



In The Netherlands

The blue sign

Traffic on the major rivers is subject to either the Inland Waterways Police Regulations (BPR) or the Rhine Navigation Police Regulations (RPR). The problem is that these regulations differ somewhat from each other. These differences are clarified and explained in this brochure.

According to the BPR small vessels must keep to starboard (right) on a large number of waterways in the Netherlands. These waterways are listed in the BPR – appendix 15a. On other waterways, vessels are advised to keep to starboard.

On the major Dutch rivers, the Boven-Rijn, Waal, Pannerdensch Kanaal, Neder-Rijn, Lek, Geldersche IJssel and Maas, large vessels may keep to either starboard or port. Consequently, a large vessel that is ascending the river usually chooses the side with the least current. This is in the inside curve: thus, starboard side in a curve towards starboard and port side in a curve towards port. In the latter case, a large ship will display a blue sign with a white blinking light.

NB: heavily loaded ships with sufficient engine power, such as those with multiple towboats, choose the deeper outer curve when ascending the river.

These special regulations can sometimes lead to tense moments for both recreational and commercial vessels.

A pleasure boat that is keeping to starboard side can suddenly be confronted by an inland craft that is rapidly ascending and needs the entire outer curve to manoeuvre. And captains of inland craft are also irritated by pleasure craft sailing at a dangerous spot in the water or not reacting correctly when they see a blue sign

Definitions

Large vessel = a vessel longer than 20 m

Small vessel = a vessel shorter than 20 m*

Meet = approach from opposite directions

Ascend = to sail against the current of a river
Descend = to sail with the current of a river

Give way = to change course

* NB: There are exceptions.

Consult the regulations.



Right and left bank

If you look downstream (in the direction of the current), the right bank is on starboard (to your right). The left bank is on port (to your left). The terms left and right bank are often used in radio telephone calls.

Ascending large vessels versus descending small vessels

A large vessel that is ascending the river must allow a suitable passageway for descending vessels. In BPR areas, this is true whether the descending vessel is large or small. The suitable passageway can be on either the port or starboard side of the ascending vessel. An ascending vessel will sometimes allow a suitable passageway for descending small vessels on both sides. If an ascending large vessel is sailing along the right bank (on the 'left side') and leaves space on starboard side, it will display the blue sign surrounded by a bright white blinking light. This sign indicates that the vessel wants to meet descending vessels 'starboard to starboard'.

A small descending ship confronted by an ascending vessel with a blue sign must yield right of way. In BPR areas, the small vessel must preferably respond to the blue sign. In RPR areas, the small vessel must always give way to the large vessel although no response is required.

In BPR areas an ascending large vessel must also display the blue sign for small descending vessels if it wants to meet 'starboard to starboard'. In doing so the large vessel shows the small vessel that it is leaving a suitable passageway on its starboard side.

Descending large vessels versus ascending small vessels

A small ascending vessel must give way to a large descending vessel. The descending vessel will usually choose the outer curve. The small vessel anticipates this by giving way. The small vessel is advised to sail to the starboard side of the middle, about one-third of the total navigable breadth from its starboard side, because this position enables it to quickly make the correct decision: whether to move to starboard or to port side (left). This change of course must be done extremely clearly so that the large vessel can see what the small vessel is doing. When ascending a river, it is sometimes difficult to determine how quickly the large vessel is approaching. And remember, it is travelling with the current.

On BPR waterways except for the Geldersche IJssel and the Maas the main rule is 'port to port', although in special cases (indicated by name) exceptions may be made. On the Geldersche IJssel and Maas the main rule is 'starboard to starboard' or 'port to port'. The choice depends on the course of the river and the position of other vessels.

Ascending small vessels versus descending small vessels

Small vessels approaching from opposite directions must give way to starboard to avoid a collision. Please note: a small vessel may never display a blue sign surrounded by a white blinking light.





General

The situation is more complicated when more than two small and large vessels are involved. When in doubt, call one another by maritime phone and make clear agreements. Always look around you very carefully before you cross a river or sail to the middle of the river in response to a blue sign. A descending ship is upon you faster than you think.

The Waal

There are two conflicting regulations on the Waal. Article 6.02 of the RPR states that small must always give way to large, and Article 9.04 paragraph 2 of the BPR states that vessels on the Waal must keep to starboard. The latter conflicts with the RPR rule. In its explanation, the BPR said that it is sometimes better to leave the starboard side and cross over to the port side. One reason for doing so is when a small vessel meets an ascending vessel with a blue sign. A small descending vessel on the Waal then responds to the blue sign of an ascending vessel.

But on the Waal, ascending vessels without a blue sign sail along the left bank together with ascending vessels with a blue sign on the right bank. This can be a dangerous situation for a small descending vessel. It can hardly move to port because of the descending traffic. In such a case, one hopes that the ascending vessel with the blue sign will leave space on its port side (the starboard side of the small vessel) for the small descending vessel that has few options. But this is not stated in the RPR. Having maritime phone contact (on time!) can sometimes result in a safe solution!

Working together

In the curves between Nijmegen and the Pannerdensche Kop, the Department of Waterways, in consultation with the Watersportverbond and the Koninklijke Schuttevaaier, has created a number of navigable channels for pleasure craft. In the suitable curves, recreational buoying has been placed behind the main buoying. These recreational channels separate large and small ships from each other in the curves upstream of Nijmegen. These additional channels are 20 metres wide and 2 metres deep.

Recommendations for sailing on major rivers

Make sure that you are clearly visible by, for example, hanging a flag as high as possible. A well-situated radar reflector makes you more visible on the radar screens of large vessels. Once again: look behind you regularly, move in a clear course and stay away from the blind spot for captains of inland vessels. Cross a river only when it is safe to do so. Consider buying a maritime phone. This will contribute to your safety.

As a result of the nearly constant waves on rivers, sludge or condensation in the tank make cause an engine to die. That is why it is important to sail with a clean fuel tank and clean filters. This prevents you from losing engine power, which can have serious consequences on waterways used by commercial vessels.

RPR: BOVENRIJN and WAAL

LARGE ascending vessels sail via the inside curve where there is the least current. Heavily loaded vessels avoid the shallow inside curves

SMALL descending vessels required to remain on starboard (right) side but may change to port side (left) if necessary.

LARGE descending vessels sail via the outside curve where the current is strongest or stay in the middle.

SMALL ascending vessels required to remain on starboard side but may change to port side if necessary.

RPR: PANNERDENSCH KANAAL, NEDER-RIJN and LEK

LARGE ascending vessels sail via the inside curve where there is the least current. Heavily loaded vessels avoid the shallow inside curves

SMALL descending vessels keep to starboard side.

SMALL descending vessels change if necessary to port side for ascending **LARGE** vessel with blue sign.

SMALL descending vessels change if necessary to starboard side for ascending **LARGE** vessel without blue sign.

LARGE descending vessels sail via the outside curve where the current is strongest or stay in the middle.

SMALL ascending vessels keep to starboard side.

SMALL ascending vessels before or in a curve to port side for descending **LARGE** vessels and if necessary, change to port side.

SMALL ascending vessels before or in a curve to starboard side for descending **LARGE** vessel and if necessary, change to starboard side.

BPR: GELDERSCHE IJSSEL and MAAS

LARGE ascending vessels sail via the inside curve where there is the least current. Heavily loaded vessels avoid the shallow inside curves

SMALL descending vessels keep to starboard of the middle.

SMALL descending vessels changes to port side for ascending **LARGE** vessel with blue sign.

SMALL descending vessels change to starboard side for ascending **LARGE** vessel without blue sign.

LARGE descending vessels sail via the outside curve where the current is strongest or stay in the middle.

SMALL ascending vessels keep to starboard of the middle.

SMALL ascending vessels before or in a curve to port side change to port side for descending **LARGE** vessels.

SMALL ascending vessels before or in a curve to starboard side change to starboard for descending **LARGE** vessels.

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Questions? Go to www.safeboating.eu and www.varendoejesamen.nl



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