INTERNATIONAL REGULATIONS (IR) COMMISSSION – CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE WORLD SAILING BOARD, NOVEMBER 2026

1. The International Regulations Commission provides advice on matters related to the regulation of recreational boats or craft by government actions or otherwise.

2. The Commission has nine current members, drawn from Finland, Germany, Greece, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, the Netherlands and the UK.

3. Members of the IR Commission monitor regulatory and technical developments in international fora – principally in the various committees and working groups of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and the European Boating Association (EBA). We make interventions and seek wider support from States and other organisations on behalf of World Sailing's interests, wherever the potential emerges for additional risks or constraints that might affect the activities and/or safety of racing, cruising, sailing and other recreational craft.

4. Over the past year members of the Commission have participated in the following meetings:

International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

- Facilitation Committee (FAL) 50 – March 2026
- Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC) 84 - April 2026
- Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) 111 - May 2026
- Sub-committee on Navigation, Communications and Search & Rescue (NCSR) 13 – June 2026
- Informal Correspondence Group on updating the WS Polar Yachting Guide (PYG)

International Standards Organisation (ISO)

- Technical Committee 188/Working Group 35 regarding hull construction and scantlings.

European Boating Association (EBA)

- General Assembly and Working Groups attended by expert staff of the UK Royal Yachting Association.

5. Nothing of major significance has emerged since last Conference that would directly affect the construction, equipment or operation of yachts and other sport and leisure craft. However, we have been monitoring some emerging regulatory, technical and safety issues and trends with particular care:

a. Maritime security and piracy, where 2025 saw a 17% increase in incidents globally compared to 2024, with 171 incidents recorded in total. This went against the overall reducing trend in reported attacks over the previous five years, from 229

incidents in 2020. The areas most affected by acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships in 2025 were the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (122 incidents: up by 34%), followed by West Africa (21: up by 24%), Indian Ocean (6: down by 40%), South China Sea (10: down by 29%), Latin America and the Caribbean (5), East Africa (5), Arabian Sea (2). There were no reported attacks in the North Atlantic or the Mediterranean. The number of crew kidnapped or held hostage reduced from 132 in 2024 to 53 in 2025.

Region	Malacca/ Singapore	West Africa	Indian Ocean	South China Sea	Others	Total
2024	91	17	19	10	9	146
2025	122	21	10	6	12	171
Variance	+34%	+24%	-47%	-40%	+33%	+17%

b. The WS IR Commission's 2022 report on the incidence of piracy and armed robbery was updated in October this year, along with its detailed guidance for yachtsmen on: minimising the risk of capture; how to liaise with and report to regional naval and security authorities; and how to react to actual piracy/armed robbery events. The 2025 update reflected trends and changes to the piracy/armed robbery threat profile, together with amendments to reporting procedures.

c. Separate safety concerns have increased in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden as a result of attacks by Houthi rebels. While these attacks have been aimed at large merchant and naval vessels, the possibility of strikes on, or collateral damage to, recreational vessels cannot be ignored. GPS jamming and other forms of electronic interference have also taken place in the area. Their effects are largely indiscriminate, and small vessel skippers should avoid over-reliance on GPS or other electronic navigation aids in this region.

d. In similar vein, the southern Arabian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz have become hazardous for marine traffic of all kinds and are best avoided by leisure and sports sailors whilst current tensions persist in the region.

6. The Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue Sub-committee (NCSR) agreed measures to improve systems for communications, navigation, maritime safety and SAR, aimed mainly at Convention-sized ships (>500 Gross Tons), but with relevance also to offshore and oceanic sailors. These include improvements and wider usage of GMDSS, LRIT EPIRBs and Digital VHF, and the intent to improve global SAR capability and training. The NCSR also approved amendments to Traffic Separation Schemes off NE America, and finalised revised ship reporting systems for the Dover Strait, Bonifacio Strait and the Western European Particularly Sensitive Sea Area.

7. On environmental matters, the IMO's Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC) is continuing to work towards greenhouse gas reduction measures, including via the introduction of technical and economic measures within an agreed 'Net-Zero' framework

for addressing carbon and other emissions from vessels. While these measures apply principally to ships of SOLAS Convention size (ie over 500 gross tons), we are watching for any potential future implications for much smaller vessels too. Similar circumstances apply to developments in the ballast water management, air pollution prevention, biofouling, marine plastic litter and ship recycling conventions. MEPC 84 also adopted a new Emissions Control Area in the north-eastern Atlantic, covering the seas around Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal. The ECA imposes stricter emission limits on nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulphur oxides (SOx) and particulate matter (PM) and will enter force on 1 September 2027.

8. The IR Commission will remain engaged in these topics, both independently and through the EBA, with the main aim of averting the making of regulations that might unnecessarily or disproportionately impact on smaller recreational vessels.

9. We are also following the development of an IMO Code relating to the safe operation of autonomous, unmanned or lean-manned surface vessels, with as yet unproven methodologies and technologies for situational awareness and collision avoidance – especially when operating in the vicinity of small, less conspicuous vessels in increasingly congested waters. A non-mandatory Code for MASS operations was adopted by the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee in May 2026, to be followed by adoption of a mandatory code in July 2030 for entry into force on 1 January 2032.

10. Cargo containers lost overboard from ships and floating on or near the surface continue to present a particular hazard to sailing craft. Many hundreds/low thousands of containers are lost at sea every year, with a total of 1,478 lost in 2025. The IMO is actively seeking to reduce this number and introduced global measures for the mandatory reporting of lost containers from 1 January 2026. Efforts are also continuing to improve capability in tracking and recovering lost containers. Further preventive steps, including the introduction of lashing software, and measures to improve Masters' awareness of risks to container ship stability, are also progressing.

11. On ISO Standards relating to small craft, the IR Commission this year contributed to the deliberations of specialist Sub-committees and Working Groups with the following outcomes:

ISO Technical Committee TC 188 which continues to progress several small craft standards, with most projects involving routine reviews, updates, and schedule extensions rather than major technical changes.

Key Updates:

- Electrical installations (WG36) remain an active area of work.
- ISO 13297 (AC/DC electrical systems) has been granted a deadline extension due to the complexity of the work, with publication now expected in 2028.
- ISO 9094.2 (Fire Protection) is under systematic review, with no significant changes anticipated.

- ISO 12217-2 (Sailing Boat Stability and Buoyancy) has received a nine-month extension for preparation of a second Draft International Standard.
- ISO 11812 (Quick-Draining Cockpits) is being revised to merge amendments, incorporate user feedback, and address harmonisation comments, but no major changes are expected.

ISO TC 188/SC1 Safety Harness Developments

The most significant changes relate to safety harness standards, including:

- Stricter testing requirements for hooks and carabiners, introducing mountaineering-based and lateral load tests.
- Revised size classifications aligned with lifejacket standard ISO 12402, based on wearer body mass.
- Enhanced child safety provisions, including restrictions on lanyard detachability for smaller sizes and measures to prevent tampering by children.
- Updated reference lanyard specifications requiring compliance with the latest EN 892 rope standard.
- New minimum strap width requirements for load-bearing components, varying by size category.

World Sailing will continue to engage with these developments in international standards.

12. The European Boating Association provided in October 2026 a very helpful annual report to the WS International Regulations Commission, covering a wide range of current issues affecting small recreational craft. This year the EBA Secretary made three explicit requests to WS for support for EBA positions, as follows:

a. Alternatives to flares: to support the EBA's proposal to have electronic visual distress signals (EVDS) recognised in Annex IV of COLREG as distress signals, advancing the proposal through the IMO.
b. Electronic charts**:** to clarify whether World Sailing is engaging with the IHO on a standard for electronic charts for the sub-ECDIS market**,** supporting the need for affordable, approved charts for recreational craft.
c. EU VAT and customs status**:** to help gather detailed evidence from across the EU of problems such as incorrect VAT demands or failed boat purchases caused by missing VAT/customs documentation. Examples were requested to be sent directly to Carol Paddison, EBA Secretary**,** at carol.paddison@rya.org.uk**,** to support the case for European Commission action.

13. Finally, a drafting group was established in September 2026 to update the Polar Yacht Guide, which was jointly published in 2021 by World Sailing and the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation, as a source of guidance and advice to yachtsmen sailing in high latitudes. The PYG seeks to reflect the intent of the IMO Polar Code for large commercial vessels, taking account of the exceptional navigational, environmental, geopolitical, safety and search and rescue conditions in the polar regions. Publication of the updated Guide is planned for early 2027.

Sir Alan Massey
Chair, International Regulations Commission