



BALLYHOLME YACHT CLUB

# Sea Swimming Risk Assessment

BYC Sea Swimming Committee — All open water swimming events

Ref: BYC-SW-RA-001

Version: V4

Issued: 20 April 2026

Next Review: May 2027

**RESPONSIBLE GROUP:** BYC Sea Swimming Committee

**INITIAL ASSESSORS:** A. McConnell, M. Bickerstaff, S. O'Connor, K. Keenan

**ORIGINAL DATE:** 10 July 2023

**SWIM SEASON:** May – September and Boxing Day

**ACTIVITIES IN SCOPE:**

- Weekly Open Water Swim (16+)
- Regular Cadet Swim (Under 16)
- Annual BYC Sea Swim
- Boxing Day Swim

## DOCUMENT REVIEW HISTORY:

10 July 2023 — v1.0 (Initial)

**A. McConnell, M. Bickerstaff, S. O'Connor, K. Keenan**

Original document created.

09 May 2024 — v2.0

**M. Bickerstaff, K. Keenan, R. Milligan, B. Polly**

Incorporated GO/NO GO water-condition protocol. Rationalised immersion hazard sections to eliminate duplication.

27 August 2024 — v3.0

**M. Bickerstaff, K. Keenan**

Additional wording to cover Annual Swim (August 2024). Note: next reviewer to check for any remaining duplication.

20 April 2026 — v4.0

**D. Nelson**

Wording improvements. Document structure rationalised; duplicated control measures consolidated. Hazards re-ordered by severity. Junior-specific controls clearly separated.

△ MANDATORY OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES – MUST BE OBSERVED AT EVERY EVENT

- Open water swimming carries inherent, potentially serious hazards that must be formally recognised and managed.
- Environmental conditions (currents, rip currents, wave action, long-shore drift) are dynamic and unpredictable.
- Cold water can rapidly incapacitate any swimmer regardless of ability – risk of drowning is significantly elevated.
- Pool swimming proficiency does NOT equate to open-water competency; ability must never be assumed.
- A nominated safety team must complete a GO/NO GO assessment before every event.
- Continuous, active supervision by competent personnel is mandatory throughout every event.
- This RA is to be read alongside the BYC Generic RA "General Considerations" and, where applicable, "Indirect or Remote Supervision".
- All accidents (however minor) must be recorded and reported to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

**HAZARD REGISTER & CONTROL MEASURES**

HAZARD & POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES	PRIMARY CONTROL MEASURES	ADDITIONAL / CONTINGENCY CONTROLS	RESIDUAL RISK	NOTES
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Cold Water & Immersion Hypothermia · Cold Water Shock · Sudden incapacitation Drowning.

**ALL EVENTS**  
**CADETS**  
**ANNUAL BYC SWIM**  
**BOXING DAY**

**PRE-EVENT**

- GO/NO GO assessment completed by safety team before every event, considering water temperature, air temp, and conditions.
- All swimmers briefed on cold water shock, warning signs of hypothermia, and when to self-exit.
- Time in water limited based on group competency and water temperature; individuals showing signs of cold or fatigue directed to exit.
- Safety team made aware of any non-wetsuit swimmers; non-wetsuit swimmers complete a competency declaration at registration.
- Swimmers advised to eat at least 30 minutes before entering water.

**EQUIPMENT**



- **Mandatory:** bright coloured swim hat and tow-float / visible flotation device worn by every swimmer.
- **Mandatory (Juniors):** approved life jacket or buoyancy aid worn at all times in the water.
- Wetsuits strongly recommended; wearing one is a personal choice for adults and is confirmed at registration.
- SUPERVISION & RESCUE
  - RIB (minimum PBL2 helm) and kayak/SUP cover deployed throughout; at least 2 persons on safety craft.
  - Safety craft remain outside swim course; only enter to assist a swimmer.
  - Rescue craft and shore team maintain two-way radio contact.
  - Swimmers count in and out (wristbands issued where numbers require it).
  - Swim area marked by high-visibility marker buoys; swimmers must remain within the course.
  - All swimmers swim the same direction (e.g. anti-clockwise) to reduce collisions.
  - Weaker swimmers identified pre-event; modified/shorter route designated for them.
  - Air horn or verbal signals used to alter course or recall swimmers; safety team decision is final.
  - Nearest A&E department identified; all safety personnel hold emergency contact numbers. Dial 999 in any emergency.



If conditions deteriorate: reduce circuit, alter route, or cancel — as per GO/NO GO protocol.  
Rapid recall: safety team initiates via horn/radio; shore team manages exit.  
Boxing Day Swim: cold-water briefing given extra emphasis; shorter course; warm clothing/hot drinks available on shore.

- Buddy system encouraged for weaker swimmers.
- Distress signal pre-agreed with all swimmers at briefing (raise arm, shout, stop swimming).
- First Aid kit on shore; trained first aider present or on-call.

**LOW**

Course distance approx. 750 m (weekly). Annual Swim distances published at registration. Circuit size adjusted to conditions and rescue coverage.

 <p><b>Unclean / Polluted Water</b>  Gastric infection · Ear/eye infection · Skin irritation · Illness  <b>ALL EVENTS</b>  <b>CADETS</b>  <b>ANNUAL BYC SWIM</b>  <b>BOXING DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DAERA bathing water quality reports monitored before each event; results factored into GO/NO GO decision.</li> <li>• Visual inspection of water before swimming commences (clarity, signs of sewage, litter, algal bloom or unusual discolouration).</li> <li>• Swimmers advised that water quality may vary with tidal and weather conditions and has not been independently tested by BYC.</li> <li>• Any decision to proceed is communicated as "at swimmers' own risk"; this is confirmed at registration.</li> <li>• Swimmers encouraged to cover open cuts and wounds with waterproof dressings before entering the water.</li> <li>• Hand-washing facilities (soap and water) available at the venue; wet wipes acceptable alternative.</li> </ul>	<p>Cancel or relocate event if DAERA reports fail threshold or if visual inspection reveals significant concern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform swimmers of any known pollution events or advisories at briefing.</li> <li>• Swimmers with open wounds or compromised immunity advised to consult own physician.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>DAERA link to be checked and result noted in event log each session.</p>
 <p><b>Water Currents &amp; Environmental Conditions</b>  Swimmer drift · Separation from group · Exhaustion · Drowning  <b>ALL EVENTS</b>  <b>CADETS</b>  <b>ANNUAL BYC SWIM</b>  <b>BOXING DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tide times, tidal flow direction and strength checked by safety team before the event.</li> <li>• Swim course planned to minimise exposure to strong currents or rip current risk areas.</li> <li>• Any known local hazards (tidal rocks, sandbanks, submerged structures) identified and included in swimmer briefing.</li> <li>• Safety briefing covers entry/exit points and any tide-related considerations for the session.</li> <li>• Rescue craft positioned to intercept any swimmer being carried by current.</li> <li>• RYA safety boat protocol followed; RIB helmed by certified PBL2 driver.</li> <li>• Swimmers reminded to swim within the buoyed course at all times.</li> </ul>	<p>If current unexpectedly strengthens: immediate recall via horn; rescue craft intercepts affected swimmers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Swim: detailed tidal survey conducted at planning stage; course adjusted if required; published pre-event.</li> <li>• Cancel or shorten swim if conditions are assessed as beyond safe management.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>Long-shore drift and rip currents to be specifically considered during GO/NO GO assessment.</p>

 <p><b>Adverse Weather</b>  Reduced visibility ·  Lightning ·  Hypothermia ·  Panic ·  Drowning  <b>ALL EVENTS</b>  <b>CADETS</b>  <b>ANNUAL BYC</b>  <b>SWIM</b>  <b>BOXING DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weather forecast (wind, rain, visibility, lightning risk) checked before every event and factored into GO/NO GO decision.</li> <li>• Heavy rain, strong winds, or poor visibility – the appeal of "novelty" extreme weather swimming is to be actively resisted; safety criteria apply regardless.</li> <li>• Swim distance and course may be reduced in response to deteriorating weather.</li> <li>• Non-wetsuit swimmers complete a competency declaration at registration; wetsuit use strongly recommended in cold or adverse conditions.</li> </ul>	<p>Immediate cancellation if lightning is observed or forecast. All swimmers exit the water without delay. GO/NO GO protocol invoked; organiser decision is final and not subject to pressure from participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rescue craft recalled to shore in severe lightning; Safety team and swimmer safety prioritised over equipment.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>Weather app / Met Office marine forecast reviewed morning of event. Note in event log.</p>
 <p><b>Entry &amp; Exit from Shoreline</b>  Slips · Trips · Falls ·  Lacerations ·  Collision with watercraft  <b>ALL EVENTS</b>  <b>CADETS</b>  <b>ANNUAL BYC</b>  <b>SWIM</b>  <b>BOXING DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swimmers briefed on designated entry and exit points before the event.</li> <li>• Warnings given on slipping hazards: seaweed, wet or dark-coloured sections of slipway, and rocks at the water's edge.</li> <li>• Appropriate footwear advised for approach to the water; swimmers to remove only when entering.</li> <li>• No running on the slipway or rocky areas.</li> <li>• Jumping or diving into water is strictly prohibited (water depth varies with tide; submerged hazards may be hidden).</li> <li>• Rescue RIB briefs other water users (dinghies, windsurfers, powerboats) of swimmer presence; swimmers warned to avoid designated watercraft areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Aid kit on shore; trained first aider present.</li> <li>• Two-way radio link between shore and safety craft for immediate coordination.</li> <li>• 999 in any emergency requiring ambulance or coastguard.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>Tidal state determines slipway exposure; check pre-event. Low-tide rocky hazards to be included in briefing.</p>

 <p><b>Cuts, Stings &amp; Submerged Hazards</b> Lacerations · Jellyfish / Weever fish stings · Algae exposure · Pain · Infection <b>ALL EVENTS</b> <b>CADETS</b> <b>ANNUAL BYC SWIM</b> <b>BOXING DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local knowledge shared at briefing regarding likely marine hazards for the session (jellyfish species present, weever fish risk, algal bloom reports).</li> <li>Swim courses avoid areas with known high hazard concentrations where possible.</li> <li>Swimmers advised to wear suitable footwear when entering and exiting the water.</li> <li>Swimmers may choose not to swim if concerned about jellyfish or other hazards, regardless of GO/NO GO decision — this is their personal right.</li> <li>First Aid kit (including treatment for marine stings) available on shore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If high jellyfish density observed: announce at briefing; allow swimmer opt-out without pressure.</li> <li>Shore first aider to treat minor stings; 999 if severe allergic reaction suspected.</li> <li>Two-way radio for rapid shore-water communication.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>Check local marine/coastguard reports for weever fish or jellyfish season warnings. Log observations in event record.</p>
 <p><b>Cadet Swimmer Safety</b> Increased vulnerability to all hazards · Supervision failure · Separation <b>CADETS ONLY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Mandatory:</b></li> <li><b>Cadet swim course will not exceed a depth of one metre</b></li> <li>all cadet swimmers wear an approved life jacket or buoyancy aid for the duration of the swim.</li> <li>Each cadet swimmer (under 16) must be accompanied by a responsible adult who remains on-site throughout — on the water or on shore — preferably a parent or guardian.</li> <li>Cadets swim a designated, shorter or modified route appropriate to their ability.</li> <li>Cadets are registered separately at sign-in; ability level noted and appropriate supervision assigned.</li> <li>Safety team to water ratio enhanced for cadet events.</li> <li>Cadet swimmers briefed separately at an age-appropriate level on distress signals, buddy system, and course boundaries.</li> </ul>	<p>If a responsible adult cannot be confirmed for a junior, the junior may not participate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandatory buddy pairing for all cadet swimmers.</li> <li>Kayak/SUP cover positioned specifically in cadet swim area.</li> <li>Any cadet showing distress — cold, panic, or fatigue — is immediately assisted to exit.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOW</b></p>	<p>For Annual BYC Swim: cadet entries managed via registration process. Parental consent form required.</p>

**DECLARATION & SIGN-OFF**

**ASSESSED / REVIEWED BY**

Name: Diane Nelson

**DATE APPROVED BY COMMITTEE & NEXT REVIEW**

Date approved: 29/04/2026

Next review due: April 2027

*Review annually or following any incident or significant change in activity.*

**BALLYHOLME YACHT CLUB – SEA SWIMMING COMMITTEE**

*This document must be read alongside BYC Generic RA "General Considerations". All participants must be briefed on its contents before entering the water.*

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