

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, Marine Notice 03/2022](#)).

8.1.1 Night pilotage

The port of Skardon River is open for night pilotage, there are no restrictions to Night Pilotage

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 order to ensure the services of a pilot, masters of ships or ships agents 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 Skardon River Port Control on VHF channel 09, 30 minutes prior to arrival at the pilot boarding ground confirming the arrival time.

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

Due to logistics and location of Skardon River an initial notification should be made as soon as possible, when a pilot is determined as being necessary.

8.2 Pilotage area

See section 4.2 – pilotage area.

8.2.1 Pilot boarding place

The Pilot Boarding Place is adjacent to the Fairway Beacon in approximate position 11°46.32S 141°55.5E

8.2.2 Pilot boarding arrangements

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

- 2.0 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 metres or greater, a combination ladder must be rigged.

8.2.3 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](#).

8.2.4 Pilotage delay and cancellation fees

The following will apply to all piloted vessels when arriving, departing, or being removed within the Skardon River 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](#).

8.2.5 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, 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 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](#). Maximum draft for transit is 12.2 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.