

Ocean Racing Coaching Manual

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The Ocean Racing Coaching Manual seeks to co-ordinate the efforts of ocean racing coaches and coaching efforts under the International Canoeing Federation. It has been compiled collaboratively by means of a survey conducted with professional coaches and interested paddlers worldwide. It draws not only from the cumulative knowledge of its contributors but also the anecdotal knowledge and experience of the sport's most experienced athletes. The purpose of the document is to direct the coaching efforts to focus and teach the core Surfski skills and abilities required. It does not offer a constructed program or system but gives valuable insight into what a Surfski coaching and instruction program should include as a minimum.

International Canoeing federation
Ocean Racing Committee





Ocean Racing Coaching Manual

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Introduction

The following document seeks to outline key coaching pillars, skills and ability levels to help surfski coaches worldwide design and implement their coaching and instruction efforts. It is based on the cumulative and collaborated knowledge of professional surfski coaches worldwide, as well as with input from the sport's most recognized athletes and contributors.

The aim of the document is to co-ordinate the efforts of surfski coaches worldwide. With a more coordinated approach to coaching surfski paddling we can be sure that paddlers are proficient in the areas where it's necessary to be proficient in.

This document is not a set coaching or instruction program or coaching model to follow; each coach or training centre should seek to develop their own program or use a program which has already been developed. Rather this document outlines what the core skills and abilities are that should be taught as a minimum. Any developed program which seeks to instruct surfski paddling should in the least include the elements described below.

This manual was put together by means of an open survey conducted amongst current and past professional and voluntary coaches, as well as interested paddlers. It also draws from the vast anecdotal experience and knowledge of some the sport's most recognized athletes.

The information gathered was then disseminated and summarized following the data trends displayed. While it may not be conclusive, it certainly gives the reader valuable insight into what it means to paddle surfski as well as core skills required.



What is Ocean Racing

Before embarking on coaching and teaching ocean racing (Surfski) paddling it is important to define what it is. Surfski paddling has the following core characteristics:

- **Limitless** - Surfski paddling is a type of kayaking which is completely limitless.
- **Any Water** - It is a water sport which can be practiced on any body of water and in any conditions – oceans, river or lakes; high winds, no wind, high surf/waves and no waves; flat water or flowing water; on flat pools and through rapids.
- **3 Elements** – It's a sport which uniquely blends the 3 elements of adventure, fitness and competition. This is a sport for anyone who has an adventurous spirit, wants to be healthy & fit and likes to measure themselves in competition. There are only a few sports that incorporate and blend these 3 elements.
- **Heritage** - It's important to understand that its heritage is from the Surf Lifesaving movement and its roots are found in ocean paddling. The craft is called a Surfski, the discipline is called "Ocean Racing". For the purpose of the document we will refer to both in context.
- **Downwind Paddling** - The ultimate aim of surfski paddling is to paddle downwind in wild open ocean conditions or anything resembling these conditions. Thus any open body of water where the wind blows will be used to practice downwind paddling.

Key challenges

With increased growth in the sport there are 3 key challenges:

- Education
- Safety
- Regulation

We need proper paddler education, as well as education of authorities, to ensure the sport stays true to its heritage and ultimate aim. This must be in paddlers' abilities to ensure safety and in the awareness of authorities to know that paddlers are doing what they are supposed to do. If we jeopardize safety through ignorant behavior it will result in over-regulation from



authorities. As the main aim of surfski is open water downwind paddling, growth of the sport could result in ignorant and dangerous behavior. It will only take a few cases of blatant ignorance before the growth of the sport is stunted and hemmed in through authorities. We need paddlers and authorities to reasonably expect to see surfskis on the water on wild and stormy days as well as calm days.

Key Coaching Pillars

There are four key pillars that are foundational to the skills and ability levels needed for surfski paddling. Surfski coaches need to:

1. Differentiate between hard and soft skills and know how to coach them
2. They need to teach the craft, paddle, the various dynamics and how to use them
3. Paddlers need to be taught how to discern various paddling conditions and what they mean
4. Finally paddlers need to be able display safe paddling by correct use of safety equipment and through knowledge of the conditions.

The 4 pillars are:

- Skills
- Equipment
- Conditions
- Safety



Pillar #1: Required Skills

There is a particular skill set needed to be a surfski paddler. These skills can be loosely grouped into hard skills and soft skills. A hard skill is specifically the ability to either do something or not; it is a skill which can be rigorously tested and which can be easily defined, for example: remounting.

A soft skill is a more subjective ability to “be in control” of the situation. A good example of this is the skill of situational awareness: understanding your situation and being able to react to it, for example: knowing when you are in the impact zone. Typically this kind of skill is learnt first through explanation and then through time and experience.

Through consultation with coaches worldwide a list of 17 core skills has been identified. The ability to execute these core skills is also part of successfully teaching the other 3 pillars of Equipment, Conditions and Safety.

Pillar #2: Equipment Know How

Every paddler needs to have knowledge of the equipment: how it works, how to set it up and how to use it. For the surfski this will include the dimensions, weights, pedals, rudder and how to set up the leg length correctly. For the paddle this will include choosing the right size paddle and getting the length and feather set up properly.

Pillar #3: Different Conditions

Surfski paddling is limitless, and is practiced on any body of water, worldwide. It is important to frame what different conditions look like and what it means for the prospective paddler. It is vitally important that a surfski paddler’s skill set includes the ability to “read the conditions” and to “know their limits”. There are 3 elements to consider: Wind, Waves and Water temperature

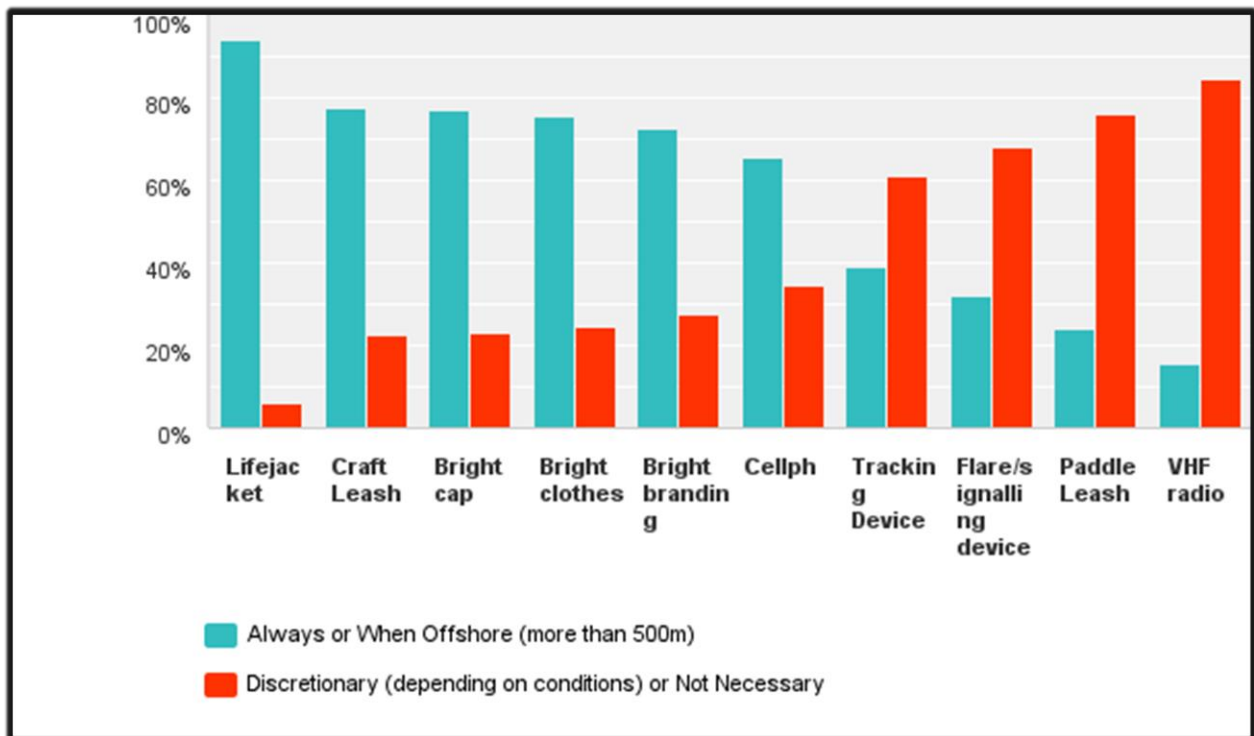
Pillar#4: Safety

This is a key challenge for surfski paddling. The ultimate aim of downwind paddling is of a very extreme nature and it is important that paddlers are coached and learn how to be as “safely extreme” as possible. It is reasonable to expect surfski paddlers to go downwind paddling, thus the priority is to ensure that it is done responsibly. Firstly there are the “hard” safety skills for

example using a leash or lifejacket and remounting; and then there are the “soft skills” for example “being aware of the conditions”.

Essential Safety Gear.

In a study completed by surfski coaches, industry professionals and interested paddlers worldwide respondents were asked to rank the list of safety gear used by surfski paddlers. They were asked to rate certain gear between being compulsory always, when offshore, discretionary or more hassle than necessary. It is interesting to note that wearing a lifejacket scored over 90% to be used always when paddling offshore, followed by a craft leash, bright clothing and then some form of communication.



Thus, the following safety gear is ranked in order of importance as should be used by surfski paddlers when paddling offshore. Note that there is a significant drop in ranking after a cellphone:



1. Lifejacket
2. Craft leash
3. Bright Cap
4. Bright Clothes
5. Bright Branding
6. Cellphone

7. A Tracking Device
8. A Flare or Signaling Device
9. A Paddle Leash
10. A VHF Radio

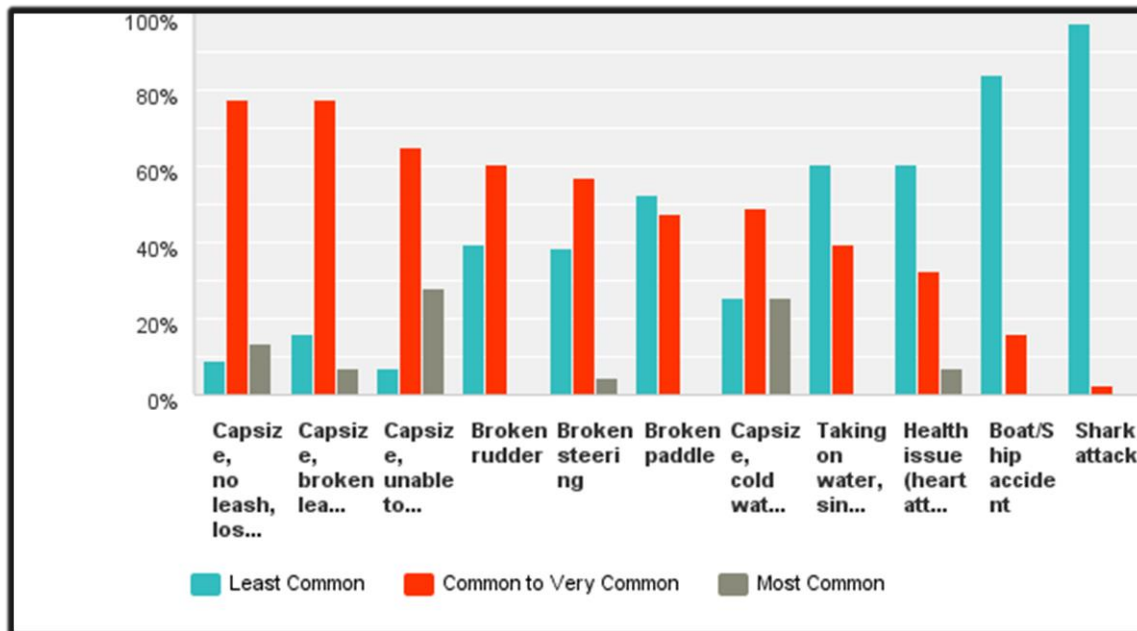
This list of ranked safety gear also gets particularly interesting when one considers what surfski coaches, industry professionals and interested paddlers have highlighted as the most common causes of surfski emergencies. It becomes plainly apparent why certain safety gear is absolutely imperative.

	Always or When Offshore (more than 500m)
Lifejacket	93.88% 46
Craft Leash	77.55% 38
Bright cap	77.08% 37
Bright clothes	75.51% 37
Bright branding	72.34% 34
Cellph	65.31% 32
Tracking Device	38.78% 19
Flare/signalling device	31.82% 14
Paddle Leash	23.91% 11
VHF radio	15.56% 7

Common Causes of Surfski Emergencies.

When it comes to safety there are primary causes to emergencies. From the survey results it is apparent that capsizing is by far the most common initial event which then leads to a subsequent happening such as losing the surfski (no leash or broken leash), or inability to remount. Thus we can understand why firstly stability and then secondly, the ability to remount, are core skills then need to be taught and mastered, followed by the correct use of safety gear.

Respondents were asked to rate the causes of surfski emergencies somewhere between Least Common to Most Common. The following Common to Very Common causes of surfski emergencies are listed in order:



1. Capsize, no leash, lost ski
2. Capsize, broken leash, lost ski (Note importance to now have lifejacket, swimming ability and comms)
3. Capsize, unable to remount
4. Broken rudder
5. Broken steering
6. Broken paddle
7. Capsize, cold water shock, unable to remount
8. Taking on water, sinking
9. Health issue such as a heart attack or dislocation
10. Boating or ship accident/collision
11. Shark attack

	Least Common	Common to Very Common	Most Common
Capsize, no leash, lost ski	9.09% 4	77.27% 34	13.64% 6
Capsize, broken leash, lost ski	15.91% 7	77.27% 34	6.82% 3
Capsize, unable to remount	6.98% 3	65.12% 28	27.91% 12
Broken rudder	39.53% 17	60.47% 26	0.00% 0
Broken steering	38.64% 17	56.82% 25	4.55% 2
Broken paddle	52.27% 23	47.73% 21	0.00% 0
Capsize, cold water shock, unable to remount	25.58% 11	48.84% 21	25.58% 11
Taking on water, sinking	60.47% 26	39.53% 17	0.00% 0
Health issue (heart attack, dislocation, etc)	60.47% 26	32.56% 14	6.98% 3
Boat/Ship accident	84.09% 37	15.91% 7	0.00% 0
Shark attack	97.67% 42	2.33% 1	0.00% 0



Skills & Abilities Required

Professional surfski coaches worldwide have outlined the following necessary surfski skills across 3 broad levels of ability – beginner, intermediate and experienced. There are 17 skills/abilities which should be displayed by surfski paddlers and virtually all of them carry through from beginner to experienced paddlers. These are the skills needed and which need to be taught and coached. They are:

1. **Correct Stroke & Technique** – the ability to take a stroke is central to being able to paddle. This is the first skill to master.
2. **Being Stable & Stability Methods** (e.g., brace stroke, legs out, correct set-up) – you must never sacrifice stability for speed, you must be stable before you are able. This is the second skill to master.
3. **Remounting the Surfski** – from both sides, using both methods. This key to safety and confidence while paddling.
4. **Wave skills** – paddling the surf zone and catching a wave. This is foundational to downwind paddling.
5. **Using Safety Gear** (skill, when and where) – correct use of safety gear is imperative.
6. **Craft Selection** – selecting a stable craft (Stability vs. Speed, Must be Stable before Able)
7. **Craft and Paddle Set-up and Understanding** – to paddle correctly and effectively your equipment must be correctly set-up.
8. **Boat Control:** Carrying, Maneuvering, Steering (e.g. rudder control etc.) – being the longest paddling craft available boat control on land, in the surf zone and offshore is imperative
9. **Control in strong wind** (20-25knots) and chop – knowing how to manage this big craft in wind and chop.
10. **Specific Downwind Abilities** – this is progression from catching a wave to light downwind conditions, to bigger downwind conditions
11. **Racing & Group Paddling** – how start, finish, train for and compete in an event; how to paddle in a big group with lots of surfskis around.



12. **Situational Awareness and Control**, especially awareness of waves & wind – being aware of your craft, the conditions and your companions.
13. **Ability Awareness** - knowing your limits & ability given the conditions. It is important the paddlers are aware of when certain conditions are beyond their ability.
14. **Local Community Awareness** – Which Groups, Local Routes, Where to find Instruction, Local Regulations, Typical Local Conditions).
15. **Time Based Experience** – certain of above skills take “time on the water” to learn and can be indicative of the paddler’s level.
16. **General Fitness** – Paddlers must work on general fitness as it is requisite for downwind paddling.
17. **Swimming Ability** (min > before 500m) – paddlers need to be able to swim at least 500m.

The 5 Key Skills

There are 5 key skills from this list that are foundational in overall ability and should be focused on to achieve complete mastery. These are skills which scale up as a paddler’s ability improves thus the paddler is never exempt from focusing on improving his or her ability regarding these 5 skills. As the paddlers is able to paddle in more hectic conditions, and improves, so these key skills will be improving all the time.

1. **Stroke & Technique.** Firstly paddlers should always be working on their technique, first on flat water and then as conditions get rougher. The ability to take a stroke correctly is foremost in being able to paddle the surfski
2. **Stability & Stability Methods** (e.g., brace stroke, legs out, correct set-up). Secondly, paddlers should always be stable. As capsizing is the biggest cause of emergencies, it is imperative that the paddler ensures they are stable and are able to maintain their stability.
3. **Remounting.** Thirdly it is imperative that paddlers are able to remount their surfski from both sides, using both remount methods and especially in the conditions that they aim to paddle in. The ability to remount should be used to gauge if a paddler is able to paddle in certain conditions.



4. **Wave skills** (e.g. paddling the surf zone, catching a wave). Fourthly the paddler should know how to paddle in waves as the ultimate aim of surfski paddling is to paddle in rough water. The foundation of this skill is paddling in and out through breaking waves on a beach. If paddlers do not have this where they live and paddle then they should make an effort to travel and do a course at a coaching facility where they can practice this key skill.
5. **Using Safety Gear** (skill, when and where). Fifthly, it is imperative that the paddler knows which safety gear to have and knows how to use the gear correctly. This means for example, being able to remount while wearing a lifejacket, knowing how to attach, remove and re-attach a leash and remount while wearing it, the ability to use a cellphone in the water through a dry bag, knowing how to shoot a flare.

The Seven Most Common Mistakes

It has been observed by professional coaches worldwide that there are 7 common mistakes made by paddlers with regards to their ability. Being aware of these mistakes will help coaches focus their coaching efforts in teaching paddlers to master them and avoid making them.

1. **Incorrect Technique Basics.** Especially as beginner paddlers, technique mistakes are common. Coaches should place extra emphasis on teaching the basics of the wing paddle and then the basics of the forward stroke
2. **Lack of Situational Awareness and Control** (especially waves, swell & wind). It is very common that paddlers forget about their situation as they are focusing on specific skills or elements. Paddlers should be coached to always be aware of their situation.
3. **Improper Craft Selection** (Speed before stability). This is the biggest mistake made by paddlers when investing in their first surfski: buying a less stable surfski that is faster, thinking that they will improve their stability as they go on. This must be absolutely avoided. An unstable paddler is a slow and unsafe paddler regardless of how "fast" the surfski is.
4. **Unable to Remount.** This is a key skill, but is also the most common mistake of paddlers especially when they go out into conditions which are slightly beyond their ability. It is important to teach the method of remounting correctly.



5. **Incorrect or Inability to use Safety Gear.** Paddlers often do not know how to use their requisite safety gear correctly. This has the opposite effect of creating safety and actually makes it more dangerous.
6. **No use of Stability Techniques** (e.g., brace stroke, legs out). When in paddlers paddle in choppy conditions they are often not able to maintain stability using basic techniques or by focusing on stability control using their core and the paddle strokes.
7. **Lack of General Fitness.** It is found that paddlers do not work on a general fitness level required to paddle in certain routes, conditions or events.

The Eight Most Neglected Skills

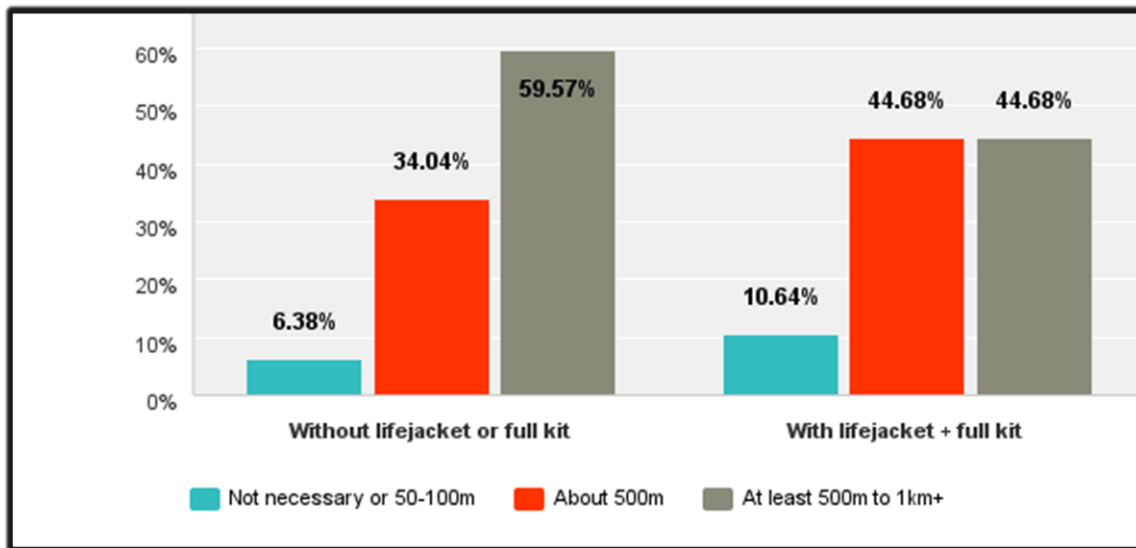
Of the seventeen core skills needed to paddle surfski properly, there are 8 skills which are routinely neglected by paddlers and should constantly be reminded of by coaches and teachers.

They are:

- 1. Technique Basics (Stroke, Rotation, Drive, Posture)**
- 2. Use of Safety Gear**
- 3. General Fitness**
- 4. Awareness of Conditions**
- 5. Craft & Paddle Selection**
- 6. Stability Techniques (e.g., brace stroke, legs out)**
- 7. Remounting**
- 8. Swimming Ability (min >500m)**

Swimming

Swimming is often overlooked as an essential skill for paddling. It is interesting to note that just on 90% of respondents in the skills survey felt that paddlers should be able to swim around 500m both with and without kit. This is a skill which should be promoted more.

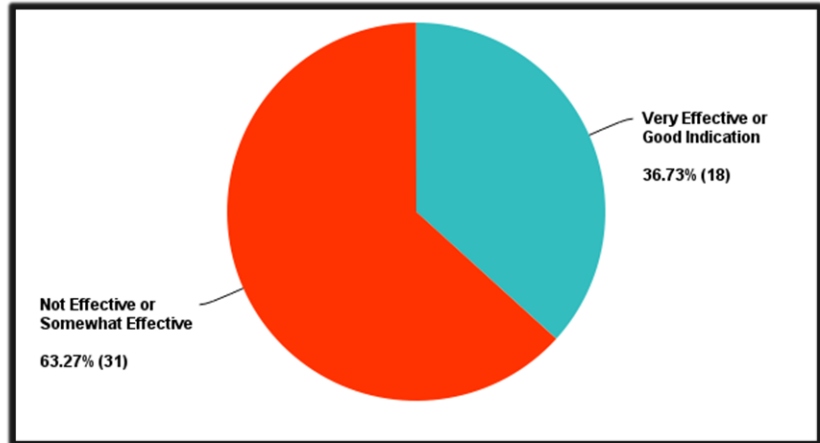


Identifying Different Levels of Ability

One of the key challenges for surfski paddling is the ability to identify different levels of ability as well as the severity of certain conditions.

Flat water speed

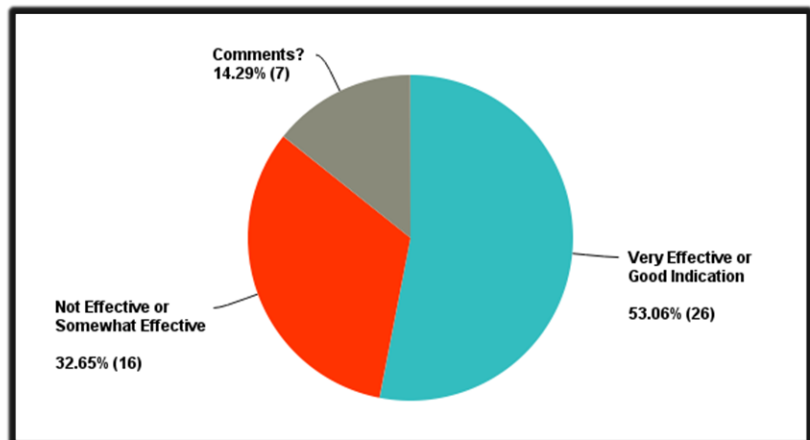
Flatwater speed is overall NOT an indication of open water ability. While it takes a proficient paddler to go fast on flat water, more than most surfski coaches feel that it certainly is not an indication of a paddlers' ability in open



water. Just because you can paddle fast doesn't mean that you will automatically be safe and proficient in rough water. Fast flatwater paddlers will have good stability and technique, but will not necessarily be good at paddling in waves, remounting or use of safety gear. While one can reasonably expect a fast flatwater paddler to have better stability and technique than comparative slower paddlers, this only makes provision for 2 of 5 key skills.

Wave skill

The ability to paddle through broken waves is a good indicator of a paddler's open water ability. Most coaches either indicated or commented that a paddler's ability to paddle through broken waves is a good indicator as to how well they



will perform in open water conditions. A paddler that is good at paddling through waves shows that they have confidence and will have practiced it many times, which assumes that they would've had to learn to remount many times too.



Conditions: Water Temperature, Wind Strength, Wave Size

Gauging the level of conditions is based on a combination of the water temperature, the strength of the wind and the size of the waves.

The following conditions were combined with water temperature. Respondents were then asked to rate the combinations in terms of Beginner, Intermediate and Experienced Only:

Low Wind = <10kn	Small waves = <2ft	Water Cold = <10°C
Med Wind = 10-20kn	Med Waves = 3-6ft	Water Mild = 10 - 18°C
High Wind = 20kn+	Large Waves = 6ft+	Water Warm = 18°C+

The higher the probability of immersion or getting wet multiplies the safety factor of conditions but does not necessarily affect the difficulty level. That being said water temperature should most certainly be considered when gauging the severity of conditions.

The difficulty factor of conditions is a combination between the wind strength and the size of the waves. Generally the bigger the waves or swell the more difficult conditions will be even when the wind is light. High winds and small waves and swell however, are also considered to be more difficult.

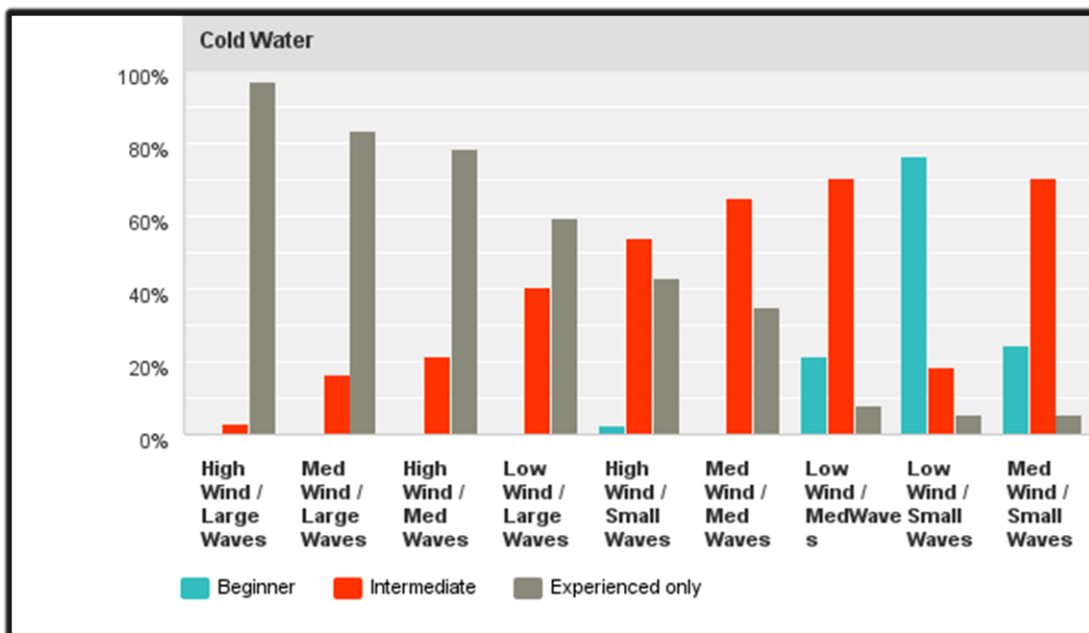
When one combines the water temperature with the wind and wave conditions the consensus is that the colder the water, the more experienced you need to be in medium to high wind and medium to high waves.

When the water is warmer there is a tendency to allow less experienced paddlers to venture into higher wave conditions if the wind is light, and vice-versa (higher wind/lower waves), but wind trumps waves in terms of rating the levels of difficulty.

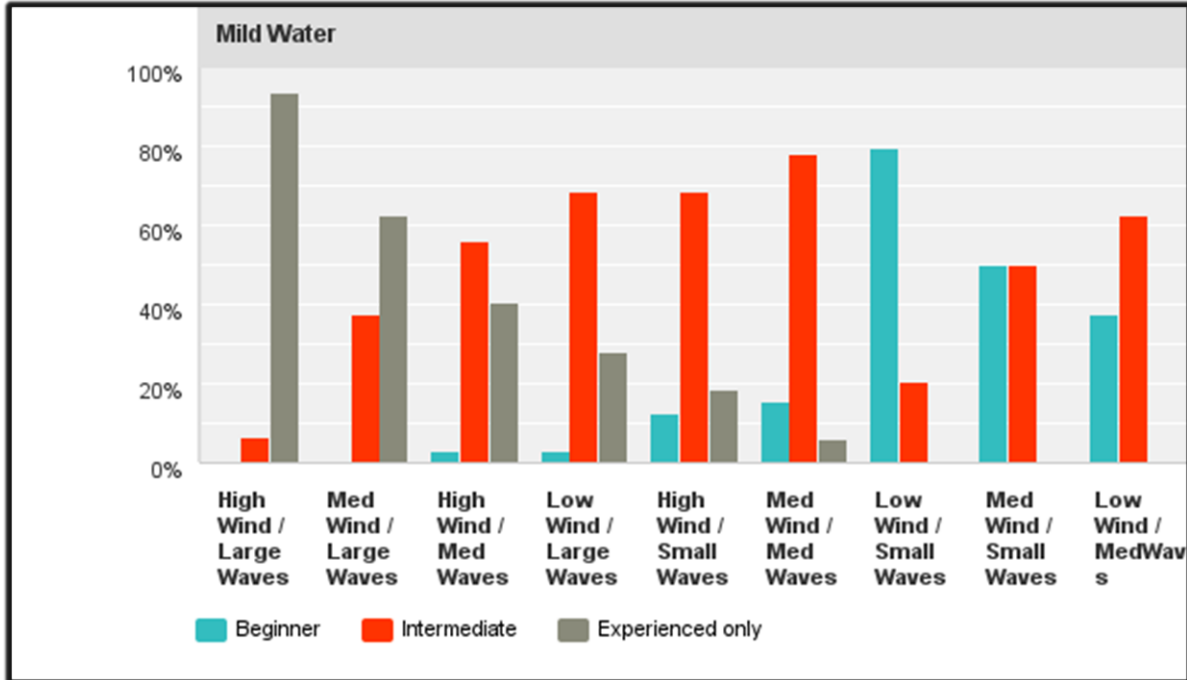
In summary, this report concludes that future rating of conditions should first be based on an objective measurement of wind strength, which then considers wave size (height and period) and then water temperature.

Cold Water vs. Mild Water vs. Warm Water: The following 3 charts sorts the combinations of wind and wave conditions from Experienced Only to Beginner, when the water is colder than 10° (Cold), between 10° and 18° (Mild) and warmer than 18° (Warm). As the water warms there is a tendency to allow more beginner and intermediate paddlers to venture out into either bigger wave or higher wind conditions, as long as the two aren't combined. However, bigger waves exclude beginner paddlers very quickly.

COLD WATER CONDITIONS



MILD WATER CONDITIONS



WARM WATER CONDITIONS

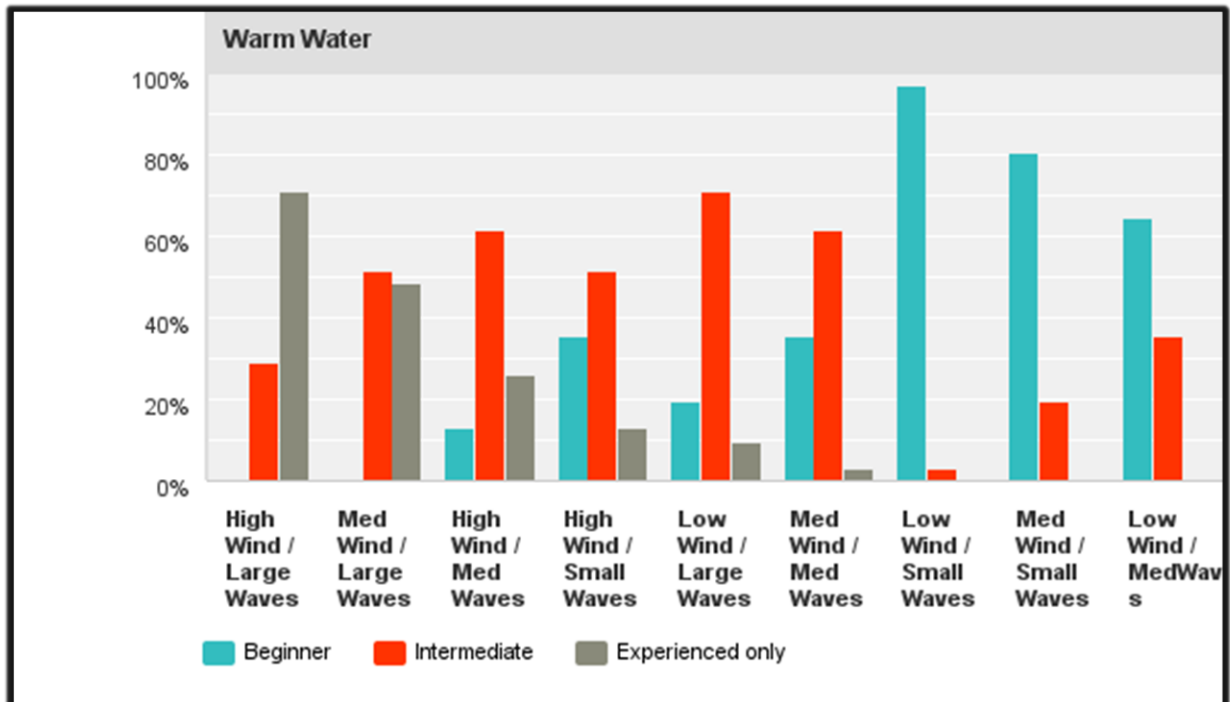




TABLE OF CONDITIONS

Cold Water				
	Beginner	Intermediate	Experienced only	Total
High Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	2.78% 1	97.22% 35	36
Med Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	16.67% 6	83.33% 30	36
High Wind / Med Waves	0.00% 0	21.62% 8	78.38% 29	37
Low Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	40.54% 15	59.46% 22	37
High Wind / Small Waves	2.70% 1	54.05% 20	43.24% 16	37
Med Wind / Med Waves	0.00% 0	64.86% 24	35.14% 13	37
Low Wind / MedWaves	21.62% 8	70.27% 26	8.11% 3	37
Low Wind / Small Waves	76.32% 29	18.42% 7	5.26% 2	38
Med Wind / Small Waves	24.32% 9	70.27% 26	5.41% 2	37
Mild Water				
	Beginner	Intermediate	Experienced only	Total
High Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	6.45% 2	93.55% 29	31
Med Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	37.50% 12	62.50% 20	32
High Wind / Med Waves	3.13% 1	56.25% 18	40.63% 13	32
Low Wind / Large Waves	3.13% 1	68.75% 22	28.13% 9	32
High Wind / Small Waves	12.50% 4	68.75% 22	18.75% 6	32
Med Wind / Med Waves	15.63% 5	78.13% 25	6.25% 2	32
Low Wind / Small Waves	79.41% 27	20.59% 7	0.00% 0	34
Med Wind / Small Waves	50.00% 16	50.00% 16	0.00% 0	32
Low Wind / MedWaves	37.50% 12	62.50% 20	0.00% 0	32
Warm Water				
	Beginner	Intermediate	Experienced only	Total
High Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	29.03% 9	70.97% 22	31
Med Wind / Large Waves	0.00% 0	51.61% 16	48.39% 15	31
High Wind / Med Waves	12.90% 4	61.29% 19	25.81% 8	31
High Wind / Small Waves	35.48% 11	51.61% 16	12.90% 4	31
Low Wind / Large Waves	19.35% 6	70.97% 22	9.68% 3	31
Med Wind / Med Waves	35.48% 11	61.29% 19	3.23% 1	31
Low Wind / Small Waves	96.88% 31	3.13% 1	0.00% 0	32
Med Wind / Small Waves	80.65% 25	19.35% 6	0.00% 0	31
Low Wind / MedWaves	64.52% 20	35.48% 11	0.00% 0	31



List of Contributors

The following is a list of contributors to this document. It is not a complete list as there were some contributors who did not share their details. A glance down this list will show that the data gathered comes from some of the most experienced paddlers and coaches the sport of Surfski paddling currently has.

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○ Cheikh Moubarack Wade	Senegalese Canoe	Dakar	Senegal
○ Américo Magalhães	Vila do Conde Kayak Clube	Vila do Conde	Portugal
○ Gayle Mayes	University of the Sunshine Coast	Sunshine Coast	Australia
○ José Guerra	Phcc	Bournemouth	England
○ Zbyněk Laube	Surfski.cz	Prague	Czech Republic
○ Cyril NIVEL	FRENCH CANOE FEDERATION	PARIS	FRANCE
○ Marco Cabrita	None	Loulé	Portugal
○ Orlando Silva	Surfski Portugal	Lagoa	Portugal
○ Erik schippers	None	Castricum	Netherlands
○ Dilsiri Welikala	Kitesurfing Lanka (Pvt) Limited	Kalpitiya	Sri Lanka
○ Charles Villierme	Tahitian Kayak Federation	Papara	Tahiti
○ Supem de Silva	Adventure SEALS	Colombo	Sri Lanka
○ Marcel Vajda	Vajda	Bratislava	Slovakia
○ José Luis Liz	Plentzia P T	Plentzia	Spain
○ Neil McCreadie	Inkfish Digital Marketing	Cape Town	South Africa
○ Merryl See Tai	Trinidad/Tobago Canoe Federation	Chaguaramas	Trinidad Tobago
○ Janneke Oostenrijk	Learn to paddle	SXM	St. Maarten
○ Seif Patwa	Confederation of African Canoing	Mombasa	Kenya
○ Stuart Bristow	Canoeing South Africa	Cape Town	South Africa
○ Bard Hosøy		Bergen	Norge
○ Thomas Hoenen		Bergen	Norway
○ Tony Harrington		Launceston	Australia
○ Tim Laws			UK
○ Paul MacIntyre		Albany, CA	USA
○ Laurenz Hoek		Tiverton	United Kingdom
○ Wim Cuijpers	RBE	Echt	Netherlands

List of supporting data (available on request)

- Full Survey Response Data.pdf
- Responses Paddler Ability.pdf
- Raw Data Skills Beginner Paddlers.xls
- Raw Data Skills Intermediate Paddlers.xls
- Raw Data Skills Experienced Paddlers.xls
- Raw Data Neglected Skills.xls
- Raw Data Common Mistakes.xls
- Summarised Core Surfski Skills.xls



About the Editor

Dawid Mocke is a world champion paddler from Fish Hoek, South Africa. He has represented his country in surf lifesaving, flatwater marathon and sprint. He started the Surfski School in 2002 and has since coached thousands of paddlers in paddling surfski. He has also travelled and coached clinics extensively for 12 years competing in International events as well as the World Surfski Series (est. 2007) which he won four times from 2009 - 2012.