event and on placid water course, in normal summer conditions, and providing that the individual can swim, the AusDBF Competition Regulations and Rules of Racing do not require an experienced competitor to wear a PFD, as a buoyancy Aid. In South Australia, PFDs must be worn at all venues with the exception of West Lakes (in daylight hours only).

**When to wear a PFD** - All paddlers who are unable to swim at least 50m or who are not water competent MUST wear a PFD when both training and competing. Where local regulations at a race site require water users to wear PFDs, all crew will wear them, irrespective of their experience in the sport. In such cases it is the Event Organisers' responsibility to notify crews whether or not the water operator provides PFDs and if NOT, it is the Crews Managers responsibility to ensure that the crew has sufficient of their own to cater for any conditions that they may encounter.

## **2.22 Alcohol**

Alcohol and water do not mix and this especially is applicable to dragon boating. At no time should a sweep be in control of a dragon boat while under the influence of alcohol, either at training or a regatta. Nor should a sweep take a crew onto the water when they are under the influence of alcohol. Some Corporate crews like to consume alcohol during a regatta. If you are a sweep at a Corporate Regatta and you feel that one or more of the crew members are affected by alcohol, report to the Chief Race Official prior to leaving the shore. The Chief Race Official will then make a call as to whether the crew should be allowed to race. NEVER make the call yourself.

### **3.0 SWEEPING GUIDE:**

Sweeps should stand in the boat. Standing allows the Sweep to have:

- Clear vision of the course and good all round vision of the team members in the boat.
- Ability to monitor conditions in and out of the boat.
- A clear line of sight between the Sweep and the drummer which enhances communication.
- Vocal commands that are clearly projected down the boat.
- The ability to use their body weight to aid in managing the steering oar.
- The added advantage of allowing the Sweep to use their body weight to help trim the boat so it rides level in the water.

#### **3.1 Basic Principles of Sweeping:**

The Sweep's stance is very important. Usually one foot is placed ahead of the other with feet shoulder width apart to give stability both fore and aft and side to side. Knees should be slightly bent and flexible, back straight, shoulders square. Place your feet in a comfortable standing position that will allow you to have good balance. The Left hand should be positioned towards the rear of the sweep oar, in line with your left leg. The right hand should be placed at the top of the sweep oar

Wear appropriate footwear - Wetsuit booties • Flat sandshoes etc., • something with grip, Not bare feet.

To steer well you must learn to be able to utilize the whole steering platform, moving back and forward maximizing the range of motion you have with the steering oar. The Sweep is looking forward past the front of the boat down the course. When the paddlers start to paddle full force, the transition can create quite a sudden jolt. There have been instances where a Sweep has flown off the back of the boat without the crew noticing until they paddle in some strange direction.

One of the most important things to do when arriving at the start line is to look down the course past the finish line to a spot on land - find a visual marker above the drummers head or centre of the two strokes such as a tree or a car, flagpole, anything that you can steer toward as it will give you a straight line down the course. The higher vantage point lets the Sweep keep their eyes on the horizon line or a spot in the distance to focus on to help keep the boat straight. Looking back, down or to the side, taking your eyes off the spot in front can easily send you off into another direction quickly. Slight movements with the oar will give great changes in direction, so be cautious.

A boat with an inexperienced team may be well trimmed (balanced) while stationary or paddling lightly then change quite dramatically during a race start as team

members lean forward and the upper part of their bodies lean out of the boat in full race mode. Your ability to quickly shift your weight to compensate will aid in trimming the boat.

**CALL COMMANDS LOUDLY AND CLEARLY!**

The people in front are 11m away, and can't hear you if it is windy or people behind them are chattering. Don't call too many instructions when they are paddling they won't hear you properly, so they won't hear a command either. If you want to instruct, stop the boat and get them to look at you {or try to} so you can see they are listening. A cox-mate or cox-vox is a very effective aid to communication in a boat.

### **3.2 GENERAL SWEEPING SKILLS:**

Steering the boat when moving is achieved by twisting the sweep oar, so that the blade tilts to about a 45 degree angle in the water - control and direction of the boat must be constantly checked to keep the boat in a straight line or your intended course. To achieve this gently steer the boat left to right or right to left of the boats intended course. Or twist the sweep oar left to go left or twist right to go right.

Note: Twisting the sweep oar is the preferred way of steering but takes practice, with pushing or pulling on the sweep oar you can over balance and fall in the water, you also place more drag on the sweep oar which will slow the boat down and cause the boat to rock from side to side.

The steering oar must be buried sufficiently in the water to enable the Sweep to steer when correcting the boat's direction; sometimes a little extra pressure is required to make the boat more responsive. Lifting the handle of the sweep oar slightly does this as this applies more pressure to the sweep oar in the water. Remember to keep the sweep oar between your shoulders and waistline and also keep the sweep oar in the water.

Try to avoid attempting to turn the boat by pulling or pushing on the oar as this could cause two things to happen; you could lose your balance and fall in water or cause the boat to become unstable and possibly capsise.

When turning the boat from a stationery position get your paddlers to help in turning the boat, get the front 3-4 paddlers on one side to draw water and the back 3-4 paddlers on the opposite side of the boat to paddle forward.

When swells are approaching the boat point the boat into the swell and get paddlers to hold water if stationary

If paddling do the same and let the wave roll under the boat; if approaching a large wave it's best to point direct into the wave and don't stop paddling. Also advise paddlers to lean out and no sudden movements.

When racing other boats, be aware that their bow wave will try to push your boat offline, so be ready to compensate for this. Also if you get too close you can actually get sucked into the wash of the other boat as well which then can cause the boats to collide. (*As a sweep you are required to keep clear water between paddler's blades of at least 2 metres.*)

When you become more experienced you may want to try keeping the sweep oar out of the water as much as possible when racing as this will provide the least resistance as the boat glides along the water. Be ready to plunge the oar back in quickly if the boat begins to veer off course.

### **Reversing a Dragon Boat**

All sweeps should be comfortable reversing a dragon boat. Sweeps should practise reversing a dragon boat regularly. Always reverse towards your new line and not away from it. Point the back of the dragon boat towards the direction you intend to go before reversing. Never have the sweep oar in the water when reversing. This is a sure way of losing control and falling off the back of the dragon boat. Only dip the sweep oar in the water as and when required. There are two things to remember when reversing a dragon boat namely:

- Always look behind to ensure there are no craft (especially another dragon boat) behind; and
- Reverse slowly as this is one of the more difficult aspects of sweeping. I.e. use only the back 3 seats to back paddle.

### **Be observant**

Watch for moving boats or small tender boats that travel from yachts moored on the waterway or to jetties. You need to be aware at all time of what is going on around you.

## **3.3 RACING**

Before sweeping at a regatta always check the race rules and ask questions at the briefing for sweeps.

- Move to the start line promptly. Crews can be left behind!
- Twist the sweep oar when cornering; this gives a sensitive, more stable response.
- In a side wind, the stern tends to get blown away; loading heavy paddlers at the back helps prevent this.
- Use back paddling on the opposite side of draw strokes to prevent boat moving forward.
- When aligning, use the wind by turning the nose into it and use it to take the nose round, only straighten up when the starter is ready
- When racing, do not endanger paddlers for the sake of winning. Always keep at least 2m between your paddlers' paddles and the other team's paddles.
- A sweep doesn't power the boat, so wherever you need help from paddlers, ask for it.



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- Always sweep as though it is an assessment!