

**PETER J BEDFORD HM
CORONER BERKSHIRE**

Our Ref: PB/PP

5th July 2005

Mr Stuart Ward
Water Safety Adviser
Amateur Rowing Association
6 Lower Mall
Hammersmith
LONDON W6 9DJ

Dear Mr Ward

Inquest into the Death of Sikander Farooq

Following the conclusion of the above Inquest on 1st July, I indicated that I would be writing to you under Rule 43 of the Coroner's Rules 1984. This states as follows:

"A Coroner who believes that action should be taken to prevent the recurrence of fatalities similar to that in respect of which the Inquest is being held may announce at the Inquest that he is reporting the matter in writing to the person or authority who may have power to take such action and he may report the matter accordingly."

You were kind enough to attend and give evidence at the Inquest and reference was also made to the ARA Water Safety Code. From the evidence as a whole, I would wish to raise the following matters:

1. As I expressed in my conclusion to the Inquest, I feel that there is a lack of clear guidance to both rowing clubs and individual rowers in certain key areas of their participation in the sport. I felt that clearer guidance/compulsory requirements could be given by the ARA which would make a significant contribution to general safety in the sport of rowing and help to prevent a recurrence of the circumstances in which Sikander Farooq so tragically lost his life.
2. The areas I would particularly like to highlight are as follows:
 - i. Wearing buoyancy aids in training. Evidence was given at the Inquest by Mr Tom Cronin, an existing Junior Coach at Reading Rowing Club, who felt that there was peer pressure on juniors not to wear life jackets/buoyancy aids, that he was at odds with other coaches of his own experience about the need to wear such aids and there was a clear ethos in the sport that these were not worn. Clearly bulky life jackets are potentially hazardous but it was suggested in the course of the Inquest that modern aids are being developed but it would seem that a lead from the ARA would be of significant help. The Safety Code gives a list of people who the [ARA] require to wear safety aids but this does not include rowers.
 - ii. Indeed, at paragraph 2.8.6 it states it is not a requirement for athletes to wear such aids whilst training. Then in addressing beginners, it suggests that those who feel more comfortable wearing a life jacket may gain confidence during their early learning period. This appears to be a very half hearted approach to inexperienced juniors who it seems would be much safer by having appropriate buoyancy aids while they are inexperienced. It seems that this should be reinforced much more strongly.

- iii. **Appropriate Clothing.** The main evidence at the Inquest was the fact that Sikander was wearing jeans, this was wholly inappropriate and that jeans should never be worn whilst rowing. However, there is no such guidance in the Water Safety Code and indeed there is nothing that indicates what is appropriate clothing and more importantly, what is not. If jeans are not appropriate, why does the Guide not say so and indicate what other garments are not appropriate. I find it surprising that, while there is a recognised uniform for a competition, there is no recommendation for training which invariably involves longer periods and less experienced rowers. There appears to be no specific or ARA approved clothing for rowing and more specifically, cold water/cold weather kit for rowing. This seems to be an area that could reasonably be addressed.
- iv. The Inquest also heard evidence concerning capsizing drills and swim tests for novice junior rowers in particular. You yourself gave evidence that under Operation Oarsome there was a requirement that junior novice rowers were initially taught on land, then had to undergo capsizing drill and swim tests before being allowed out on to the water in any form of boat. My understanding of the evidence was that this was not a general policy recommended by the ARA to clubs and certainly was not followed as a matter of regular practice. It seems to be a sensible approach and is it not something that clubs can be required to follow when dealing with complete novice junior rowers? At present it appears to be a recommendation but can it not be given compulsory status?
- v. The key benefit of capsizing drills is to train rowers to respond appropriately when suddenly immersed, particularly in cold water. While emphasis was given at the Inquest to the importance of remaining with the boat in the event of a capsizing, that is clearly not a message that appears to be getting through to grass roots at junior novice level. This may partly be because the reference in the Water Safety Code is buried in paragraph 2.5.2.2 and is given no emphasis whatsoever. Given the known risk to rowers of immersion in freezing water, it appears that the message to stay with the boat needs to be given greater clarity and to form part of basic training at the earliest possible stage. For example, the leaflet that is sent to all members refers at paragraph 6 to knowing what to do when a boat capsizes but simply states that the club will instruct the rower in the correct procedures. This appears to be an ideal opportunity to spell out what is required. The same applies to paragraph 3 about appropriate clothing and paragraph 14 concerning life jackets/buoyancy aids. Instead of putting the emphasis on clubs to deal with these matters, why does the ARA not spell out clear guidance and recommendations? There appears also to be confusion over the use of throw lines. Evidence was given at the Inquest that 90% of boating [coaching] is done from the bank. Your evidence was that you would expect such coaches to have a throw line with them during the course of that coaching. However, as was pointed out, the Water Safety Code only refers to throw lines being carried in a coaching launch. Indeed, the Code has no reference to coaches having any equipment at all. Your evidence was that it is for clubs to decide what equipment they use but again guidance in such a crucial area would seem to be sadly lacking. Indeed, in your evidence, you acknowledge that there appear to be variants between the contents of the Code and your understanding of the Coaching Scheme which coaches have to pass with the ARA and when you stated that the Code is to give guidance to clubs, you were unable to explain why certain elements of the Code are read as "requirements". It is understandable that there must be confusion on the part of coaches and clubs in these crucial areas.
- vi. I consider that one of the important elements of the evidence that I heard at the Inquest was in relation to the lack of any obligation on clubs/coaches to maintain a written log setting out the competence and experience of junior/novice rowers. In the circumstances of Sikander's death, this would have allowed Mr Pigot to review Sikander's experience and make an informed decision as to whether or not he should have gone out in a single scull. As it was, he was left with the information from Sikander himself, which turned out to be false because of his apparent keenness to go out in a single scull. Clear guidance from the ARA to maintain such a log would appear to be of significant safety benefit.

3. I have no wish to unreasonably restrict the enjoyment of the sport of rowing. However, we live in an age when safety has never been more clearly addressed and stressed. The ARA is in a wonderful position to give a lead in these areas and I hope that this letter has helped highlight important areas where it would seem that improvements can easily be made which will be of significance in improving general safety in the sport of rowing.

I would be grateful if you would be kind enough to acknowledge safe receipt of this letter and I look forward to hearing from you with regard to appropriate feedback.

I am copying this letter to Sikander's family so they can be made aware of the issues that I have brought to your attention.

Yours sincerely

Peter J Bedford
HM Coroner Berkshire

cc Blandy and Blandy Solicitors