Tips For Prospective Blue Water Cruisers

Words by Wendy Hinman and Garth Wilcox

Peter McCaffery

PART 3

WENDY HINMAN AND GARTH WILCOX SAILED 34,000 MILES OVER 7 YEARS ABOARD THEIR 31-FOOT WYLIE-DESIGNED BOAT, VELELLA, CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE PACIFIC OCEAN, WITH A FORAY INTO THE SOUTH CHINA SEA.

WENDY IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK ABOUT THEIR ADVENTURES.

COMFORT IN THE HEAT OF THE TROPICS

The heat in the tropics can be overwhelming at first. It is critical to have an awning to use while sailing. We can roll ours up and unroll it easily underway depending on how windy/sunny it is and how much visibility we need. Another larger one for in port is handy for keeping cool in still / wet conditions, but they can be a liability in unsettled conditions. Our large awning has thru hulls for water catchment which are useful, although we rarely use the big awning because we rarely sit for long periods of time and we worry about the wind coming up unexpectedly. Shading for the foredeck can be nice in especially hot or rainy climates (so we can keep the hatch open while it's raining) and a foredeck awning can also be used to collect rain for filling your fresh water tanks. If they are deployed at lifeline level, unexpected wind can be less of an issue. Windscoops disintegrate rather quickly in the sun and wind but are useful for getting the boat cool.

You may want to make sure you have good ventilation inside the boat since it gets very hot in the tropics. We are lucky to have a hatch over the chain locker that we can leave open even when it is pouring rain. We also have a cockpit window that is usually protected by the awning in rainy weather. Fans mounted in the galley and near sleeping areas can be important for comfort. Figure what it takes to run these into your energy needs. Ours take about .3 amps each. Solar shower can easily puncture and deteriorate in UV. Buy a garden sprayer with pump for fresh water rinses after swimming. A hot tea kettle can heat the water to the ideal temperature in cooler weather, but usually tropical weather makes cool showers very refreshing. Polarized sunglasses are important for navigating through underwater reefs and saving your eyes from the glare on the water.

We found that summer clothes we wore in Seattle were too warm for the tropics. Regular t-shirts and polo shirts can be pretty hot in still conditions. Sleeveless t-shirts are good, as are large collared short sleeved loose dress (oxford or Hawaiian) shirts and, of course, bathing suits are standard cruising gear. Gauze type fabric is

much cooler. Mexico, New Zealand and Fiji have a good selection of inexpensive bathing suits and decent summery clothes, sometimes of lower quality. You might want some UV protective, quick dry kind of clothing that REI, Columbia Sportswear, Ex Officio and catalogs like Travelsmith sell. Sometimes we are out in the sun without the awning for hours when navigating a tight lagoon or when we're out in the dinghy and it is nice to have another way to stay cool and protected from the strong sun.

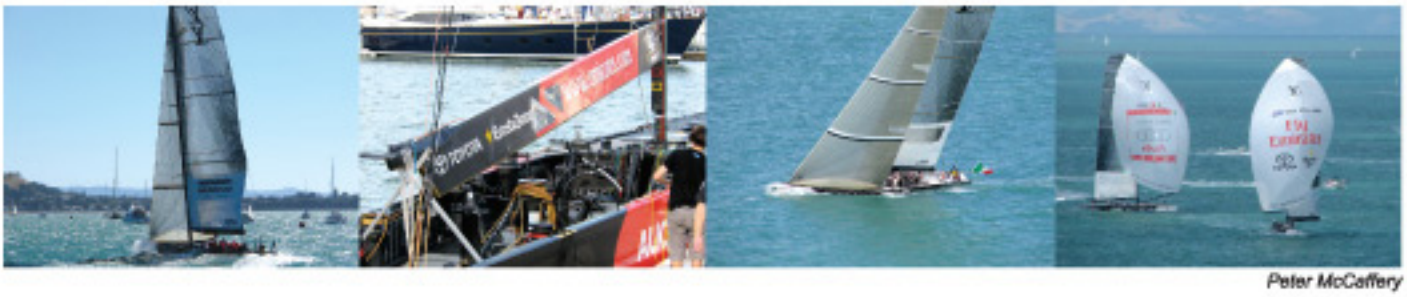
Special, quick dry UV clothing (or nylon) is useful with the strong sun and all the wet dinghy rides. Men's nylon swim trunks are perfect shorts for cruising, since they dry so quickly and let you air out without the need for underwear which can hold moisture. (In addition to beach landings, it is easy to get wet with waves splashing between the boat and dinghy as you are boarding.) Pareos / sarongs are handy to wear as skirts in conservative countries (even over shorts or bathing suits for easier dinghy landings) and are cool, as well as quick and easy to wash and dry. We see locals carrying umbrellas to keep the sun off in areas where hats and sunglasses aren't as accepted. We bought hats at REI made by Sequel that were very well suited to the tropics, with a back flap to cover the neck, a strap, air vents to let air in the sides yet protect the scalp and a dark under rim to save the eyes and they came in sizes which means they fit us well.

MISCELLANEOUS HANDY ITEMS TO HAVE ON BOARD

We've found dry bags absolutely essential. A small one is handy for keeping things dry when taking the camera and a few items to shore for short trips. A backpack or hip bag is handy for carrying the day's necessities - water bottle, sunscreen, mosquito repellent, money, camera, towel, hats, bathing suit, etc. A larger dry bag has been useful for keeping laundry or groceries dry or other larger items on wet dinghy rides.

You may want a nylon mesh bag for snorkel gear so it is easy to carry for day trips and can drip dry when hung from the lifelines or stern rail. Make sure you have good snorkeling equipment that fits and feels comfortable to wear. It is a great diversion and great way to cool off. Armorall can help protect your fins as well as other plastic items from UV damage. A shorty wet suit can keep the sun off and keep you warmer during longer snorkeling sessions. You may also want to exchange thick terry cloth bath towels for thinner beach towels, since they dry quickly and are much easier to wash without dedicating significant fresh water to the effort. We sent our bath towels home from Mexico and bought beach towels to replace them. We often use hand towels to dry off after a swim and have found a pack towel / chamois cloth to be especially handy for day trips since we can wring it out well after use.

Having a sewing machine onboard is very handy for sewing flags, clothes or slipcovers, as well as repairing clothing, stitching on awnings and dodgers (which only lasts 3 years), and sails.



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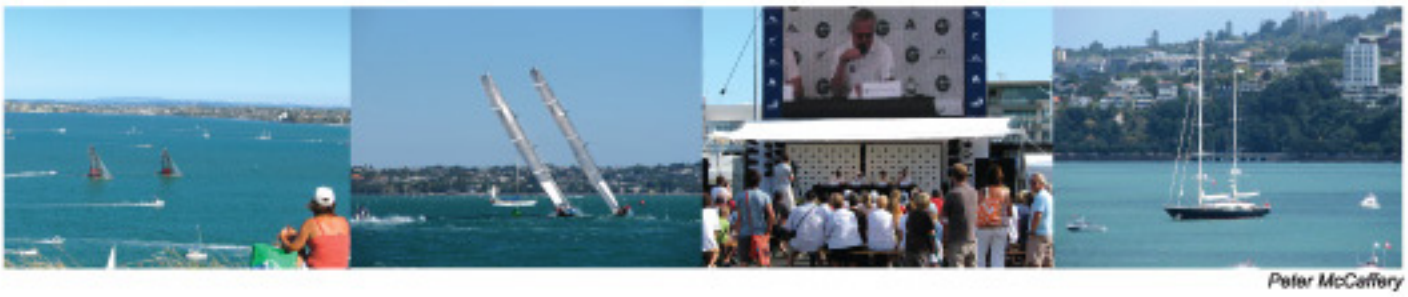
LAUNDRY

Coin-operated laundry is scarce in Mexico and the South Pacific, but laundry services are more readily available. We had a number of clothes ruined by them and a couple of things lost, so tend to approach the laundry services cautiously. The wash water and dryers are often very hot, heated by a wood fire in many cases, so separate your laundry carefully and provide specific care instructions along with a list of items included. The hot water will bake in any stains, so pre-treat any spots. Soaking laundry in baking soda or a great diaper product we found in New Zealand (and Australia) called Napi-san can brighten dull and stained clothes. If in doubt, ask for cold water and no drying. Only hand wash things with lycra / spandex and elastic, like bathing suits, stretch pants, biking shorts, or bras and even underwear if you can manage or the elasticity will be gone in a short time. And hand wash any special clothes or favorite items. For hand washing, a deep paint bucket



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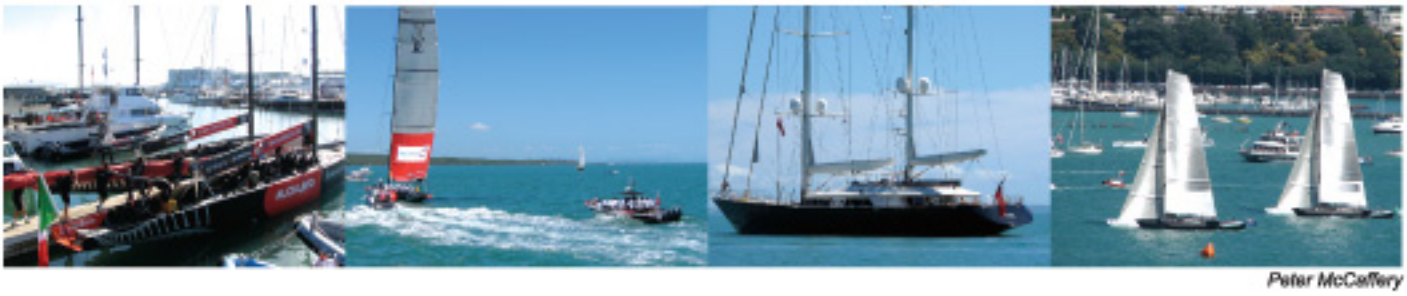
with a mini toilet plunger works well, along with a fingernail brush to work on spots. Liquid detergent of most any kind works well in saltwater, although we tend to use a little more than in fresh water. I often use salt water until the final rinse and sometimes will do the final rinse at the tap on shore if I can to avoid using specially treated tank water that we have to haul. Bringing laundry ashore in a bucket or dry bag for a quick final rinse and wring can work well in some locations. We have been impressed with how much water we can catch with a small foredeck awning and make a point of doing laundry when we've been able to catch lots of fresh water. Our dinghy collects lots of water and (since we have no engine fuel can inside and it's usually relatively clean), we can use that for the wash cycle. Hand wringing can be tough on the wrists after a large laundry session; Wringers are handy but big to carry aboard the boat. Sometimes we make sure the stays are clean and use them to help wring.

Having 2 sets of washable slipcovers to protect the permanent cushion covers, saves them over the long run, especially on passages when they get abused. Salt from our skin and clothes inevitably gets on the cushions, as does oil from suntan lotions and mosquito repellent, and it'd be nice to be able to clean them more often and easily. Slipcovers can be softer on your bare skin and can be rotated if you have more than one set to keep things clean and looking good. Fleece is a great material that is soft on the skin. Bright floral patterns available in the tropics can brighten up the interior and offer a easy change of decor.



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WATER

Fresh drinking water has not been hard to get in our travels. It is not available absolutely everywhere, but with a little bit of planning and water management is available most places and is good - and it usually tastes better than water made from a water maker. We treat our tank water with chlorine or Aqua tablets, but usually it is fine without. Having 4 jerry jugs on hand to haul water is critical since filling tanks alongside isn't usually possible. Many fuel docks do offer free water as in the States sometimes only with fill up. We use saltwater for washing and bathing with a quick fresh water rinse and can live for 3 weeks on 50 gallons. Most boats carry more than this and a majority have water makers but water makers need special care and take fuel to run. Catching water on awnings can defray the hassle of obtaining or making fresh water and we are amazed at how much we can catch, usually enough for all our needs. We have cut a silver tarp (with a thru-hull and hose that run from it into jerry cans) that we have at hand in the v-berth area and set it up if it looks rainy and we need water. Others have some sort of deck fill system. Catching is the ideal way to get water, and although we found it rarely rained in Mexico and the Tuamotus, we could catch what we needed almost everywhere else, and catching water makes a rain squall fun. Since we've started catching water we find we can be more free with our fresh water and don't need to rely on saltwater as much for washing.

FUEL

Fuel docks are adequately plentiful in most major ports, although planning ahead is important. Sometimes fuel docks require Med mooring to a gnarly concrete fuel dock and filling with jerry jugs becomes more appealing. We only carry 18 gallons and have found that adequate, but we tend to sail more than most people and use our engine a lot less, usually just for charging. Many boats carry fuel jugs on deck. UV tends to fade and crack them over time. (In rough conditions these jerry cans can be swept overboard, taking the stanchions with them.) Fuel is usually much more expensive outside the U.S. Premix gasoline (sometimes called Zoom) for the dinghy outboard is also readily available.

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BOAT PREP

PREPARING YOUR BOAT FOR VOYAGING

It is impossible to have the perfect boat before you leave to go cruising since it is hard to anticipate everything.

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The Sailing Adventures Of Vellela

You have to just call it good enough and set off sailing at some point. Experience will teach you about your boat and your needs. Our nearly 2 month long shakedown cruise revealed many issues that we addressed before really leaving the conveniences of home. You may find it helpful to visit the section where we discuss the modifications we made to our boat before departing. Keep in mind that people have different priorities and each boat comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses, so someone else's advice may not work for you. Our philosophy was to go small and simple so we could go sooner.

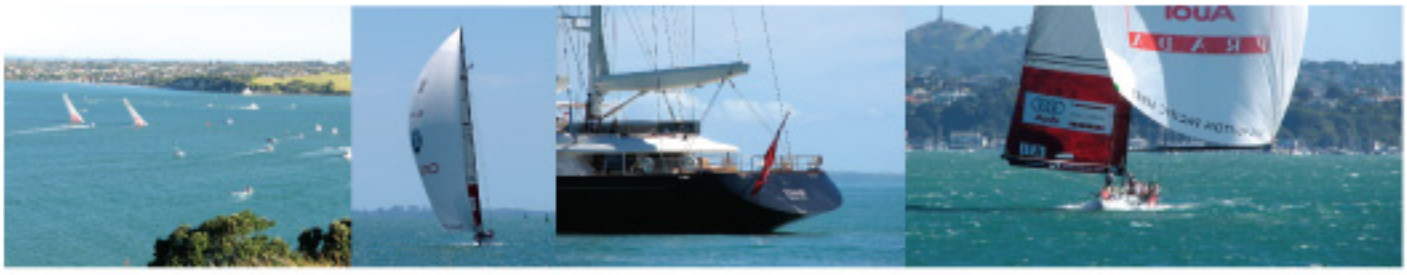
Decisions about how to best prepare a boat for voyaging depend significantly upon individual lifestyle choices. We postponed several decisions about buying expensive items and have since added some and decided others were not necessary based on the way we live. Our list of modifications is always evolving. We've found that planning stops once every year or year and a half in places where we can do a major boat overhaul helps us manage many problems until we can properly address our needs and helps keep maintenance from overwhelming us. (For example, we left with a brand new mainsail, but old jibs and staysails, since we weren't really sure which we'd use. Once we got to New Zealand, we had a very good idea of what we needed and found good quality workmanship at lower prices than the U.S. Had we purchased sails before departing, we'd have made inappropriate choices).

POWER GENERATION

All the electricity you need for daily living must be generated somehow. You need to become completely self sufficient without shore power since it isn't really feasible to rely on it over the long term once you leave your home marina. Estimating your power needs will be is challenging in advance, but we'd suggest you overestimate your needs and set up a variety of methods for generating that power. Reducing your power use minimizes the power one needs to generate. At one time, all of the four methods we had of generating power: Alternator, solar panels, trolling generator and wind generator didn't work for various reasons. In general, we were glad to have the redundancy so that when one system had a problem or the weather wasn't suitable (cloudy or calm), we could rely on another. Most people use a combination of the various means of generating power, along with running the engine or a generator two hours each day. Fuel is much more expensive outside the U.S. A book called "Alternative Power Sources" can be useful for making decisions about meeting power needs, although the book is not written specifically for boats. We've connected all our power generating sources to one regulator, a flex charge 25 and this diverts power if we are topped up. Again, the lower your needs are for power, the less need there is for generating it.

ALTERNATOR

We don't use our alternator for much of our power generation, but it makes sense to have a high tech alternator / regulator to maximize the output and an alternator that will take the stress and heat of operating at maximum output. We have a 50 amp alternator and it generates 35amps at the speeds we run it at high idle. We have a Next Step regulator which works fine. A monitor that allows you to keep track of your power generation helps you figure out how much power each item draws and your current state of battery charge. We like our new Link 10, but for a long while we were using the voltage meter to establish our state of battery charge after our original monitor died. We used to have a monitor that interfaced with our alternator regulator and the system worked well until we had a voltage spike and both were destroyed simultaneously. A general suggestion would be to insure that all systems can work independently if needed.



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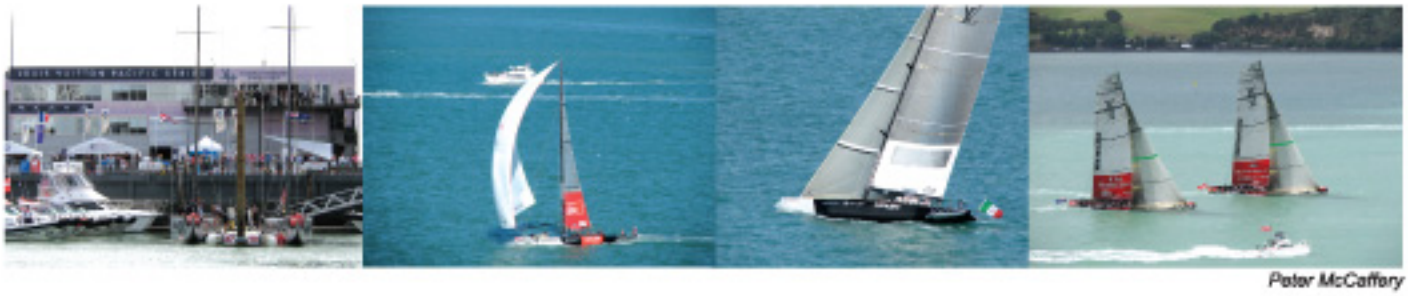
SOLAR PANELS

A quarter of their watt rating equals the number of amp hours per day that solar panels generate on average. Solar panels seem to lose some output over time. The rigid solar panels do better in cooler climates and need air flow

beneath them for better power generation. Finding a safe, secure and unobtrusive way to mount rigid panels can be a challenge. Many people mount them to rigid horizontal lifeline poles so they can be tilted, but the edges are sharp and can present the potential for injury when getting in or out of the dinghy in their vicinity and lines can catch on them. They add windage to the boat which can be scary in high wind conditions. Others mount them onto radar arches and still others on pivoting brackets attached to verticle pole mounted aft of the cockpit. Flexible solar panels can offer an option if rigid panel mounting isn't feasible. They can be stored under settee seats and are more tolerant of shadows (hard to avoid on a boat) than the rigid ones. Flexible solar panels can kink if they are not tied well in windy conditions and williwas can come up at night without warning; Damage to our flexible panels has reduced their output. Solar panels of both types need to be cleaned periodically to keep power generation at top levels. In addition, electrical fittings can corrode over time. We think the ideal solar panel would be the Solara since it could be glued to the deck (and could be walked on), and we would choose this next time, mounted on top of a hard dodger or cabin top.



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TROLLING GENERATOR

Trolling generators that drag behind the boat generate power pretty well when you're moving, but work best at a hull speed of between 3 and 6 knots. Ours is a homemade 10 amp DC generator fixed to the boat (no gimbal). It has a ring on the end of the shaft to which we tie a 100 feet of 1/2" doublebraid. The line then is spliced to a 3 foot long 5/8" stainless bar, with a ring at one end for attaching the line, and a 6 inch diameter 3 blade outboard prop on the other. The output is run through a 15 amp power diode. It puts out about 4-5 amps at 6 knots of boat speed, but we find at about 8 knots the spinner can jump out of the waves when the swell is large and kink the line, which reduces its effectiveness and creates extra drag. Trolling generators can interfere with radio reception and can be challenging to recover in windy conditions. We've found heaving to be the best way to stop the generator from spinning while recovering it. Fishing is incompatible with the trolling generator.

WIND GENERATOR

Wind generators can often be quite loud, especially the Air Marine brand (although we hear the blades can be shaved to reduce noise on these). For some generators, it has to be howling in the anchorage to generate much. Our Rutland 910 generates power at lower wind speeds but doesn't generate as much as others at higher speeds. It will generate all the power we need in windy anchorages (above 15 knots) and when sailing to weather. It can increase our stress in windy conditions and sometimes we'll tie it off for peace of mind, particularly if we don't need the power. Given a choice, we'd forego the noise and windage and set ourselves up for a higher solar input.

SHORE POWER

Marinas are much more prevalent than they used to be and do offer an option to anchoring for a special treat, for getting projects done (with unlimited power and water if you're lucky) or leaving the boat for extended periods, but they are expensive. Most marinas typically offer only 220V power except in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. so 110 volt battery chargers as well as many power tools aren't worth much after leaving those areas. And replacing electrical appliances can be difficult unless you're traveling home. Installing a 220 volt battery charger will allow you to use foreign power sources. You may need some plugs and receptacles to create your own shore power cable that will plug into your boat. You can always buy the appropriate end fitting for that particular country upon arrival. Some marinas will allow you to use a transformer to convert the power from 110 to 220, but they are expensive, heavy and large, and marinas require an electrical inspection before you can plug in. Dual power transformers are common for many electronic appliances but you might want to have U.S. style plugs on hand to make your own adapters so you can hook into foreign sockets.

ESTIMATING YOUR POWER NEEDS

Estimating your power needs is hard since you haven't lived aboard offshore before, but perhaps you can learn from our experience. Generally we use less power than most people and we use approxately 20-30 amps per day. Since we do not have pressure water, radar, auto bilge pumps, an electric windless, a satellite phone, or an autopilot, we cannot estimate the draw for those items. We are not using our Adler Barber Coldmachine refridgerator but it was our biggest draw when we did, using 60 amps per day alone. Read our section later on 'Keeping Up With Refrigeration' for a more thorough discussion. The following are estimates for items as we might use them on a high usage day. (Usage would be balanced based on charging ability that day and the general state of battery charge):

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ESTIMATED POWER DRAW

AT ANCHOR

Item	Lights: Incandescent	Lights: Flourescent	Fans	Shortwave radio	Stereo: radio	Stereo: CD	VHF: listening	VHF: transmitting	SSB: listening
# of units	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
amps	1.5 amps	1.0 amps	0.3 amps	0.5 amps	1.0 amps	3.0 amps	0.5 amps	1.0 amps	2.0 amps
Time	4 hours	5 hours	12 hours	5 hours	1 hour	1 hour	24 hours	.5 hour	2 hours
Amp hours	12 Amp hours	10 Amp hours	7.2 Amp hours	2.5 Amp hours	1 Amp hour	3 Amp hours	12 Amp hours	.5 Amp hour	4 Amp hours

Item	SSB: transmitting	Computer: floating	Computer: charging and on	Computer: charging and off	Digital camera battery charging	Cordless drill charging	Handheld VHF charging	LED Anchor light
# of units	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
amps	6.0 amps	2.0 amps	4.0 amps	1.0 amps	.5 amps	.5 amps	.5 amps	.1 amps
Time	.5 hour	3 hours	1 hour	.5 hour	1 hour	3 hours	3 hours	12 hours
Amp hours	3 Amp hours	6 Amp hours	4 Amp hours	.5 Amp hour	.5 Amp hour	1.5 Amp hours	1.5 Amp hours	1.2 Amp hours

AT SEA

Item	Lights: Incandescent	Lights: Flourescent	Fans	GPS	Instruments	VHF: listening	VHF: transmitting	SSB: listening	SSB: transmitting	LED Tri color
# of units	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
amps	1.5 amps	1.0 amp	0.5 amp	0.5 amp	0.5 amp	0.5 amp	1.0 amp	2.0 amps	6.0 amps	0.1 amps
Time	1 hour	1 hour	24 hours	24 hours	24 hours	24 hours	.5 hour	2 hours	.5 hour	12 hours
Amp hours	1.5 Amp hours	1 Amp hour	12 Amp hours	12 Amp hours	12 Amp hours	12 Amp hours	.5 Amp hour	4 Amp hours	3 Amp hours	1.2 Amp hours

Members' Windshifts - January / February 2009

New Members - *effective from 1st January 2009*

HOWARD, John Christopher	VAUGHAN, Robert Alan
LAU, Wai Kwong Thomas	

Absent Members - *effective from 1st January 2009*

PAINTER, Kevin Young	SHUM, Hiu Yin Sally
GRINSTEAD, Steven Travis	WOO, Ka Lok Felix
HILL, Michael John	WONG, Ping Wai Jackson

Resigned Members - *effective from 1st January 2009*

DAWSON, Ross David	

Absent Members - *effective from 1st February 2009*

BRADFIELD, John Leslie	MOOSE, Gerald
CHAN, Kwok Wai	WONG, Wing Chin Vincent

Resigned Members - *effective from 1st February 2009*

LEUNG, Ka Yee Teresa	SOO, Richard James Chew Bong