

On the 'new rules' with Howard Elliott

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Howard Elliott, International Judge, provides competitors and race officials an explanation of how the 2025-28 Racing Rules of Sailing 2025-2028 have been updated from 2021-24.

General Comments

Generally, the changes to the Rules are not significant and will not affect the average competitor. The average competitor will probably welcome the tidying up of Rounding Marks, Sailing the Course, Obstructions (in particular Continuing Obstructions). The new Rules have not significantly changed these.

Information for Organising Authorities and Race Committees Applicability and Changeover

- When do these rules apply.
- What happens to events/series which span the changeover date

The following is from the **Revision** section in the preamble to the Rules:

This edition becomes effective on 1 January 2025 except that for an event beginning in 2024 the date may be postponed by the notice of race.

In summary, the 2028 Rules come into effect on January 1 2025. Right in the middle of most Australian events and series. There is an option to have the 2021-2024 Rules apply for a specific event, however, this needs to be stated in the Notice of Race.

Recommendation: Unless there is a specific reason to do so, do not have the 2021-2024 Rules apply for a specific event.

As set out below, the changes to the Rules are not “game changing”. Unless there is a very specific reason to keep using the old rules, my recommendation is to let the new rules come into effect and change over to them. This minimises the disruption to competitors and Race Committees. Although this changeover may occur between races of an event, again, the changes are not significant.

A potential issue may arise where an individual race spans the change over. That is, the race starts prior to 1st January 2025 and finishes on or after 1st January 2025. Whether you wish to take account of this should be an informed and risk based decision. From a risk perspective, there are a very small number of rules (19 and Proper Course) where any potential problems could occur. The risk in 19 is very low and relates only to continuing obstructions. The risk related to Proper Course is also very low.

An effective risk mitigation approach for events which span the changeover is to ensure that you have a skilled and competent Protest Committee.

Preparing Notice of Race and Sailing Instructions

Here is a quick summary of the significant changes to the Rules which should be taken into account when preparing NoR and Sis.

RRS 89.2(a) NoR must be published in writing.

RRS 86 has changed which Rules you cannot amend in the NoR and/or SI. You cannot amend:

- o the Definitions;
- o a rule in the Introduction;
- o A rule in Part 2 (When boats meet) or 7 (Race Organisation);
- o rule 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 42, 43, 47, 50, 63.3, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 76.1, 76.2(a), 76.2(b) or 79;
- o a rule of an appendix that changes one of these rules;
- o Appendix H, N or R; or a rule in a World Sailing Code listed in rule 6.1.

RRS 44.3 now requires the NoR/SI to explicitly allow Scoring Penalties. Previously Scoring Penalties were

inferred through Appendix T (Arbitration) but because they were not explicitly turned off they could be used. This change now makes it clear whether Scoring Penalties are allowed.

Equipment Rules of Sailing (ERS) are now referenced at relevant Rules such as RRS 50 (Competitor Equipment and Clothing), RRS 55.2 (Spinnaker Poles). This clarifies specific equipment terms only. The substance of the rules is not changed.

RRS 56.3 is new and requires that, if used, AIS and like devices are not turned off. This reflects the need for safety equipment to be used appropriately. There have been instances where AIS and similar devices were turned off by competitors who did not want to give away their position.

Other Changes For Race Committees

Some other changes which should be noted:

RRS 76 Exclusion of Boats or Competitors has been tidied up. Generally a bit more to do from a process fairness perspective, if you want to reject an entry.

RRS 78 now balances penalties for breaches of class rules.

Part 5 – Protests – has been completely rewritten. The underlying obligations and requirements have not changed. However, the rule numbers have changed to NoR/SIs which change Rules will need to be updated to the new rule numbers.

Appendices- Warning. Not all the working groups have fully completed their changes. While unlikely, don't be surprised if you see changes to Match, teams and Boards rules. Appendix UF (Umpired Fleet racing) has yet to be released. If you have an event which spans the change over and makes use of one or more of the Appendices, let me know and I can find out the status of any relevant working group.

Information for Competitors

Summary

- Continuing Obstructions
- Sail the Course
- Avoiding Collisions
- Rounding Marks and obstructions
- Protests

Rules of Part 2 – Separation

Sail the Course

The requirement to sail the course has been a fundamental part of the Rules for many years now. The definition of sailing the course has made its way from a Rule to a Definition. Note that as a Definition, Sailing The Course can not be changed by NoR or SIs. The new definition of Sail the Course is very simple and effective and includes that

- You must start (according to the definition of Start)
- You must round or pass each mark on the required side and in the order specified in the Sis (the old string rule)
- You must finish (according to the definition of Finish)

What is important is that "sail the course" as a defined term appears in a couple of the rules.

Rounding Marks

Generally, rounding marks remains fundamentally and functionally the same. RRS 18 has been reorganised so that it reads a little better. But functionally it remains the same – outside (or clear-astern) boat gives the inside (or clear-ahead) boat mark-room. Perhaps the most significant change is in the **Definition of Mark-Room**. Mark-room is now very clearly defined as:

Mark-Room Room for a boat

- (a) to sail to the mark when her proper course is to sail close to it,
- (b) to round or pass the mark on the required side, and
- (c) to leave it astern.

The original subtleties of this remain, particularly in relation to proper course and tactical rounding. However, the key change is the introduction of “(c) to leave it astern” which provides some clarity on the age old debate of “when has a boat rounded or passed a mark”. While I will go into the intricacies of this in later articles, the most common situation is where two boats are rounding a leeward mark and are headed upwind. The question was at what point can the outside (leeward) boat start to luff the windward boat as they round the mark. The answer, in most cases, becomes as soon as the inside (windward) boat has left the mark astern (that is, aft of a line drawn from the stern perpendicular to the centreline – same definition for overlap). There are the standard restrictions on the leeward boat (RRS 16, and maybe RRS15) but as soon as the mark passes astern of the windward boat, the windward boat is no longer afforded mark-room and must keep clear of the leeward boat.

As I said, this is the generalised typical case. There are many other scenarios which could be discussed in future articles.

Rounding/Passing Obstructions

The big change here is that we finally are given a definition of Continuing Obstruction. A Continuing Obstruction is:

1. An Obstruction – see the definition of obstruction. As such RRS 19 and 20 apply
2. A minimum of 3 Boat lengths long – of the shortest boat

But it is not

3. A vessel under way (this includes ferries and supertankers – they are simply obstructions)
4. A boat racing – also simply an obstruction
5. A Committee Vessel that is ALSO a mark – depending on which mark, RRS 18 may apply.

Protests

This section has been rewritten, primarily for clarity and simplification reasons. From a competitor perspective the only significant change is that your protest now must identify:

1. the protestor; and,
2. the protestee; and,
3. the incident.

All three must be present on the Hearing Request or Protest form.

Previously, identifying the incident was the minimum requirement. The minimum requirements now include the parties. Otherwise, Part 5 remains much the same. Protestor must hail and display a flag (if required). You must inform the other party etc.

I will detail protest procedures in later articles. The core requirements have not changed - hail and display a flag (if required), notify the other party within the time limit, lodge the protest within the time limit.

Summary

In summary, the changes to the Rules are not major. For officials, the changes are logical and sensible and do not significantly change things. The challenge for Officials is updating their NoR. SIs and other documents to refer to the correct rule. This is especially true of Part 5 (Protests) and RRS 18. For competitors, the key changes are Continuing Obstructions and Mark-Room.

Make sure you attend a Rules lecture before this season starts to refresh your knowledge. Sail safely and avoid collisions.

The study pack for the 2025-28 RRS [is here](#). For more on the RRS, [click here](#).

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