

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 50m or more;
- A vessel towing another vessel where the combined length of the vessels is 50m 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; and
- All vessels 35m LOA and above and a vessel towing another vessel where the combined length of the vessels is 35m or more transiting Smiths Creek will require the services of a pilot unless an exemption, or exception to the rule has been granted by the Regional Harbour Master. A list of vessels with a current exception to the rule can be found in paragraph 8.1.6.
- All ships over 280m in length will be required to have two marine pilots onboard for both the arrival, departure and any other movements within the pilotage area.

8.1.1 Approaches to the pilot boarding ground

The Cairns fairway is approached from the inner route of the Great Barrier Reef or by direct access for vessels approaching via the Grafton Passage from the Coral Sea.

8.1.2 Night pilotage

The port of Cairns is open for pilotage and exempt ship movements 24 hours per day.

8.1.3 Request for pilot

The requirements of the [Transport Operations \(Marine Safety\) Regulation 2016](#) shall be observed for all bookings. Far North Queensland Port Corporation (trading as Ports North) provides a pilotage service for ship arrivals, departures, and removals. All pilot transfers are carried out by pilot launch.

Requests for pilotage services are described in QSHIPS booking procedures.

8.1.4 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; and
- Departures: 24 hours.

Initial notification should be made via the [QSHIPS](#) website.

8.1.5 Pilotage transit times

In general, the following pilotage transit times apply for vessels arriving in Cairns

Pilot boarding place Alpha to Trinity Inlet berths (Portside too) – allow 2 hours

Pilot boarding place Bravo to Trinity Inlet berths (Portside too) – allow 1 hr 45 mins

Pilot boarding place Charlie to Trinity Inlet berths (Portside too) – allow 1 hr

Pilot boarding place Delta to Trinity Inlet berths (Portside too) – allow 2 hours

Note: times shown above may vary due to environmental factors, specific ship requirements and ships speed.

Tug and barge operations may take longer than indicated above.

Generally, vessels berthing starboard side too, stemming the tide, will reduce the transit time by approximately 30 minutes.

8.1.6 Exception from Smiths Creek Pilotage

A request for exception from the 35m LOA and greater pilotage ruling in Smiths Creek is to be made in writing to the Regional Harbour Master (Cairns).

8.1.7 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

See [4.2 – Pilotage area](#).

8.2.1 Pilot boarding places

For the [16.1 Port of Cairns](#) – Pilotage plan and Passage Plans are available for vessels wishing to enter the port of Cairns.

Pilot Boarding Place	Lat/Long	Description
Alpha	16 47.50 S 145 53.50 E – 4.2nm NE of C1	Used for vessels greater than 120m
Bravo	16 48.60 S 145 50.60 E – 1.7 nm NNE of C1	Used for vessels less than 120m
Charlie	16 50.26 S 145 49.04 E – 1nm N of C7	Used for vessels 100m or less, *see restrictions
Delta	16 46.00 S 145 50.00 E – 3.9nm N of C1	Used for vessels greater than 120 m

Table 15 Pilot boarding places

*Pilot boarding place Charlie restriction

PBP Charlie is only to be used during adverse weather, when pilot boarding operations present a danger to the pilot and vessel. The use of this boarding ground is at the discretion of the allocated pilot and advice is to be provided to the Regional Harbour Master (Cairns).

Vessels utilising PBG Charlie are not to proceed past the designated pilotage limit until contact is established with Cairns VTS on VHF channels 16/12 and confirmation of pilot boarding arrangements sought.

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

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 delays and cancellations

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, 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.