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Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972

Consolidated Edition 2003



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Foreword

The Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 has been accepted by many States since it was adopted on 20 October 1972 and entered into force on 15 July 1977. It was amended in 1981, 1987, 1989 and 1993 and has more recently been amended by resolution A.910(22), which was adopted by the twenty-second session of the Assembly on 29 November 2001 and entered into force on 29 November 2003. This publication contains the consolidated text of the 1972 Convention as amended in 1981, 1987, 1989, 1993 and 2001.

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CONVENTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL REGULATIONS FOR PREVENTING COLLISIONS AT SEA, 1972, AS AMENDED

The Parties to the present Convention,

DESIRING to maintain a high level of safety at sea,

MINDFUL of the need to revise and bring up to date the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea annexed to the Final Act of the International Conference on Safety of Life at Sea, 1960,

HAVING CONSIDERED those Regulations in the light of developments since they were approved,

HAVE AGREED as follows:

Article I

General obligations

The Parties to the present Convention undertake to give effect to the Rules and other Annexes constituting the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972, (hereinafter referred to as “the Regulations”) attached hereto.

Article II

Signature, ratification, acceptance, approval and accession

1. The present Convention shall remain open for signature until 1 June 1973 and shall thereafter remain open for accession.
2. States Members of the United Nations, or of any of the Specialized Agencies, or the International Atomic Energy Agency, or Parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may become Parties to this Convention by:
 - (a) signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance or approval;
 - (b) signature subject to ratification, acceptance or approval followed by ratification, acceptance or approval; or
 - (c) accession.
3. Ratification, acceptance, approval or accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument to that effect with the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization* (hereinafter referred to as “the

* NOTE: The name of the Organization was changed to “INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION” by virtue of amendments to the Organization’s Convention which entered into force on 22 May 1982.

Organization”) which shall inform the Governments of States that have signed or acceded to the present Convention of the deposit of each instrument and of the date of its deposit.

Article III

Territorial application

1. The United Nations in cases where they are the administering authority for a territory, or any Contracting Party responsible for the international relations of a territory, may at any time by notification in writing to the Secretary-General of the Organization (hereinafter referred to as “the Secretary-General”), extend the application of this Convention to such a territory.
2. The present Convention shall, upon the date of receipt of the notification or from such other date as may be specified in the notification, extend to the territory named therein.
3. Any notification made in accordance with paragraph 1 of this article may be withdrawn in respect of any territory mentioned in that notification and the extension of this Convention to that territory shall cease to apply after one year or such longer period as may be specified at the time of the withdrawal.
4. The Secretary-General shall inform all Contracting Parties of the notification of any extension or withdrawal of any extension communicated under this article.

Article IV

Entry into force

1.
 - (a) The present Convention shall enter into force twelve months after the date on which at least 15 States, the aggregate of whose merchant fleets constitutes not less than 65% by number or by tonnage of the world fleet of vessels of 100 gross tons and over, have become Parties to it, whichever is achieved first.
 - (b) Notwithstanding the provisions in subparagraph (a) of this paragraph, the present Convention shall not enter into force before 1 January 1976.
2. Entry into force for States which ratify, accept, approve or accede to this Convention in accordance with article II after the conditions prescribed in subparagraph 1(a) have been met and before the Convention enters into force, shall be on the date of entry into force of the Convention.
3. Entry into force for States which ratify, accept, approve or accede after the date on which this Convention enters into force, shall be on the date of deposit of an instrument in accordance with article II.
4. After the date of entry into force of an amendment to this Convention in accordance with paragraph 4 of article VI, any ratification, acceptance, approval or accession shall apply to the Convention as amended.

5. On the date of entry into force of this Convention, the Regulations replace and abrogate the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1960.

6. The Secretary-General shall inform the Governments of States that have signed or acceded to this Convention of the date of its entry into force.

Article V

Revision conference

1. A conference for the purpose of revising this Convention or the Regulations or both may be convened by the Organization.

2. The Organization shall convene a conference of Contracting Parties for the purpose of revising this Convention or the Regulations or both at the request of not less than one third of the Contracting Parties.

Article VI

Amendments to the Regulations

1. Any amendment to the Regulations proposed by a Contracting Party shall be considered in the Organization at the request of that Party.

2. If adopted by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in the Maritime Safety Committee of the Organization, such amendment shall be communicated to all Contracting Parties and Members of the Organization at least six months prior to its consideration by the Assembly of the Organization. Any Contracting Party which is not a Member of the Organization shall be entitled to participate when the amendment is considered by the Assembly.

3. If adopted by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in the Assembly, the amendment shall be communicated by the Secretary-General to all Contracting Parties for their acceptance.

4. Such an amendment shall enter into force on a date to be determined by the Assembly at the time of its adoption unless, by a prior date determined by the Assembly at the same time, more than one third of the Contracting Parties notify the Organization of their objection to the amendment. Determination by the Assembly of the dates referred to in this paragraph shall be by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting.

5. On entry into force any amendment shall, for all Contracting Parties which have not objected to the amendment, replace and supersede any previous provision to which the amendment refers.

6. The Secretary-General shall inform all Contracting Parties and Members of the Organization of any request and communication under this article and the date on which any amendment enters into force.

Article VII

Denunciation

1. The present Convention may be denounced by a Contracting Party at any time after the expiry of five years from the date on which the Convention entered into force for that Party.
2. Denunciation shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument with the Organization. The Secretary-General shall inform all other Contracting Parties of the receipt of the instrument of denunciation and of the date of its deposit.
3. A denunciation shall take effect one year, or such longer period as may be specified in the instrument, after its deposit.

Article VIII

Deposit and registration

1. The present Convention and the Regulations shall be deposited with the Organization, and the Secretary-General shall transmit certified true copies thereof to all Governments of States that have signed this Convention or acceded to it.
2. When the present Convention enters into force, the text shall be transmitted by the Secretary-General to the Secretariat of the United Nations for registration and publication in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Article IX

Languages

The present Convention is established, together with the Regulations, in a single copy in the English and French languages, both texts being equally authentic. Official translations in the Russian and Spanish languages shall be prepared and deposited with the signed original.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned* being duly authorized by their respective Governments for that purpose have signed the present Convention.

DONE AT LONDON this twentieth day of October one thousand nine hundred and seventy-two.

* Signatures omitted..

INTERNATIONAL REGULATIONS FOR PREVENTING COLLISIONS AT SEA, 1972, AS AMENDED

PART A – GENERAL

Rule 1

Application

- (a) These Rules shall apply to all vessels upon the high seas and in all waters connected therewith navigable by seagoing vessels.
- (b) Nothing in these Rules shall interfere with the operation of special rules made by an appropriate authority for roadsteads, harbours, rivers, lakes or inland waterways connected with the high seas and navigable by seagoing vessels. Such special rules shall conform as closely as possible to these Rules.
- (c) Nothing in these Rules shall interfere with the operation of any special rules made by the Government of any State with respect to additional station or signal lights, shapes or whistle signals for ships of war and vessels proceeding under convoy, or with respect to additional station or signal lights or shapes for fishing vessels engaged in fishing as a fleet. These additional station or signal lights, shapes or whistle signals shall, so far as possible, be such that they cannot be mistaken for any light, shape or signal authorized elsewhere under these Rules.
- (d) Traffic separation schemes may be adopted by the Organization for the purpose of these Rules.
- (e) Whenever the Government concerned shall have determined that a vessel of special construction or purpose cannot comply fully with the provisions of any of these Rules with respect to the number, position, range or arc of visibility of lights or shapes, as well as to the disposition and characteristics of sound-signalling appliances, such vessel shall comply with such other provisions in regard to the number, position, range or arc of visibility of lights or shapes, as well as to the disposition and characteristics of sound-signalling appliances, as her Government shall have determined to be the closest possible compliance with these Rules in respect of that vessel.

Rule 2

Responsibility

- (a) Nothing in these Rules shall exonerate any vessel, or the owner, master or crew thereof, from the consequences of any neglect to comply with these Rules or of the neglect of any precaution which may be required by the ordinary practice of seamen, or by the special circumstances of the case.

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- (b) In construing and complying with these Rules due regard shall be had to all dangers of navigation and collision and to any special circumstances, including the limitations of the vessels involved, which may make a departure from these Rules necessary to avoid immediate danger.

### Rule 3

#### *General definitions*

For the purpose of these Rules, except where the context otherwise requires:

- (a) The word *vessel* includes every description of water craft, including non-displacement craft, WIG craft and seaplanes, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water.
- (b) The term *power-driven vessel* means any vessel propelled by machinery.
- (c) The term *sailing vessel* means any vessel under sail provided that propelling machinery, if fitted, is not being used.
- (d) The term *vessel engaged in fishing* means any vessel fishing with nets, lines, trawls or other fishing apparatus which restrict manoeuvrability, but does not include a vessel fishing with trolling lines or other fishing apparatus which do not restrict manoeuvrability.
- (e) The word *seaplane* includes any aircraft designed to manoeuvre on the water.
- (f) The term *vessel not under command* means a vessel which through some exceptional circumstance is unable to manoeuvre as required by these Rules and is therefore unable to keep out of the way of another vessel.
- (g) The term *vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre* means a vessel which from the nature of her work is restricted in her ability to manoeuvre as required by these Rules and is therefore unable to keep out of the way of another vessel. The term *vessels restricted in their ability to manoeuvre* shall include but not be limited to:
  - (i) a vessel engaged in laying, servicing or picking up a navigation mark, submarine cable or pipeline;
  - (ii) a vessel engaged in dredging, surveying or underwater operations;
  - (iii) a vessel engaged in replenishment or transferring persons, provisions or cargo while underway;
  - (iv) a vessel engaged in the launching or recovery of aircraft;
  - (v) a vessel engaged in mine clearance operations;
  - (vi) a vessel engaged in a towing operation such as severely restricts the towing vessel and her tow in their ability to deviate from their course.

- (h) The term *vessel constrained by her draught* means a power-driven vessel which, because of her draught in relation to the available depth and width of navigable water, is severely restricted in her ability to deviate from the course she is following.
- (i) The word *underway* means that a vessel is not at anchor, or made fast to the shore, or aground.
- (j) The words *length* and *breadth* of a vessel mean her length overall and greatest breadth.
- (k) Vessels shall be deemed to be in sight of one another only when one can be observed visually from the other.
- (l) The term *restricted visibility* means any condition in which visibility is restricted by fog, mist, falling snow, heavy rainstorms, sandstorms or any other similar causes.
- (m) The term *Wing-In-Ground (WIG) craft* means a multimodal craft which, in its main operational mode, flies in close proximity to the surface by utilizing surface-effect action.

## **PART B – STEERING AND SAILING RULES**

### *Section I – Conduct of vessels in any condition of visibility*

#### **Rule 4**

##### *Application*

Rules in this section apply in any condition of visibility.

#### **Rule 5**

##### *Look-out*

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper look-out by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

#### **Rule 6**

##### *Safe speed*

Every vessel shall at all times proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper and effective action to avoid collision and be stopped within a distance appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions.

In determining a safe speed the following factors shall be among those taken into account:

- (a) By all vessels:
  - (i) the state of visibility;
  - (ii) the traffic density including concentrations of fishing vessels or any other vessels;
  - (iii) the manoeuvrability of the vessel with special reference to stopping distance and turning ability in the prevailing conditions;
  - (iv) at night the presence of background light such as from shore lights or from backscatter of her own lights;
  - (v) the state of wind, sea and current, and the proximity of navigational hazards;
  - (vi) the draught in relation to the available depth of water.
- (b) Additionally, by vessels with operational radar:
  - (i) the characteristics, efficiency and limitations of the radar equipment;
  - (ii) any constraints imposed by the radar range scale in use;
  - (iii) the effect on radar detection of the sea state, weather and other sources of interference;

- (iv) the possibility that small vessels, ice and other floating objects may not be detected by radar at an adequate range;
- (v) the number, location and movement of vessels detected by radar;
- (vi) the more exact assessment of the visibility that may be possible when radar is used to determine the range of vessels or other objects in the vicinity.

## Rule 7

### *Risk of collision*

- (a) Every vessel shall use all available means appropriate to the prevailing circumstances and conditions to determine if risk of collision exists. If there is any doubt such risk shall be deemed to exist.
- (b) Proper use shall be made of radar equipment if fitted and operational, including long-range scanning to obtain early warning of risk of collision and radar plotting or equivalent systematic observation of detected objects.
- (c) Assumptions shall not be made on the basis of scanty information, especially scanty radar information.
- (d) In determining if risk of collision exists the following considerations shall be among those taken into account:
  - (i) such risk shall be deemed to exist if the compass bearing of an approaching vessel does not appreciably change;
  - (ii) such risk may sometimes exist even when an appreciable bearing change is evident, particularly when approaching a very large vessel or a tow or when approaching a vessel at close range.

## Rule 8

### *Action to avoid collision*

- (a) Any action to avoid collision shall be taken in accordance with the Rules of this part and shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, be positive, made in ample time and with due regard to the observance of good seamanship.
- (b) Any alteration of course and/or speed to avoid collision shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, be large enough to be readily apparent to another vessel observing visually or by radar; a succession of small alterations of course and/or speed should be avoided.
- (c) If there is sufficient sea-room, alteration of course alone may be the most effective action to avoid a close-quarters situation provided that it is made in good time, is substantial and does not result in another close-quarters situation.
- (d) Action taken to avoid collision with another vessel shall be such as to result in passing at a safe distance. The effectiveness of the action shall be carefully checked until the other vessel is finally past and clear.

- (e) If necessary to avoid collision or allow more time to assess the situation, a vessel shall slacken her speed or take all way off by stopping or reversing her means of propulsion.
- (f)
  - (i) A vessel which, by any of these Rules, is required not to impede the passage or safe passage of another vessel shall, when required by the circumstances of the case, take early action to allow sufficient sea-room for the safe passage of the other vessel.
  - (ii) A vessel required not to impede the passage or safe passage of another vessel is not relieved of this obligation if approaching the other vessel so as to involve risk of collision and shall, when taking action, have full regard to the action which may be required by the Rules of this part.
  - (iii) A vessel the passage of which is not to be impeded remains fully obliged to comply with the Rules of this part when the two vessels are approaching one another so as to involve risk of collision.

## Rule 9

### *Narrow channels*

- (a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable.
- (b) A vessel of less than 20 m in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway.
- (c) A vessel engaged in fishing shall not impede the passage of any other vessel navigating within a narrow channel or fairway.
- (d) A vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if such crossing impedes the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway. The latter vessel may use the sound signal prescribed in Rule 34(d) if in doubt as to the intention of the crossing vessel.
- (e)
  - (i) In a narrow channel or fairway when overtaking can take place only if the vessel to be overtaken has to take action to permit safe passing, the vessel intending to overtake shall indicate her intention by sounding the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(i). The vessel to be overtaken shall, if in agreement, sound the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(c)(ii) and take steps to permit safe passing. If in doubt she may sound the signals prescribed in Rule 34(d).
  - (ii) This Rule does not relieve the overtaking vessel of her obligation under Rule 13.
- (f) A vessel nearing a bend or an area of a narrow channel or fairway where other vessels may be obscured by an intervening obstruction shall navigate with particular alertness and caution and shall sound the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(e).