

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:

- all foreign flag ships with LOA >35metres transiting Hovell Bar;
- all ships with LOA of 50 metres 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 to use the services of a pilot;
- a small ship less than 35 metres (the relevant ship) if:
 - it is combined with another small ship for propelling one of the ships
 - the total of the length of the ships is 50 metres or more
 - the master of the relevant ship has command of the combined ships.

8.1.1 Night pilotage

The port of Thursday Island (Port Kennedy) is open for pilotage and exempt ship movements 24 hours per day.

8.1.2 Requests for pilot

A pilotage service is provided by Ports North for ship arrivals, departures and movements within the Thursday Island (Port Kennedy) pilotage area.

In order to ensure the services of a pilot, masters of ships should make the request via the QSHIPS program and if unable to do so email or telephone the office of Maritime Safety Queensland at Cairns VTS at least 72 hours prior to arrival at the pilot boarding ground.

Radio contact should be made with the Thursday Island Port Control on VHF channel 12, 30 minutes prior to arrival at the pilot boarding ground confirming the arrival time.

Exempt Masters are to call Thursday Island Port Control 30 minutes prior to entering the port.

8.1.3 Notice required

Ships requiring the services of a pilot are required to submit arrival, removal and departure notices no less than the indicated number of hours prior to the desired movement:

- Arrivals 72 hours
- Removals 72 hours
- Departures 72 hours

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 120m LOA - this excludes passenger vessels with full ECDIS and Operating Bridge Team, this excludes Tug and Barge operation.

8.1.5 Cruise Ship Requirements

Normanby Sound anchorage and Brisbane Rock Anchorage for passenger ships, a pilot will be onboard for the duration of the visit. Ship propulsion shall be readily available for use at short notice.

Inner anchorage, just south of the main wharf for passengers ships/superyachts between 100m to 145m LOA a pilot will be onboard for the duration of the visit. Ship propulsion shall be readily available for use at short notice

Inner anchorage, just south of the main wharf for passengers ships/superyachts 50m to 100m LOA, Pilot may depart the ship and go ashore once safely anchored but remain available at short notice, dependant on conditions, as agreed with the RHM on the day. Ship propulsion shall be readily available for use at short notice

8.2 Pilotage Area

See 4.2 Pilotage area.

8.2.1 Pilot boarding places

For the port of Thursday Island (Port Kennedy), pilotage and passage plans are available for vessels.

There are four pilot boarding grounds for Thursday Island (Port Kennedy) depending on the approach and vessel LOA.

- Vessels approaching from the east and crossing the Hovell Bar board pilot south of Chapman Reef in the white sector of the lighthouse on No. 4 Islet in the following position 10°33.3'S 142°17.3'E.
- Vessels approaching from the west greater than 90 metres board pilot at the Reef Pilot Boarding Ground near Goods Island in position 10° 33.9' S 142° 04.4' E.

- For vessels approaching from the west less than 90 metres the Normanby Sound Pilot Boarding Ground is used for boarding pilot in position 10° 34.7' S 142° 08.7' E.
- Vessels approaching from the south will board at the pilot boarding ground 10° 36.0'S, 142° 12.48'E in the centre of South Passage.

Vessels are to contact Thursday Island Port Control on VHF 16 or 12 for pilot boarding instructions prior to arriving at their designated pilot boarding ground.

8.2.2 Pilot boarding arrangements

Pilot transfer instructions will be advised to the ship prior to the pilot boarding by VTS. The instructions will include:

- Pilot boarding time;
- Restrictions/requirements;
- Boarding position; and
- Pilot boarding/disembarkation sequence.

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.

8.2.3 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.

8.2.4 Passage planning and bridge resource management (BRM)

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](#).

8.2.5 Pilotage delays and cancellation fees

A cancellation for Pilotage without the required notice of three hours will attract a penalty of the relevant Pilotage fee or fees.

A fee is payable in the following instances:

- if the programmed ship movement is delayed for more than 30 minutes but not more than one hour for the first hour;
- If the ship is delayed for more than one hour but not more than two hours; and
- a delay in excess of two hours constitutes a cancellation.

These charges can be found in Schedule 6 Part 2 Division 3 of the [Transport Operations \(Marine Safety\) Regulation 2016](#).

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 at Cairns or about to depart. Severe penalties apply to infringements.

8.3 Pilot licences, pilot 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 reporting requirements for Torres Strait and Great Barrier Reef

All merchant vessels 70m 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 North East 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](#). Maximum draft for transit is 12.2m; vessels with a draft greater than 10m will be advised of the required tidal window by the pilotage company.

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