

# Safety Report

## Be careful coming up for air!

### Narrative

Water sports, and particularly diving, are some of Queenslanders' favourite pastimes, and they get even more popular every year.

An experienced scuba and free diver was enjoying some spear fishing at a well know ship wreck off the Gold Coast. The diver was outfitted in some of the best gear including a full length "camouflage" wetsuit. These wetsuits are designed to break up the silhouette of the diver and make him more difficult to see. This is an advantage when hunting fish underwater; it is not an advantage on the surface! And of all the great gear and equipment the diver had at his disposal, the one thing he didn't have was a code A flag, commonly known as a "diver's flag".

The diver had been below the surface for around a minute, leaving no trace of his presence below, when a 4.3 meter runabout boat passed over head. Unfortunately, the diver, now out of air and kicking for the surface, tied to occupy the same space and time as the boat, with disastrous results for the diver. The boat's propeller cut the diver multiple times causing extremely serious injuries.

Fortunately, the diver who had friends in a nearby vessel came rapidly to his aid. Immediate first aid probably saved the diver's life, but the injuries have required ongoing surgery and rehabilitation.

The obligation on the master of a ship to keep a proper lookout is not an obligation to see everything. On this occasion, the vessel was travelling at 10 knots and covered approximately 230 meters during the diver's one minute dive. The master was not speeding and was keeping a proper lookout on this occasion. The master could not have been reasonably expected to see a camouflaged diver under the surface of the water from 200 meters away.

### Lessons

- 1. Collision Regulations require that ships engaged in diving operations must exhibit the code A flag. This flag has a blue and white horizontal band and must not be less than one meter in height. Always use a code A flag whenever snorkelling or diving, and especially around popular boating locations.**
- 2. Consider your visibility from the perspective of other water users. Even in ideal conditions, a diver in the water may be difficult to see.**
- 3. Look up and listen for passing boats when surfacing.**
- 4. Never swim or dive alone.**

Safety Reports are prepared by the Compliance Unit, Executive Services and Compliance Branch, Maritime Safety Queensland. Safety Reports are intended to draw the attention of the marine community to the lessons arising out of investigations into marine accidents. Consequently, the reports do not assign fault or blame nor do they determine liability.

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