

M2088

Posted on 19.01.2023 by Adam Parnell

Category: [Superyachts](#)

Report Title Pressurised to make a fatal decision

Initial Report

The superyacht was anchored in a bay where jet skis had been prohibited due to the density of traffic in the anchorage and a spate of previous incidents.

The owner was on board with a fellow guest who drank heavily. They requested that the jet ski be launched. The captain explained that using jet skis was prohibited and ill-advised when inebriated. The owner and his guest were insistent, and this conversation escalated until the captain was given the ultimatum of either launching the jet-ski or being dismissed.

The captain yielded to this threat, and the jet ski launched. Shortly after, the owner's guest had a high-speed collision with a nearby vessel. The casualty was recovered from the water, unconscious and severely injured; the crew found he was not breathing and commenced CPR, but the casualty died before emergency services arrived.

The result was one death, a traumatised crew and owner, and the captain losing his job. He remained out of work for the following two years while under investigation and threat of criminal prosecution.

Superyacht owners are often demanding and "no" is unfamiliar to them and seen as an insult. Captains who stand their ground risk being side-lined for their professional conduct, and those that do yield to such demands potentially face even more dire consequences.

Comment

The drink had clouded the judgement of the guest and the owner, but the captain knew that jet-skiing in the bay was prohibited. Even if the owner had sacked the captain on the spot, once they had sobered up, they would most likely have realised that the captain was speaking objectively, not subjectively. However, even when it could place others in danger, it can still be hard to refuse a request or order by an owner, particularly if they are used to getting their way or see refusal as a challenge to their authority. In this instance, the owner bullied the captain into launching the jet ski against their professional judgement. However, a captain's first duty is the safety of crew and passengers, and they should have refused, no matter the circumstances.

To avoid such scenarios, captains are encouraged to confirm with the vessel's owner that they are empowered to refuse requests that put people or the vessel at risk of harm – and, crucially, that they will be listened to. Ideally, this should be done as early in the professional relationship as possible – potentially even at the interview. Shrewd owners will accept that the captain is looking after their interests. Where such assurances are not forthcoming, this should be a 'red flag' to the captain that safety on board is at some point likely to be compromised. Better to seek alternative employment at that point than find oneself being threatened with the sack in the heat of the moment. CHIRP wants to state that the master has other places to report this coercion, which should be made known to the master.

Key Issues

Fit for duty: Drink had impaired the judgement of both the guest and the owner.

Pressure/culture: The owner bullied the captain into going against their professional judgement. On board, such behaviour was reflected in the safety culture (and probably the welfare culture).

Yacht crew can contact the [International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network \(ISWAN\)](#) via WhatsApp (+44 (0)7514 500153) for 24-hour help and support for issues such as bullying and harassment, unpaid wages, and mental health support.

pressurePressure

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