

**Report on the grounding of the
yacht “Woteva” on the
8th October 2011.**

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Background

Woteva is a TP52 Class yacht currently owned by Sailors with disAbilities. She was competing in the Flinders Islet race as part of the Blue Water Point score run by the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia.

Sailors with disAbilities use the boat, and these races, as a training program for the upcoming Rolex Sydney to Hobart Yacht race.

Sailors with disAbilities has been following this program for many years.

All CYCA entry criteria had been completed and the yacht's entry had been accepted. The vessel had a current equipment audit certificate for Cat 2 races. Crew met race requirements. On the way to the start, a crew meeting discussed the race and risks involved in ocean racing. A race strategy was discussed and a watch system was to be implemented from 2100 hours.

The report will cover the lead up to the incident, the grounding, recommendations and conclusion.

Appendix 1 will show a map of Bellambi Reef which show's the approximate approach, approximate grounding and subsequent wash into smooth water and anchoring.

There are many components of this incident that I will discuss in detail, things we could have done better and things we were not aware of before the grounding. I will look at those in more detail.

Lead up

It is my opinion, that the number one problem was a lack of appropriate communication both before the race started on shore and on the boat.

As you will see, all the incidents that caused the chain of events could have been broken with better onboard communication.

As mariners, we must put the safety of our boat above all and in doing so, guarantee maximum safety of our crew. To do that, crew must report any and all things that they feel are not right.

The first thing was, we put to sea with flat house batteries, or “flattish”. I am not sure what the state of the batteries were, but they must have been very low. We were not aware of this until the instruments started flashing 10 miles from the islet.

We started the engine, and the batteries were not taking or receiving a charge. I then assumed that my problem was charging as we were now approaching the islet. I switched on the hand held GPS and VHF radio and got paper charts up. The laptop (navigation software enabled) was still functioning well so we are now using the paper as a back up. We cleared the islet without incident.

Sailors with disAbilities are a training organisation in principle and we are constantly supporting new crew into new and expanding roles on board.

In hindsight, more supervision on my part was required during this change in circumstance; I believe that would have given us a different outcome. This sometimes is difficult to do and is usually a value judgment; however, I should have erred on the side of caution.

Having cleared the islet I put a team on the charging problem, to see whether we did indeed have a failed charging system, failed batteries or both. In the execution of this process, people were removed from their assigned station. The deck watch believed they had good water. Unfortunately, due to the disruption downstairs the navigator had been drawn into this process unbeknown to the deck team.

There had also been a change in helmsman since leaving the islet, I was the new helmsman and had not made myself completely aware of our circumstance.

It wasn't until the grounding did I realise that we had moved far further to the west than I had thought. Prior to the grounding I had felt confident in our course of 015. While this was a closing course, the wind had just shifted to the north and I felt we may get a course for Sydney shortly. It was at this time that the look out

yelled “breakers ahead”. It was with disbelief I saw the first crest rising abeam. Turning the boat to the east and as this wave drained out from beneath us we grounded on Bellambi reef.

This was the lead up that got us into the situation; the following are the events as they unfolded as I best remember. The time of the grounding was approximate 0330 hours and weather conditions were quite benign

Grounding

The engine was running at the time in neutral as we were trying to sort out this battery charging problem. Woteva rose to the second wave and lifted on to the reef. I went to engage the engine into drive; our engine control system has a removable handle which had been removed. This denied the facility of the engine to propel off the reef.

All hands on deck had been called. The first person on deck was thrown overboard by the impact of the second or third grounding. By now the winch handle had been found and inserted into the engine control but with a man overboard. Until the man was recovered I was not prepared to engage a propeller. This recovery process took approximately 90 seconds.

I should say at this point, that while there had been errors to get us into this situation from here on my crew performed flawlessly. Situations like this are about training, technology and the attitude to employ the above. I believe not one of the crew failed in the application of their duty. Being bounced across a reef in the early hours of the morning is not much fun. The team were looking after each other and discussing likely scenarios as to what would happen if. .

One of the crew felt that the boat was being washed across the reef. One of the life rafts was being crushed by the main sheet and this was cut free. Remember that the boat is violently striking the reef every 6-10 seconds you cannot stand up, the crew are prostrate on the deck or cock pit.

We were considering how best to launch the life rafts if we had to in this situation. Or was it better to try and swim ashore or to the waiting yachts. By now we had confirmed that the boat was moving off the reef and indeed then slid into deep water.

The engine had stalled, probably with a rope around the propeller. More importantly the start key was now missing. One team brought the anchor on deck and made it ready for deployment. Another team handed in a hull report, no significant leaks, and rudder bearings intact, keel bolt sound, hull unbreeched. Quick check of mast and standing rigging appeared ok. Anchor, a Dan forth

aluminum type was deployed. I think we were on a sandy bottom, she answered the pick.

A hand held VHF was passed up to cockpit so radio comms could be instigated with rescue services and yachts standing by

Because of our mayday the rescue helicopter had been dispatched and was looking for us. We did not and should have, lit a white flare to indicate all well and show our position.

We had just recovered our diver who had cut away a rope from the propeller. We jump started the engine and had some steerage, although the rudder blade had been compromised and the bulb had been removed from the keel. We were preparing to make way back to Sydney when we were instructed by Water Police to take a tow to Port Kembla.

During the grounding and the time after we lost or destroyed three sails, but managed to retrieve the code zero.

Recommendations.

1. **On Board Communication-** with modern boats moving at speeds twice and even three times that of boats ten years ago, we need to know where we are; there is no time to second guess. If a signal is sent up to the deck then this should be confirmed by the deck (watch leader) to those downstairs. If we had had a higher standard of communication I know the situation would not have developed. This is best demonstrated with the flat batteries. Had we known that the batteries were flat or nearly flat on departure we could have kept the motor running for the duration of the race and the situation would not have developed. Had we known our situation clearly after clearing the islet the situation would not have developed.
2. **Life rafts** the question as to how they are secured and how they are deployed continues to exercise my mind. One thing is for sure when you are being bounced around across a reef or in a heavy seaway you do not have time to undo shackles etc. A sharp knife should be attached alongside or to a life raft for the sole purpose of cutting the lashings if required. The stern lifelines should be laced to the stanchions pushpit, again, so they can be cut away. To get a couple of men to throw the life raft over the life lines would have been impossible. In 1998 Hobart we had a raft secured foredeck of the mast and I remember thinking how difficult it would be to get a team up there and the same thought crossed my mind during this grounding. Each boat has its own unique situation; however some thought should be put into how this should be done. Getting crew

into the life raft in these conditions is also worth discussing if the need arose.

3. **Engine control and engine starting** – I understand the arguments the pros and cons, however, the engine control type which allows you to remove the handle will not be used on any Sailors with disAbilities boat again. A simple thing, the key should be attached by a string or lanyard to the start panel and a spare key kept in a safe place. All Sailors with disAbilities boats from now on will be able to be started from the deck.
4. **Grab bags and personal possessions** – a water proof grab bag will be provided for the crew's personal property and any extra safety equipment that the skipper or crew deem necessary. All personal possession will be stored in a water proof grab bag for the duration of the race
5. **Crew-** All Sailors with disAbilities crew members will be familiar with the appropriate safety certificate for the boat.
6. **PFD** will be worn far more frequently by Sailors with disAbilities crew, to allow them the opportunity to become familiar with this piece of equipment with its inbuilt safety harness and tether. This technology can and may save your life.
7. **MAYDAY** – this was put out by the boat as we had a man overboard in very dangerous conditions in the event we recovered him quickly. At the time I believe the boat was at risk of sinking, putting the entire crews life in jeopardy. Once we recovered from this position we should have informed the appropriate authority of our changed circumstances I.e.-Cancel Mayday.
8. **Anchors-** Sailors with disAbilities from now on will be using a plough type anchor as its primary anchor on all its boats. This anchor has a broader application for different sea bottoms and while it is heavier than other options safety will not be compromised.
9. **Radio and technology-** Boats today have some of the most whizz bang technology however, it is so much junk if you don't know how to use it. Our battery monitor is a case in point. It is the responsibility of the skipper to make sure that at least one person on each watch has a complete understanding of all this equipment.
10. **Checklist-** It will be the practice of all Sailors with disAbilities' boats to read with all crew a standard checklist before departure. Be this for a kids day on Sydney Harbour or an entry in the Sydney to Hobart Race. This checklist will be created by experienced sailors and include, but not limited

to, water, fuel, engine, battery status, safety equipment, sails, and rig and steering. The confirmation that this process has taken place will be entered into the Log Book.

Conclusion.

After the incident, constant contact was made with all of the crew by the senior crew members and with officials from the CYCA.

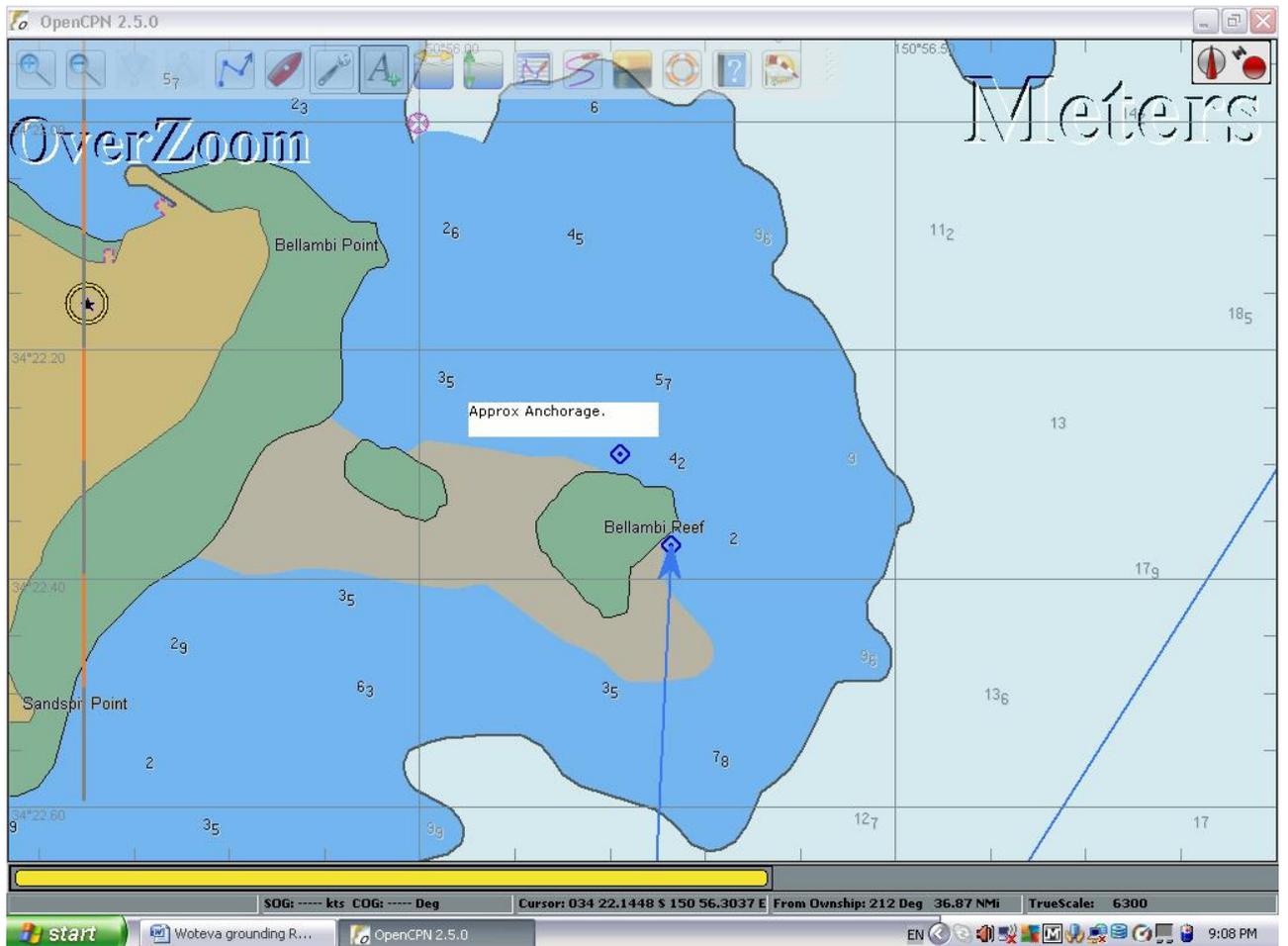
Approximately a week after the incident a crew evening was held at the Sailors with disAbilities headquarters to debrief the incident whilst also providing ongoing support and respect for the welfare of our crew.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those involved through this time, particularly the team at Marine Rescue, Water Police and Maritime at Port Kembla. To all yachts that stood by and the CYCA I would like to extend our thanks as well.

It has been a very difficult for me and I appreciate the understanding shown to me.

David Pescud.

Appendix-1



Map shows approximate course of Woteva from Flinders Islet and approximate impact point. It was endeavored to show the anchor point after Woteva exited the reef.