

8. Pilotage

8.1 Vessels that require a pilot

The [Transport Operations \(Marine Safety\) Act 1994](#) specifies that, unless a current pilotage exemption certificate (PEC) is held by the master of a ship, pilotage is compulsory for:

- a ship that is 50 m or more
- a vessel towing another vessel where the combined length of the vessels is 50 m or more
- a ship whose owner or master asks for the services of a pilot
- a ship whose master is directed by the Regional Harbour Master (Cairns) to use the services of a pilot.

Pilotage exemption may be obtained by masters of ships, depending on ship length, trading regularly to the port after they have completed the required number of observation trips, mentored pilotage trips and check pilotage as determined by the Regional Harbour Master (Cairns) and completed a written examination ([Pilot transfer arrangements 03/2022](#)).

8.1.1 Night pilotage

There is normally no restriction as to movements during the hours of darkness, but this will depend on the particular circumstances prevailing at the time.

8.1.2 Request for pilot

The requirements of the [Transport Operations \(Marine Safety\) Regulation 2016](#) shall be observed for all bookings. Australian Reef Pilots provides a pilotage service for ship arrivals, departures and removals. Pilot transfers are carried out by pilot launch.

Requests for pilotage services are described in [Queensland Shipping Information Planning System \(QSHIPS\)](#) 1.4.10 booking procedures.

8.1.3 Notice required

Ships requiring the services of a pilot are required to submit arrival, removal and departure notices. Initial notification should be made via the [QSHIPS](#) website.

8.1.4 Personal Pilot Unit (PPU)

It is mandatory for pilots to use a PPU on all vessels in excess of 160m LOA.

8.2 Pilotage area

The Pilotage area is described in section 4.2. Vessels must not approach closer to the harbour than the pilot boarding position without a port pilot on board.

8.2.1 Pilot boarding places

| Pilot Boarding Place | Lat/Long |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Approaching from the Northwest | 12° 48.9' S 141° 34.8' E |

8.2.2 Pilot disembarkation place

| Pilot Boarding Place | Lat/Long |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| | 12° 54.50' S 141° 34.81' E |

8.2.3 Pilot boarding arrangements

Pilot transfer instructions will be advised to the ship prior to the pilot boarding by Weipa VTS.

The instructions may include:

- Pilot boarding time
- Restrictions/requirements (by the regional harbour master (Cairns))
- Boarding position
- Desired course and speed to conduct the transfer.

Ships are to be at the pilot boarding ground at the notified time of pilot boarding, with all preparations for boarding completed in accordance with the instructions in this section.

Ships should be underway,

- Proceeding at 7 knots and
- Providing a good lee.
- The pilot ladder is to be rigged on the lee side,
- 1.5 m above the water,
- With two manropes and
- A heaving line standing by,
- At night, a forward facing light is required to illuminate the ladder in accordance with IMO requirements and IMPA recommendations see [Pilot Boarding Ladder Arrangement](#) and [Pilot transfer arrangements – Marine Notice 04/2023](#).
- If the ship has freeboard of 9 meters or greater, a combination ladder must be rigged.

Full details of the regulations and fees are contained in schedule 10 of the [Transport Operations \(Marine Safety\) Regulation 2016](#).

8.2.4 Pilot /Personnel Transfer Safety

It is essential to ensure the safe transfer of pilots and other personnel at sea. Responsibility for safe practices for personnel transfers rests with each person involved in the activity including the ship owners, operators, master and crew, pilotage providers, pilots and pilot boat crew as well as the person being transferred. All parties should observe both the spirit and intent of the regulations, to ensure safety is not compromised.

The pilot ladder is to be rigged two metres above the water, with two manropes and a heaving line standing by. At night, a forward-facing light is required to illuminate the ladder in accordance with IMO requirements and IMPA recommendations.

Refer: [Pilot Boarding Ladder Arrangement](#) and [Pilot transfer arrangements – Marine Notice 04/2023. \(Pilotage - boarding ladder arrangements\)](#).

Where a Pilot suspects that the pilot transfer arrangement provided are unsafe, they should refuse to board the vessel until the matter is resolved and is made safe by the master and crew. If the issue cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the pilot then the movement will be aborted until such time that the Pilot boarding arrangement is made to safe.

Additionally, the matter must be reported immediately to AMSA, Cairns VTS and the pilot's employer.

8.2.5 Passage planning – bridge resource management (BRM)

Marine Notice 11/2016 has been issued by the [Australian Maritime Safety Authority \(AMSA\) Bridge Resource Management](#) – Marine Notice 11/2016 and should be referred to by all masters of vessels operating in Australian waters. Any passage plan is a basic indication of preferred intention and both pilot and master should be prepared to depart from it when circumstances so dictate.

A passage plan for this port can be found on the [MSQ website](#).

8.2.6 Alcohol management

The [Transport Operations \(Road Use Management\) Act 1995](#) section 79 requires that persons in charge of ships have a zero blood alcohol reading. The Queensland Water Police periodically conduct random breath tests of masters and pilots on ships arriving or about to depart the port. Severe penalties apply to infringements.

8.3 Pilot licences, pilotage area endorsements and exemption from pilotage licences

The master of a vessel with a LOA greater than 50m may be exempt from pilotage once they have obtained a pilotage exemption area endorsement.

8.3.1 Examination for pilotage exemption area endorsement

The examination will consist of written and oral components and will include an assessment to determine the candidate's ability to safely conduct the navigation of a ship without a pilot while within the pilotage area. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of port procedures and the ability to navigate a ship through the pilotage area and port without the aid of navigational charts.

8.3.2 Cancellation of licences

A licence may be cancelled or suspended when major port changes or developments are taking place. It may also occur where masters fail to comply with port procedures.

8.4 Pilotage requirements for Torres Strait and Great Barrier Reef (GBR)

All merchant vessels 70 m in length and over and all oil, gas and chemical tankers irrespective of size are required to take a licensed marine pilot when transiting the Torres Strait and Great Northeast Channel. Pilotage is also required for these vessels transiting the inner route from Cape York to Cairns Roads and for transit of Hydrographers Passage; significant penalties apply for non-compliance.

Full details can be found in [Marine Notice 06/2022 Coastal pilotage](#). Maximum draft for transit is 12.5 m; vessels with a draft greater than 10 m will be advised of the required tidal window by the pilotage company.

Refer to the [Reef VTS publication](#) for further information.