

Glenn Dawson on understand Radio Sailing rule 20

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ROOM TO TACK AT AN OBSTRUCTION – RULE 20

After watching a number of videos earlier this year, it became apparent that this rule is not well understood by many radio sailors. In addition, there was a specific change to the rule in relation to the hail which came into force on January 1 2021.

WHEN DOES RULE 20 APPLY?

The rule applies when boats are approaching an obstruction. An obstruction in simple terms is:

- An object that a boat could not pass without changing course substantially.
- An object or area of the race course that can be safely passed on only one side.
- A right of way boat or boats that you are required to keep clear of, or a boat disabled, capsized, anchored or aground.

A boat may hail for room to tack and avoid a boat on the same tack. However, she shall not hail unless she is approaching an obstruction and will soon need to make a substantial course change to avoid it safely, and she is sailing close-hauled or above.

There is a limitation on this rule. A boat shall not hail if the obstruction is a mark and a boat that is fetching it would be required to change course as a result of the hail.

SO what that means is that if two or more boats are approaching a bank of the lake on either tack, a leeward boat can hail for room to tack to avoid running into the bank.



This photograph by Miguel Salvador, is from the UK 2013 National Championship, Fleetwood. The blue boat on starboard, is approaching the bank and needs to tack on to port, but the two boats behind and to weather are on starboard and could collide if Blue suddenly tacks.

NOW: The recent change to Appendix E1.3 which applies here is that the HAIL must contain the words “Room”, “Tack” and the sail number of the boat hailing, in any order. It is no longer applicable to hail “water”.

This hail identifies the boat making the hail, as well as uses terms which are defined in the Racing Rules.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- After a boat hails, she shall give a hailed boat time to respond.
- A hailed boat shall respond even if the hail breaks rule 20.1.
- A 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.
- When a hailed boat responds, the hailing boat shall tack as soon as possible.

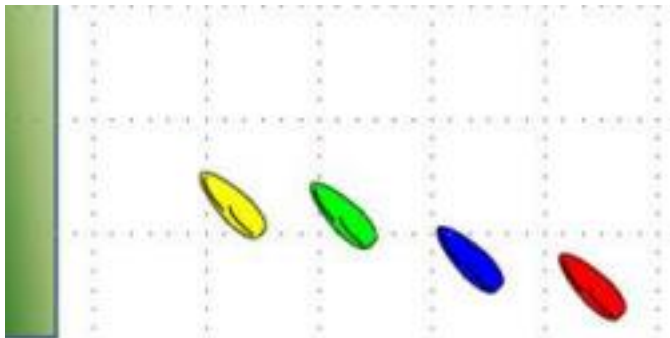
The important thing here is that the HAILED BOAT SHALL RESPOND even if the hail breaks the rule. It is not the judgement of the boat which is going to have to tack first about when to tack. The boat must respond even if an incorrect hail is used, or if the hailed skipper believes the hail is too early.

The boat which is hailed must respond by tacking as soon as possible, even if the other skipper thinks there is still plenty of time or water under the keel. There is no discussion or debate, simply, the boat must respond.

WHAT IF THERE ARE OTHER BOATS AROUND?

When a boat has been hailed for room to tack and she intends to respond by tacking, she may hail another boat on the same tack for room to tack and avoid her. She may hail even if her hail does not meet the conditions of rule 20.1.

But this may take some time, so the hail from the initial boat has to take that into account. There must be time given for boats to respond, so the first hail has to be made in enough time prior to hitting the bank to allow all boats to respond.



World Sailing Case 113 covers this situation and simplifies it by saying that all boats hearing the hail by Yellow that are affected, MUST respond. In addition, a rule, R20.3 exists so that Green or Blue or Red who at this point do not need to hail for room to tack themselves (do not meet the conditions of R20.1) break no rule by passing on the chain of hails.

These together make it clear that Yellow has to allow time for Green to hail Blue to hail Red and so on. But it goes further and simplifies the situation by saying that all boats hearing the hail by Yellow that are affected, MUST respond (either by tacking, or by hailing 'you tack' and staying clear).

WHAT DOES THE HAIL ENTITLE YOU TO?

The hail seeks "Room to Tack". A tack commences when a boat passes head to wind and finishes when the boat is on its new course. The hail seeks to allow you Room to do a tack and complete it.

Once the tack is complete, any rights that you have gained from the hail disappear. If another boat is approaching on starboard after your tack is complete, you have to give way to that boat. You cannot claim "water" (room to tack) when you are on a tack which is sailing away from an obstruction.

PENALTIES

If you are the hailed boat:

- You believe the hail is in error, you must respond to the hail and your only recourse is to protest the hailing boat for breaching Rule 20.1.
- You believe the hail is not made in accordance with Appendix E1.3 (including the words “room”, “tack” and the sail number), you could protest the other boat for breaching Rule 20.1

If you are the hailing boat:

- You make a hail and the other boat does not respond by tacking as soon as possible or hailing “You tack”, you can protest the other boat for a breach of Rule 20.2.

Protest committees have some discretion in how they handle penalties under Appendix E7. A protest for an incorrect hail (eg: 76 hailed “water” instead of “76 needs room to tack”) might lead to the Protest committee deciding that, whilst a rule has been broken it does not deserve a disqualification from the race.

The protest committee has the option of awarding a points penalty (eg a 20% points increase on that race) or require 76 to complete a penalty turn after the start signal but before crossing the start line in the next race to exonerate the breach.

Repeated breaches by a skipper might force the Protest Committee to impose a greater penalty.

At Umpired events under Appendix Q, the Umpire is able to impose a 360 penalty immediately in the case where an incorrect hail is made.

GOOD HABITS

The hail of “water” has been around for years, but is now not in accordance with the rules. It would be a good habit to get into to make the correct hail, especially if you have any intention of participating in Championship level events.

Understand also that room to tack at an obstruction only applies when you are sailing towards an obstruction, not when you are sailing away from one!