



Surf Life Saving Australia - Circular

May 2008

IRB Towing Procedures - Update

Document id 92/07-08	Audience Secretaries, Club Captains, Gear Stewards, IRB Captains, IRB Drivers/Crew
Department Lifesaving	

Summary

The National Board of Lifesaving has recently endorsed several amendments to IRB towing procedures. This circular provides a summary and justification of these changes.

Background

The current protocols for towing with an IRB involve the towing rope being affixed to the crewman bow rope/handle which then runs down the centre of the craft between the crew and driver.

Following a meeting of IRB Inspectors, the matter of towing protocols was raised with the Board of Lifesaving for review. It was felt that this setup as the only method of towing creates a hazard for the driver or crew in times when the craft is required to maneuver off the line of the craft it is towing.

In addition to the above, advice from IRB manufacturers is that the bow rope/handle is not a 'load bearing' attachment. This attachment is design purely as an aid to the crewman to control the boat in the surf, and was never meant to bear the load of a towed craft. By looping or otherwise attaching a tow rope to the bow rope/handle, it is possible that the weight or pressure from the tow will tear the bow rope from the IRB.

Both these situations have the potential to seriously injure the driver or crewperson should they be unable to move out of the way of the rope in sufficient time.

Finally, the existing method of towing is deemed unsuitable with the introduction of Class 3 (Cat or Tunnel Hull) IRB's where the crewperson sits on the floor of the craft and the bow handle is located to one side of the bow (not inline with the centre).

Details of Changes

In response to the above concerns, the National Gear & Equipment Panel has undertaken a review of IRB towing protocols. The review included extensive practical trials of alternative towing methods and solutions, conducted within several states.



Following this review, two recommendations of the Panel have now been endorsed:

- i) That the IRB towing protocols be updated to no longer use the bow rope handle for towing, and that tow ropes be affixed using the transom eyelets or the front bull nose handle.
- ii) That the specifications for IRB tow ropes be changed from 25m length to 15m length, with a snap hook and flotation buoy fitted at each end.

Towing Method

By using the transom eyelets as an attachment point, the risk to both driver and crew is significantly reduced as the eyelet(s) are load bearing points. In addition, as the tow rope is affixed to the transom as opposed to the bow of the IRB, the chance of the rope detaching and causing rope/recoil injury to the driver or crew during tow is also greatly reduced.

Where an SLSA approved IRB is the disabled craft and is being towed (by any vessel), the tow rope should also in this case be affixed to only the front bull nose handle (the lifting handle) and not the bow rope handle. This change again reflects the fact that the bull nose lifting handle is 'load bearing' whereas the bow rope handle is not. It is also an appropriate method for towing Class 3 IRB's, where the previous practice was unsuitable, again due to the location of the bow handle.

Tow Rope Specifications

After comprehensively trialing tow ropes of varying lengths (25m, 15m and 10m), results showed that a shorter rope length gave more control over the tow. In the surf zone especially, the current rope length of 25m saw the towed vessel up to 2-3 swells behind the towing IRB. In most circumstances the 25m rope was considered to be unnecessarily long. The new recommended tow rope length of 15m is much more practical.

In response to the changes to towing procedures, it was recognised that a more ideal configuration for the tow rope was to have 'snap hooks' and 'rope floats' fitted to both ends (as opposed to a snap hook at only one end, with an eye loop at the other). Where the previous method of towing allowed for the eye loop to fit over the crew rope/handle, this is impractical when affixing to the transom eyelet. A snap hook is ideal in this situation. A second snap hook is still required at the end of the rope affixed to the disabled vessel. An example of where this would be needed is when towing another IRB or an RWC. Both craft require a snap clip as the best option for attaching the tow rope to the nose of the craft.

The addition of the rope floats will ensure that both ends of the tow rope are easily retrievable in the event either end is dropped overboard (e.g. in a 'quick release' situation). The floats will not only ensure buoyancy, but also improve visibility.

Note: For quick release of the tow rope, SLSA advise that the tow rope should be clipped preferably to the eyelet located on the driver's side of the IRB.



Component Specifications

Please refer to the below table for exact specifications for all SLSA tow rope components.

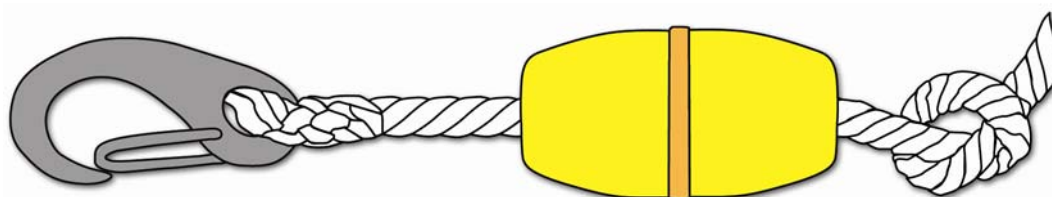
Item	Details
Rope	3-strand nylon rope, 12mm. Overall finished length 15m – recommend allowing 16m rope length prior to splicing. Silver / supersilver / polyethylene rope may be used as an alternative (nylon is the preferred option due to high break load – 2200kg).
Clips	100mm stainless steel snap hook (sometimes called ‘snap clip’). Must be forged with smooth curves and surfaces for snag free handling. Please note that ‘claw clips’ are not suitable and are prohibited by SLSA due to OH&S concerns.
Floats	Soft foam, cork or plastic rope float. Minimum size 70mm (length) x 40mm (diameter). Preferred rescue yellow, red or orange in colour.

Assembly Instructions

- i) Cut rope to approx 16m in length. This will allow sufficient rope for splicing both ends, with excess rope cut away for an overall finished length of 15m.
- ii) Slide rope through float hole.
- iii) Securely attach (splice) snap hook to end of the rope.
- iv) Move float up toward snap hook, and secure in place with half-hitch knot in rope, tied behind the float. Allow approx 10-20mm movement for float.
- v) Repeat steps 1-4 for opposite end of rope.

Instructional Diagram

The below illustration depicts the general arrangement for assembling the new tow ropes. Snap hooks and floats should be affixed at both ends.



Note: This diagram is a guide only. Not to scale.



Cost and Purchasing

The cost of additional floats and snap hooks is minimal, and also mitigated by the reduced length in overall length of rope required.

The new tow rope specifications use all standard components available from any good local marine supplier (e.g. Whitworths Marine – www.whitworths.com.au).

Local marine suppliers and/or riggers, as well as all SLSA approved IRB manufacturers, will be able to assist clubs with modifying an existing rope, or provide a new rope to the updated specification.

As an alternative, clubs with members of such expertise (e.g. splicing experience) will be able to complete these modifications internally.

Implementation Timeline

The new towing procedures and tow rope specifications are effective immediately. These changes will be reflected in the next edition of the SLSA Powercraft Manual, which is currently under review.

In order to allow clubs to make the necessary changes to equipment, SLSA has set a transition period for the phasing in of modified tow ropes. Clubs will be able to use either configuration of rope (25m or 15m with floats) up until **1st January 2009**, from which point all ropes will be required to meet the new specifications as outlined within this circular. Any club subject to an annual Gear Inspection within this transition period will be able to present either configuration for inspection.

Clubs are asked to inform all IRB Drivers and Crew within their club of the new towing procedures, and for IRB Captains or Gear Stewards to make arrangements for the adjustment of tow ropes according to the new specifications, and within this timeline.

SLSA has advised all registered IRB Manufacturers in writing to ensure the correct tow rope is supplied with all new purchases from June 2008 onwards.

Further Information

For enquiries about gear & equipment, please contact SLSA's National Lifesaving Development Officer, Matthew Bruce on (02) 9300 4000 or by e-mail at mbruce@slsa.asn.au.