

As we were about to go to press with the last issue of the newsletter, I received notice of the death of a sea kayaker on the Abel Tasman coast. It seemed appropriate to include the press clipping at that time as I believed that it would be of interest to all paddlers. As usual, the first press reports could have been improved by a more balanced picture of the facts. Tom Horn, who runs Abel Tasman Kayaks, has asked that the more balanced press account published in papers on 16 September, be published, and I have also taken the opportunity to ask Tom to add comments. These comments follow. The accident is a timely reminder that sea kayaking can be a hazardous undertaking. In fact, it is worthy to note that far more paddlers drown on estuary, lake and coastal trips than on whitewater river trips. The kayak hire industry has responded to the accident by getting together to write up a 'Code of Practice' for such operations. This Code is currently being drafted and will be circulated to all hire companies before being made public. Once this is done we will distribute the document for comment.

DOC can't stop solo kayaking

The Department of Conservation says it has no legal or moral right to stop people kayaking alone near the Abel Tasman National Park.

Waimea district conservator Mr Hari Rautjoki said the two companies, Abel Tasman Kayaks and Ocean River Adventure Company, did not have to get a special licence to rent out kayaks.

Horner Martin Tiger Bass, 22, of Palm Beach, Florida, was found dead on Thursday between Tonga and Bark bays after hiring a kayak from the first company on Tuesday and striking out alone.

Tragically it has been revealed that Abel Tasman Kayak's co-owner Mr Tom Horn bent his company's rules to let the man go out alone.

Mr Rautjoki said yesterday that there could not be regulations on the number of people using hired goods.

"I mean people go into the area with their own kayaks, yachts, and so on.

"All we can do is advise them to go with at least one

person.

"It is just like hiring out skis.

"And yes, we can not stop them going in alone just as much as we can not stop people tramping alone.

"Let me say that the two companies are very, very safety conscious in terms of equipment and making sure they (kayakers) are very experienced."

Mr Horn said yesterday that Mr Bass had been insistent in his requests to go kayaking.

Eventually he was given the chance to go with a party of two.

Unfortunately they did not turn up. Mr Horn tried to make an arrangement with the other kayak company for Mr Bass to go with two of their customers but the two had already left.

He let the man go alone by "relaxing" judgment with the stipulation he must stay out only two days and not go beyond Tonga Island.

Before the man left he spent an hour paddling with him and giving instructions.

Mr Horn said he was very distressed about the death of Mr Bass.

He says he will never bend his rules again.

"I made the wrong judgment. He was so keen.

"What I do want to make clear is that this type of accident is extremely rare."

"...After reading a splendid trip report in the last newsletter I was somewhat surprised to find a short newspaper report on the last page about an American who died in a sea kayak accident. As a person with first-hand knowledge of the accident I would like to correct one or two statements made in that article and to tell what really did happen.

The obvious correction to be made is that concerning the 'dangerous sea currents' mentioned in the report and said to have been made by a Park Ranger. There are no dangerous sea currents along the coastline of the Abel Tasman National Park whatsoever. To the contrary, it must be one of the most protected and safest areas to sea kayak on. Mr Bass, who died, was never approached by Park Rangers and was never warned of something that did not exist.

Mr Bass approached us and for three days insisted upon his requirement to go sea kayaking. Usually people are not allowed by us to go kayaking by themselves in

our kayaks, but after three days a group was organised for him to join. At the last moment these arrangements fell through, as did a second attempt to join him up with another party. Finally, while good weather persisted, Mr Bass was allowed to go through both theoretical and practical skill and safety training in the use of the kayak and familiarisation with the area. After two hours of such training he was allowed to depart.

On the afternoon of the same day, Mr Bass got close to the rocky coastline north of Bark Bay and capsized in the approximately four-foot swell and surge, which had no breaking waves or whitecaps. In the surge amongst the rocks he struck his head which, apparently, was the cause of his death.

What made Mr Homer Bass approach this area of rocks while a safe beach was about 200m away will, however, remain unanswered, although the Coroner's inquest may well throw some light on this matter..."

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During the Sea Kayak Forum in February, there was some discussion on the best way of organising a group of paddlers when paddling on either a windy and rough day, or at night. The suggestion made by Paul Caffyn seemed to be the most accepted manner. Paul's suggestion was that since in rough conditions you need to brace into the waves and wind, if you need to check on a paddler behind you, then this is best done on the windward side. Hence, you should arrange your party in a line astern with the boat behind, to windward of the boat ahead. In this manner you can check on the boat ahead by looking slightly down-wind, and when you turn your head to check on the boat behind, you turn your head to look over your windward shoulder. In effect, you have your party strung out at 135 degrees to your line of travel. As each kayaker catches a wave, he will catch up to the kayak ahead, so the spacing should be such that the boat behind does not run into the paddle of the kayak ahead. If a breaking should broach a kayak, the turn will be into the wind to brace into the wave, thus avoiding the kayak ahead.

At night kayakers are required to carry an all-round white light - this is part of the International Collision Regulations. Bevan Walker recommended that paddlers should sling a small light on both their back and chest. His suggestion was to use either cyalume chemical light sticks, or squid lights. Squid lights are small water-tight lights made of a fluorescent material and further lit by a bulb powered by two AA size batteries. Whatever light you use, it should not be so bright as to reduce night vision, it needs to be only sufficiently bright to enable the kayaker to be located from close range.

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Asset grab alleged

WELLINGTON

Marlborough MP Mr Doug Kidd accused the Government of making "another grab for community assets" during debate on the Foreshore and Seabed Endowment Revesting Bill in Parliament last night.

The bill returns to the Crown all foreshore and seabed which had been vested in harbour boards and local authorities.

Mr Kidd described it as a device to "build the Department of Conservation empire".

Conservation Minister Mr Philip Woollaston said the bill was mainly a "machinery matter". It was required because of the reorganisation of local government and dissolution of many harbour boards.

He said now was the ap-

propriate time to rationalise the status of coastal lands.

"In many cases the original harbour boards no longer exist and the boards and the local authorities which took over their responsibilities do not have complete records.

"With the dissolution of harbour boards on November 1, these endow-

ments will pass to other agencies - principally local and regional authorities - which have even less reason to be administering these lands.

"This bill also revokes existing reclamation authorities more than five years old which have not been exercised. Some of these are very old and do not relate to present day needs at all."