

5.0 Regional marine incident summaries

5.1 Gold Coast region

The Gold Coast region comprises the local authorities of the Gold Coast, Logan, Beaudesert and Boonah. From a waterways perspective, the region oversees 189 kilometres of mainland coastline, 266 kilometres of island coastline and 210 kilometres of rivers and creeks. The region's waterways include the Southport Broadwater reaching from Jumpinpin bar to the multitude of residential canals within the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Seaway, the tidal limits of the Logan, Pimpama, Coomera and Nerang Rivers, along with Tallebudgera and Currumbin Creeks, the Hinze Dam, and Lakes Moogerah and Maroon.

During holiday periods Gold Coast waterways become congested by a diverse range of recreational watercraft. With rapidly expanding boat building facilities at the Coomera Marine Precinct, Hope Island and Southport trending towards the construction and maintenance of larger vessels, the dynamics of on-water boating traffic are changing, particularly in terms of integration of larger, more powerful vessels with the traditional but ever expanding small recreational speedboat type fleet that frequent the shallow waters of the region. Commercial fishing charter, ferry and other commercial vessel operations also continue to expand to satisfy tourist demand.

While spatially a very small region, the Gold Coast region is home to more than 30,000 registered vessels, 97 per cent of which are recreational. The region also boasts significant interstate and international visiting vessel numbers all year round.

In 2006 the region experienced growth in registered vessel numbers of approximately four per cent, marginally below the state-wide growth rate of 4.44 per cent.

Looking at marine incidents, there were 89 marine incidents reported in 2006, three less than in 2005 but up by 8.6 per cent on the average number of reported marine incidents over the previous four-year period.

With the diversity and volume of vessel traffic in the Gold Coast region it is not surprising that collision incidents made up 40.5 per cent of all the reported incidents in the region in 2006. Collisions with other vessels accounted for 30.3 per cent of the region's reported incidents.

Incident study 3

Never to be forgotten Christmas party!

The vessel: 10m recreational speedboat

The incident

While enjoying an evening Christmas party cruise on a Gold Coast waterway one of the guests climbed onto the rear swim platform and accidentally fell into the water and was struck by the vessel's propeller. Another guest dived into the water to assist the woman and raised the person overboard alarm. The master immediately stopped the vessel and the injured woman was assisted back onto the swim platform of the vessel.

The police were notified of the accident by mobile phone as the master proceeded to beach the vessel nearby. The woman sustained fatal injuries to her head and died at the scene. It is not clear what caused the woman to fall into the water but both the guests and the master of the vessel had been drinking.

Safety insights

- The master of a boat has a general obligation to ensure the safety of all on board.
- Alcohol & boating do not mix.
- Masters should always expect the unexpected when boating.





As expected more than 46 per cent of the region's reported incidents occurred within the extensive smooth water limits of the region. A further 22.5 per cent of incidents occurred in inland (non-tidal) waters. The region recorded the same number of incidents in offshore waters in 2006 as in 2005 (19).

The Gold Coast region's climate is ideal for year round boating activity. More than 80 per cent of the region's reported incidents in 2006 (n=89) occurred in daylight hours, clear weather, light to moderate winds and good visibility. This suggests there are other factors contributing to these incidents occurring.

There were 120 vessels involved in the 89 reported Gold Coast region incidents in 2006. Recreational speedboats (24) were the most involved vessel in reported incidents. Recreational motorboats, commercial passenger vessels and commercial speedboats each recorded 14 vessels involved in marine incidents in 2006. There were also 13 recreational jet skis involved in reported marine incidents in the Gold Coast region in 2006. This figure is likely to understate the true involvement of recreational jet skis in marine incidents.

Turning to those incidents that resulted in fatalities or serious injuries, there were 11 such incidents reported as occurring in the Gold Coast in 2006, compared with 14 in 2005. These 11 incidents resulted in one death and 12 persons being hospitalised with serious injuries. The fatality resulted from an incident where a female passenger fell overboard from a recreational speedboat and was accidentally hit by the vessel's propeller.

Seven (63.65 per cent) of the Gold Coast's reported FSI incidents occurred in offshore waters. Five of these were incidents involving injuries to the crew of surf life saving inflatable rescue boats (IRBs).

All of the 12 reported serious injuries resulted directly from falls within the vessel or as a result of the operation of the vessel.

5.2 Brisbane region

The Brisbane region boundary encompasses 37 local authorities. The region extends west to Bulloo Shire on the South Australian border to the northern boundary of the Booringa Shire of which the township of Mitchell is its headquarters. The waterways contained within the region include north of Logan River through Moreton Bay extending to Noosa River in the north. The western waters consist of Wivenhoe, Somerset, Beardmore dams and inland rivers including the Condamine and Balonne Rivers which flow directly into the Murray Darling River system.

One of the factors contributing to an increase in boating activity within the coastal region has been the continuing decrease in water levels of inland waterways. Boat owners are particularly being attracted to the Sunshine Coast waterways where recreational and commercial boating activities are experiencing rapid expansion.

From a shipping perspective, the region revolves around the Port of Brisbane which processes an estimated 5,000 trade ship movements in and out of the port each year. Over the past five years the port has experienced annual growth in ship movements of around 10 per cent.

In addition to trade and associated ship movements, other commercial operators access Moreton Bay shipping channels and fairways. These include dredging boats, ferries, barges, survey ships, commercial tourist and passenger vessels and commercial fishing vessels. Commercial fishers tend to use the channels and fairways more at night and this increases marine safety risks.

Although the majority of smaller recreational vessels don't generally venture offshore past the port of Brisbane entrance beacons, there is still considerable recreational vessel movement in and out of the shipping channels and fairways on route to many of the islands and local fishing grounds around Moreton Bay. There is also an active recreational yachting fraternity in the Brisbane region with frequent organised events in and around the main shipping channels of Moreton Bay.

While the Brisbane region boasts almost 43 per cent of the state's registered recreational vessel fleet, the growth in registered recreational vessel numbers slowed in 2006 to 3.63 per cent compared with

a state average growth of 4.6 per cent. Similarly, the number of registered commercial vessels in the region actually fell by 4.45 per cent in 2006.

Against this backdrop the region recorded 204 marine incidents in 2006, one more than in 2005 and in line with the four-year average number of reported marine incidents. These incidents represent 29.1 per cent of all reported incidents in Queensland in 2006.

As with the Gold Coast region, collision incidents were the single greatest type of incident reported in 2006. Overall, 70 collision incidents (34.3 per cent) were reported including 42 incidents involving collisions with other vessels. Capsize incidents were also over-represented in 2006 with 51 (25 per cent) such incidents reported.

As would be expected, the majority (65.2 per cent) of incidents occurred within the smooth and partially smooth water limits of the region. A further 23.5 per cent of incidents occurred in offshore waters with the remaining 22 incidents occurring in non-tidal inland waters of the region.

Human factors were identified as contributing to more than 64 per cent of the reported incidents in 2006, with inattention and operational error representing more than 45 per cent of all the identified human factors contributing to these incidents.

The majority of reported incidents (more than 60 per cent) occurred in daylight hours, clear weather and good visibility.

There were 276 vessels involved in the 204 reported Brisbane region incidents in 2006—a ship to incident ratio of 1.35:1. Recreational vessels (141) made up a little over 51 per cent of the vessels involved. Among these, recreational motorboats (44), recreational speedboats (42) and recreational sailboats (35) were the most heavily involved recreational vessels. There were only eight recreational jet skis reported as involved in marine incidents in the Brisbane region in 2006.

Incident study 4

Weir did that come from?

The vessel: 4.2m outboard-powered recreational speedboat

The incident

Three men were boating late at night on an inland river. While travelling at speed the master realised too late that he was too close to a weir across the river. Despite his best efforts to steer clear, the runabout struck the rubber wall extension bladder of the weir. One of the passengers was instantly thrown from the boat over the weir wall, landing in the overflow pond 11 metres below the weir. With the force of the impact, the runabout catapulted sideways then backwards over the weir wall, ejecting the other two men in the process. The vessel came to rest upside down hanging from a water break bollard at the top of the weir.

The two men made heavy contact with the concrete weir wall before tumbling down the wall into the overflow pond. The first man ejected, still conscious after his fall, was able to raise the alarm and emergency services were activated. A search ensued and one of the remaining two men was quickly found, unfortunately dead. A search continued for another 48 hours before the remaining man's body was also found in the overflow pond.

Safety insights

- Maintaining a proper lookout and safe and manageable speed are critical, particularly in restricted visibility, darkness and restricted areas.
- Masters must ensure they have knowledge of local conditions and hazards.





Looking at commercial vessel involvement, there were 145 commercial vessels reported as involved in the marine incidents in the Brisbane region in 2006. Among these, commercial passenger carrying vessels were the most involved type of commercial vessel with 39 vessels involved—marginally over-represented compared with their previous four-year average involvement (34.5). The next most involved commercial vessels were commercial fishing vessels (28) and the ‘commercial-other’ vessel category (25). The ‘commercial-other’ category includes vessels such as trading vessels under pilotage, barges and the like.

From the perspective of marine incident fatalities and serious injuries the Brisbane region saw significant improvement in 2006. There were seven incidents reported in 2006 that resulted in fatalities or serious injuries, significantly fewer than the 14 such incidents reported in 2005 and a previous four-year average of 13.75 FSI incidents. These seven incidents nonetheless did result in four deaths and a further four persons being hospitalised with serious injuries. The number of persons seriously injured represents a significantly improved outcome when compared with the previous four-year average number of persons seriously injured (12.25).

Two of the deaths occurred in one incident in which a high-speed inflatable recreational craft collided with a moored recreational sailing boat in the Brisbane River. The incident occurred just after midnight. The four serious injury incidents all involved injuries resulting from onboard incidents or from the manner of operation of the vessel.

5.3 Gladstone region

The Gladstone region covers the area from St Lawrence in the north, south to Double Island Point and west to the Northern Territory border. This includes the tourist areas of Hervey Bay, Tin Can Bay and Yeppoon, the commercial fishing centres of Tin Can Bay, Urangan, Bundaberg, Gladstone and Yeppoon, the ports of Bundaberg, Rockhampton (Port Alma) and Queensland’s largest multi user port, Gladstone. Commercial boating activity also takes place on the inland waterways such as the Thompson River. The region also encompasses the southern portion of the Great Barrier Reef including Heron, Lady Elliot and Lady Musgrave Islands. Larger commercial cruise vessels also occasionally call at the Port of Maryborough.

The region includes 1868 kilometres of mainland coastline, 1342 kilometres of island coastline, a further 1737 kilometres of rivers and creeks and a number of significant freshwater impoundments which allow boating and fishing activity.

With such diverse maritime interests within the region, there inevitably are conflicting demands between the commercial, fishing and recreational sectors of the industry. The recreational sector includes a vibrant houseboat and yacht rental industry operating mainly in the Great Sandy Strait. Recreational boating activity in this region continues to increase at a rate beyond the state average. The lack of a significant on-water compliance presence on inland waterways has recently been highlighted with an emerging issue of non-compliance by boaties with safety equipment requirements.

At 31 December 2006 there were 38,051 registered vessels within the Gladstone region including 37,148 registered recreational vessels and 903 registered commercial vessels. This represents growth in registered vessel numbers in 2006 of 6.77 per cent—well above the state average growth rate of 4.44 per cent for 2006. Commercial vessel numbers showed a 4.15 per cent increase in 2006 compared with a fall of 1.31 per cent in commercial vessel numbers statewide.

The Gladstone region received 139 reports of marine incidents in 2006, 35 more than in 2005 and up by 48 per cent on the previous four-year average of 93.75 reported incidents per year.

Collisions (42) were the most prevalent type of incident reported in 2006, including 24 incidents involving collisions between vessels. There was also an increased number of unintentional grounding incidents (33)—up from 29 in 2005 and well above the previous four-year average of 17.25 unintentional grounding incidents.

Sixty-nine per cent of the reported incidents occurred within the smooth and partially smooth water limits of the region. However the number of offshore incidents (38) also increased in 2006 from 28 in 2005 and a previous four-year average of 24.25. More than 75 per cent of the reported incidents occurred in clear weather and good visibility.

Human factors were identified as contributing to 64 per cent of the reported incidents in 2006, with inattention (21) and navigational errors (29) the most frequently identified human contributing factors.

There were 171 vessels involved in the 139 reported incidents in 2006—90 commercial vessels and 81 recreational vessels. The most involved vessels in incidents in 2006 included commercial fishing vessels (31), recreational motorboats (36), recreational sailboats (25) and commercial passenger vessels (20). Commercial fishing vessels were significantly over-represented when compared with their involvement in 2005 (21) and their previous four-year average involvement (20.5).

It is noteworthy that 13 vessels were lost as a result of marine incidents in 2006—well above the previous four-year average of 7.5 vessels lost per year. Ten of the 13 vessels were lost in offshore waters.

Incident study 5

Life jackets are not life savers unless worn!

The vessel: 9m timber recreational motorboat

The incident

On a fine Friday evening, the owner of a 30 foot timber cabin cruiser decided to go fishing for the weekend. He set out with his trusty dog, and a friend on board as deckhand. During the night, the vessel's engine stopped and the owner dropped anchor to assess the problem. When he went to investigate, he discovered the rear deck was awash and that the vessel was sinking quickly. The vessel sank shortly thereafter.



So sudden was the vessel's demise that neither man was able to fit a life jacket before abandoning the vessel. In the darkness they hung onto whatever floating debris they could find. Eventually the two men were separated by tidal currents. The deckhand subsequently managed to locate a life jacket floating in the current and was able to fit it to himself in the water. After several hours, he drifted onto the shore of a nearby island, but it was not until the following morning that he could raise the alarm and get assistance. The owner and master of the vessel was located some time later washed ashore on the same island. He had drowned.

It was subsequently established that the vessel's lifejackets were stowed under the bunks rather than in an easily accessible location in the wheelhouse.

Safety insights

- A personal flotation device is a mariner's best friend.
- Personal flotation devices should be easily accessible to all persons on board the vessel at all times.
- If time permits, do not abandon ship without first fitting a personal flotation device.
- At any time that there is doubt as to the watertight integrity of the vessel, personal flotation devices should be fitted.



The region's record in terms of marine incident fatalities and serious injuries deteriorated in 2006. During the year there were ten reported incidents that resulted in four deaths and seven serious injuries. The four fatalities represent an over-representation of 100 per cent when compared with the region's previous four-year average fatality rate. All four fatalities involved recreational vessels and three occurred in inland waters, including a double fatality which resulted from the collision of a recreational speedboat with the wall of a dam.

Five of the seven serious injury incidents involved commercially operated vessels. The two remaining serious injury incidents involved recreational speedboats.

5.4 Mackay region

The Mackay region extends from Georges Point and Gloucester Island at the northern end of the Whitsunday Islands to Long Island Sound and St Lawrence in the south. While the bulk of the region's marine activity is located in the northern area at Mackay, the Whitsunday Islands and Airlie Beach, the region is also responsible for marine and boating safety in a band of mainland Queensland stretching west to the Northern Territory border.

The region encompasses two major shipping ports at Mackay and Hay Point and monitors the movement of ships both within the ports and the inner shipping route of the Great Barrier Reef.

Marinas currently exist in Mackay, Abel Point (Cannonvale), Hamilton Island, Laguna Quays and Hayman Island and two more marinas are planned for the Whitsunday region to cater for the increasing boating activity. Construction of the Port of Airlie project has commenced and the new Shute Harbour Marina is in the development application stages. A major upgrade is also planned to increase the size of Hayman Island Marina.

While the number of commercial vessels in the region is static, vessels are improving in quality as the industry becomes more sophisticated and safety-conscious. The region boasts an active industry-based Marine Safety Culture Project in the Whitsunday area.

There is a much faster growth in the recreational sector as the size and speed of recreational vessels increases with the boom in the local markets and the mining industry. It is apparent that increasing recreational boating activity is placing a strain on the current recreational facilities as well as having implications for safe vessel movement management, as recreational boaties interact with extensive commercial marine activities.

The region overlooks 800 kilometres of mainland coastline, 1,341 kilometres of island coastline, 317 kilometres of navigable rivers and creeks and a number of freshwater impoundments. The Pioneer River in Mackay with its weir type impoundments supports recreational activities such as fishing, skiing, canoeing and rowing. The Kinchant, Teemburra and Peter Faust Dams are the main fresh water impoundments in the region and provide a facility for fishing, PWC users, skiers and recreational hobby craft users.

At 31 December 2006 there were 16,773 vessels registered within the Mackay region of which more than 95 per cent are recreational vessels. While the region's registered vessel fleet represents only 7.84 per cent of the total Queensland registered vessel fleet, growth in registered vessel numbers in 2006 was 6.75 per cent compared with a state average growth of 4.44 per cent.

Despite significant growth in vessel numbers and the associated increased on-water activity, the region's reported marine incidents for 2006 (105) were down by eight per cent on the 114 incidents reported in 2005 and the region's previous four-year average number of reported marine incidents (126.5).

With increasing congestion and vessel traffic it is not surprising that the most prevalent types of reported marine incidents were collisions. Of the 31 reported collision incidents, 20 involved collisions with other vessels. Equally as significant were the 29 unintentional grounding incidents reported in 2006—significant because of the 31 per cent reduction in this type of incident when compared with the 42 reported incidents in 2005.

Incident study 6

Paddling for one's life!

The vessels: 10.5m recreational speedboat and a competition class outrigger canoe

The incident

A group of employees from one of the Whitsunday's most popular island resorts had set off in one of the resort's outrigger canoes for a late afternoon training session. In ideal conditions the young men had only been paddling for a short time when they noticed a power boat nearby towing a wake board and tube. When the wake board rider fell off, the power boat started to turn at speed to return and pick up the rider.



It seems that the master of the power boat, focusing on picking up his skier, didn't notice the outrigger in front of him, even though the men aboard the canoe did their best to attract his attention. Fearing the worst, the paddlers scrambled and jumped for their lives, just as the power boat slammed directly into the side of the outrigger. One unlucky paddler took the full force of the power boat's impact, throwing him into the water and causing major injuries to his back, pelvis, leg & foot.

The injured man was transferred by Medivac helicopter to Mackay Base Hospital where he has subsequently undergone more than eight operations. He was later transferred to Royal Brisbane Hospital for further surgery.

Safety insights

- Masters need to maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing to adequately assess the risk of a collision, particularly when involved in waterskiing type activities.
- When waterskiing, it is the spotter's job to watch out for the skiers – the master's job is to operate the boat safely.
- Excessive speed can be dangerous. Going slower allows more time to react to unexpected circumstances.
- A safe speed is one that takes account of all prevailing conditions including complementary boating activity.

Eighty per cent of the region's reported incidents in 2006 occurred in the region's extensive smooth and partially smooth water limits.

The Mackay region boasts a significant "bare boat" hire and drive sector. It is therefore not surprising that 24 of the 128 vessels involved in incidents in 2006 were commercial hire and drive vessels. The other vessel types significantly represented in reported marine incidents in 2006 were commercial passenger vessels (31) and recreational sailboats (22).

Looking at the 31 incidents involving commercial passenger carrying vessels, it is noteworthy that there were no fatalities or serious injuries resulting from these incidents. That said, it is somewhat concerning that 11 commercial passenger vessels ran aground and a further seven vessels were involved in collision incidents—three with other vessels.



5.5 Townsville region

The Townsville region extends from Gloucester Passage south of Bowen to waters up to Meunga Creek situated just north of Cardwell. The geographical boundary of the region also encompasses inland freshwater rivers, creeks and impoundments, such as Lake Dalrymple (Burdekin Falls Dam), extending west to the Northern Territory border. Included in the region are the Port of Townsville and the Port of Lucinda, Abbott Point and Bowen Harbour.

With easy access to the Whitsunday Island Group, the Bowen Harbour is home to a large recreational vessel fleet as well as a significant commercial fishing fleet which is primarily engaged in live trout fishing in the reef areas offshore from Bowen. There is only a remnant east coast trawl fleet still operating in the Townsville region.

From a shipping perspective, a major industrial bulk coal loading facility is located at Abbott Point. The Port of Townsville also receives considerable shipping movements throughout the year. The commercial marine sector is also vibrant in and around Townsville with the commercial dive boat industry and smaller commercial craft and high speed catamarans servicing tourism and community demands. Destinations include Magnetic Island and Palm Island.

Further north, hire and drive houseboats, guided commercial fishing charters and a significant number of recreational vessels operate in and around the Cardwell/Hinchinbrook Channel area.

The Townsville region oversights 827 kilometres of mainland coastline, 651 kilometres of island coastline and 769 kilometres of rivers and creeks.

Incident study 7

Fiery fishing trip

The vessel: 12m commercial passenger charter vessel

The incident

A commercial passenger charter vessel set out for a one day fishing charter offshore from Townsville with eight passengers onboard. While underway, smoke was noticed coming from the starboard engine compartment. The fire began to spread rapidly.


The master immediately radioed Coastguard of the fire onboard and soon after had no alternative but to order all passengers and crew to abandon ship. All were recovered by rescue vessels and returned to Townsville. The charter vessel proceeded to burn to the waterline.

Miraculously, only one person was injured—suffering mild smoke inhalation. The vessel was a total write-off.

Safety insights

- Fire onboard commercial passenger carrying vessels has been assessed as one of the top 10 marine safety risks in Queensland.
- There is no room for heroics during an incident involving fire onboard—it is often prudent to abandon the vessel (as proved to be the case in this incident).
- Quick thinking and response is critical when there is a fire onboard.
- Onboard fire incidents underline the importance of having emergency procedures, emergency drills and passenger briefings.





At 31 December 2006 there were 19,752 registered vessels within the Townsville region, including 19,234 registered recreational vessels. Registered vessel numbers in the region continue to grow marginally above the overall rate of growth in Queensland as a whole—4.6 per cent growth in 2006 compared with 4.44 per cent for Queensland as a whole. The number of commercially registered vessels within the Townsville region, while relatively small, increased by 6.8 per cent in 2006 compared with a 1.31 per cent fall in the number of commercially registered vessels statewide. This increase reversed three years of falls in the number of commercially registered vessels in the Townsville region.

Townsville region historically has had low numbers of reported marine incidents. In 2006 there were 42 marine incidents reported within the Townsville region, three more than in 2005, but under-represented when compared with the region's previous four-year average of 47.5 reported incidents.

The most prevalent types of incidents reported in 2006 were capsize incidents (11), collision incidents (7) and unintentional grounding incidents (9). The majority of the reported incidents (52.4 per cent) occurred within the region's smooth and partially smooth water limits. 35.7 per cent of incidents (15) occurred in offshore waters.

53.2 per cent of the vessels involved were commercially registered vessels, with commercial fishing vessels (6) and commercial passenger vessels (6) the most involved types of commercial vessels. While fewer recreational vessels were involved, there were 11 recreational motorboats involved and a further seven recreational sailboats. There was only one incident involving a jet ski (recreational) reported within the Townsville region in 2006.

The Townsville region's marine safety outcome when measured in terms of fatalities and serious injuries was exemplary in 2006, with no fatalities or serious injuries reported from marine incidents. This comes on the back of three recorded marine incident fatalities in 2005. It is acknowledged that the incident numbers in the Townsville region are historically small and even small random variations can make an otherwise good year look ordinary.

5.6 Cairns region

The Cairns region stretches from Mission Beach, south of Cairns up the east coast of Cape York including the islands of the Torres Strait then around the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Northern Territory border. The region's extensive mainland coastline coverage includes ports at Mission Beach/Clump Point (Tourism), Mourilyan (Molasses wharf), Innisfail (Fishing), Cairns (Sugar, tourism, fishing, coastal trade), Port Douglas (Tourism and some fishing), Cooktown (Tourism and fishing), Cape Flattery (Silica export), Thursday Island and Horn Island (Torres Strait & Cape York hub), Weipa (Bauxite export, some tourism/fishing) and Karumba (Zinc export, fishing and some tourism).

Inland, the region also is responsible for boating safety on Lake Tinaroo on the Barron River and Koombooloomba Dam on the Tully River.

In terms of commercial shipping operations, the active industry sectors include fishing (prawn trawling, tuna, fin fish, crayfish, beche-de-mer (sea cucumbers)), tourism (reef/dive/snorkel and fishing charter, visiting cruise ships and super yachts), export (sugar, bauxite, zinc, silica sand), general cargo (supply to Torres Strait and other remote communities) and merchant shipping transiting the Great Barrier Reef Inner Route.

The major issues in terms of marine safety confronting the region at present include the physical size of the region, accessibility to remote parts of the region, implementing the Torres Strait Marine Safety Strategy, maintaining a good marine safety record in the face of larger and faster tourist passenger carrying vessels, and continuing to improve the safety standards and practices of the large commercial fishing fleet.

Geographically, the Cairns region has nearly 3,000 kilometres of mainland coastline, 2,267 kilometres of island coastline and a further 6,434 kilometres of rivers and creeks.



Incident study 8

Watch out for water skiers!

The vessels: Two recreational speedboats (skiboats)

The incident

On a clear day at a popular skiing spot on an inland lake a high powered skiboat was attempting to pull a skier out of the water when it struck an inflatable ski biscuit behind another skiboat. There were two children on the inflatable tow at the time and one of them, a 13 year old boy, was struck by the bow of the skiboat. The boy suffered serious head injuries requiring admission to hospital.



Safety insights

- Maintaining a proper lookout and a safe and manageable speed are critical when undertaking water ski activities, particularly given the close proximity to other vessels and skiers and the frequently chopped and lumpy surface conditions.
- The role of the spotter/lookout when water skiing is to keep an eye out for the person being towed. The skiboat master must keep a proper lookout in relation to the safe operation of the vessel and its interaction with other vessels and water users.
- Inattention, even for a second, can result in unexpected and often catastrophic events.

There were 19,245 vessels registered in the Cairns region as at 31 December 2006 representing an increase of 3.04 per cent during the calendar year. All of the increase was in the region's recreationally registered vessel fleet, which makes up 94 per cent of the total registered vessel numbers. The region's commercially registered vessel numbers fell by nearly four per cent in 2006. It is not clear why commercially registered vessel numbers are falling, but it could be the result of increasing economic pressure on operational viability, particularly in the commercial fishing sector and as a product of larger commercial passenger vessels replacing multiple smaller vessels.

In 2006 there were 122 marine incidents reported in the Cairns region, up by 31 per cent on the number of incidents reported in 2005 and significantly over-represented when compared with the previous four-year average of 96.75 reported incidents.

The most frequently reported type of incident was collisions (32) of which 16 involved collisions with other vessels. There were also 22 unintentional grounding incidents and 21 capsize incidents reported. A further eight incidents involved a person overboard. 65 per cent of the incidents identified human factors as contributing to the incident. Inattention accounted for 30 per cent of the identified human contributing factors.

While the majority of the incidents (61.5 per cent) were reported as having occurred in smooth and partially smooth water limits, 41 (33.6 per cent) of the incidents were reported as having taken place in offshore waters.

There were 156 vessels involved in the 122 reported incidents. 71 per cent of these vessels were commercially operated vessels, including 39 commercial passenger carrying vessels, 28 commercial fishing vessels and 24 commercial non-passenger vessels. Of the 45 recreational vessels involved, there were 16 recreational speedboats, 16 recreational sailboats and 10 recreational motorboats. More than 71 per cent of the incidents occurred during daylight or twilight hours.

The loss of ships has been a feature of the Cairns region's marine incidents over the past five years, particularly commercial fishing vessels. That trend continued in 2006 with nine per cent of reported incidents resulting in the loss of 11 vessels. This compared with 6.4 per cent of incidents involving the loss of a vessel for the remainder of Queensland.



The Cairns region's fatal and serious injury incidents were up significantly in 2006, with 15 reported FSI incidents compared with seven in 2005 and a previous four-year average of eight reported FSI incidents. These 15 FSI incidents resulted in seven fatalities and a further nine people hospitalised with serious injuries.

Human factors were identified as contributing to more than 73 per cent of the reported FSI incidents. In three incidents alcohol and drugs were identified as contributing factors, while in four of the incidents inattention was identified as the major human contributing factor. Environmental and material contributing factors were each only identified as contributing to 13.3 per cent of the reported FSI incidents.

The most frequently occurring FSI incident type was person overboard with four such incidents reported. These four incidents resulted in a total of four fatalities. A further six of the FSI incidents involved death or serious injury as a result of an onboard incident.

Notably, seven (46.7 per cent) of the reported FSI incidents occurred in offshore waters, six of these resulting in fatalities. All of the region's seven fatalities occurred in offshore waters.

There were 20 vessels reportedly involved in the region's 15 FSI incidents. Commercial non-passenger vessels (5), commercial fishing vessels (4) and recreational speedboats (5) were the most involved vessels in FSI incidents.