

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.

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. Far North Queensland Ports Corporation Ltd (trading as Ports North) provides a pilotage service for ship arrivals, departures and removals. Pilot transfers are carried out by pilot launch. In cases a pilot unable to board via pilot launch due to weather, a pilot helicopter will be used.

Requests for Pilotage services are to be made via [QSHIPS](#)

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 – 48 hours
- removals – 24 hours
- departures – 24 hours
- change of vessel to berth – 3 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.

8.2 Pilotage area

The [Pilotage area](#) is described in section 4.2.

8.2.1 Pilot boarding places

The [Weipa Pilot Boarding Ground](#) 16.10 is situated 5.5 n.miles West Southwest of the Fairway Beacon (12° – 43·9'S – 141° – 36·0'E).

A small ship pilot boarding place is situated 1 mile north of Beacon SC8 in position 12° 40.45' S, 141° 43.33' E.

Vessels utilising the small ship pilot boarding place must have an LOA of 100 m or less and a draft of 5 m or less. No vessel is to proceed to the small ships pilot boarding place until they have reported to Weipa VTS their intentions prior to crossing the compulsory pilotage limit for the port of Weipa. Vessels are not to impede in/outbound Bulk Carriers while transiting to/from the boarding place.

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.

The pilot launches have the word 'PILOT' in black on either side of the main superstructure and exhibit the standard pilot launch signals.

For Port of Weipa transfer operations, Ships should be underway, proceeding at ten knots and providing a good lee.

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, Brisbane VTS and the pilot's employer.

8.2.4 Passage Planning

A 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 delay and cancellation fees

The following will apply to all piloted vessels when arriving, departing or being removed within the Weipa pilotage area:

- Delay fees will apply if a vessel departs more than 30 minutes after her scheduled departure time; fees are charged on an hourly basis up to a maximum of two hours.
- If the delay exceeds three hours then the pilotage is deemed to have been cancelled and a full cancellation fee applies; if a cancellation fee is applied the hourly delay fees are not applicable.
- A delay caused by weather which may affect a vessel's ability to be safely navigated will not constitute a delay for the purpose of this section.
- Equipment and mechanical failures will constitute a delay and attract a delay fee or cancellation fee as described above.

In determining the delay time, the following criteria will be used:

- Inbound – a pilotage cancellation without the required three hours' notice will attract a penalty of the relevant pilotage fee.
- Delay fees will be incurred if the pilot boards a vessel more than 30 minutes after the programmed estimated time of arrival of the vessel at the pilot boarding ground or the agreed boarding ground.
- Outbound or removal – delay fees will be incurred if the vessel departs the berth or anchorage more than 30 minutes after the programmed estimated time of departure. The actual time of departure will be taken as 'last line' or 'anchor aweigh' as these times are recorded in QSHIPS and are the acknowledged and accepted time of departure.

Full details of the regulations and fees are contained 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 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.