



Thursday, May 8, 2025

To: U.S. Coast Guard First District Commander, Rear Admiral Michael E. Platt

From: Brad Read, Executive Director of Sail Newport

Dear Admiral Platt,

I am writing to express my strong support for **maintaining** the essential aids to navigation at the entrance to Narragansett Bay, in Newport Harbor, and along the channel leading up to Prudence Island. While I and tens of thousands of boaters have concerns about the potential removal of visual aids to navigation across the District, this submission specifically advocates for the U.S. Coast Guard's continued operational and financial support for the aids to navigation from south of Prudence Island to the MOA buoy "NB" in Rhode Island Sound, which have been considered for removal.

In general, these navigational aids—proposed for removal—are crucial for safe maritime operations in the region. As someone deeply involved in the maritime community through the management of a public-access sailing education center, I understand firsthand the importance of these essential visual and audible aids, which help ensure the safety of both recreational boaters and commercial traffic navigating these waters.

One of the arguments for reducing the number of buoys in Southern New England is that "everyone has AIS" or "everyone uses GPS and electronic charts," so these buoys may be considered unnecessary.

First and foremost, this is not the case. A large percentage of boaters in our community do not have tablets, radar, or navigation screens. Many people sail or operate small vessels without access to these devices.

Secondly, this argument is akin to eliminating all exit signs, stop signs, or traffic lights on federal roadways because "they are listed on the car's navigation system." We teach our sailors to keep their heads out of the boat and maintain situational awareness at all times. Removing these buoys would force boaters to stare at their screens—if they have them—instead of keeping their eyes out of the boat to avoid traffic, reefs, and other potential hazards.

Keeping these buoys in place provides essential visual and audible references that help keep our waterways safe. The removal of any of the following essential aids to navigation would stretch the already strained resources of the Newport Harbormaster, Newport Fire Department, Jamestown Harbormaster, DEM Law Enforcement, and the U.S. Coast Guard. It will result in more navigational errors, collisions, and groundings, potentially causing damage to property, injury, environmental harm, and even loss of life.

We strongly urge the U.S. Coast Guard to continue operational and financial support for the following aids to navigation:

MOA NB Buoy

The NB (MOA) Buoy delineates the traffic separation scheme for Narragansett Bay. It is the only AIS-broadcasting buoy in the area, having replaced the iconic Brenton Reef Tower. This is a crucial landmark on navigational charts, both paper and electronic. The AIS signal from this buoy helps fishermen, commercial traffic, and recreational boaters safely traverse the area leading into Narragansett Bay.

Newton Rock Buoy GR “NR” (Off Beavertail, South Tip of Conanicut Island - Jamestown)

This buoy marks the eastern edge of the West Passage traffic separation scheme and the western edge of the East Passage scheme. It also marks a dangerous reef about 200 yards northeast of the bell buoy (Newton Rock), between the buoy and the shoreline. With ocean swells building up near the south tip of the island, this visual and audible aid is crucial to prevent recreational boaters from becoming caught in breaking waves.

R6 (West of “Butterball” Rock/Ledge, South of Castle Hill Point)

Even with the Castle Hill light operational, R6 plays a vital safety role. Approximately 100 yards inside the R6 bell is a dangerous reef. Without this visual aid, unsuspecting fishermen or recreational boaters will run aground. R6 also allows for a safe transition from R4 to the entrance of the Bay, helping boaters avoid the ledge south of Castle Hill Point.

Goat Island Lighted Buoy #3 (South of Goat Island in Newport Harbor)

This fairway channel marker is essential for safe navigation in and out of Newport Harbor. Without it, boaters entering from the north would only have two visual aids. Traveling directly from C1 to Buoy #7 would result in many boats running aground in 2–4 feet of water. Buoy #3 is critical for boaters navigating without electronic aids.

R12 and R12A (South-southwest and West of Rose Island)

With the Rose Island Lighthouse designated as a private aid to navigation, R12 and R12A are the only properly maintained markers in this area. Removing R12A could lead boaters to cut between the bridge and the island, posing a serious safety risk due to an unmarked reef. The danger exists at both high and low tide and could result in potentially fatal accidents. Removing R12 will have the same result on the SW corner of the island where a large boulder resides approximately 150’ inside the bell and another 100’ from the island. It is less than 4’ of water over that boulder at low water.

East Passage Lighted Buoy “17” (G-17, East-southeast of Gould Island)

Removing Buoy 17 would lead to increased conflicts between ships and recreational traffic by effectively expanding the width of the shipping channel. G17 marks the only western boundary of the shipping channel until Prudence Island and must remain to preserve safe navigation through this part of Narragansett Bay.

WR 21 (Southeast of the Southern Point of Prudence Island)

This green lateral buoy marks a recently charted wreck off the southern point of Prudence Island. Many vessels with drafts over 25’ feet have had close calls here. The buoy’s light is visible from over three miles away, making it an important range marker for vessels heading north toward Bristol, Fall River, and other points north.

In Conclusion

These existing aids to navigation play a vital role in guiding all types of vessels safely through Narragansett Bay, especially in varied weather conditions and during periods of high traffic. We commend the U.S. Coast Guard for maintaining these critical safety features in our waterways. They are essential for preventing accidents, protecting the marine environment, and supporting the economic activities that rely on safe and efficient navigation.

I urge the U.S. Coast Guard to consider the serious implications that removing these aids would have on navigation safety and the broader maritime community. Maintaining the current configuration is essential to uphold the high standards of safety and reliability that our maritime operations depend upon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bradford S. Read
Executive Director
Sail Newport