

DCA Rallies Policy and Procedures

Background

Suggested opportunities to meet and sail with other members are an important part of DCA life. They have traditionally been called rallies but can be called raids, meets or messabouts. They range from day sails to short camp cruises in sheltered waters or coastal venues. They are occasions for socialising, making new friends and comparing notes and boats. They are not organised events where participants follow instructions. People can sail in company or sail alone, each one making their own decisions. Depending on the location, members may take part not just in sailing dinghies but also in rowing boats, kayaks and canoes. At some gatherings people all launch from the same place; at others they launch at different locations and meet up at a suggested spot. Some members travel to meeting places by car or on foot to meet up with those arriving in boats.

Initiating procedures

Any member can suggest a rally which would normally be at a location with which he or she is familiar. Suggestions may be made at regional planning meetings or in the DCA members' forum at any time. The person making the suggestion usually becomes the host or rally coordinator. The important information which can be shared in the DCA Forum, DCA Journal or on the website is the date(s) proposed and the sailing location.

Attending a rally

Any fully subscribed member is welcome at a rally with or without a boat. If bringing a boat it will be assumed that the member is a competent skipper, is fit to participate and the boat is in good order. According to SOLAS regulations skippers must ensure their vessel meets technical specifications for stability and watertight integrity, that the crew is trained in emergency procedures, and that all equipment necessary for safety is carried and maintained. The DCA publish a checklist of safety recommendations which can be found on the DCA website, in the DCA Members' Section and inside the back cover of the DCA journal Dinghy Cruising.

Sailing is by its nature an unpredictable sport and therefore inherently involves an element of risk. By taking part in a DCA rally members agree and acknowledge that they are aware of the element of risk involved and accept responsibility for the exposure of themselves, their crew and their boat to that risk. They must also accept that they are responsible for the safety of themselves, their crew, their boat and their other property, whether afloat or ashore. This means that skippers will be expected to assess for themselves whether they have the equipment and skills to undertake the proposed passage safely taking into account the expected weather and, if relevant, tidal conditions.

Whilst at a rally, members may be in discussion with other members regarding local navigation, tides and weather but should remain aware that it is their responsibility at all times, to assess the information provided and make appropriate decisions based on their own craft and their own capability with regards to the safety of themselves, their crew and their craft.

If attending without a boat, other participants may welcome that member aboard as crew but are under no obligation to do so.

Boat insurance

Individual skippers at a rally are expected to take responsibility for any injury, damage or loss caused by their actions or omissions. So any member attending a rally with a boat is advised to have boat insurance which includes third party liability cover of at least £1,000,000.

The role of a rally host

A rally host can provide details about the launch site or sites that are available at the proposed rally location and clarify the facilities available at the site. Information which may be given could include car parking and trailer storage facilities, the type of slipway and the presence or absence of other facilities, e.g., toilets, café etc. The host may also advise whether the rally destination can be reached via sheltered waters or requires open water (sea) sailing experience and can suggest a time to meet up either at the launch site or at a potential destination for a picnic or pub meal.

If a sailing club is suggested as a launching venue, the host should obtain permission from the club committee and negotiate a fee for non-members to use the club facilities for the duration of the rally. In this situation the host should make sure the fees are collected from the participants and handed over to a member of the club's committee. If an activity centre or campsite is booked for use during a rally, the host should inform members of any rules, by-laws, fees or guidelines relating to use of the facilities and members are expected to comply with these.

A rally host should not express a view on whether an attending skipper should or should not participate in the rally or advise attendees whether the conditions of the day are safe for individual participants or otherwise. In addition hosts should not offer navigational advice other than to point out known hazards and should not offer any form of tuition related to the activity of sailing.

If the weather forecast suggests that weather conditions at a proposed rally are going to be unsuitable for dinghy cruising, the rally host can cancel the suggested meetup. A cancellation notice will be posted in the relevant section of the members' forum and announced on the WhatsApp group if one has been set up. Cancellation does not stop individual members continuing with their plans to sail at the proposed location if they wish.

Safety

As a DCA rally is simply an occasion for like-minded people to meet up and spend time together on and off the water, and no training or organised activity is involved, no safeguarding obligations are incurred and no safety boat is provided. All members participating in a DCA rally are, however, expected to adhere to international maritime law, which states that all ships anywhere at sea are obliged to provide assistance to people in distress. Rescue at sea is anchored in maritime tradition as a human duty and DCA members are asked to provide any assistance they can to anyone in difficulty in coastal or inland waters as long as they are not putting themselves or their crew at risk. We also expect participating members to take all reasonable steps to avoid harming, injuring or upsetting others.

Care of Children

It is DCA policy only to accept as members persons aged 18 years or over. Therefore children and young people under the age of 18 years should never be present at a rally without a supervising adult. This policy is intended to safeguard young people rather than discourage participation. The DCA welcomes families with children at rallies. It is the parent or guardian's responsibility to satisfy themselves that their child or young person is with an appropriate adult at all times. If any member or guest has concerns regarding the welfare of a child or young person present at the rally, these concerns should be reported to the parent or guardian where possible and appropriate. Where this is not possible or is not appropriate due to the nature of the concerns, call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000 for advice or in an emergency, the police. If the parent or guardian of a child does not wish that child to be included in photographs taken during the rally, it is their responsibility to communicate this requirement to the rally host and other attendees.

Rally Reports

It is customary but not compulsory for rally hosts to submit an account of the rally to the Editor of the DCA Journal. The purpose of the report is to form a record of activities in the DCA and to inspire other members to consider exploring that sailing location or attend a rally themselves. The report normally contains a list of attendees and the names and types of their boats, followed by an account of their sailing and social activities. It should be accompanied by a selection of photographs with captions. Photographs should not be embedded in a text document. Regional Secretaries are requested to check if rally hosts have prepared and submitted a report and advise the Editor if there will not be a report. Reports of frequently visited locations or day sails can be combined into one report.

Public Liability Insurance

The DCA will hold public liability insurance covering the United Kingdom where the majority of rallies are held. This insurance will cover the DCA's legal liability for any accidental injury to a member of the public or damage to their property that is deemed to occur as a result of DCA activities. It will cover any legal fees and compensation payments that might be payable. The purpose of this policy document is to make clear that participation in a DCA rally does not involve transferring any responsibility for passage planning, sailing decisions and individual boat safety to the DCA. These all remain the responsibility of individual skippers. Holding public liability insurance is simply a safety net to protect the Association should somebody decide to accuse it of negligence whether justified or not.

If any DCA Regional Group outside the UK wishes to arrange similar insurance cover, the Regional Secretary can obtain suitable quotes for consideration and approval by the DCA Committee.