

Northern Interior Cruising Committee

WHITE PAPER – BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

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A *white paper* is an authoritative report or guide informing readers in a concise manner about a complex or contentious issue and presenting the issuing body's position on the matter. It is meant to help readers understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision.

An Internet search garnered the following definitions for *Benefit of the doubt*:

- A favourable opinion or judgement adopted despite uncertainty (Dictionary.com)
- A favourable judgement given in the absence of full evidence (wiktionary.org)

The Cruising Manual states “***Benefit of the doubt*** will be extended to the cruiser. If the call is considered borderline or difficult to discern, a brief rationale should be noted on the cruise card and where appropriate, in the field. The cruiser’s decision will be accepted where the decision is reasonable in the particular circumstances” (Section 3.3 Principles)

The Northern Interior Cruising Committee (NICC) has long promoted the philosophy of giving “*Benefit of the Doubt*” to the cruiser. This paper is intended to clarify the use of Benefit of the Doubt and provide guidance on what qualifies for it and when it should apply.

When to Use BOTD

Benefit of the Doubt should only be granted to the cruiser when the judgement call has been deemed reasonable. The call should be considered questionable when the rules are ambiguous, or the incident is infrequent resulting in a non-decisive answer.

Benefit of the Doubt should not be granted merely to save time and effort in arriving at a sound conclusion. A reasoned approach must always be taken and the validity of the doubt must always be confirmed.

The Doubt Test

In order to extend Benefit of the Doubt (BOTD) to a cruiser one should first test and prove the nature and validity of the *Doubt*. The following four questions should be asked:

1. Is there a definitive rule that would result in a consistent answer?
2. Is there a standard convention available to remove the doubt?
3. Is there a standard measurement within the defined error tolerance that would apply and could be used in a calculation?
4. Is there a known calculation, correctly applied, that would result in a consistent answer?

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In cases where a measurement(s) is used to support a call and the error tolerance has not been exceeded, BOTD may be applicable.

In cases where a calculation(s) is used to support a call and the calculation(s) is correct, BOTD may be applicable.

If the answer is YES to any or all of these questions, then the *Doubt* is not reasonable and BOTD is not granted to the cruiser.

The Benefit Test

In all cases, where a cruiser makes a call that could potentially be subject to a BOTD judgement (i.e. where the call is deemed questionable and outside a definitive rule and/or standard convention or outside the normal protocol for measurements and calculations) the cruiser must mark his/her work in the field (where applicable) and document all measurements, calculations and the rationale for making the call.

Lack of documentation indicates an incomplete thought process or, in a worst-case scenario, implies that the cruiser failed to identify the real issue altogether.

All cruiser calls must be substantiated in order to qualify for BOTD.

The NICC stresses the importance of having the cruiser and check cruiser work together to resolve disagreements with the application of BOTD.

Following the process described above should lead to a resolution that is based on experience, common understanding and mutual respect.

Definitions

Bias	A person's prejudice, tendency or inclination that is unreasoned, inhibits impartial judgement and distorts the truth
Definitive Rule	A rule found in the Cruising Manual that addresses a specific concern which does not have a qualifying clause
Favourable	Approval of something positive or promising to the advantage of someone or something
Judgement	The ability to judge, make a decision, or form an opinion objectively, authoritatively, and wisely without prejudice
Known Calculation	A proven equation or formula used by forest measurement specialists, forest mensurationists, statisticians and biometricians in calculating tree metrics
Reasonable	Fair and sensible based on sound thought and reason
Reasoned	Justified by logic or good sense
Standard Convention	A set of agreed upon, stipulated, or generally accepted standards or criteria used to arrive at a conclusion
Standard Measurement	A unit of measure that is applied in an equation or formula to calculate tree metrics (basal area, tree volume, tree height, net sound wood, density or other tree value).