



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

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## Observance of Traffic Separation Schemes

Note to Shipowners, Masters and all concerned with the Navigation of Seagoing Vessels

*This note supersedes Marine Guidance Notice 28*

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### *Summary*

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 as amended, govern the conduct of all vessels in and near Traffic Separation Schemes (TSSs) which have been adopted by the IMO.

1. Rule 10 of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 as amended, governs the conduct of all vessels in and near Traffic Separation Schemes which have been adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The Regulations are to be found in Merchant Shipping Notice No. M.1642/COLREG 1.

### **Application**

2. Rule 10(a). It is important to note that this Rule only applies to schemes which have been adopted by IMO. In other schemes local regulations may apply, and these may modify not only Rule 10 but also, in some cases, other Steering and Sailing Rules. Admiralty charts show schemes established by competent national authorities but do not differentiate between IMO-adopted schemes and unadopted ones. The charts carry a note to this effect, advising mariners to refer to Annual Notice to Mariners No. 17 which lists all charted schemes and indicates which are IMO-adopted. Changes to ANM No. 17 are promulgated in the weekly editions of Admiralty Notices to Mariners. The charts also have notes referring to the existence of special provisions associated with certain schemes which may govern their use by certain classes of vessel. Sailing Directions should be consulted for these special provisions. Masters of deep-draught vessels should note that the existence of a scheme

does not imply that the traffic lanes have been adequately surveyed. Charted depths and source data diagrams (if available) should be studied when planning a passage where depths are critical (Schemes introduced or amended after April 1989 are only adopted once the IMO is satisfied with the adequacy of hydrographic surveys). Traffic Separation Schemes are usually sited where there is a heavy concentration of shipping. Mariners are therefore reminded of the particular importance of strictly adhering to Rules 5-8 which refer to Look-out, Safe Speed, Risk of Collision, and Action to Avoid Collision. Mariners are also reminded that except where there are special local rules to the contrary, the other Steering and Sailing Rules – those of Section II when vessels are in sight of one another and that of Section III in restricted visibility – apply within a scheme as they do elsewhere at sea.

*By virtue of using the traffic lane through vessels do not have any priority over crossing or joining traffic.*

### **Procedure within a Traffic Lane**

3. Rule 10(b) and (c). All vessels using a traffic lane must conform to the essential principles of routeing. If they are following the lane they must proceed in the general direction of traffic flow and if they are crossing it they must do so on a heading as nearly as practicable at

right angles to that direction. Vessels should normally join or leave a traffic lane at its termination, however they may join or leave from either side of a lane provided they do so at as small an angle as possible to the general direction of traffic flow. The same procedure with certain exemptions, as stated in Rule 10(k) and (l), applies to vessels which are within a lane for purposes other than for passage through or across it, such as vessels engaged in fishing, if they are making way; it is appreciated that such vessels cannot always maintain a steady course and speed but their general direction of movement must be in accordance with this principle. Any substantial departure from this direction by any vessel is only allowed if it is required by overriding circumstances, such as the need to comply with other Steering and Sailing Rules or because of extreme weather conditions. Particular attention is drawn to the requirement that vessels which must cross a traffic lane shall do so on a heading as nearly as practical at right angles to the direction of traffic flow. Steering at right angles keeps the time a crossing vessel is in the lane to a minimum irrespective of the tidal stream, and leads to a clear encounter situation with through vessels.

#### **Inshore Zones**

4. Rule 10(d). Vessels other than those of less than 20 metres in length, sailing vessels, vessels engaged in fishing, and vessels en route to or from a destination within an Inshore Traffic Zone, should if it is safe to do so use the appropriate adjacent traffic lane. It does not preclude traffic under stress of weather from seeking protection of a weather shore within such a zone nor does it impose any specific behaviour on vessels within an inshore zone and traffic heading in any direction may be encountered. Within the context of this Rule it is the view of the MCA that the density of traffic in a lane is not sufficient reason by itself to justify the use of an inshore zone, nor will the apparent absence of traffic in the inshore zone qualify as a reason for not complying with this Rule.

#### **Anchoring within a Separation Zone**

5. Rule 10 (e) and (g). The question has arisen as to whether a vessel which needs to anchor because, for example, of an engine breakdown or bad visibility, may do so in a separation

zone. In the view of the MCA this would be a seaman like manoeuvre and is allowed for under paragraph (e) (i).

#### **Vessels not using a Scheme**

6. Rule 10 (h). The existence of a Scheme does not mean that it is obligatory to use it, if its use appears unsafe due to prevailing conditions or the size or state of the vessel. In these circumstances the Master should consider an alternative route and avoid the Scheme by as wide a margin as is practicable.

#### **Fishing Vessels**

7. Rule 10(b), (c), (e) and (i). Vessels fishing within a Scheme are considered to be using the Scheme and must therefore, when working in a traffic lane, conform to the essential principles laid down in Rules 10(b) and (c) as discussed above. When fishing in a separation zone they may follow any course. The requirement that vessels fishing must not impede through traffic means that they must not operate in such a manner that they, or their gear, seriously restrict the sea room available to other vessels within a lane. Rule 8(f) places further obligations upon fishing vessels with regard to their responsibility not to impede vessels following a traffic lane and this obligation remains in a developing situation where risk of collision is involved. When taking any action they must however take account of the possible manoeuvres of the vessel which is not to be impeded.

#### **Sailing Vessels and Small Craft**

8. Rule 10(j). Vessels of less than 20 metres in length and sailing vessels shall not impede traffic following a traffic lane and the same obligations as are set out for fishing vessels in paragraph 7 similarly to apply to them. No specific mention is made in the Rule of a sailing vessel having an auxiliary engine, but it is the view of the MCA that if such a vessel cannot follow the routing procedures under sail because of light or adverse winds, then she should make use of her engines in order to do so.

#### **Vessels engaged in Safety of Navigation Operations**

9. Rule 10(k). Vessels engaged in operations for the safety of navigation of the Scheme e.g.

buoy laying, wreck removing, or hydrographic surveying if restricted in their ability to manoeuvre, are exempt from the provisions of Rule 10 to the extent necessary to carry out the operation. This exemption does not extend to vessels engaged in other survey activities in a Scheme.

### **Cable Laying Operations**

10. Rule 10(1). Vessels engaged in cable operations, if restricted in their ability to manoeuvre, are exempt from the provisions of Rule 10 to the extent necessary to carry out the operation.

### **Precautionary Areas**

11. Many Schemes have precautionary areas associated with them where traffic lanes cross or converge so that proper separation of traffic is not possible. Precautionary areas are not part of a traffic separation scheme and Rule 10 is not generally applicable. Ships should navigate with particular caution

within such areas. Precautionary areas should be avoided, if practicable, by ships not making use of the associated Schemes or deep-water routes.

### **Signal – YG**

12. It is important that any vessel observed in a Scheme which appears to be navigating otherwise than in accordance with the established principles of such Schemes is advised of the fact at the time. A special signal exists for this purpose: the two letter signal YG meaning “you appear not to be complying with the traffic separation scheme”.
13. The master of any vessel receiving this signal by whatever means should take immediate action to check his course and position and take any further steps which appear to him appropriate in the circumstances.
14. Marine Guidance Note MGN 128 (Navigation in the Dover Strait) is complementary to this note.

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