

Appendix 12 – Whitsundays

Extreme Weather Event Contingency Plan 2024 - 2025

Department of Transport and Main Roads — Maritime Safety Queensland September 2024

Document history

Date	Version	Comments
September 2023	1	Original
September 2024	2	Reviewed for currency. Amendments to remove individual messaging for each vessel type. Dates and webpage updated.

Whitsunday Region

This area-specific plan must be read in conjunction with the full Extreme Weather Event Contingency Plan document, available on the MSQ webpage <https://www.msq.qld.gov.au/Safety/Preparing-for-severe-weather/Extreme-weather-contingency-plans> .

Extreme Weather Event

The hazards covered under this plan include CYCLONE and FLOOD. One or more hazards may occur simultaneously.

Yellow – Advice

Destructive winds, swell, rain or riverine flooding forecast within 24-48 hours

Masters and Owners are to **Prepare Now** for potential destructive winds, swell, rain or riverine flooding forecast within 24-48 hours.

Masters and Owners should **Monitor Conditions** and **Stay Informed**, monitoring the Bureau of Meteorology, Local Government and VHF channel 10/16 where possible.

General Information

An extreme weather event **advice** warning will be issued when an extreme weather event or developing event is likely to affect the area within 48 hours, but not expected to impact the area within 24 hours. This phase is a critical time for masters and owners to plan and prepare for the impact of the event.

The Regional Harbour Master may commence working towards closing the marinas and waterways to elements of commercial and recreational traffic movements, by giving explicit or by making a particular direction to restrict the:

- entering or leaving of specific vessels in or out of a marinas, waterways or pilotage area; and/or
- movement of specific vessels within a pilotage area.

Such direction will be appropriate with the threat to the safety of shipping or the environment and may occur at any time during Yellow, Orange or Red Alert.

The restriction on commercial and recreational vessel movements will, as far as practical, be implemented in consultation with key authorities and in a timely manner in order to minimise risks.

The extreme weather event advice will be communicated through an appropriate combination of VHF radio warning messages, notices to mariners, email and media releases. Stay informed by monitoring weather updates from BoM and monitor conditions.

During this period, masters and owners (or their representatives) should review their safety plans and address any matters outstanding (for example fuel, food, water and contact details).

Certain high risk commercial vessels and facilities may receive specific advice and instructions through direct messaging from the Regional Harbour Master. Additionally, any regionally essential cargoes may be risk assessed such that their departure is conducted as late as is safe to do so.

BE AWARE of flood waters. River conditions can change rapidly and with little notification.

Vessels to remain in situ

Commence securing your vessel for the forecasted weather event including reducing wind loadings, securing your tender, double-up mooring lines and ensure commercial vessels are secured as per your Extreme Weather Event plan to cyclone rated moorings.

Recreational vessels on Buoy Moorings to activate their Extreme Weather Plan (Cyclone Contingency), ensuring all is well secured on their vessel, wind loadings reduced, and mooring tackle in good condition or doubled up. Consider where the mooring tackle is secured to your vessel, and if possible secure along the length of your vessel so that additional cleats are engaged to spread the load. Owners must allow sufficient time to attend their vessels, conduct extreme weather preparations and return to shore before the waterways are closed by the Regional Harbour Master.

Vessels to relocate in the local area

Reduce wind loadings and anchor or moor in protected and sheltered location, clear of other vessels and infrastructure.

Vessels proceeding to sea

VTS will inform large ships' masters and agents of situation and potential reduction of notice to sail and/or expected closure of the inner and outer anchorages.

Vessels alongside loading, to update their completion loading times whenever a change has occurred.

Orange – Watch and Act

Destructive winds, swell, rain or riverine flooding forecast within 12-24 hours

Leave/Evacuate Now – If your extreme weather event plans require you to relocate within the local area or depart for sea.

Monitor Conditions as they are changing – Regularly checking the Bureau of Meteorology, Local Government websites as well as maintaining a listening watch on VHF channel 10/16 where appropriate.

Do not enter flood waters – This includes by vessel such as passive craft, tender or small craft.

General Information

An extreme weather event **watch and act** warning will be issued when an extreme weather event or developing event is likely to affect the area within 12-24 hours. This phase is critical for masters and owners to complete all preparations in an orderly manner prior to the event occurring.

The extreme weather event watch & act will be communicated through an appropriate combination of VHF radio warning messages, notices to mariners, email and media releases.

Masters, owners and marine facility operators are expected to implement their safety plans in a timely and orderly manner.

If requested by port stakeholders, any regionally essential cargoes WILL be risk assessed, such that their departure is conducted as late as is safe to do so, depending on agreement from Master and Terminal Management.

Certain high risk commercial vessels and facilities will receive specific advice and instructions through direct messaging from the Regional Harbour Master. Some activities will be suspended, and restrictions may be placed on the movements of other vessels. This may include directed evacuations, instructions to remain and shelter in place or instructions not to enter flood waters. Once the movement of ships in relation to a pilotage area, waterways or marinas has been restricted, and the port has been effectively closed by the Regional Harbour Master, the entering and leaving of ships in and out of these is not permitted, unless vessels have specific exemptions applied.

Vessels to remain in situ

Continue to conduct your own extreme weather event plan, securing your vessel where it is safe to access. Ensure you allow sufficient time to return to shore before waterways are closed by Regional Harbour Master.

If waterways are closed while still on the vessel contact a family member, or Whitsunday Volunteer Marine Rescue, or Whitsunday VTS on VHF 16 or phone, to inform when departing your vessel so that a marine watch may be conducted to ensure your safety.

Vessels to relocate in the local area

If safe to access, relocate your vessel now to a more suitable location in the local area.

If waterways are partially closed while still on the vessel contact a family member, or Whitsunday Volunteer Marine Rescue, or Whitsunday VTS on VHF 16 or phone, to inform when departing your vessel so that a marine watch may be conducted to ensure your safety.

Vessels proceeding to sea

Coordinate with Whitsunday VTS.

For vessels at anchor (such as cruise ships) master's / agents to immediately report to VTS their intentions.

The evacuation plan will be developed based on vessel type, characteristics and terminal.

Port Partial Closure

The Regional Harbour Master will have commenced Whitsunday waterways, marinas, buoy moorings and anchorages closure plan, wholly or in part, by giving general or by making a particular explicit direction to restrict the following:

- entering or leaving of vessels in or out of marinas, waterways and pilotage areas: and/or
- movement of vessels within the waterways and pilotage area, as part of a considered reduction to marine activities in the region to ensure marine safety. This may include directing vessels of specific size off the waterways and allowing exemptions to specific vessels as part of supporting island evacuations or preparedness.

Such directions will be appropriate to the threat to the safety of shipping or the environment and may occur at any time prior to the event.

The partial closure of the Pilotage Areas, waterways, marinas, buoy mooring grids and anchorages will have commenced, or restriction on vessel movements will, as far as practical, be implemented in consultation with key authorities and in a timely manner in order to minimise risks.

Red - Emergency Warning

Destructive winds, swell or riverine flooding forecast within 6 hours

Leave/Evacuate Immediately – If your extreme weather event plans require you to relocate within the local area or depart for sea and it is safe to do so.

Seek/take shelter now – If unable to depart for sea.

General Information

The extreme weather event **emergency warning** will be communicated through an appropriate combination of VHF radio warning messages, Notices to Mariners, email, SMS alert and media releases. Stay informed by monitoring weather updates from BoM and local government authority.

By this phase, all vessels are expected to have enacted their vessel safety plans noting that the port may be closed and/or vessel movements restricted depending on the threat to safety of vessel movements or the environment. Mariners

should note that it is likely to be too late to consider the safety of your vessel and that extreme weather conditions may limit the ability of emergency services to assist you should you run into difficulties. Your vessel should be secured in place. Your actions should be directed towards your own personal safety.

It is also important to be alert during the 'eye' of the cyclone as a period of calm may be experienced before the damaging wind force resumes once the eye has passed.

Vessels to remain in situ

Access to vessels at anchor, secured to cyclone buoy mooring may not be safe, as gale force winds if not already experienced will commence soon.

Your evacuation plan should now have you safely ashore considering appropriate shelter.

It may now be too late to consider the safety of your vessel and weather conditions may limit the ability of emergency services to assist you should you run into difficulties.

Vessels to relocate in the local area

You should be finalising securing your vessel now.

If **NOT SAFE** to access, leave your vessel in situ.

Your evacuation plan should now have you safely ashore considering appropriate shelter.

It may now be too late to consider the safety of your vessel and weather conditions may limit the ability of emergency services to assist you should you run into difficulties.

Vessels proceeding to sea

All vessels commenced passage at best speed to safer navigable waters.

Vessel masters reminded to maintain proper lookout, due possible restricted visibility associated with storm front and traffic congestion as vessels determine passages to keep away from the effect of extreme/cyclonic weather conditions.

Port Closure

The Regional Harbour Master will have closed the Pilotage Areas, waterways, marinas, buoy mooring grids and anchorages.

VTS Closure

The Regional Harbour Master may be required to close Whitsunday VTS operations in part or wholly depending on safety of personnel. VTS may be relocated to the Nelson Street Office, Mackay City, on a minimal manning routine during this alert status, or transfer all operations to another regional VTS centre such as Townsville or Gladstone.

Yellow – Advice

After the event has passed, recovery underway

Monitor Conditions as they are changing – Regularly checking the Bureau of Meteorology, Local Government websites as well as maintaining a listening watch on VHF channel 10/16 where appropriate.

Do not enter flood waters – This includes by vessel such as passive craft, tender or small craft.

General Information

The Regional Harbour Master will assess residual risks and determine the actions needed to be addressed. Do not assume that as the extreme weather event (or cyclone) has passed, it is now safe to move your vessel.

Vessels should stay in their place of shelter until they are advised that it is safe for vessel movements to resume. The lifting of restrictions and resumption of vessel movements will be communicated through an appropriate combination of VHF radio warning messages, notices to mariners, email and media releases. Stay informed by monitoring weather updates from BoM and monitor conditions.

Owners and masters of vessels should be aware that aids to navigation may be affected by the extreme weather event and that other dangers may be present in waterways. VTS may conduct messaging about unusual currents, floating debris, subsurface obstruction or unknown shoaling depths.

Mariners should maintain a listening watch on VHF frequencies 16 and 10 and follow advice/directions given by Whitsunday VTS.

Movements will be at the RHM's discretion and can be in stages including limited internal port movements until the channel or areas within the port are deemed safe.

Mariners are to consult the latest Notices to Mariners for updated information on port depths and conditions.

Maritime infrastructure will need to be inspected to ensure that facilities are operational and fit for purpose.

Port Partial Re-Opening to Support Specific Port Clearance Operations

The Whitsunday Pilotage Areas, waterways, buoy mooring grids, anchorages and marinas will be re-opened in part, based on a planned approach by the Regional Harbour Master following directions to allow the entering or leaving of specific ships in and out of a pilotage area, or movement of vessels within a pilotage area. Such direction will be provided:

- based on individual risk assessment, and the pilotage area determined as safe as reasonably possible for identified vessels to re-enter and conduct specific port operations, anchor or leave.
- based on risk assessment to re-open the anchorages (outer and inner) returning specific vessels on a planned basis via VTS coordination.

The Vessel Traffic Services centre will coordinate the safe movement of these specific vessels, as part of supporting specific port operations in accordance with the port opening plan.

White – All clear

Port open to all traffic, business as usual

General Information

The Whitsunday Pilotage Areas, waterways, buoy mooring grids, anchorages and marinas (including all Compulsory Pilotage Areas) is fully re-opened by the Regional Harbour Master following direction to allow the entering or leaving of ships in and out of a pilotage area, or movement of vessels within a pilotage area. Such direction will be provided:

- When satisfied that all danger has passed, and the pilotage area is safe for vessels to re-enter or leave; and
- Following inspections and surveys to critical maritime infrastructure (for example navigational aids and wharves) as well as clearance of navigational hazards.

The Vessel Traffic Services centre will continue to monitor the safe movement of vessels following the opening of the pilotage area in accordance with normal practice.

Maritime operations to be conducted in accordance with the Whitsunday Port Procedures and Information for Shipping Manual.

Masters are reminded that vessels to maintain proper lookout and proceed at a safe speed to the prevailing circumstances following any VTS directions, remaining cognisant some storm debris could remain in the waterways.

Owners and masters should inspect their vessel for any repairs or maintenance required and review their emergency preparedness plans.

Vessels who remained in situ

Safe to return to your vessel.

Recommend conducting a full vessel survey to ensure no damage and watertight integrity maintained.

Vessels who relocated in the local area

Safe to return to your vessel.

Recommend conducting a full vessel survey to ensure no damage and watertight integrity maintained.

Remain vigilant that local waterways may still have unseen submerged obstructions, if relocating your vessel.

Vessels returning from sea

Vessel masters to contact their agents for information (time and date) regarding planned return to anchorage or berth.

All vessels to listen for and follow Whitsunday VTS instructions.

Communication

The successful implementation of this plan relies on high quality communication of information and directions.

The *Whitsunday* Vessel Traffic Service, at the Regional Harbour Master Office *Mackay*, will be the Maritime Control Centre.

The Vessel Traffic Services Centre will implement the extreme weather event contingency plan on behalf of the Regional Harbour Master by acting as the central communications point and will be designated as the Maritime Control Centre for the duration and aftermath of the extreme weather event.

The Maritime Control Centre call sign will be *Whitsunday VTS*.

VHF channels *10, 16* and *67* will be continuously monitored before and during the extreme weather event, unless the centre is evacuated.

Maritime Safety Queensland may contact stakeholders via SMS and/or email regarding information to potential extreme weather events or extreme weather events.

Updates on whether broadcasts and conditions in your local vicinity may be broadcast by the local coastguard or marine rescue stations, initiated on VHF channel *16, 21, 67 and 80*.

Key Contacts

Name	Contact Number
Regional Harbour Master	07 4944 3700
Mackay VTS	1300 645 022

Key Websites

Name	URL
Detailed weather updates: BOM	www.bom.gov.au
MSQ Website	www.msq.qld.gov.au
MSQ Dashboard – detailed information on Port closures, Notice to Mariners, Tide Charts and more.	https://www.qldmaritime.msq.qld.gov.au/