

Seafarers' Blessings and Imprecations

Fair winds and following seas!

That's a seafarer's 'blessing' for a safe journey and outcome, whether it be a journey, as such, or simply any venture, task, life-change or undertaking.

Fair winds has the connotation of winds that are the right speed and direction to take you at a comfortable pace and ensure you safely attain your goal.

Following seas suggests not only a smooth ride and a pleasant experience, but seas that will hasten your arrival at your destination or your attainment of your goal. The seas coming from the rear rock the ship a lot less than seas from any other direction...and push you along. Mostly.

May your stern gland leak in a following sea!

This is a less charitable seafarers' incantation – not unlike the euphemistic Chinese curse “may you live in interesting times!” There's no well-wishing here.

A leak in your stern gland, whose purpose is to ensure the propeller shaft doesn't become a conduit for sea water, is a perennial concern of seafarers. To have a leak in your stern gland, with the sea constantly coming up against it – as would happen in a following sea – would be a veritable nightmare. One might speculate that a leaking gland in a following sea is tantamount to a slowly but inevitably sinking vessel.