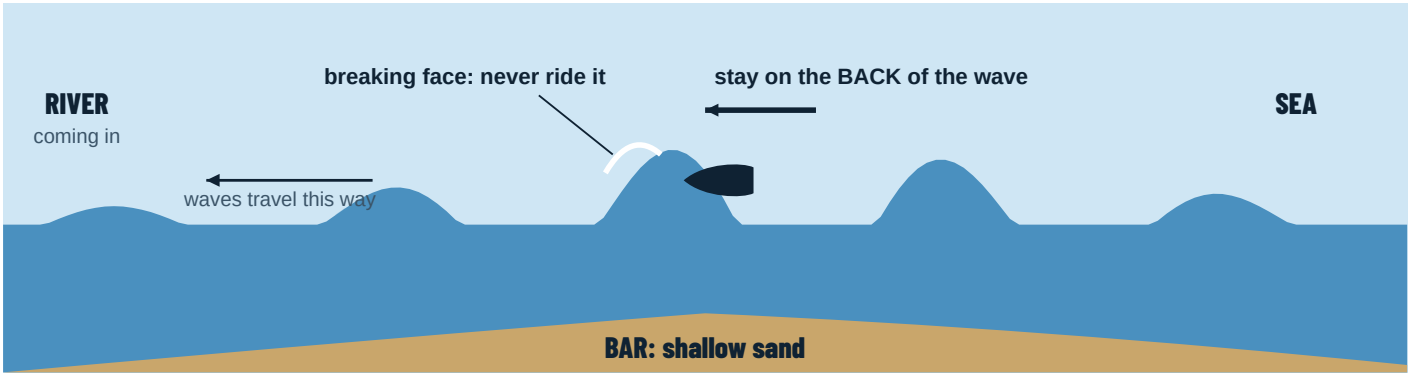
ZULU MARINER DATA CARD

23 CROSSING A COASTAL BAR

Where the swell meets shallow water and the tide. Plan it, watch it, then cross it.

COMING IN: RIDE THE BACK, NOT THE FACE



BEFORE YOU CROSS

1. Check the forecast, the swell, the tide and any bar warning. Look at the bar camera if there is one.
2. Log on with Marine Rescue on VHF: who you are, how many on board, where you are going, when you will be back.
3. Lifejackets on, everyone. It is the law crossing a coastal bar in NSW, and in Queensland in an open boat or the open area of any boat.
4. Bung in, hatches shut, gear tied down, bilge pump working, engine warm.
5. Watch from a safe spot for 10 minutes or more. Swell comes in sets with lulls between. Count them.

THE TIDE

- Best: an incoming tide, ideally the last of the flood near high water. More depth, smaller waves.
- Worst: the ebb (outgoing tide). Water running out against the swell stands the waves up steep and close together.
- Swell builds after you leave. A bar that was easy at 6 am can close by noon.

GOING OUT

- Wait for the lull after a big set, then go with steady power.
- Meet the waves bow on, or slightly angled.
- Ease off as you reach a crest so you do not launch off the back; power on again after.
- Never turn beam on in the break.

COMING IN

- Wait outside the break and watch the sets.
- Go in on the back of a wave, behind the last of the set, and stay there.
- Match its speed. Do not overtake it or surf down the face: that is how boats broach and roll.
- Keep the stern square to the swell. Weight aft, hands on the throttle.

IF IT GOES WRONG

- Swamped or rolled: stay with the boat, stay together, use the EPIRB and radio.
- Not sure? Do not cross. Wait for the tide, or stay inside.
- Log off with Marine Rescue when you are back. If you do not, they come looking.

Study aid only. Not for navigation.
Check the current official rules. Card 23 · v1.7 · © Nautical Bridge