

Marine incidents in Queensland

2023

Maritime Safety Queensland
Department of Transport and Main Roads



Queensland
Government

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Forward

The Marine Incidents in Queensland 2023 report provides an account of the marine incidents that were reported to Maritime Safety Queensland during that calendar year. The analysis of these incidents in their particulars and their long-term trends informs education, regulation, and enforcement strategies intended to reduce the risks associated with recreational boating.

In 2023, 16 Queenslanders did not return home from their day on the water. In some cases, the investigations into these incidents are not yet complete. At this time, it appears that three of the deaths were the result of traumatic injuries, while the remaining 13 were the result of drowning while not wearing a life jacket. When things go wrong, the ability to stay afloat and signal for assistance is often the difference between life and death.

To reduce this toll, the entire boating community needs to work together to create a boating culture that is cognisant and respectful of the serious risks that come with the pleasures of recreational boating.

Sally Stannard

Director-General

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Introduction

This report has been prepared by Maritime Safety Queensland in accordance with section 127 of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994*. It provides the particulars of marine incidents reported to Maritime Safety Queensland that occurred during 2023 and involved at least one Queensland regulated ship (QRS).

A Queensland regulated ship is a recreational vessel or ship that is not regulated under the *Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessels) National Law Act 2012 (Cth)* or the *Navigation Act 2012 (Cth)*.

The data used in this report was extracted from marine intelligence databases. The data is subject to change when the outcomes of open incident investigations are finalised.

Key points

- During the 2023 calendar year, Maritime Safety Queensland received reports of 292 marine incidents that involved at least one Queensland regulated ship.
- These 292 incidents involved 363 Queensland regulated ships and 11 domestic commercial vessels.
- The most reported types of incidents were collisions between ships (77), capsizes (41), collisions with an object (33), and groundings (30).
- These incidents resulted in 16 fatalities (including four missing and presumed deceased) and 63 injuries, including 23 hospital admissions.
- Thirteen of the 16 people who died drowned or are presumed to have drowned.
- None of the people who drowned or are presumed to have drowned were known to have been wearing a lifejacket.

Incidents

Queensland regulated ships were the only vessels involved in 281 of the 292 marine incidents reported during 2023, where 70 incidents involved two or more Queensland regulated ships. The other 11 incidents involved both Queensland regulated ships and domestic commercial vessels.

The 292 incidents occurred disproportionately across the year with the highest number of incidents occurring in January (13%) and December (11%) and the smallest number of incidents occurring in August (5%) and May (4%).

Incidents more frequently occurred on Saturdays and Sundays (45%) and in most cases between 9am and 6pm (60%).

At the time of these incidents, the vessels were most commonly operating in smooth waters (66%), in clear weather (65%), with good visibility (65%), and winds below 16 knots (61%). All four of these ideal boating conditions were reported in 76 (26%) of the 292 incidents.

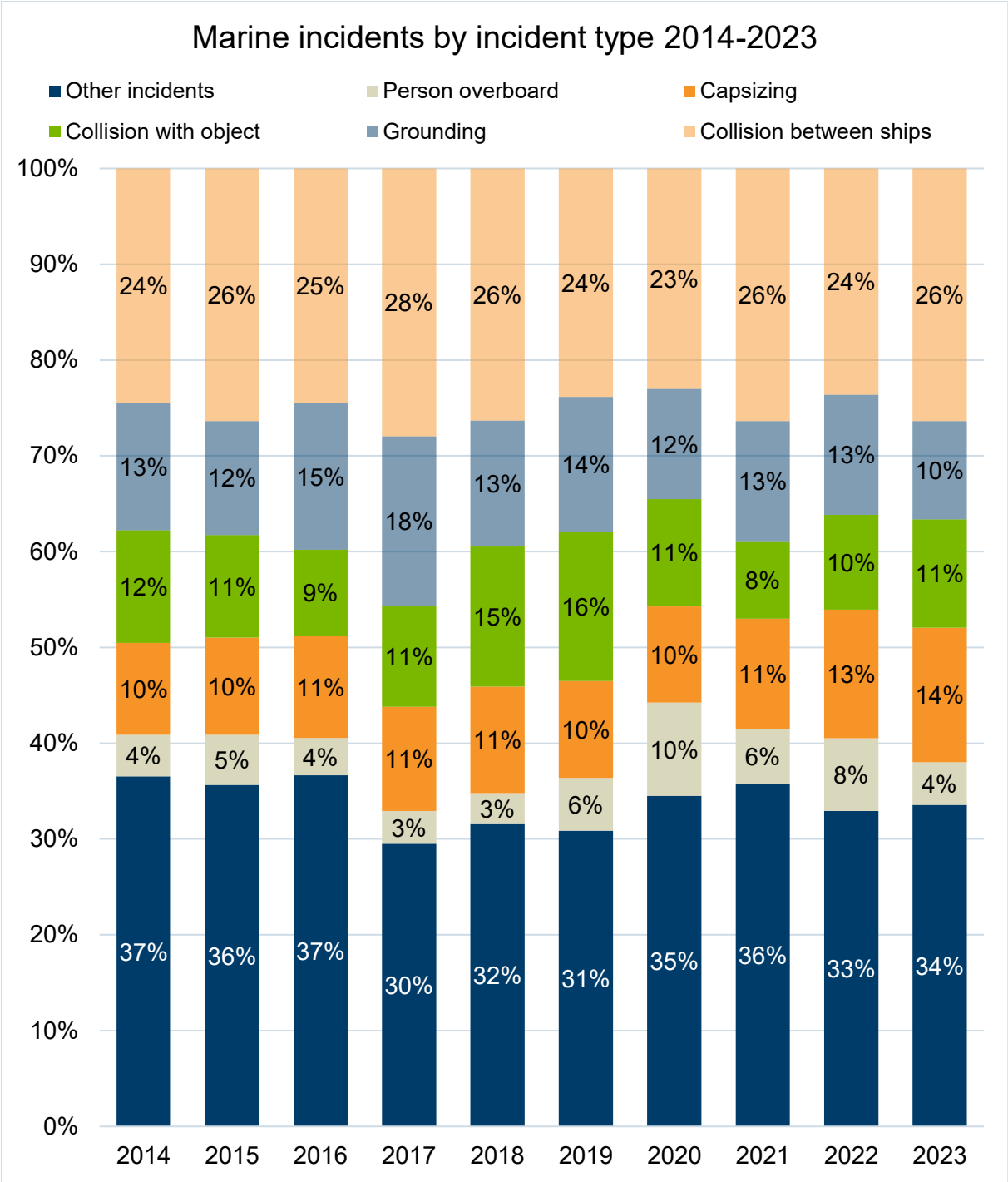
The most often reported incident type (see Figure 1) was a collision between ships, accounting for 77 (26%) of the 292 incidents. This was followed by 41 capsizes, 33 collisions with objects and 30 groundings.

Marine incident investigators categorise the factors contributing to an incident as human, environmental or material. Human factors contributed to 153 incidents, environmental factors to 114 incidents and material factors to 81 incidents.

The most frequently identified factors in each category were:

- human factors – inexperience or lack of knowledge (47)
- environmental factors – wind conditions (56)
- material factors – equipment failure (38).

Figure 1 – Marine incidents by incident type 2014 – 2023



People

The 292 reported incidents resulted in 16 fatalities (including four missing and presumed deceased) and 63 injuries, of which 23 required hospitalisations.

The 23 people admitted to hospital included 11 masters, 11 passengers and one water skier.

Seventeen were on motorboats, four were on personal watercraft, and two were on sailboats.

These hospital admissions were the result of nine different types of incidents including:

- six admissions resulting from collision with a ship (six incidents)
- four admissions resulting from collision with an object (three incidents)
- three admissions resulting from structure or equipment failure (two incidents)
- three admissions resulting from persons overboard (three incidents)
- two admissions resulting from a capsizing (one incident)
- two admissions resulting from operation of the vessel (two incidents)
- one admission resulting from a swamping (one incident)
- one admission resulting from a grounding (one incident)
- one admission resulting from an onboard incident (one incident).

The 16 fatalities were the result of 14 incidents, where four incidents involved missing persons:

- seven fatalities resulting from persons overboard (seven incidents)
- six fatalities resulting from capsizings (four incidents)
- one fatality resulting from a collision with an object (one incident)
- one fatality resulting from a fire (one incident)
- one fatality resulting from a swamping (one incident).

All the vessels involved in fatal incidents were appropriately registered, and the masters were appropriately licensed, or operating the vessel under the supervision of an appropriately licensed person.

All the deceased were men, aged between 14 and 85 years of age. Thirteen of those who lost their lives drowned or were lost at sea and are presumed to have drowned. None of the 13 are known to have been wearing a life jacket.

Vessels

The 292 reported incidents involved 374 vessels, of which 363 were Queensland regulated ships and 11 were domestic commercial vessels.

The 363 Queensland regulated ships included:

- 258 motorboats
- 52 sailboats
- 42 personal watercraft
- 5 paddle boats
- 6 houseboats.

Thirty-one of the 363 Queensland regulated ships were lost, 34 sustained major damage, 48 sustained moderate damage, and 68 sustained minor damage.

Most commonly, the damage to, or loss of, these 181 vessels was caused by:

- collisions with another vessel (77)
- flooding, or swamping (30)
- capsizing (22)
- collisions with an object (18)
- fire or explosion (14)
- grounding (11).

The 11 domestic commercial vessels included five passenger vessels, four non-passenger vessels and two hire and drive motorboats. Two of these vessels sustained minor damage when they were involved in a collision with another vessel.

Trends

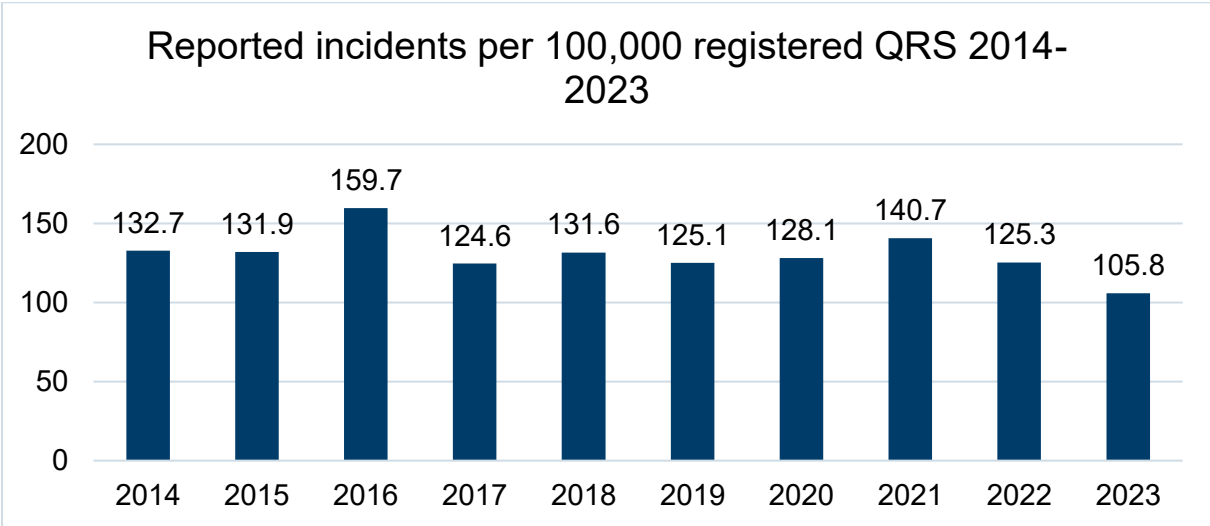
The number of reported incidents decreased from 343 in 2022 to 292 in 2023 and was significantly lower than the 10-year average of 356.9 incidents (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Summary of key indicators 2023 versus 2013-2022 average

Indicator	Actuals 2023	Average 2013-2022
Total incidents	292	356.9
Total fatal incidents	14	9.2
Total fatalities	16	10.6
Total hospitalisation incidents	20	26.9
Total hospitalisations	23	32.0
Incident rate per 100k vessels	105.8	137.5
Fatality rate per 100k vessels	5.8	4.1
Hospitalisation rate per 100k vessels	8.3	12.3

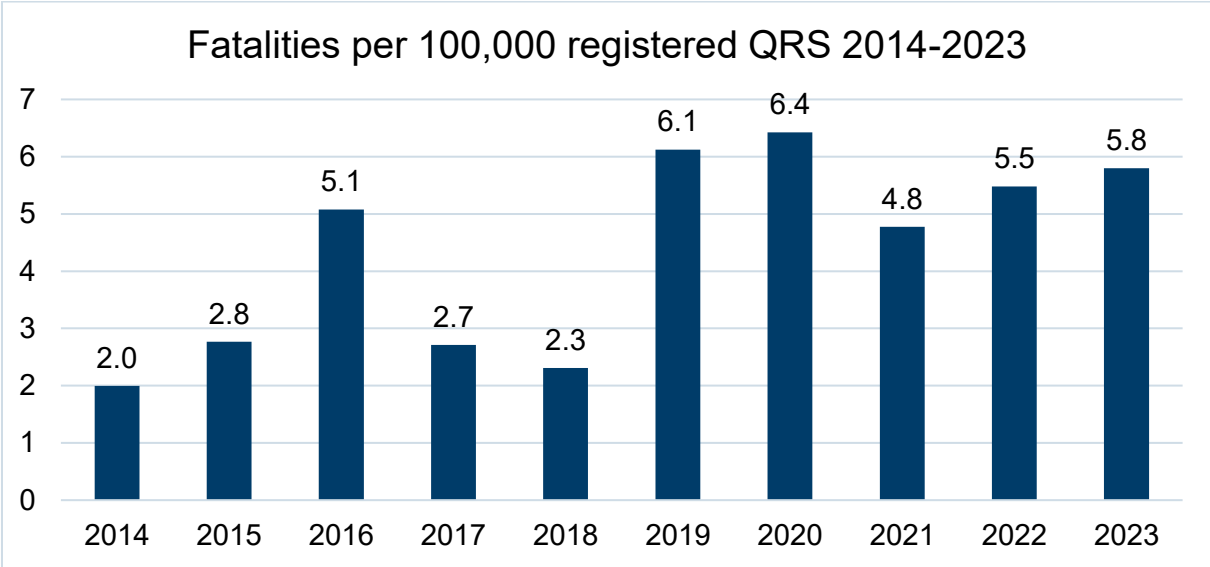
The incident rate per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships decreased from 125.3 to 105.8 and was significantly lower than the 10-year average of 137.5 incidents per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships.

Figure 2 - Reported incidents per 100,000 registered Queensland regulated ships 2014-2023



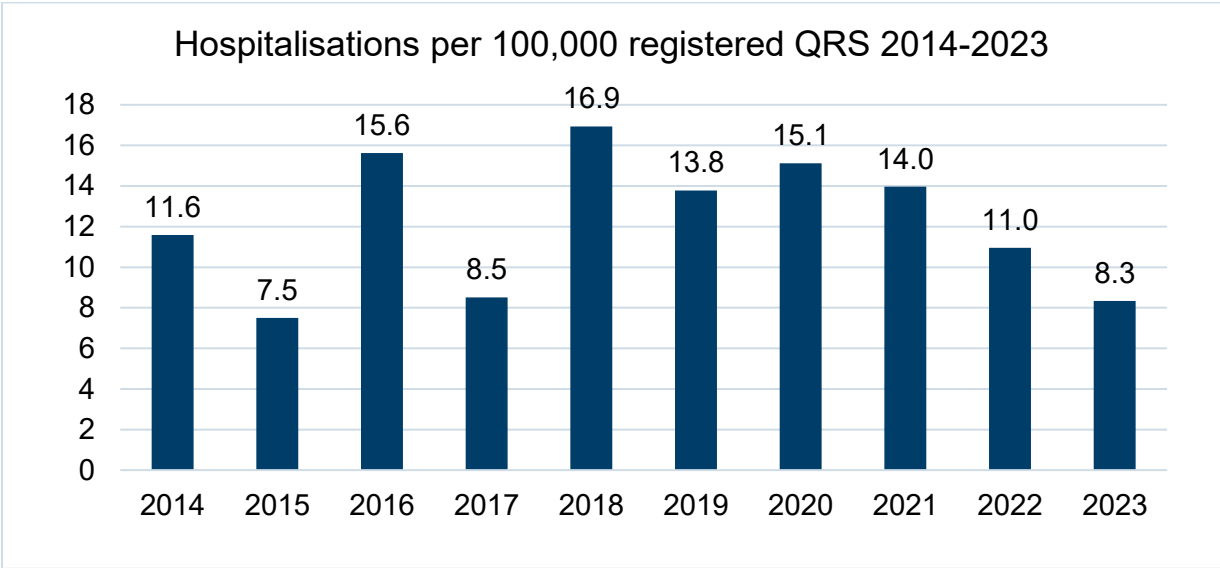
Fatal incidents increased from 13 to 14, as did fatalities from 15 to 16. In both cases these were significantly higher than the 10-year averages of 9.2 and 10.6 respectively. The fatality rate increased from 5.5 to 5.8 fatalities per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships and was significantly higher than the 10-year average of 4.1 fatalities per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships.

Figure 3 - Fatalities per 100,000 registered Queensland regulated ships 2014-2023



Hospitalisation incidents and hospitalisations decreased from 27 in 2022 to 20 in 2023 and from 30 to 23 respectively. In both cases these were significantly lower than the 10-year averages of 26.9 and 32.0 respectively. The hospitalisation rate decreased from 11.0 to 8.3 hospitalisations per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships and was significantly lower than the 10-year average of 12.3 hospitalisations per 100,000 Queensland regulated ships.

Figure 4 - Hospitalisations per 100,000 registered Queensland regulated ships 2014-2023



Maritime regions

Brisbane

The Brisbane maritime region's three reporting areas are the Gold Coast, Pinkenba and the Sunshine Coast.

The Brisbane maritime region received reports of 168 marine incidents involving 221 vessels — 216 Queensland regulated ships and five domestic commercial vessels. There were seven fatalities, 15 hospital admissions and 26 other injuries reported.

Gold Coast

The Gold Coast reporting area received 86 marine incident reports involving 116 Queensland regulated ships. There was one fatality, five hospital admissions and 10 other injuries reported.

Pinkenba

The Pinkenba reporting area received 42 marine incident reports involving 57 vessels — 53 Queensland regulated ships and four domestic commercial vessels. There were four fatalities, nine hospital admissions and 13 other injuries reported.

Sunshine Coast

The Sunshine Coast reporting area received 40 marine incident reports involving 48 vessels – 47 Queensland regulated ships and one domestic commercial vessel. There were two fatalities, one hospital admission and three other injuries reported.

Gladstone

The Gladstone region received 57 marine incident reports involving 73 vessels — 70 Queensland regulated ships and three domestic commercial vessels. There were three fatalities, five hospital admissions and eight other injuries reported.

Mackay

The Mackay region received 22 marine incident reports involving 26 vessels — 25 Queensland regulated ships and one domestic commercial vessel. There was one fatality, two hospital admissions and two other injuries reported.

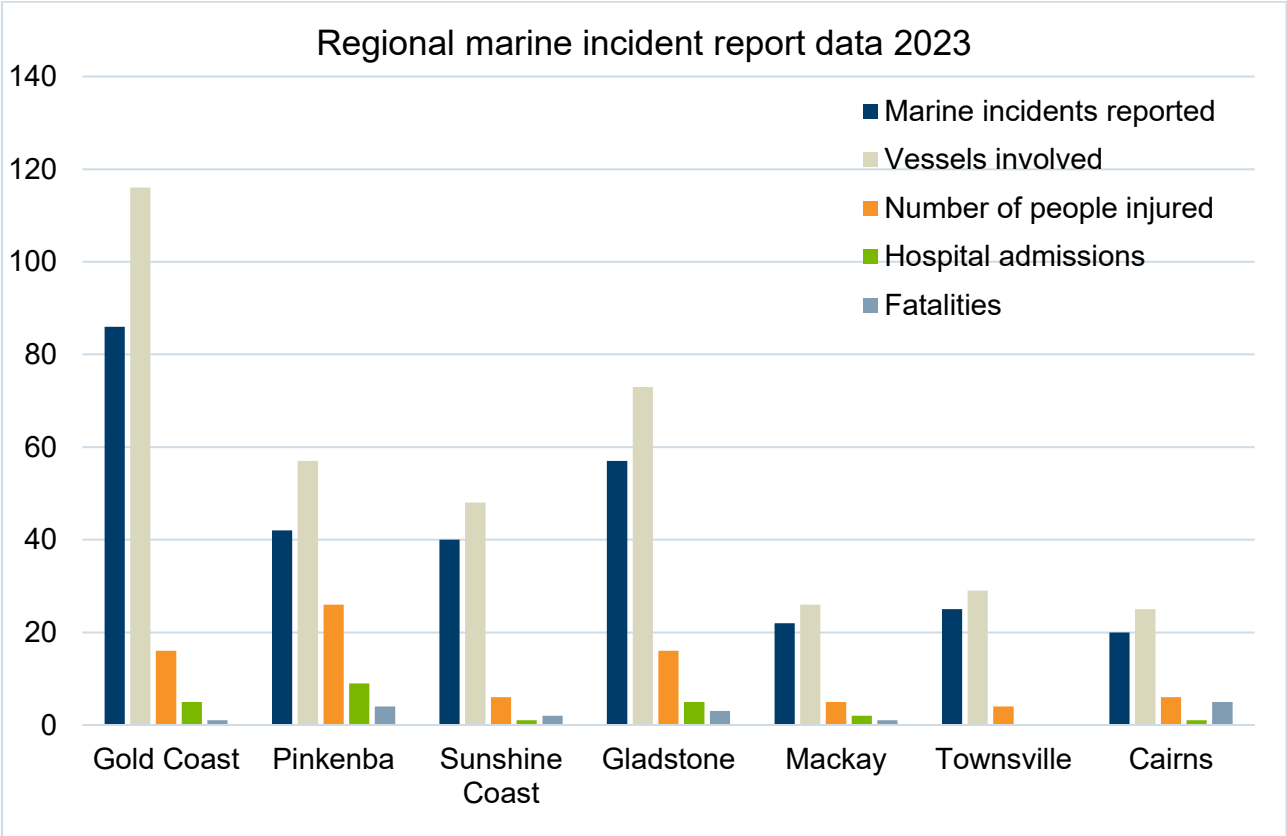
Townsville

The Townsville region received 25 marine incident reports involving 29 vessels — 28 Queensland regulated ships and one domestic commercial vessel. There were no fatalities, no hospital admissions and four other injuries reported.

Cairns

The Cairns region received 20 marine incident reports involving 25 vessels —24 Queensland regulated ships and one domestic commercial vessel. There were five fatalities, one hospital admission and no other injuries reported.

Figure 5 – Regional marine incident report data 2023



Summary

The particulars of the incidents reported during 2023 are consistent with those reported during the recent years coincident with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maritime Safety Queensland encourages the reporting of marine incidents in accordance with the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1995*. The investigation and analysis of these incidents is used in the development of more effective education, regulation, and enforcement strategies.

It is intended that these strategies will help reduce the number and seriousness of marine incidents occurring in Queensland waters.

Marine incident tables

Table 2 – Queensland regulated ships by region in 2023

Queensland regulated ships	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total**
Jun 2023	157,042	36,360	96,542	24,140	51,143	22,559	21,154	23,130	275,983
Dec 2023	158,822	36,966	97,278	24,578	51,510	22,767	21,061	23,130	278,232

Table 3 – Marine license holders by region in 2023

Recreational marine driver license holders	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total***
Jun 2023	648,475	138,833	418,834	90,808	147,989	53,419	71,526	76,503	1,010,692
Dec 2023	655,774	140,648	422,996	92,130	149,988	54,099	72,100	77,085	1,022,011

Table 4 – Marine incidents by incident type and region in 2023

Incidents by Type	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
Collision between ships	53	30	16	7	13	4	3	4	77
Grounding	12	5	5	2	9	2	7	0	30
Capsizing	29	15	6	8	7	2	0	3	41
Collision with object	24	13	4	7	5	3	1	0	33
Other incident	9	4	2	3	2	3	2	1	17
Flooding	6	3	1	2	5	5	5	3	24
Other - close call	4	2	1	1	3	0	1	1	9
On-board incident	6	3	0	3	0	0	0	1	7
Swamping	7	4	3	0	8	1	2	2	20
Person overboard	8	3	2	3	4	0	0	1	13
Fire or explosion	9	4	1	4	1	2	1	4	17
Collision with a person	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Loss of ship	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Total	168	86	42	40	57	22	25	20	292

Table 5 – Vessels involved in marine incidents by jurisdiction and region in 2023

Vessels involved	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
QRS	216	116	53	47	70	25	28	24	363
DCV	5	0	4	1	3	1	1	1	11
Total	221	116	57	48	73	26	29	25	374

Table 6 – Vessels involved in marine incidents by ship damage and region in 2023

Damaged vessels	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
Ship lost (economic loss)	13	3	8	2	5	5	3	5	31
Major damage	20	11	9	0	8	4	0	2	34
Moderate damage	28	13	14	1	10	5	4	1	48
Minor damage	35	15	17	3	16	7	7	5	70
Damaged vessels	96	42	48	6	39	21	14	13	183
No reported damage	125	74	9	42	34	5	15	12	191
Total	221	116	57	48	73	26	29	25	374

Table 7 – People by injury type and region in 2023

Reported injuries	Brisbane	Gold Coast*	Pinkenba*	Sunshine Coast*	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
Fatalities	7	1	4	2	3	1	0	5	16
Hospital admissions	15	5	9	1	5	2	0	1	23
Other injuries	26	10	13	3	8	2	4	0	40
Total injured	48	16	26	6	16	5	4	6	79
No reported injury	258	135	65	58	85	27	25	27	422
Total	306	151	91	64	101	32	29	33	501

*Gold Coast, Pinkenba and Sunshine Coast equate to the Brisbane total.

** Total for Queensland which includes vessels registered to addresses outside of Queensland.

*** Total for Queensland which includes licensees with addresses outside of Queensland.