

## Risk Assessment – Cruiser Sailing Passage to Wootton Creek (Isle of Wight)

Activity: Skippered small craft passage (sailing cruiser)

Location: St Denys Boat Club (River Itchen) to Wootton Creek, Isle of Wight

Activity Type: Skippered club passage – skipper-led dynamic risk management

Assessor: James Wardle

Reviewed by: Andrew Ktenas

Date last reviewed: January 2026

Version: v1.0

### Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers a supervised cruiser sailing passage from St Denys Boat Club to Wootton Creek on the Isle of Wight. The passage involves transiting Southampton Water and the Central Solent with significant commercial and leisure traffic. Wootton Creek has a shallow, narrow entrance with charted hazards (including Wootton Rocks) and limited room to manoeuvre, particularly at low water or in poor visibility. Inside the creek, the navigable channel can be narrow and may not align with midstream, so accurate pilotage and tidal planning are essential. Conservative boat handling is required throughout, with an agreed abort point before committing to the entrance.

### Participant Responsibilities

All crew are responsible for supporting their own safety and that of the vessel. Crew must follow the skipper's instructions, wear lifejackets at all times on deck, assist with lookout duties, and respond promptly to sail handling, pilotage support, mooring/anchoring tasks, and emergencies. Crew must report fatigue or seasickness early and avoid distracting the helm during approaches and other high-workload phases.

### Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Control Measures (Port / Solent guidance aligned)	Risk Level	Further Actions
Large commercial shipping in Southampton Water (incl. main channels)	All on board / other vessels	Collision; severe injury; vessel damage	Keep clear of main channels where practicable; continuous lookout; cross promptly at ~90°; do not impede constrained-by-draught vessels; monitor Southampton VTS channels; engine ready	Medium	Skipper brief on channel crossing plan and VTS
Approach to Wootton Creek: Wootton Rocks / rock ledge and other	All on board / other vessels	Grounding; hull/keel damage; loss of control	Pilotage plan; use chart/plotter and depth sounder; enter with sufficient tide; proceed at slow speed; dedicated bow lookout; do not cut corners at the entrance	Medium	Carry recent pilotage notes; define abort point offshore

entrance hazards					
Shallow, narrow channel inside creek (deep water often only ~10 m wide; position varies)	All on board	Grounding; loss of manoeuvrability; delay until refloat	Follow buoyage/transits where available; maintain mid-channel depth awareness; keep speed down to minimise damage if touching; plan to arrive with adequate height of tide and daylight	Medium	Set minimum under-keel clearance and tidal window
Ledges / drying areas near entrance and along creek banks	All on board	Soft/hard grounding; rudder/prop damage	Avoid edges; continuous echo-sounder monitoring; avoid attempting to 'shortcut' bends; plan for drying-out only where suitable and brief crew	Medium	Brief drying-out implications; identify safe drying areas (if any)
Ferry operations nearby (Fishbourne-Portsmouth vehicle ferries) and fast passenger craft in area	All on board / other vessels	Close-quarters situations; large wash; collision risk	Maintain lookout; avoid ferry tracks; keep clear of large vessel approaches; make course changes early and obvious; monitor appropriate VHF where relevant	Medium	Check expected ferry times if routing close to Fishbourne approach
Water-ski / high-speed activity area and reported wreck hazards offshore of Wootton Creek	All on board / other craft	Collision; wash; injury	Avoid marked ski areas; keep to safe offshore route; maintain predictable course and separation; brief crew on high closing speeds	Medium	Plot hazard marks and avoid area during peak use
Congestion and restricted manoeuvring near visitor moorings / pontoons (e.g., fore-and-aft moorings)	All on board / other vessels	Allision; line entanglement; injury handling lines	Fenders/lines prepared; designate line-handlers; slow speed; clear comms; avoid attempting mooring if conditions/crew skill inadequate; have 'go-around' plan	Medium	Skipper to assign roles and rehearse mooring plan
Restricted visibility (rain/haze/glare) during creek approach/entry	All on board / other vessels	Grounding or collision	Delay entry if visibility poor; slow down; sound signals as appropriate; enhanced lookout; use radar/AIS if fitted; ensure nav lights	Medium	Carry and check sound signals; confirm visibility abort criteria
Man overboard in tidal flow / cold water	Individual overboard	Drowning; hypothermia; separation	Lifejackets on deck; MOB briefing; recovery aids ready; engine ready; clear roles; maintain visual contact	High	Confirm recovery capability with crew strength
Fatigue / seasickness on	All on board	Reduced performance;	Manage crew workload; hydrate and feed; early reefing; rotate	Medium	Welfare check before committing to creek

Solent crossing		dehydration; poor decision-making	tasks; conservative timing		entry
Engine failure in or near narrow channel	All on board	Loss of control; grounding	Engine checks; anchor ready; sail plan for manoeuvring; tow readiness; avoid entering if engine reliability uncertain	High	Mandatory engine run test pre-departure; confirm tow contacts

### General Notes

- Passage planning must include tidal gates, weather margins, and clearly defined abort points.
- A float plan must be filed with a shore contact including route, crew list, and ETAs.
- VHF: monitor appropriate port and harbour working channels; Channel 16 for distress only.
- Review annually or following any incident, near miss, or significant route change.