



# Belfast Harbour

## NAVIGATIONAL GUIDELINES

**Guidance for Mariners Navigating within Belfast Harbour Limits**

# BELFAST HARBOUR NAVIGATIONAL GUIDELINES

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## 1. Application & Definitions

1.1 This Guidance applies to all Reporting Vessels navigating within Belfast Harbour Limits, and to those vessels bound for Belfast or departing Belfast when navigating within the approaches to Harbour Limits, and should be read in conjunction with Belfast Harbour Marine Bye Laws, Belfast Harbour Pilotage Directions, Belfast Harbour Notice to Mariners, and Leisure Craft Code of Conduct as appropriate.

1.2 For the purposes of these guidelines:

**“Deep Draughted Vessel”** means any vessel arriving or departing with a draught of 10.2m or greater.

**“ETA”** means Estimated Time of Arrival

**“Harbour Craft”** means any Pilot Launch, workboat, line boat or other boats based in Belfast Harbour either permanently or temporarily, when engaged in the normal business of the Harbour.

**“Harbour Limits”** are to the South West of a line drawn between Carrickfergus Castle and Grey Point, and to the seaward of the Lagan Weir. Belfast Harbour also reserves the right to manage vessels arriving to and departing from the Harbour when in the approaches to Harbour Limits.

**“Inner Harbour”** means to the South West of Beacon 15.

**“Recreational Craft”** means any craft under 24m in length used solely for recreational purposes and not for commercial gain, hire or reward.

**“Reporting Vessel”** means any vessel over 24m in length, and any vessels under 24m in length that are operating commercially.

**“SHA”** means Statutory Harbour Authority. Belfast Harbour Commissioners are the Statutory Harbour Authority for Belfast Harbour, of which the day to day marine safety and operational responsibility rests with the Harbour Master on behalf of the Harbour Authority.

**“Small Vessel”** means all vessels under 24m in length.

**“Victoria Channel”** means the dredged channel to the South West of No.1 & No.2 buoys, but does not include the part of Victoria Channel that lies within the Inner Harbour, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

**“VTS”** means Vessel Traffic Service which operates on VHF Channel 12, callsign “Belfast Harbour Radio”

1.3 Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed as a reason to prevent any Master / Skipper of a vessel navigating within Belfast Harbour Limits from taking such action as may be necessary in order to protect life, prevent pollution, and protect property or infrastructure.

## 2. Reporting of Vessel movements

- 2.1 Vessels bound for Belfast Harbour are required to declare their arrival no later than 2pm the previous working day, or prior to departing their previous port, whichever the sooner. Such report should contain:
- (a) ETA at Belfast Fairway Buoy
  - (b) Particulars of Vessel, including Draught, Gross Tonnage, and details of tow if applicable
  - (c) Master's Name
  - (d) Last Port, next Port
  - (e) Appointment of Agent
  - (f) ISPS pre arrival information
  - (g) UK Port Waste Notification
  - (h) Declaration of defects (see section 9)
- 2.2 Vessels arriving at Belfast Harbour are required to report to the VTS (Callsign "Belfast Harbour Radio") at the following times:
- (a) 6 hours to the Fairway Buoy
  - (b) 2 hours to the Fairway Buoy, confirming Pilot Boarding position, draught, Master's family name, last port, and declaration of any defects.
  - (c) 15 minutes to Fairway Buoy, **or** upon anchoring in Belfast Lough.
  - (d) On passing Fairway Buoy
  - (e) On passing No.5 Beacon, indicating where vessel intends to swing if applicable.
  - (f) When alongside berth.
- 2.3 Vessels departing Belfast Harbour are required to report to the VTS at the following times:
- (a) 2 hours prior to departure if Pilot required
  - (b) 15 minutes prior to departure, indicating draught, Master's family Name, next port, and a declaration of any defects
  - (c) When ready to depart, to request traffic clearance, and indicate where vessel will swing (if applicable)
  - (d) When underway from the berth
  - (e) Passing beacon 12, indicating where vessel will exit the buoyed channel.
  - (f) Passing No.2 buoy outbound.
- 2.4 Hazardous Cargo
- Unless prior arrangements are in place, vessels carrying hazardous cargo should forward manifest to Port Operations via ship's agent / manager no less than 48 hrs in advance.

## 3. Use of VHF Radio

- 3.1 Belfast Harbour operates a VTS within Harbour Limits.
- 3.2 All Reporting Vessels are required to maintain a listening watch on VHF Channel 12 when navigating within the Inner Harbour, Victoria Channel, or when intending to cross the Victoria Channel.
- 3.3 All Bridge to Bridge communications relating to navigation and traffic movements are to be made on VHF Channel 12. When changing from VHF channel 12 to another working channel, VTS should be informed.
- 3.4 Details of VTS areas, reporting requirements, Traffic Clearance and working channels are contained within current Belfast Notice to Mariners.

## 4. Conduct of Vessels within Harbour Limits

- 4.1 Masters are required at all times to navigate their vessels at a speed commensurate with local circumstances and conditions so as not to endanger lives or cause injury; interfere with the navigation, manoeuvring, loading or discharging of vessels; cause damage to banks, moorings, quays, dock gates or other property.
- 4.2 Due care should be taken when passing vessels moored on berths adjacent to navigational channels, in particular over the Low Water period when “draw off” can cause particular problems to berthed vessels.
- 4.3 The Harbour Master may determine the order in which vessels may enter or leave the harbour and their berth in the Harbour. No person should attempt to take any vessel into or out of any dock or basin within the port without the permission of the VTS
- 4.4 Reporting Vessels subject to Pilotage, as prescribed by Belfast Harbour Pilotage Directions, shall not pass the Pilot Boarding Position until they have embarked their Pilot, unless permitted to do so by the Harbour Master or VTS.
- 4.5 Reporting Vessels will not be permitted to pass No.1 Buoy if the berth the vessel is bound for is occupied.
- 4.6 The Master of every vessel within Harbour Limits should moor and keep moored his vessel as directed by the Harbour Master, and should move that vessel to or from any berth within the Harbour in accordance with any directions that the Harbour Master may give from time to time.
- 4.7 The Harbour Master may give directions for regulating:
  - (a) The movement of vessels
  - (b) The loading unloading or transfer of goods,
  - (c) The embarkation or disembarkation of passengers,
  - (d) The loading, removal and disposal of ballast,
  - (e) Any other matter affecting safety within the port, including Directions to Dangerous Vessels.
- 4.8 Reporting Vessels are required to have a minimum Under Keel Clearance of 1.0m, or such greater clearance as may be directed by the Harbour Master, whilst underway within Harbour Limits.

## 5. Deep Draughted Vessels

- 5.1 Vessels with a draught greater than 10.2 m should exhibit the appropriate shape and lights and, in Restricted Visibility, the sound signals as prescribed by the Collision Regulations for vessels constrained by their draught. Such signals should be exhibited prior to passing Pilot Boarding Position “A”
- 5.2 Any other vessel, upon encountering a Deep Draughted Vessel exhibiting the appropriate signals indicating they are constrained by their draught should, where possible, avoid crossing ahead of such vessel. If however crossing ahead is unavoidable, it should be carried out at a safe distance commensurate with the prevailing circumstances and conditions.
- 5.3 Deep Draughted Vessels may be given a clear channel for their transit from No.1&2 buoys. During such times, VTS will make a broadcast to all vessels. When a clear channel has been declared, no passing or overtaking of these vessels is permitted, with the exception of Tugs and Harbour Craft. Outbound vessels may be permitted to proceed provided they exit the channel at No.6 beacon prior to the Deep Draughted Vessel passing No.1&2 buoys.

- 5.4 The Master of a Small Vessel should not impede the passage of any vessel greater than 24m in length navigating within the inner Harbour or Victoria Channel.

## 6. Navigation in the Victoria Channel and Inner Harbour

- 6.1 The International Rules for Prevention of Collision at Sea apply to All Vessels within Belfast Harbour Limits. In particular, Rule 9 – Narrow Channels applies throughout the Victoria Channel and Inner Harbour.
- 6.2 Overtaking may only to be conducted when safe to do so and with the agreement of the vessel being overtaken and the VTS
- 6.3 Reporting Vessels should not navigate within the Victoria Channel in such a way as to cause obstruction to another vessel which is confined to the Channel by reason of its draught.
- 6.4 Any vessel wishing to cross the Victoria Channel to the South-West of No 2 buoy should seek permission from VTS
- 6.5 Reporting Vessels over 24m in length may not pass another Reporting vessel over 24m in length in the River Lagan (S of Ballast Quay light), Herdman and Musgrave Channels, with the exception of Harbour Craft and Tugs.
- 6.6 Vessels navigating to and from the part of Victoria Channel that lies within the Inner Harbour have priority over those exiting Herdman / Musgrave Channels.
- 6.7 Reporting Vessels inbound to Belfast Harbour should pass to the North of the Fairway Buoy, and should normally join the Victoria Channel between No.1 & No.2 buoys. Outbound Reporting vessels should pass to the South of the Fairway Buoy.
- 6.8 Reporting Vessels outbound from Belfast may leave the Victoria Channel anytime after No.6 beacon provided it is safe to do so.
- (a) Outbound Vessels should avoid meeting inbound vessels in the vicinity of No.1 and No.2 buoys.
  - (b) Those vessels with draught 7.5m or less when outbound may navigate between No.4 and Helen's Bay Buoys, passing to the south of No.2 buoy.
- 6.9 Reporting Vessels bound to or from Jetties or anchorages to the North or South of the Lough are not required to comply with 6.7.
- 6.10 On occasions whereby visibility is restricted due to fog, mist, snow or any other cause, the following will apply:
- (a) Vessels encountering visibility less than 1 nautical mile should inform VTS. Rule 19 applies throughout Harbour Limits. All vessels under 24m in length are not to impede passage of any vessels over 24m in length in any channel.
  - (b) A one way system may be implemented during periods where visibility is less than 5 cables, during such times Passenger Vessels, scheduled services and ships tidally restricted will be given priority over other movements.

- (c) Vessels not fitted with operational radar should not navigate within the port when due to fog, mist, snow, rain, dust, smoke or other cause, is less than 0.5 nautical miles.
- (d) Vessels carrying hazardous cargoes in bulk or marine pollutants in bulk are not normally permitted to navigate within Harbour Limits when visibility is less than 0.5 miles. Such vessels will be individually risk assessed at the discretion of the Harbour Master.
- (e) Vessels requiring the aid of towage are not normally permitted to navigate within Harbour Limits when visibility is less than 0.5 miles. No act of Pilotage requiring tugs is to be undertaken in reduced visibility, without a full discussion with the tugs, as per the Tug Company's Operational Guidelines.

## **7. Anchoring**

- 7.1 Anchoring is prohibited inside Harbour Limits, except: to assist with manoeuvring, in an emergency, or with prior permission of the Harbour Master
- 7.2 Whilst underway within Harbour Limits, vessels must have their anchors to be cleared ready for immediate use
- 7.3 Anchors used for berthing to be retrieved as soon as possible. If retrieval is not possible, anchor is to be marked and Port Control advised of the position.
- 7.4 Anchors are not to be used in Barnett Dock Cut or outside the Victoria Channel in vicinity of gas pipeline.

## **8. Minimum Composition of Bridge Team whilst Navigating inside Harbour Limits & Use of Autopilots**

- 8.1 The Master of a reporting vessel should, at all times, be on the Bridge when navigating inside Harbour Limits.
- 8.2 A 2<sup>nd</sup> person capable of taking over in the event of the Master becoming incapacitated (normally the Chief Mate), should be contactable and readily available to take over if not already on the Bridge.
- 8.3 The minimum composition of the Bridge Team whilst navigating within Harbour Limits should be:
  - a) During daylight hours: The Master & 1 other person, who may be the Pilot when one is embarked.
  - b) During hours of darkness: The Master, a lookout, and a Pilot if one is embarked.
  - c) The Bridge of Passenger vessels and vessels carrying hazardous substances in bulk should be manned by the Master and a competent Deck Officer, one of whom may be the PEC Holder, and a helmsman/lookout at all times.
  - d) On other vessels, when a PEC holder forms part of the Bridge Team, he should be accompanied by another Officer capable of undertaking the conduct of the vessel, and additionally during hours of darkness, a lookout.
- 8.4 Automatic Steering Devices may only be used within Harbour Limits provided:
  - a) Such equipment is capable of instantaneous changeover
  - b) The use of Automatic Steering Devices does not relieve the Master of his obligation to have a competent helmsman on the Bridge during times such Devices are in use.



## 9. Reporting of Defects, Collisions, Fires etc

- 9.1 The Master of a Reporting Vessel arriving at Belfast Harbour having any defect or having been involved in a Reportable Occurrence, should notify the Harbour Master at earliest opportunity, and should not enter Harbour Limits without approval from the Harbour Master.
- 9.2 The Master of a Reporting Vessel that suffers a defect or other Reportable Occurrence whilst within Harbour Limits should report such defect to the Harbour Master at earliest opportunity via the VTS or other appropriate means.
- 9.3 Reportable Defects to Navigation equipment include but are not limited to:
- Radar
  - Compass or Gyro Compass
  - ECDIS (except if the latest edition of charts 1752 and 1753 are carried and are fully corrected.
  - Log
  - Autopilot
  - GPS
  - Echo Sounder
- 9.4 Reportable Defects to Manoeuvring equipment include but are not limited to:
- Steering
  - Main propulsion
  - Thrusters
- 9.5 Reportable Defects to Mooring equipment include but are not limited to:
- Anchors
  - Windlasses
  - Mooring winches
- 9.6 Reportable Occurrences include but are not limited to:
- Collision
  - Allision
  - Grounding or Stranding
  - His vessel or tow obstructs a Fairway or Channel
  - Discharges of noxious substances or pollutants
  - Jettisons or loses any object which could obstruct a berth or fairway
  - Fire on board
- 9.7 The occurrence of a "Near Miss" relating to any of the above, or any other observation that for the safe and efficient running of the Harbour that the Harbour Master ought to be made aware of, should be considered as Reportable.

## 10. Fire on board.

On discovering a fire on board, the Master should:

- Take immediate action to extinguish the fire using the ship's equipment and any other actions as required by the vessels ISM Safety Management System
- Ensure Port Control, Terminal operator and emergency services are immediately notified.
- Cease cargo operations

## 11. Navigation while affected by drink or drugs

No person should have the command, charge or management of a vessel underway or otherwise navigate or have the charge of or undertake any activity which is or may be material to the safe conduct of a vessel underway when unfit by reason of drink or drugs to do so or to have that charge.

The master of a vessel should not cause or permit any person to navigate or otherwise have charge of or undertake any activity which is or may be material to the safe conduct of a vessel underway if that person is unfit by reason of drink or drugs to do so, have that charge or undertake that activity.

The master of **any** vessel should not move the vessel within Harbour Limits if his ability to do so is impaired by drink or drugs or if the proportion of alcohol in his breath, blood or urine exceeds:

- i) ***In the case of breath, 35 micrograms of alcohol in 100 ml.***
- ii) ***In the case of blood, 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 ml, and***
- iii) ***In the case of urine, 107 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres.***

## 12. Towage and Mooring Operations.

12.1 The Master of every Reporting Vessel should ensure that, where required, he has made provision for sufficient number of Tugs to allow his vessel to be berthed alongside. Reporting Vessels requiring tugs are not permitted to pass No.1 Buoy until the tugs have confirmed they are available.

12.2 Belfast Harbour Minimum Towage Requirements apply to Reporting Vessels. Additionally, all vessels carrying 10,000T or more of hazardous or polluting cargo in bulk, and vessels with draught 9m or greater require a minimum of 1 tug in attendance.

12.3 Restrictions on Towage in Reduced Visibility:

- a) Towage is only to be undertaken when visibility is greater than 0.5 miles, and it is not decreasing.
- b) If visibility reduces below 0.5 miles after the operation has been started:
  - i. the vessel must be slowed to minimum safe speed,
  - ii. other vessel movements are to be suspended
  - iii. towage must be re-assessed between the Master, Pilot and Tug Master.
  - iv. VTS/Harbour Master must be advised of proposed towage plan and intended actions.
- c) Where the possibility of reduced visibility exists, the forward tug should only be made fast in Push/Pull mode to prevent overrunning it.

A contingency plan should be discussed between Master and Pilot prior to entering the port during the Master/Pilot exchange, which should include named free berths which are suitable for that size of vessel. These berths should allow 24 hour access to boatmen.

12.4 Under normal circumstances, unless the Pilot and / or Master deem otherwise, Tugs in attendance should be made fast. In any event, vessels swinging with the aid of tugs in the vicinity of berths handling hazardous cargoes should have the tugs made fast.

- 12.5 Tugs attending inbound vessels are to be made fast before passing Beacon 15. Escort Tugs are to be in attendance before Beacon 15 for inbound vessels, and must accompany departing vessels until past Beacon 15.
- 12.6 The Master of every Reporting Vessel should ensure that he provides for the attendance of a sufficient number of competent persons to handle, by boat or ashore, the vessel's ropes, wires, lines or other moorings to any pier, quay or dolphin as may be necessary to moor or unmoor the vessel (Boatmen).
- 12.7 The Master of an inbound reporting vessel shall ensure in good time prior to approaching the berth, that he makes contact with the Boatmen to establish mooring arrangements and vessel position are agreed and understood.
- 12.8 The Master of a Reporting Vessel which is berthed within Harbour Limits should ensure that such vessel is securely made fast and that the moorings are adjusted as necessary to allow for the rise and fall of the tide and for the loading and unloading of cargo. Vessels should have adequate and secure moorings at all times.  
Masters should ensure that their vessel is laid as close as possible alongside the berth or premises at which the vessel is berthed and that neither the vessel nor the vessel's moorings obstruct other vessels, or hamper the use of a dock entrance, pier, wharf, quay or jetty.
- 12.9 Except with the permission of the Harbour Master, the Master of a Reporting Vessel should at all times when his vessel is within the Harbour ensure that his vessel is capable of being safely moved and navigated and that there are sufficient crew or other competent persons readily available:
- a) to attend to his vessel's moorings;
  - b) to comply with any directions given by the Harbour Master for the unmooring, mooring and moving of his vessel; and
  - c) to deal, so far as reasonably practicable, with any emergency that may arise

### **13. Condition and Use of Vessel's Propulsion Machinery**

- 13.1 The Master of a vessel bound for Belfast should ensure that all manoeuvring and propulsion systems have been tested immediately prior to arrival.
- 13.2 The Master of a Reporting Vessel other than a small vessel lying at a recognised mooring or anchorage, should not take any steps to render his vessel incapable of movement without first obtaining a Permit to Immobilise his vessel from the Harbour Master.
- 13.3 The Master of a Reporting Vessel should at all times keep his vessel so loaded and ballasted and in such condition that it is capable of being safely moved.
- 13.4 Where a Reporting Vessel (other than a small vessel) is at any time not capable of being safely moved by means of its own propulsive machinery, the Master or Owner should as soon as reasonably practicable inform the Harbour Master.
- 13.5 The Master of a Reporting Vessel whilst berthed should not cause or permit the external means of propulsion of the vessel to be set in motion for trial other than as required by SOLAS or in connection with manoeuvre on or off the berth without the permission of the Harbour Master.

### **14. Repair Works, Lifeboats, and Diving**

- 14.1 The master of a vessel in the Harbour should not permit any person to undertake from the quay or from the water any repairs to any part of his vessel, or any equipment or any other item from or for the vessel, except with the prior permission of the Harbour Master, and then only subject to such reasonable conditions as the Harbour Master may impose.  
A Permit is required from the Harbour Master for any of the following:
  - a) Hot Work other than Hot Work within a Vessel's Engine.
  - b) Working over the side of a Vessel or Quay.
  - c) Diving.The VTS is to be informed on commencement and cessation of operations covered by Permits.
- 14.2 Where the harbour master has approved any diving, all persons taking part should comply with the Diving at Work Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/2776) and any instructions given by the Harbour Master.
- 14.3 Lowering of ship's lifeboats may be undertaken within the Inner Harbour upon receipt of clearance from VTS. If lifeboats are to be maneuvered, the Coxswain must be contactable by the Vessel and VTS on Channel 12.
- 14.4 Engine immobilisation for routine maintenance and minor repairs is not permitted whilst alongside in Belfast Harbour. This falls in line with good practice in other UK and EU ports and gives Belfast Harbour Port Operations confidence that should the weather deteriorate or an incident occur in the port that shipping can be moved as required.

### **15. Bunkering, Tank Cleaning & Gas Freeing**

- 15.1 All Vessels conducting Bunkering Operations should refer to the procedures contained within Belfast Harbour Bunkering Guidelines.

15.2 Tank cleaning is only permitted within Harbour Limits with prior permission from the Harbour Master

15.3 No gas freeing is permitted within Harbour Limits without prior permission from the Harbour Master

## **16. Passage Plans**

16.1 All vessels arriving to or departing from the Port, other than Harbour Craft and Tugs normally employed within the Harbour, are required to have a Passage Plan. This plan is to incorporate the entire movement within Harbour Limits to/from the berth, and should be based upon the standard Port Passage Plans.

16.2 The Master is required to submit a copy of the Passage Plan to the Harbour Master upon request.

16.3 The Passage Plan to be agreed with the Master and Pilot as part of the Master/Pilot exchange, and declared to the VTS (see sections 2.2(e) and 2.3(c&e)).

## **17. Navigational Risk Assessment**

Any specialised operation, project or vessel which falls outside the normal scope of the Navigational Risk Assessment will be subject to a Formal Risk Assessment. Should the Harbour Master deem it necessary this will need to be completed prior to the vessel entering Harbour Limits and / or commencing operation.

## **18. Change of Vessel's Details**

Any vessel which intends to undergo change of Ownership, Name, Flag, or Manager (as per ISM DOC) should immediately inform the Harbour Master in writing of such intention.