

## **PPSA PORT HANDICAPS – FAQs**

**WHAT IS NHC?** The RYA's National Handicap for Cruisers (NHC) system allows boats of all sizes and configurations to race together on reasonably equal terms. It replaces the Portsmouth Yardstick (PY) system which is obsolete and no longer supported for cruisers by the RYA. NHC works by starting with approximate handicaps then adjusting those handicaps after each race in a series so that towards the end of the series handicaps have settled down to figures that accurately reflect actual performance on the water. Simple software/spreadsheets are available to do the necessary calculations. In this way NHC can accommodate all sorts of yacht types and configurations. In practice NHC can work very well for long and consistent series where most yachts take part in most races of the series. Usually it takes a series of at least 8 races to work really well,

**WHAT IS A PORT HANDICAP?** NHC works well for a race series but is not directly suitable for one-off races etc where there is no opportunity for handicaps to evolve into accurate handicaps. Our Port Handicaps are intended to overcome this problem and can be considered short-cut accelerated NHC handicaps being the PPSA's best estimate of the average performance of a boat relative to all the other boats in the port, when racing together in average conditions in the port. In other words, Port Handicaps are the handicaps that it is estimated would evolve if all the boats in the port (360 of them!) raced together in a long and consistent race series run under NHC! It must be appreciated that a Port Handicap is a "handicap" and takes into account both the speed potential of the boat and the skill of the skipper and crew. It is not a "rating" which takes into account only hull and sail dimensions etc. Thus a boat with an expert skipper and well drilled crew will usually have a higher Port Handicap than an identical boat sailed by beginners. In this regard a Port Handicap is just like a golf handicap where an experienced and skilled golfer will usually have a lower handicap than a beginner.

**HOW IS A PORT HANDICAP DERIVED?** Four methods are used by the Port Handicapper to derive a Port Handicap. If a boat has taken part in a reasonably consistent and reasonably long race series run under NHC in the port then the handicap that settles towards the end of that series becomes its Port Handicap. This is the most reliable way and automatically aligns the Port Handicap with the NHC system. Next, if a boat has a Portsmouth Yardstick (PY) number which has been well tested in the port then a simple conversion factor is used to convert this into a Port Handicap. The conversion formula is Port Handicap = 906/PY Number. This is fairly reliable but the resulting Port Handicap is only as good as the previous PY number and of course most modern boats have not been allocated a PY number. Next, if a boat has an IRC certificate then a conversion graph has been developed that allows the IRC TCC to be converted to Port Handicap; this is also a fairly reliable method. Finally, for boats new to the port or have not taken part in racing before, the Port Handicapper has available an open-domain calculation formula (known as the Emsworth formula) which does a reasonable job of estimating a Port Handicap, at least for normal displacement cruisers. This last method is the least reliable but does allow a boat to get started in racing, and the handicap can always be reviewed and tweaked after a few races have been completed.

**HOW DO I APPLY FOR A PORT HANDICAP?** Please complete an Application Form (available from the PPSA website) and send it to the Port Handicapper. The application form calls for basic data on the boat and usually this is readily available with an online search at sites such as sailboatdata.com. There is no charge for applying; it is part of the PPSA's service.

**WHERE CAN I FIND OUT THE PORT HANDICAP OF A RIVAL BOAT?** A Port Handicap List is published on the PPSA website and is updated from time to time.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK MY PORT HANDICAP (OR THE PORT HANDICAP OF ANOTHER BOAT) IS UNFAIR?** Please raise the matter with the sailing officer of your club, and provide him with the evidence, such as comparative race results etc. Then ask the sailing officer to forward the complaint to the Port Handicapper accompanied by his comments. Do not raise complaints directly with the Port Handicapper; he will merely refer the matter back to the sailing officer for comment which will delay the process. Do remember that identical boats can have very different Port Handicaps depending on the skill (and perhaps luck!) of the crew.

**ARE PORTS HANDICAPS REVIEWED?** Yes all Port Handicaps are reviewed annually and when anomalies are brought to the Port Handicapper's attention. Each winter, sailing officers of PPSA clubs are requested to examine race results for events they have organised and bring to the attention of the Port Handicapper any apparent discrepancies. Also the Port Handicapper will check annually whether a global adjustment of handicaps is necessary to maintain the alignment of Port Handicaps with NHC and thus prevent steady "creep" of handicaps. For example, in 2015, all Port Handicaps were increased numerically by 0.72% to maintain this alignment.

**FINAL COMMENTS** It is appreciated that some sailors have found adapting to a "handicap" system, rather than a "rating" system, difficult and have concerns that a handicap system provides little incentive for serious racers. It needs a different mind set to sail with continually adjusted handicaps, but in practice a handicap system means a serious sailor cannot rest on his laurels; he must strive to do better otherwise the beginners will steadily catch up. Meanwhile beginners are encouraged to keep at it and develop their skills because they can see they have a real chance of catching up. If serious sailors don't like NHC then its simple; they have the option of going IRC or ORC! Finally the success of NHC and our Port Handicap scheme is demonstrated by the fact that the number of boats on the Handicap List was declining in the days of PY but has risen from about 200 in 2015 when NHC was introduced to around 360 today.