Racing Rules of Sailing

New Definition Exoneration

A submission from US Sailing

Purpose

To add a new definition to clarify the meaning of term that is frequently used in the RRS.

Proposal

Add a new definition Exoneration as follows:

Option 1

Exoneration A boat **exonerated** for breaking a **rule**

(a) is freed from fault,
(b) need not take a penalty, and
(c) shall not be penalized for breaking that rule.

OR

Option 2

Exoneration A boat **exonerated** for breaking a **rule** is freed from fault, and she need not take a penalty and shall not be penalized, for breaking that **rule**.

Current Position

None. The proposed definition is new.

Reasons

When a word is not defined in the RRS, we are told that the word is used in the sense ordinarily understood in nautical or general use. That advice does not work well in the case of exoneration. The most common dictionary definitions for ‘exonerate’ are to acquit, to clear someone convicted of a crime, to free from blame, and to absolve from an obligation. None of these are very helpful to a reader when they find ‘exoneration’ or ‘exonerated’ in a rule.

As used in the RRS, ‘exoneration’ has two specific implications that are not found in dictionaries. Those are stated explicitly in the proposal as ‘she need not take a penalty and shall not be penalized’.
The term ‘exoneration’ is not a term frequently used in everyday conversation and it is likely to be unfamiliar to many readers whose native language is not English. The words ‘exoneration’, ‘exonerated’ and ‘exonerating’ are used 11 times in the current RRS and over 100 times in The Case Book.

For all these reasons, a definition stating the meaning of ‘exoneration’ as that term is used in our sport is appropriate and will be helpful to readers.

There are many incidents in which a boat breaks two rules. It is common in such cases for the boat to be exonerated for breaking one of those rules but not to be exonerated for breaking the second rule. In such cases, the boat is disqualified for breaking the second rule. Therefore, it is important to make it clear in the definition that a boat is exonerated for breaking a particular rule and may not be exonerated for breaking other rules in an incident. The words ‘for breaking that rule’ at the end of the proposed definition emphasize that point.

The two options incorporate the same concepts and only differ in the formatting and presentation of the rule.