



Subject: Safety Awareness for Inland Passenger Vessels Operating on the Western Scheldt

Dear Sir or Madam,

Following recent incidents in which windows of two inland passenger vessels were damaged as a result of wave action generated by passing seagoing vessels, the **Joint Nautical Authority** would like to draw your attention to a number of important safety considerations for operating on the Western Scheldt.

The Western Scheldt is a busy tidal waterway where inland passenger vessels share the fairway with large seagoing ships up to a length of 400 meters. Masters should be aware that these vessels generate significant bow and stern waves, as well as hydrodynamic interaction effects, which may cause substantial vessel movements and create risks for passengers, crew and the vessel itself.

To enhance safety, the Joint Nautical Authority requests shipping companies to ensure that their masters and navigating personnel observe the following:

- **Adapt navigation to the prevailing circumstances.** Anticipate the effects of bow and stern waves generated by passing seagoing vessels and take timely precautionary measures to mitigate their impact. Always keep enough distance of seagoing vessels.
- **Adjust vessel speed where and when necessary.** Reducing speed may improve vessel control and provide additional time to respond safely to wave action, cross-currents and changing traffic situations.
- **Ensure effective communication in one of the designated working languages.** Masters and bridge teams should be able to communicate clearly and effectively in either **Dutch or English** when communicating with Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) centres and other vessels.
- **Ensure adequate local knowledge.** Navigation should be conducted by personnel who are familiar with the specific conditions on the Western Scheldt, including local traffic patterns, reporting procedures, applicable regulations, and the correct VHF channels used by the Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) centres.
- **Ensure sufficient navigational experience.** All masters navigating the Western Scheldt should have experience with the interaction effects of seagoing traffic, navigation on a tidal river, and manoeuvring in cross-current conditions. These are characteristic features of the Western Scheldt and require specific navigational skills and awareness.

In addition, the Joint Nautical Authority makes the following safety recommendation:

- **Passenger safety on open decks.** During navigation on the Western Scheldt, operators are advised to discourage passengers from remaining on the side balconies of the vessel. Due

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to vessel movements caused by waves and hydrodynamic effects from passing seagoing traffic, these areas may present an increased risk of injury. Where possible, passengers should be encouraged to remain on the roof deck or within the vessel during transit.

The Joint Nautical Authority requests shipping companies to distribute this information among all masters and relevant operational personnel and to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to maintain the highest standards of navigational safety.

We appreciate your cooperation and your continued commitment to safe navigation on the Western Scheldt.

Flushing, Friday September 18th 2026

Yours faithfully,

Joint Nautical Authority

Dutch chief of staff

Flemish chief of staff

J.P. Janse

B. Vanmeensel

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