Belfast Harbour
Marine Operations Safety Plan
2024 - 2026

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

First established in 2000 by the Department for Transport and most recently revised in April 2025 as the Ports and Marine Facilities Safety Code (PMFSC), the 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 PMSC. This Marine Operations Safety Plan elucidates the specific management measures in place and establishes performance targets.

In adherence to the PMSC, 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 PMSC, essential for supporting this plan, is documented within BHC's Safety Management System.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners have declared compliance with the requirements of the PMSC in March 2026 to the MCA.

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.

Further details of the ‘Designated Person,’ Monty Smedley of ABPmer Ltd, can be found here.

The Safety Management System underwent its latest external audit in December 2025.

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, prioritising 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.

At Belfast Harbour, the safety and well-being of everyone who visits or works within the estate remain the highest priority, even in times of disruption. While unforeseen circumstances may occasionally lead to delays in services, vessel movements, or operational activities, our unwavering commitment to safety takes precedence.

BHC recognises that demand for efficient vessel movements and port services can create commercial pressure on marine operations and is committed to ensuring that commercial considerations never take precedence over the safety of navigation, people or the environment. Marine personnel are fully supported in delaying, suspending or declining any service that cannot be delivered safely.

Established Management Activities

Communication, consultation and feedback are fundamental to ensuring 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 Sub-committee & Mooring Workshop – meeting quarterly
- 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.

Belfast Harbour

Performance Objectives

	Objective	Performance Target	By When	Completion Measure	Status
1.	**Navigational Incidents** – determine the cause of an incident to prevent recurrence	No major incidents, serious injuries or serious pollution as a result of the failure of the port's Marine Safety Management System.	2024	No major incidents, serious injuries or serious pollution events in 2024 as a result of the failure of the port's Marine Safety Management System Minor observations of pollution reported OPRC approved and 2024 OPRC returns submitted to MCA CPSO	Compliant
			2025	No major incidents, serious injuries or serious pollution events in 2025 as a result of the failure of the port's Marine Safety Management System Minor observations of pollution reported OPRC approved and 2025 OPRC returns submitted to MCA CPSO	Compliant
			2026		
		All reported Incidents investigated in a timely manner.	2024	3 Major 16 Moderate 78 Minor 49 Insignificant All reportable incidents reported to MAIB	Compliant
			2025	2 Major 17 Moderate 67 Minor 40 Insignificant All reportable incidents reported to MAIB	Compliant
			2026		
		Identify opportunities for improvement and ensure policies and procedures are reviewed where appropriate.	2024	Following Documents Reviewed: • NEW Minimum Towage Requirements • MSMS updated to V.17 • VTS Manual • Towage Manual • Pilot Boat Operations Manual • 3 new SOPs introduced, 5 SOP amended	Compliant

			2025	Following Documents updated: • MSMS updated to V.18d • Pilotage Directions 2022 Amendment 2 • Port Operations Qualifications and Competency requirements 2025 v5 • Pilot Boat Operations Manual v7 • 3 new SOPs introduced, 5 SOP amended	Compliant
			2026		
2.	**Vessel Traffic Service** – operational capability and delivery	Provide an effective Vessel Traffic Service throughout the port.	2024	Service operated to meet the requirements of MGN 401. • Recruitment of additional personnel Approved. • New VTS system procured and installation on going	Compliant
			2025	3 additional VTS staff employed and trained. Ongoing amendments to rostering so that double manning is implemented	Compliant
			2026		
		Seek to ensure that Belfast Harbour's 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	VTS system effectively operational for 100% of the period	Compliant
			2025	VTS system effectively operational for 100% of the period	Compliant
			2026		
		VTS Operators recruited and trained to industry standards	2024	VTS Operator External Annual Assessments conducted Additional VTS resourcing approved.	Compliant
			2025	3 additional VTS Operators commenced employment in 2025 and completed training	Compliant
			2026		
		Implementation of new VTS system	2024	VTS Project progressing with Installation of 2 New radar sites. Conclusion of installation and commissioning is expected December 2025.	Compliant
			2025	VTS project behind schedule, commissioning not yet implemented	Ongoing
			2026		
3.	**Pilotage** – provision of pilotage service including the authorisation	No major incidents resulting from pilot or PEC holder error.	2024	No major incidents resulting from pilot or PEC holder error.	Compliant

	of Pilotage Exemption Certificates (PEC)		2025	No major incidents resulting from pilot or PEC holder error	Compliant
			2026		
		Authorised Pilots and PEC Holders to be trained and assessed as per procedures and protocols.	2024	12 Unlimited pilots Total number of Pilot movements: 3739 40 Total PEC Holders of which 6 new PEC Certificates issued 3 Local Knowledge certificates also issued Total PEC Acts:7711	Compliant
			2025	12 Unlimited pilots Total number of Pilot movements: 4189 43 Total PEC Holders of which 6 new PEC Certificates issued 3 Local Knowledge certificates renewed Total PEC Acts: 7523	Compliant
			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	Towage providers audit process commenced Process of management of workboat records reviewed and amended	Compliant
			2025	Intermediate towage provision impacted by the sale and removal from the Port of two 20 tonne Bollard Pull Tugs	Compliant
			2026		
		Fully compliant with industry best practice and Belfast Harbour policies and procedures.	2024	No reported non-conformances of the Towage Operations Manual	Compliant
			2025	Following the MAIB report into the tug BITER incident, procedures were updated, simulator sessions were undertaken and additional training was delivered to pilots	Compliant
			2026		
		Implement a Marine Licence Scheme	2024	Marine Licensing Scheme deferred to 2025	Deferred
			2025	Marine Licence scheme implementation phase ongoing	Ongoing
			2026		
		New towage Requirements & revised Towage Operations Manual created, implemented and successfully applying safe and efficient towage	2024	New towage Requirements & revised Towage Operations Manual created.	Compliant
			2025	Ongoing monitoring of revised min towage requirements	Compliant
			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	Routine Surveys conducted in July and December. Additional areas surveyed in December and all information supplied to UKHO	Compliant
			2025	Routine surveys conducted in June and November and all information supplied to UKHO	Compliant

			2026		
		Navigational Lights – In conjunction with the Commissioners of Irish Lights to provide and maintain 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.	2024	Irish Lights Authority audit conducted February 2024. No deficiencies recorded. Audit Outcome: Compliant	Compliant
			2025	Irish Lights Authority audit conducted February 2025 No deficiencies recorded. Audit Outcome: Compliant	Compliant
			2026		
		Wrecks and Obstructions – Investigate all reported wrecks and Obstructions in a timely manner.	2024	No wreck or obstructions reported in 2024	Compliant
			2025	No wreck or obstructions reported in 2025	Compliant
			2026		
		Notices / Warnings – Promulgate Local Notices and Warnings to port users of changes to Navigational Aids, depths and other dangers to Navigation.	2024	31 Notices to Mariners issued. 25 Port Operational Notices issued.	Compliant
			2025	28 Notices to Mariners issued 33 Port Operational Notices issued	Compliant
			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	The following consultations conducted in 2024: -Minimum Towage Requirements consultation completed -Marine Safety Forums meeting January and July -Towage Sub-Committees held -Mooring Workshop Held -Navigation Risk Assessment HAZID meeting -Incident reviews with MCA and Coastguard -District Marine Safety Committee -Carrickfergus Harbour Authority- Quarterly Users Meeting	Compliant
			2025	The following consultations conducted in 2025: -Marine Safety Forums meeting January and August -Towage Sub-Committees held -Mooring Workshop Held -District Marine Safety Committee -Carrickfergus Harbour Authority- Quarterly Users Meeting	Compliant
			2026		
7.	**Contingency and Emergency Planning**	Review of Emergency Plans and Procedures.	2024	Following documents reviewed for emergency plans and procedures: MSMS Business Continuity Plans VTS Manual Towage Manual Pilot Boat Operations Manual Various SOPs reviewed	Compliant

			2025	MSMS Pilot Boat Operations Manual Various SOPs reviewed Risk Assessments updated	Compliant
			2026		
		Undertake desk top / real time exercises	2024	Multi Agency exercises undertaken: 17th December- Exercise Templeton- oil spill response drill	Compliant
			2025	Exercises: 16th October 2025- successful live drill of OPRC equipment 18th December 2025- Belfast OPRC Oil Spill Table-top exercise – "Exercise Merry Hell"	Compliant
			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	Pilot Boat Crew- Ship Stability and Radar/Electronic Navigation completed OPRC 2P training for VTS and Pilot Boat Crew Simulator sessions in Cork for pilots and towage providers 1 DHM certificate of competence revalidated	Compliant
			2025	Two Assistant Harbour Masters enrolled on the UK Harbour Master Certificate OPRC 2P and 5P courses revalidated Simulator sessions ongoing	Compliant
			2026		
		Undertake annual appraisals and training needs analysis.	2024	Personal Development discussions ongoing throughout the year	Compliant
			2025	Personal Development discussions ongoing throughout the year	Compliant
			2026		
9.	**Bridging Documents**	Develop Bridging Document	2024	Not applicable	N/A
			2025	New PMFSC published April 2025. BHC is working towards the establishment of a Bridging process by identifying applicable stakeholders and developing a procedure to satisfy the requirements of the updated code	Ongoing
			2026		