Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 20

A submission from the Royal Yachting Association

Proposal

20 ROOM TO TACK AT AN OBSTRUCTION

20.1 Hailing and Responding

When approaching an obstruction, a boat sailing close-hauled or above may hail for room to tack and avoid another boat on the same tack. After a boat hails,

(a) she shall give the hailed boat time to respond;

(b) the hailed boat shall respond either by tacking as soon as possible, or by immediately replying ‘You tack’ and then giving the hailing boat room to tack and avoid her; and

(c) when the hailed boat responds, the hailing boat shall tack as soon as possible.

20.2 Exoneration

When a boat is taking room to which she is entitled under rule 20.1(b), she shall be exonerated if she breaks a rule of Section A or rule 15 or 16.

20.3 When Not to Hail

A boat shall not hail for room to tack unless safety requires her to make a substantial course change to avoid the obstruction. Also, she shall not hail if the obstruction is a mark that the hailed boat is fetching.

(a) if she is sailing below close-hauled, or

(b) if she can avoid the obstruction safely without making a substantial course change, or

(c) if the obstruction is a mark that the other boat is fetching.

Current Position

As above.

Reason

Improve the structure and clarity of the rule by placing all exceptions in rule 20.3.

For inapplicability currently covered in 20.1, the hailed boat may ignore the hail, and if she tacks she does that of her own volition, whereas for inapplicability currently covered in 20.3, the hailed boat must respond and protest the hailer under 20.3. This is confusing.
A better structure is to put all applicability in the same place. As this is a safety rule, we want the hailed boat always to respond.