



A classic school of small scad balling as a defence against an approaching predator. Nikon D300, Subal ND20, 10 to 17mm FE zoom, Subtronic Mini flash guns, ISO 100 f11 1/125.

snapper, unicorn surgeon fish, bat fish and barracuda.

On exposed reefs you will often find schools of fish on promontories where there is significant current. Approaching them can be hard work but they are often more tolerant if you are holding station with them. On the reef itself there are species like goat fish, black spot snapper and sweetlips which are very territorial and will co-operate if you make a slow approach.

Wrecks are a favourite haunt for some species either because they offer protection from strong currents. Species like bat fish are often found schooling on wrecks and of course you will almost certainly find glassy sweepers in the darker recesses.

On popular reefs you may often find that fish begin to school beneath day boats or live aboard boats almost as soon as they moor or

anchor. This can provide an opportunity to get close but of course the fish are often in shadow, so tighter composition may produce the best results.

It is a sad fact that in many areas of the world the very schooling behaviour which protects fish so well from their natural predators has been the downfall of many species which are targeted by the most efficient predator of all, man. Modern oceanographic and fisheries technology means that determined fleets can track a species from its spawning and breeding grounds to feeding grounds where the target fish can be scooped from the sea with frightening efficacy. Although many countries now have large no take areas or protected zones, illegal fishing is still a big problem and one that is very difficult to police particularly for poorer nations. Some tropical regions have not yet been subjected to this technological assault and so we can still witness the amazing site of schooling fish. One can only hope that these areas will persist until the fishing industry has developed better fish farming methods or stock management techniques which allow species to regenerate in step with the hunter's demands. Until then enjoy the spectacle and experience whenever you encounter it.

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Getting a vessel coded

by Charles Hood

The rules (law) state that any vessel (in the UK) being used in a commercial capacity must be 'Coded', i.e. inspected by a MCA (marine coastguard agency) approved authority to comply with SOLAS (safety of life at sea) regulations. Further that the skipper must be suitably qualified in seamanship to a standard for the conditions that the vessel will operate in. At this point it may be worth defining commercial. Commercial in this context is any work carried out on or using the vessel for monetary gain. Dividing up the direct fuel cost on a club trip does not fall into this category but there cannot be any other form of payment for example maintenance costs or wages of any kind. So what happens if you don't comply with the rules? Quite simply you open yourself up to possible litigation, a bit like if you were to operate a taxi service with a privately owned car, which is not duly insured and licensed with the local council. How will anyone find out? The charter business at sea is a highly competitive business and rival skippers miss nothing in the harbours that they operate in – say no more!

With the above knowledge on

board a few years ago I purchased a seven metre RIB (rigid hull inflatable boat, sometimes known as RHIB), called Logan, along with a colleague and we decided it would be purely for pleasure use. Bizarrely in the UK there are no regulations at all with respect to the vessel's condition or competence of the coxswain if you are purely using the boat for your own use. Over a three-year period we filmed and photographed predominantly basking sharks but also other marine life and started to get a reputation for knowing where the action was. After several enquiries from various overseas shark aficionados, film companies and television stations I agreed to act as a safety boat to a commercial hard boat and to take a few divers out just for a share of the fuel. This worked extremely well, however, I couldn't be paid for a valuable service that I thought I was offering. Furthermore Logan's other owner wanted to start to offer underwater video courses that would also require a boat charter. So we decided to get her Coded and also get qualified as a commercial skipper.

The latter was the easy part. I was already a RYA (royal yachting



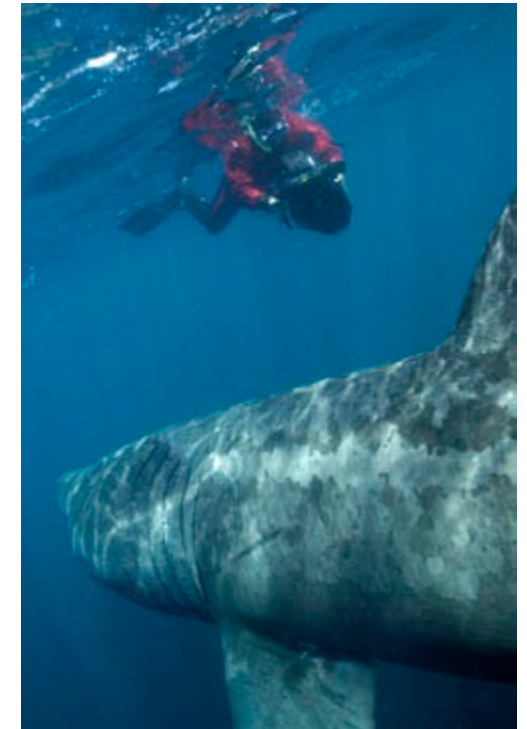
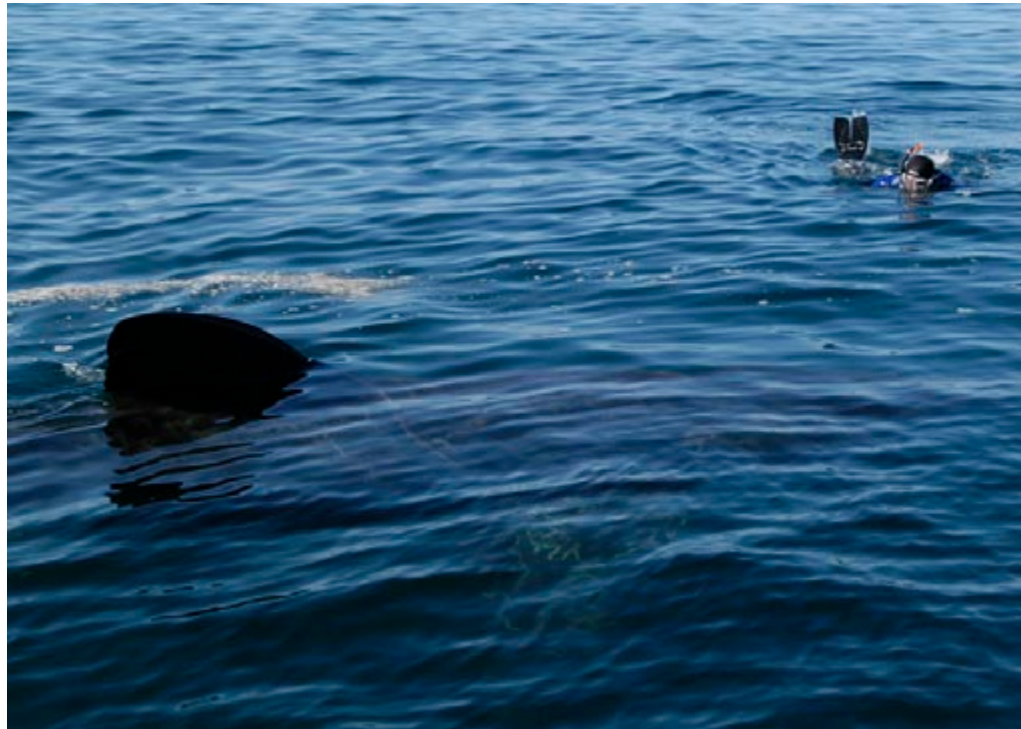
association) Coastal Skipper and had thousands of hours at sea under my belt. Thus I simply enrolled on the RYA Powerboat part two exam and completed a Sea Survival course, sent off twenty quid to the MCA and I received my certificate a few days later. For anyone without experience the RYA offer courses designed to take the complete novice up to a

commercial standard but they do require a certain amount of sea hours to be completed in between courses. The exam is fairly straightforward. It involves a reasonable understanding of charts and passage planning, meteorology, boat operations and maintenance, radio competence, knots, emergency procedures, first aid, night operations, knowledge of

GPS (global positioning system) and other electronic equipment. The day of the exam is basically in three parts. The morning is generally theory, the afternoon practical boat handling and evening is all down to night operations. The Sea Survival course is not an exam as such but you have to demonstrate a degree of competency with the knowledge they give you and be able to get you and your fellow crew into a life raft from the water, which not as easy as you may think.

Oh, you also require a medical. As I am an HSE (health and safety) commercially qualified diver the diving medal, which I already have would count, otherwise it's a visit to your GP at a cost of around £100.

So far so good. Next came what turned out to be one of the most bureaucratic and tedious processes I've ever embarked on, i.e. getting Logan coded. After I trawled the net (internet) for a few hours, which resulted in a complete lack of information I contacted the MCA direct to try and ascertain what was required to get Logan coded. This got me nowhere except I did learn that the information I required maybe gained by ploughing through vast pages of the MCA website, where I would have to decipher gobbledygook of the highest order. Also I was informed that all the stuff on the site was all about to be 'harmonised' and just for



the records this was October 2007 and to date this harmonisation has still not taken place. The issue is that RIBs are not classified separately at this higher level, they just fall into the category of a commercial vessel as would any other hard boat.

As luck would have it on my Powerboat exam I ran into a chap who codes boats and he offered to help, albeit for a sum of money that would rival the recent government bailout of the high street banks. It would appear that all coding companies keep their cards very close to their chests so one has to pay for advice before you know what your getting yourself into. So the

following information is worth a huge sum of money (and a large donation to UWP contributors!) to anyone wanting to embark on a similar exercise .

In essence there are two main areas the boat has to comply with. The first is the build specification and a stability test at sea and the second is a list of safety equipment it has to carry onboard. If we address the former issue first: in theory any manufacturer building boats to CE specifications should be able to provide this information – after all they built the vessel and it has to be up to European standards. In practice it would appear

that European standards and MCA requirements differ, and neither party apparently 'believes' the other is right. So although I had vast documents from the manufacturer showing what looked like to me what the MCA wanted, as it later transpired they weren't. Thus I needed to have Logan inspected at sea. This involved loading her up with vast amounts of weight and people and having an inspector take various measurements of load-line, angle of tilt and transom height when the weights and people were in various predefined positions. Then we had to completely deflate one of the stern tubes to ensure she

would still remain afloat with a punctured tube. The Inspector then went away and entered all these measurements into a number crunching machine to see if we were OK – and as it happens we were.

The second part of the exercise was then to compile an inventory of safety equipment and just by the guy's facial expression I knew it was going to be painful. First off were the fuel lines. What an earth can be wrong with our fuel lines I thought? Ours were the normal ISO 8469 approved type found on any boat anywhere in the world, but not up to specification, no. We required ISO 7840, which are fire rated to withstand 900 degrees centigrade for two minutes – on a RIB! So our existing lines had to be all replaced, however, I now have piece of mind that should Logan catch fire and be totally destroyed at least the fuel lines will remain intact. Oh also we would have to fit fuel shut-off valves at the fuel tank end of the hoses, being able to disconnect the lines at the engine is not good enough. And just in case our fuel tank developed a leak vents had to be put into the console, originally they requested a hydrocarbon sensor fitted but as there are no waterproof ones on the market and the fuel tank is above deck height we settled for vents. Then came a list I was kind of expecting, two fire extinguishers, a first aid kit - not your normal one but a SOLAS approved one (basically similar but twice the cost), still at least I know I can supply everyone with anti-seasickness tablets for about four weeks! Next up a handheld VHF to accompany our fixed one, ten life jackets – we were only going for approval for eight people on board but apparently you need two spares, shows the confidence they have in SOLAS approved life jackets! Fog horn, torch, manual bilge pump (we already had an electronic one plus twin elephant



trucks), bailer, two foam life-rings - one with 18 metres of floating line and the another fitted with a drogue and duly marked with the vessels name and port of registration. Apparently the latter is required if it all goes tits-up. These life-rings will at least inform the coastguard of the vessel that was lost when they are washed up onshore. Oh and also they must have an additional SOLAS radar reflective patch stuck on them. Barometer – what? Yes we needed a barometer, fortunately I found a neat little gizmo on Ebay that resembled a digital watch for around £12 so not too painful.

Unfortunately we didn't fair that well in the radar reflector department. Ours was just a normal one, the criss-cross kind of device you see on your average fishing vessel up to five times Logan's size. No we required one that would give the equivalent of a 10 square metre sheet of metal – oh well its only another £400 pounds, lets keep going. Can I have a look at your anchor, was the next question? Ah ha I thought, a good solid 7 kilograms of Sheffield's finest, five metres of chunky chain you could haul the QEII out of the water with and 70



metres of warp, plus a grapnel anchor, similar chain and 50 metres of rope we used for a shot line, surely this would suffice? Wrong! We needed two (one primary and one spare) 8 kilogram anchors, with 10 metres of six millimetre chain and 30 metres of line – although in the end we did compromise that our existing anchor would suffice as a back-up. Enough warp to tow the vessel? – well yes we've got half a mile of anchor warp – point to me I think. Next up flares. Yes again, we have not only one but two RYA offshore packs – enough for a jolly good firework display in anyone's book. Not enough. We needed two more handheld flares. Fortunately we have two engines, each with their own battery so a secondary method of starting the engine was by de facto in place. Emergency steering was also fairly straightforward as we decided we could uncouple the bar that joins the engines steering mechanism and use it as a crude tiller. Oars - along side both midships tubes, navigation lights - on stern 'A' frame, a method of recovering a man overboard – ladder, port side aft, enough hand rails for all passengers to hold onto when seated – oh yes, GPS



aid kit and handheld GPS. But we've already got all these – better still our TPAs are full diving style submersible ones. OK we agreed as long all divers were in drysuits and I have the first aid kit and VHF in a grab bag along with our huge collection of pyrotechnics, this would do. So now we were on the homeward straight. A waterproof pouch containing charts, life raft and lifejacket instructions, engine starting procedures, tide tables, almanac, hand bearing compass, safety manual, first aid manual, manual of manuals, VHF emergency operation details, log records and passage planning sheets completed the inventory.

So what was the final cost? The thick end of £3K - OUCH. Was it all worth it? In a nutshell yes. We can now operate commercially and further explore the stunning marine environment unique to the Cornish coast and at the same time hopefully to earn some money. Logan has been specifically designed for film and camera work. She has a large open deck area for the likes of gigantic camera housings even when carrying four twinsets or rebreathers. We have a huge experience (a combined total of over 40 years) of locating basking sharks, seals, sunfish and other marine life as well as wrecks and some of the most dramatic underwater scenery in UK. We have already had paying

customers, including the French film company Galatee who successfully filmed basking sharks off Sennen with us for their forthcoming blockbuster film. What we specialise in is small groups who want to get the most from a days filming. All activities are carried in accordance with MCS (marine conservation society) guidelines with minimal disturbance to the animals. Let them come to us and don't chase them is our rule. What we don't do is everyday diving operations at a budget price that a club might expect. Although we are licensed to carry eight people including skipper and crew we

generally recommend a limit of four divers/snorkellers to maximise filming opportunities.

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and sounder – on console, kill cord – left of helm, spare kill cord – bugger. In case the coxswain goes overboard along with the kill cord attached to him there's no easy way of starting the engines without a spare one – OK. I concede a valid point.

Now with a shopping list approaching two grand we came to the expensive bit - the life raft. So another £1000 bought me a SOLAS, CE, RYA, ISO, DoT, HSE, etc, etc approved raft. Sorry not good enough. But it's got all the certificates! It can keep all eight of us alive in storm force gales in a sub-arctic climate for twenty years. No. It needed to be SOLAS B not just SOLAS. That 'B' is very important as we would require TPAs (thermal protection aids), a first

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