

## SAFETY ALERT

Contact: [safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk](mailto:safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk)

SUBJECT	Solo Paddling – Sea Kayaking
Date Issued	November 2022

### Background

In just three months this year, there have been 3 serious incidents involving solo sea paddlers in the UK. Tragically two of these resulted in fatalities – **neither called for help**.

The third, following a call for help, resulted in a rescue off the coast of Barra, Outer Hebrides, where the observation and commitment of a passing commercial aircraft was crucial in its success. The rescue reads:

*“A kayaker swept out to sea off the Western Isles was rescued after he spotted a passenger plane coming in to land.*

*The man was disorientated and distressed after being blown out into open water off Barra.*

*But in an emergency call to the coastguard, he was able to give a clue to his location by telling them he had seen a Loganair flight approaching Barra's beach airstrip a short time earlier.*

*The aircraft's pilots returned to the air and retraced their flight path.*

*After finding the kayaker, the crew passed on the coordinates to the emergency services and circled the location until Barra lifeboat arrived”*



*Loganair boss Jonathan Hinkles has praised the actions of the crew in the incident on 8 July 2022*

### Guidance

British Canoeing recognise that solo paddling is widely practised but issues the following guidance:-

Paddling on your own significantly increases the risks when compared to paddling in a group. If you have a pre-existing medical condition such as epilepsy, heart problems, diabetes, asthma etc. you are strongly advised to paddle as part of a group.

#### **Always carry a means of calling for help on your person**

If you choose to paddle alone you should have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to do so. Whenever you paddle alone you are advised to undertake a dynamic risk assessment, consider the environmental factors and take appropriate precautions.

Being prepared and thinking ahead can eliminate many risks.

You should: -

- Wear a buoyancy aid
- Have reliable self-rescue skills
- Check your boat and equipment thoroughly before you set out

Tell someone where you are going and when you will be back. Call them when you get back.

- On a journey: -
  - Carry on your person, communication /signalling equipment (mobile phone, PLB, VHF radio). A guide can be found [Calling-for-help.pdf \(britishcanoeing.org.uk\)](https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/calling-for-help.pdf)
  - Carry a spare paddle and repair kit
  - Have knowledge or familiarity with the route
  - Know the expected weather and sea conditions (listened to and understand the effects of the most recent weather forecast)
  - Carry navigation equipment if needed, even if it is felt unnecessary

Further British Canoeing/RNLI guidance: [RNLI Kayaking Leaflet](#)

## Calling for help! – communication devices

No matter how well prepared or experienced you are, on occasions, things do and will go wrong. There may be things that go beyond your control or circumstances that could not have been reasonably foreseen. When they do, you may need help or rescue. A means of calling for help at sea is critical.

There are many communication and signalling devices that can be kept on your person, the most widely used equipment by paddlers is:

- A handheld VHF radio [Calling-for-help.pdf \(britishcanoeing.org.uk\)](https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/calling-for-help.pdf)
- A personal locator beacon (PLB) [PLB-Information-Sheet.pdf \(britishcanoeing.org.uk\)](https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/plb-information-sheet.pdf)
- A mobile smart phone – in a waterproof case.

## SafeTrx – Journey tracking

**SafeTrx** is the Coastguards Official Safety Identification system.

The RYA SafeTrx app monitors your boat/crafts journeys and can alert emergency contacts should you fail to arrive on time. It links your location directly to the Coastguard enabling a quick response and swift rescue should you need it. It is an app for both Android and Apple iOS smartphones that allows you to track your journey on your phone.

For more information on how to get the app and using the SafeTrx journey tracking system which identifies your location to the Coastguard in an emergency [RYA SafeTrx on the App Store \(apple.com\)](https://www.apple.com/rya-safetrx/)

For more information on how SafeTrx works [Ship Tracker App | Fleet Safety | SafeTrx Maritime \(safetrxapp.com\)](#)

