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## IS TEXTING A GROWING DANGER AT SEA?

Safety at sea is not just a fashionable buzz word as all professional mariners know their lives and wellbeing revolve around having good safety at sea practices. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the recreational boating fraternity because this summer we have seen an ever increasing number of accidents and deaths involving recreational craft on the water.

Not only do we have many recreational boaties with no idea of the rules, they are also repeating shore-side bad habits at sea. One such incident involved myself while returning back to port. A yacht, under power, was closing on a collision course from my port. While our speed was a modest nine knots, the yacht under power, was doing around eight and we could see the helmsman, obviously preoccupied in the cockpit. After giving a wakeup call on the horn and not willing to take the risk of turning to port when facing a potential collision, we stopped. Meanwhile our good yachty continued to motor past our bow while busily texting on his cellphone. Our efforts to remind him of the rules of the road were returned by much gesticulating and being told to piss off. Once clear we noticed the errant yachty's female guest in the cockpit, not exactly dressed for the chilly Easter weekend. Another distraction maybe!

Seriously, in the north, when out on the water we are frequently seeing near misses that could have been potential life threatening accidents only but for the grace of God. The recent accident of launch versus trimaran in the Marlborough Sounds is another case where, not keeping a proper lookout, speeding and failing to give way are all contributing factors. When will we learn? Surely the time has come to licence vessel operators who have sat either day skipper, boat master or yacht master exams and in so doing, demonstrate to other users, particularly commercial users, that these boaties may have learned something and at least know the rules of the road.

Maritime New Zealand must now act. All too often their focus is on public safety and commercial craft. It is my sad belief that it's not a case of if, only when, we will have a serious boating accident involving pleasure craft versus commercial and immediately, public perception will be to blame the commercial operator. Granted, I am not suggesting the commercial industry is blameless, but we continue to see and hear reports from commercial operators of potentially dangerous close quarters incidents involving pleasure craft going unreported because Maritime New Zealand does nothing about it.

The recent announcement by NIWA scientists who have discovered that nearly all snapper on the west coast of the North Island come from nurseries in just one harbour, the Kaipara, is scary to say the least. This only places a greater responsibility on local authorities to ensure that urban, toxic and agricultural runoff into this harbour is kept to a minimum. We are told our Snapper8 fishery is currently around eight to nine percent of the original virgin biomass. To know our breeding stock is all in one basket, so to speak, is frightening.

To lose the health of the Kaipara, would be to lose any chance of rebuilding the remnants of what once was a strong, vibrant and healthy fishery.

In the next issue we will be featuring a story on the former Australian fisheries research vessel, *Kapala*. In the early days of the Australian fishing industry, these guys went out there and found tonnes and tones of fish. Then they came back and told everyone that there were shit loads of fish out there and then the fishing industry went out and brought shiploads back. Now, in some areas, there's virtually nothing left. The upshot of all this is that the good work done by the scientists went to waste because, in many areas, no one thought to develop a resource management plan at the same time. This story highlights lessons of the past and when it comes to the inshore fish stocks, if we do not look after our nurseries we run the very real risk of losing an already depressed fishery.

As we go to press the Royal New Zealand Navy is about to take delivery of its long awaited inshore patrol craft. Once these have been commissioned we, with the navy's support, will be monitoring their sea trials.

In looking around the traps, my comments in the last issue regarding how the current economic downturn is providing opportunities for the commercial marine industry are well founded. Many operators are making the most of getting good deals on new equipment, vessel refits and upgrades. While there is some softening in the tourist industry, for the workboat, ferries and fishing industry, it really is business as usual. In this issue we are pleased to bring you the latest in news and views and events on the waterfront. Enjoy.

Keith Ingram, Editor