

OCTOBER 2024

# INTERPRETING SURVEY REPORTS

A GUIDE FOR BOAT OWNERS



**CORMORANT**  
MARINE SURVEYS

Prepared by: Michele Rossetti  
Founder of [Cormorant Marine](#)

# UNLOCKING INSIGHTS: YOUR GUIDE TO MARINE SURVEY REPORTS

At Cormorant Marine, we are committed to be at the forefront of marine surveying, not only providing exceptional services but also empowering boat owners with knowledge and insights. Our decision to create this white paper stems from a growing demand among our clients for detailed information that guides informed decision-making.

Through our extensive experience in the field, we have encountered numerous questions and concerns from clients regarding the nuances of survey reports, including terminology, potential red flags and the implications of findings. Recognising these needs, we felt compelled to compile this guide as a resource for our community.

Our aim is to provide boat owners with the knowledge they need to read through survey reports confidently, enhancing their understanding and ensuring their vessels' safety and value. In doing so, we reinforce our commitment to excellence and support for our clients in their maritime journeys.

# INDEX

## **I. Introduction**

## **II. Types of Survey Reports**

- Pre-Purchase Surveys
- Deal Breaker Surveys
- Acceptance Surveys
- Insurance Surveys
- Damage Surveys

## **III. Understanding Survey Reports**

- Common Terminology
- Identifying Red Flags
- Recommended Repairs and Maintenance

## **IV. The Role of the Marine Surveyor**

- Expertise and Qualifications
- Responsibilities
- Importance of Trust

## **V. Frequently Asked Questions about Survey Reports**

## **VI. Conclusion and Resources**

## INTRODUCTION

“Reports provide owners with a clear understanding of the issues, including explanations of their causes and recommendations for solutions.”

Understanding survey reports is crucial for boat ownership. When a survey is conducted, the typical outcome is a written report. The surveyor inspects the vessel, which may take a few hours to several days, depending on the vessel's characteristics and the type of survey. During the inspection, findings are noted, and a report is issued, complete with pictures and explanations of any issues discovered.



# ISSUES CATEGORIES

Findings are generally categorized by their level of importance; different surveyors may use various schemes, but issues can typically be divided into three categories:

- **Urgent Issues:** These may affect the vessel's safety or its ability to sail. They often involve significant damage to safety systems such as the structure, rigging that could compromise stability, or critical engine failures. Issues in this category require immediate action before the vessel is set to sail, as they pose a high risk of failure, endangering both the vessel and its crew.
- **Evident Issues:** These require attention but do not immediately impact safety. They usually involve minor repairs such as gelcoat or GRP repairs, winch maintenance, or oil changes for the engine and gearbox.
- **Minor Issues:** This category includes less critical concerns that, while potentially costly, mainly affect aesthetics. These might involve paint jobs on the interior or exterior, renewing interior canvas, or other activities that should be addressed during standard annual maintenance (e.g., antifouling renewal).

Reports provide owners with a clear understanding of the issues, including explanations of their causes and recommendations for solutions. A summary of all identified issues, organized by the type of system affected and prioritized by category, helps the owner and yard understand and plan the necessary maintenance or repair work according to their importance, ensuring the vessel remains safe and in good order.

# TYPES OF SURVEY REPORTS

## Pre-Purchase Surveys:

A pre-purchase survey evaluates the overall condition of a boat before purchase. It inspects all elements and systems of the boat, including an out-of-water inspection and a sea trial. The purpose is to ensure that no hidden issues exist and to provide an estimate of repair costs. A pre-purchase survey typically lasts between six hours and several days, depending on the vessel's dimensions and characteristics.

## Deal Breaker Surveys:

This inspection offers a preliminary overview of the vessel's condition. It involves a general assessment of maintenance history and inspection of key structural areas and systems. The objective is to identify major concerns that may hinder the buying process and lead a prospective buyer to reconsider the purchase. This survey is particularly useful for buyers far from the boat who want to avoid spending money on travel and accommodation before conducting an initial examination.

## Acceptance Surveys:

This survey verifies that a used vessel complies with contractual agreements following repair works or other jobs. It can also be conducted before delivering a new vessel to the owner to ensure that all contracted systems meet specifications and that the vessel is in working order.

## Insurance Surveys:

Insurance companies typically require a survey before renewing policies, especially for older vessels. This survey assesses whether the vessel meets the insurer's safety and seaworthiness standards. The extent of the survey may vary based on the insurer's requirements but usually includes checks on the structure and main systems.

## Damage Surveys:

When damage occurs—whether from an accident, material deterioration or weather-related incidents—a surveyor assesses the extent of the damage and recommends repairs. A damage survey usually involves a fault analysis and a detailed inspection of the affected area and related systems. Damage from grounding, for example, may require thorough inspections of the hull structure, steering system, and rigging, which all may be affected although indirectly.



# UNDERSTANDING SURVEY REPORTS

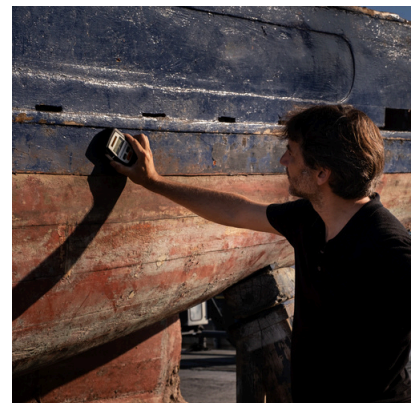
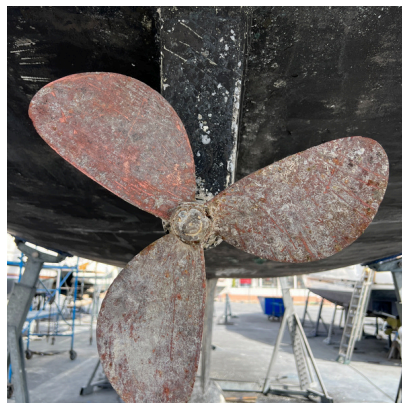
## COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Survey reports are typically organized by systems that group various components of the vessel, making it easier for boat owners to understand the condition of each part. For example, the "Mooring Gear" section includes all items necessary for anchoring, such as the anchor, anchor chain, windlass, cleats, and mooring lines. This systematic approach helps owners quickly identify which components are functioning well and which may require attention.

Another critical system for sailing vessels is the rig, which encompasses various elements such as the mast, spreaders, shrouds, stays, boom, and sails. Each of these components plays a vital role in the overall performance and safety of the vessel.



Specific terminology is often used to describe findings related to the vessel's construction materials, which is crucial for assessing its integrity. For instance, in glass-reinforced plastic (GRP) hulls, "osmosis" is a term frequently encountered. It describes the deterioration process of the resin due to water penetrating the laminate, which can compromise the hull's strength. In metal hulls, the thickness of the hull plating is a critical measurement, as it indicates the metal's health and potential corrosion issues that could affect the vessel's longevity. Wooden hulls, on the other hand, are particularly susceptible to rot in damp environments, making moisture content readings essential for evaluating their structural integrity.





## IDENTIFYING RED FLAGS

**Surveys are invaluable for uncovering hidden problems that may not be immediately apparent to the owner or broker. Often, significant issues go unnoticed, leading to costly repairs or safety risks later on.**

For example, structural problems are common in GRP boats constructed with a counter-mold matrix or grid. In these cases, the prefabricated structure may become partially or entirely unglued from the hull due to stresses from grounding or sitting on hard surfaces, potentially compromising the vessel's safety.

Metal and wooden boats face their own risks: corrosion in metal hulls and rot in wooden hulls can lead to severe structural failures. Proper testing methods, including ultrasonic instruments for metal, percussive tests for both metal and wood, and moisture meters for wood, are critical for identifying these significant vulnerabilities.

Engine issues also serve as red flags; some engines may fail to start, continuously overheat, or exhibit excessive vibrations, indicating underlying mechanical problems. Additionally, on deck, improperly secured teak planks can lead to water ingress in the core of the deck, resulting in extensive and costly repairs if not addressed promptly.

These examples of red flags—damages that require substantial expenditure and compromise safety—are highlighted in red in the survey report to underscore their seriousness and impact on the vessel's operational integrity.

## RECOMMENDED REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

A well-prepared survey report summarizes all findings, grouped by system and categorized by importance. Each finding includes a detailed explanation of the issue's cause and recommended repair methods. Serious issues should be prioritized and addressed first, especially those that may pose safety risks. However, it's equally important to attend to other identified concerns that may not pose immediate threats but could develop into more serious problems if neglected. Addressing these issues not only helps maintain the safety and performance of the vessel but also protects its value over time.



# THE ROLE OF THE MARINE SURVEYOR

## Ensuring Vessel Safety and Value

When purchasing a new boat, selling an old one, or assessing a damage, a professional survey provides the necessary knowledge and expertise to ensure you're making informed financial decisions. A surveyor helps you understand any shortcomings in your vessel and offers an expert, independent opinion on the causes of damage and the required repairs.

Effective surveyors always measure and quantify findings. When an issue is measurable, it becomes tangible and undeniable, making it easier to renegotiate counting on a clear report that documents assessed problems. An objective assessment from a third party often facilitates agreement between buyers and sellers during negotiations. Moreover, a surveyor plays a crucial role in ensuring the vessel's soundness and safety. Frequently, surveyors uncover structural issues that may have gone unnoticed by the owner, which can significantly impact safety. A thorough survey also evaluates safety systems—components like seacocks are often overlooked, and a detailed inspection may reveal defects that could endanger the vessel and its crew while at sea.

## Expertise and Qualifications

The field of marine surveying is often unregulated, resulting in a diverse range of backgrounds among surveyors. This can include experienced captains, divers, brokers, and highly qualified naval engineers. In the UK and the US, various associations are working to establish minimum standards of expertise for their members. Surveyors lacking specific degrees in nautical or related fields typically join these associations to validate their qualifications.

## Responsibilities

A marine surveyor's primary responsibility is to identify issues that may jeopardize a vessel's safety or seaworthiness. Many of these issues are overlooked due to owner negligence or lack of awareness, which can create significant risks at sea. Conducting a thorough assessment of a vessel's condition is essential to uncover any concerning issues. Inspections should be carried out both on and off the water; while this process can be time-consuming, it is invaluable for ensuring the vessel's safety.

Establishing a vessel's health before purchase instills confidence in prospective buyers. A comprehensive list of identified issues serves as a basis for transparent negotiations, helping all parties reach a fair agreement.

# TRUST

*“The way surveyors conduct their work is crucial for building trust with clients.”*

Once a survey is complete, clients need to feel assured that the surveyor has performed a meticulous job. Clear communication, objective assessments, and transparency are vital elements that foster this trust.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SURVEY REPORTS

## **What should I do if I don't understand the report?**

Reports are written in accessible language, with necessary technical terms where needed. To address any doubts, each survey includes a discussion after the report is delivered, which can be conducted face-to-face, via video call, or by phone.

## **Can I renegotiate the price of the boat based on the report?**

This depends on the contract signed with the broker. Some contracts allow the buyer to withdraw and recover the deposit without questions, while others permit withdrawal only if significant safety or integrity issues are identified. However, a detailed, objective report often facilitates fruitful negotiations regardless of the type of contract.

## **What steps should I take if issues are found?**

The first step is to communicate the issues with both the seller and broker. Transparency is beneficial; since the issues are usually identified by an independent party, all sides typically appreciate the findings. The next step is to reach an agreement on repair costs and execute the recommendations, either before or after the purchase.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SURVEY REPORTS

## **At what stage of the negotiation can a pre-purchase survey be conducted?**

A pre-purchase survey is ideally conducted after an offer has been made on the boat but before the sale is finalized. This allows the buyer to assess the vessel's condition and negotiate any necessary repairs or price adjustments based on the survey findings.

## **I'm concerned about osmosis; can it be measured?**

Yes, osmosis can be measured. During a survey, specialized equipment, such as moisture meters, is used to assess the moisture content in the hull material. This helps determine the extent of osmosis and the necessary steps for remediation.



## CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the different types of survey reports is essential for any boat owner. These reports not only provide a clear picture of your vessel's condition but also help ensure the safety and value of your investment. Engaging a qualified marine surveyor is a key step in your journey as a boat owner, giving you peace of mind and confidence in your choices.

As the founder of Cormorant Marine, I am committed to delivering thorough and unbiased survey services that cater to your needs. I focus on providing detailed reports that highlight existing issues and potential risks, empowering you to make informed decisions about your vessel.

If you have any questions or are considering a survey, please feel free to reach out. I'm here to offer expert advice and guidance tailored to your specific situation.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### RELATED ARTICLES FOR FURTHER READING:

Explore our blog for insightful articles on marine surveying, maintenance tips, and safety best practices:

[Sailing through the purchase of a second hand boat](#)

[Tips for buying a boat from your desktop](#)

[The importance of an inspection out of the water](#)

[Is she fit for an extended navigation?](#)

## STAY INFORMED:

Subscribe to our newsletter for the latest resources, updates, and expert insights delivered directly to your inbox. Join our community of informed boat owners today!

## CONTACT US

Have questions or need more information?  
Our team is here to assist you. Reach out to us at:

**Email:** [info@cormorantmarine.com](mailto:info@cormorantmarine.com)

**Phone:** +34 609 58 06 51

We welcome inquiries and consultations to discuss your specific surveying needs.





**CORMORANT**  
MARINE SURVEYS

**Offering  
peace of  
mind**

