

Belfast Harbour Marine Operations Safety Plan 2024 - 2026

Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) serve as the designated Statutory Harbour Authority for Belfast Harbour and assumes the role of Competent Harbour Authority within the Belfast Harbour Pilotage Area.

Established in 2000 by the Department of Transport and subsequently revised in November 2016, the Port Marine Safety Code sets forth a national standard against which harbour authorities' policies, procedures, and performance are evaluated.

As the duty holder, BHC bears collective and individual responsibility for ensuring public accountability regarding marine safety in accordance with the Code. Consequently, BHC is committed to upholding marine safety standards that align with the Port Marine Safety Code. This Marine Operations Safety Plan elucidates the specific management measures in place and establishes performance targets.

In adherence to the Port Marine Safety Code, BHC releases this Marine Operations Safety Plan covering the period from 2024 to 2026.

A comprehensive overview of the port's Marine Safety Management structure and compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code, essential for supporting this plan, is documented within BHC's Safety Management System.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners has declared compliance with the requirements of the PMSC in March 2021 to the MCA. The next compliance exercise is expected to be 6 months after publication of the updated Port Marine Safety Code.

Marine Policies

Harbour authorities are entrusted with a spectrum of both statutory and non-statutory responsibilities and authorities pertaining to marine operations. For Belfast Harbour Authority, these obligations encompass ensuring the safety and well-being of harbour users, entailing the conservation and facilitation of safe harbour usage, alongside a duty to mitigate losses stemming from any negligence on the part of the harbour authority. To effectively discharge these duties, the authority is endowed with both general and specific powers. To ensure the effective execution of these responsibilities, Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) have instituted the following policies:

- Navigational Safety Policy
- Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Policy
- Pilotage Policy
- Hydrographic Policy
- Enforcement and Prosecution Policy

All policies are integrated within BHC's Safety Management System. Each Marine Policy undergoes a thorough review every 3 years to ensure continued relevance and efficacy.

Marine Procedures

Marine Procedures encompass a comprehensive set of operational protocols, processes, and guidance vital for supporting Belfast Harbour's marine services and operations. These procedures are outlined in various documents, including:

- Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Manual
- Pilotage Manual
- Conservancy section within the Marine Safety Management System (MSMS) Manual
- Marine Services section within the MSMS Manual

To ensure compliance and effectiveness, the Designated Person, as stipulated in the Port Marine Safety Code, provides independent assurance directly to the 'Duty Holder'. This assurance is achieved through rigorous assessment and audit processes, confirming the compliance and operational efficiency of Belfast Harbour's MSMS.

The Safety Management System underwent its latest external audit in December 2023.

The Management of Marine Operations

This Marine Operations Safety Plan signifies Belfast Harbour's commitment to managing and overseeing marine operations within the confines of its jurisdiction and authority, prioritizing the protection of the port, its stakeholders, the public, and the surrounding environment.

Belfast Harbour is dedicated to fostering a positive safety culture and continually enhancing its risk-based Marine Safety Management System and safety performance.

The harbour will fulfil its duties and obligations to deliver efficient services and regulate shipping effectively, supporting all harbour activities, particularly commercial vessel movements, to ensure the safe passage of vessels within the port.

Even in times of disruption, Belfast Harbour will prioritize the safety of its personnel, port users, and vessels, ensuring that safety considerations take precedence over commercial interests. While this may occasionally result in delays to services, vessel movements, or activities, the safety of navigation remains the foremost priority.

Established Management Activities

Communication, consultation and feedback are a fundamental to ensure the safety and navigational requirements are understood and are continually reviewed. The following are undertaken to ensure the maintenance of an effective Safety Management System

- Dedicated Risk Assessments of existing marine operations and services.
- The proactive and reactive review of identified hazards to navigation and the associated risk control measures required to mitigate these risks to a level which is As Low As Reasonably Practicable (ALARP).
- The investigation of all reported Marine Incidents and the maintenance of a comprehensive Incident Management System.
- Daily liaison between the Duty Harbour Master and the VTS in relation to the safety and effective regulation of vessel movements in the harbour and its approaches.
- Monthly Marine Safety Management meetings to review Incidents and Non Compliance.
- Marine Safety Forum – meetings every 6 months
- Towage & Boatmen Operations Liaison Group – meeting every 6 months
- Regular Pilotage meetings comprising Harbour Masters and authorised Belfast Harbour pilots.
- Regular internal and external audits and reviews of the Marine Safety Management System, its functions, procedures and performance.
- Training and Development of Marine Department Personnel - Continual Professional Development.
- Maintenance and exercising of Belfast Harbour Marine Emergency Plans and procedures, including oil spill management and Business Continuity Plans.

Performance Objectives

	Objective	Performance Target	By When	Completion Measure	Status
1.	Navigational Incidents – determine the cause of an incident to prevent reoccurrence	No major incidents, serious injuries or serious pollution as a result of the failure of the port’s Marine Safety Management System.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		All reported Incidents investigated in a timely basis.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Identify opportunities for improvement and ensure policies and procedures are reviewed where appropriate.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
2.	Vessel Traffic Service – operational capability and delivery	Provide an effective Traffic Organisational Service and Information Service throughout the port.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Seek to ensure that Belfast Harbours VTS System operates at 99.9% availability through a maintenance, procurement and installation strategy for the VTS equipment which will add to the reliability of individual elements or to its duplication.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
					2024

		VTS Operators recruited and trained to industry standards	2025		
			2026		
		Implementation of new VTS system	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
3.	Pilotage – provision of pilotage service including the authorisation of Pilotage Exemption Certificates (PEC)	No major incidents resulting from pilot or PEC holder error.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Authorised Pilots and PEC Holders to be trained and assessed as per procedures and protocols.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
4.	Marine Services – Towage services, pilot launch and mooring services	Ensure operators are compliant with national and local regulation for equipment and personnel.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Fully compliant with industry best practice and Belfast Harbour policies and procedures.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Implement a Marine Licence Scheme	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		New towage Requirements & revised Towage Operations Manual created, implemented and successfully applying safe and efficient towage	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
5.	Conservancy – conserve the harbour and its approaches	Hydrographic Surveys - Ensure that the port and approaches have an adequate schedule of hydrographic surveys and that these are undertaken in line with the defined schedule.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Navigational Lights – In conjunction with the Commissioners of Irish Lights to provide and maintain	2024		
			2025		

		adequate navigational aids consistent with port user requirements to facilitate safe navigation within the port and its approaches. Report to CIL on a quarterly basis.	2026		
		Wrecks and Obstructions – Investigate all reported wrecks and Obstructions in a timely basis.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Notices / Warnings – Promulgate Local Notices and Warnings to port users of changes to Navigational Aids, depths and other dangers to Navigation.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
6.	Consultation - liaison and consult with port users	Arrange regular meetings with port users to consult on any traffic management and navigational issues, safety issues, pilotage, conservancy, and leisure activity.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
7.	Contingency and Emergency Planning	Review of Emergency Plans and Procedures.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Undertake desk top / real time exercises	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
8.	Training of Marine Personnel – to ensure required qualifications are current for all marine personnel and any ongoing professional development and training needs are identified.	Continual Professional Development to ensure all marine personnel are competent to perform their duties.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		
		Undertake annual appraisals and training needs analysis.	2024		
			2025		
			2026		