

**QUEEN'S HARBOUR MASTER**

**PORTSMOUTH**

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE  
EMBARKATION AND  
DISEMBARKATION OF ADMIRALTY  
PILOTS**

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THROUGHOUT THE DOCKYARD PORT OF PORTSMOUTH

QHM PORTSMOUTH

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## FORWARD

The purpose of this code is to act as a guide to safe practice in the boarding and landing of Admiralty Pilots by pilot boat in the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth and is commended to all those involved in the provision of a pilotage service. The code not only covers the act of transfer between a pilot boat and ship, but in addition also addresses issues such as the actual pilot boat, boarding/landing areas, responsibilities of all of those involved in the transfer and their training. It should be used primarily as a guide to safe operating procedures which can be adapted to suit particular locations or circumstances.

The Code has been updated to incorporate current SOLAS and UK legislation and in particular the Guide to Good Practice associated with the Port Marine Safety Code. It has also been aligned with the UKMPA/UKHMA/BPA/UKMPG Code of Safe Practice for the Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots revised July 2021.

# CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION OF ADMIRALTY PILOTS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This edition of the Admiralty Pilots Code of Practice has been written to incorporate the content of a separate Code of practise entitled *The Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots*, prepared jointly by the Marine/Pilotage Working Group of the British Ports Association, the UK Major Ports Group and the Technical & Training Committee of the United Kingdom Maritime Pilots Association, revised July 2021.

## 2. THE PILOT BOAT

The Queen's Harbour Master (QHM) acting as the *de facto* Competent Harbour Authority (CHA) for the Dockyard Port of Portsmouth must ensure that any pilot boats in service meet the requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats and any subsequent additions or amendments.

QHM approves or licences the pilot boats regularly employed in the provision of a pilotage service, having satisfied himself that they are suitable for such use using the OPS 408 process with the current Marine Services provider, Serco.



## 3. ROUTINE CHECKS

Prior to leaving the berth and at least once per watch, the Coxswain should ensure that the boat is in all respects ready for sea. All hatches and watertight openings should be closed when underway and at sea.

Any Deck lighting should be routinely tested.

On joining and prior to leaving the berth, the Coxswain, Pilot and crew should familiarise themselves with the stowage of the safety equipment and its operation.

Where appropriate mooring ropes should remain ashore, any ropes left onboard must be properly stowed so that they do not pose a tripping or snagging hazard.

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The deck of the pilot boat should be clear of all unnecessary obstructions allowing a clear transfer area and clear passage and movement to the Pilot and crew. Deck lighting should be tested before departure.

An up to date log is to be maintained onboard to include entries of all safety checks.

## 4. LEAVING THE BERTH

The pilot boat should not leave the berth unless it is in all respects ready for sea.

The pilot boat should be manned in compliance with Merchant Shipping Notice MGN 50(M).

The pilot boat should only operate within the terms of the MCA Pilot Boat Certificate, which should be clearly displayed onboard.

The boat's crew are to call Harbour Control (call sign QHM) on VHF Ch 11 when departing, completing the assigned task and returning to the berth. These reports should include the numbers of persons onboard. QHM Harbour Control is to monitor the position of the pilot boat. This is especially important in heavy weather and restricted visibility.

Pilots should be careful, in particular during periods of reduced visibility, not to impede or distract the Coxswain of the pilot boat in his execution of safe navigation of the vessel, for example by restricting his access to radar and the use of the boat's VHF.

When circumstances require, Coxswains should not hesitate to ask the pilot for assistance in order to reduce their operational workload.



All pilots and crew should wear appropriate protective clothing and buoyancy equipment as required by QHM and MCA regulations. Pilots should be aware of the potential dangers associated with auto-inflation lifejackets in the event of flooding or should the pilot boat capsize.



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## 5. BOARDING AND LANDING AREAS

The following areas have been identified and evaluated for the boarding and landing of Admiralty Pilots ensuring that there is sufficient sea room for ships to manoeuvre, depth of water and where possible shelter from the more exposed elements of prevailing winds and weather. These areas are clearly defined in nautical publications and marked on the appropriate chart.

Boarding Areas for vessels arriving/departing the Eastern Solent:

1. 4 Miles South of the Nab Tower
2. Nab West Pilot Boarding Area
3. St Helen's Pilot Boarding Area

Boarding Area for vessels arriving/departing the Western Solent

1. North Sturbridge Buoy (6¼ cables SSW of Gilkicker Point)



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## 6. ON APPROACHING THE SHIP

VHF Radio contact should be established between the pilot boat and all the vessels to be served as soon as possible on VHF channel 11 (channels 16 or 12 may also be used to establish initial contact).

The Coxswain should confirm their relative positions and intended movements of the vessels so that a safe plan for conducting pilot transfers can be agreed.

After consultation with the pilot, the pilot boat Coxswain should advise the ship of the side on which to rig the pilot ladder, the required distance of the lowest step above the water and heading/speed in order to establish the best lee for the pilot transfer.

Due allowance should be made for the close proximity of other vessels, intended movements, the possible effects of wash and any set due to wind and tidal stream.

On approaching a ship from ahead on the same side as the pilot ladder care must be taken to ensure the wash from the pilot boat does not interfere with the safe boarding/diseembarkation of the Pilot. This may require the pilot boat to remain clear of the ladder until the wash is clear.

It is prudent to use a searchlight at night to check for incoming wash. It will be necessary for any vessels to get underway if they are unable to provide a lee whilst at anchor.

During the approach to the ship both the Pilot and Deckhand should remain in the cabin until instructed to proceed forward by the Coxswain. This is to ensure that the boat has reduced speed, is in the lee of the customer vessel and settled ready for the transfer to take place.

The pilot boat radar should be switched to standby before the Pilot uses the ladder. At night and during the final approach, the pilot boat searchlight should be used to illuminate the pilot ladder and forward deck of the pilot boat before anyone proceeds on deck.

In adverse conditions where there is significant risk to personnel or the pilot boat, the Coxswain should make the ultimate decision whether to place the boat alongside the ship.

If there is any doubt at any time about the safety of the transfer operation, the Pilot should not board or land.

If the ladder presented is non-compliant, or a near miss occurs during the transfer, an appropriate report must be made to QHM. A non-compliant or unsafe ladder must not be used until the non-compliance is rectified.

The Pilot and Coxswain should consider the hazards associated with undertaking the transfer while the pilot boat radar is operational. Any decision taken to suspend its

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usage during the transfer should only be made after fully assessing the prevailing conditions and the potential impact on navigation and situational awareness.

In restricted visibility, it is recommended that whenever possible, a ship to be served is approached around its stern and not across the bow.

## **7. THE SHIP**

The ship should rig a pilot ladder or combination ladder on the side requested and in accordance with the regulations stated in SOLAS Chapter V Reg.23 and Annex 21 IMO Resolution A889 (21) (1999). These requirements are described at the Annex. See also paragraph 16 for guidance on boarding RN Ships that cannot fully comply with the above regulations because of their design.

If the pilot ladder is not rigged in accordance with regulations, the decision to embark/disembark is the responsibility of the Pilot. If unhappy, the Pilot is to instruct the ship to adjust the ladder appropriately, or refuse to embark.

The ladder should be rigged and secured at the ship's side or side door as near midships as practical and on the parallel body of the ship, clear of all overboard discharges. Where this is not possible a full risk assessment produced by the vessel should be available for the pilot to refer to.

The ladder should sit flush against the ship's side and if a list is unavoidable the ladder should be rigged on the side of the list and must be clear of the gunwale of the pilot boat.

When rigging a combination/accommodation ladder it must lead aft to the pilot ladder and be rigged sufficiently high to allow the pilot boat to lie alongside the pilot ladder without any risk of the pilot boat coming into contact with the accommodation ladder due to any swell. Underway or transfers at anchor to accommodation ladders are acceptable, but underway making way transfers to accommodation ladders are not.

During the pilot transfer the supervising ship's officer should be in direct contact with the bridge. The ship should maintain steerage way at speed that allows the pilot vessel to remain comfortably alongside and should not stop or reverse engines except in an emergency or when requested by the pilot boat Coxswain.

## **8. LOW FREEBOARD SHIPS**

When a ship has a low freeboard similar to the pilot boat, the transfer can be particularly hazardous as the boat will not be able to work against the hull of the vessel. Such situations are made more difficult in adverse weather conditions when both the pilot boat and ship may roll or pitch creating an increased risk of injury to the Pilot and/or Deckhand, and possible damage to the pilot boat should it become "hung up" on the ship's gunwale.

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Before the transfer takes place, the Coxswain and Pilot must be satisfied that the pilot boat is sufficiently stable alongside the ship for the transfer to be safely completed.

The increased amount of time necessary to conduct a safe transfer under such conditions means that the intended course and speed is critical to ensure that the risk to the ship and the pilot boat is reduced to as low as practicable.

## 9. PILOT EMBARKATION OPERATION

The decision whether or not to attempt to put a pilot boat alongside a vessel is the responsibility of the Coxswain. The Pilot will make the decision whether to embark.

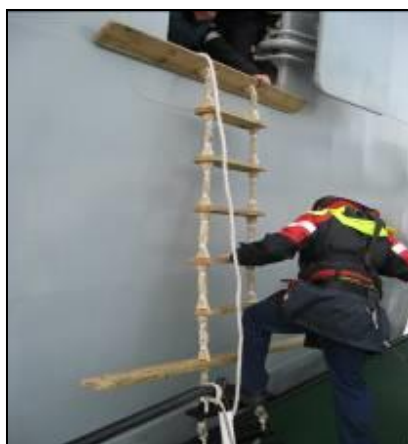
In adverse weather conditions, the risk associated with boarding operations are heightened. Neither the Pilot nor the Deckhand should proceed from the cabin until the pilot boat is in the lee of the ship and the decision to proceed with the transfer has been made by the coxswain. In all conditions, both the Deckhand and Pilot are to be dressed in appropriate PPE, worn in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.

It is recommended that the Deckhand be secured by a life line to the pilot boat whilst on deck, without the line restricting his freedom of movement. Similar arrangements should be made available to the Pilot.

When leaving the cabin the Deckhand, followed by the Pilot, should pass along the outboard side of the cabin to the boarding position.

As the pilot vessel approaches the coxswain and pilot should decide if the pilot ladder is rigged at a height as such that it will not become trapped between the two vessels. If either person is unhappy, the ship should be invited to adjust the length of the ladder.

Before stepping onto the ladder the Pilot should establish it is secure by talking to the crew at the top of the ladder.

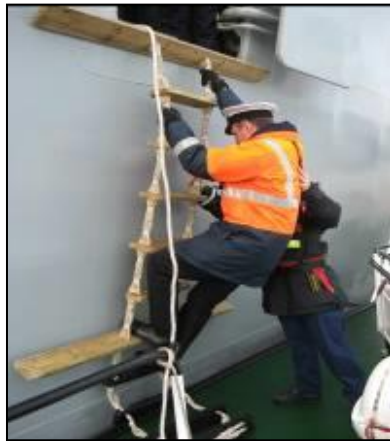


The Pilot should only embark if the top of the ladder is manned. Stepping off the pilot boat onto the ladder requires timing so as to step onto the ladder at the top of a wave

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or roll. If conditions are such as to create any risk of injury then the attempt should be abandoned. At night the ladder is to be sufficiently illuminated to make the judgement on when to step onto the ladder as safe as possible.

Where the Pilot has a reasonably short climb, it is better for the pilot boat to remain alongside whilst the climb is completed to ensure the pilot boat does not foul the ladder when leaving the vessel's side. However, with a long climb, the Pilot may prefer the pilot boat to move away from the vessel's side in order to avoid serious injury in the event of a fall. Such a decision should be made as a result of consultation between Pilot and Coxswain prior to the Pilot leaving the cabin. If the pilot boat leaves the vessel's side, particular care must be made not to foul the ladder.



When boarding using a pilot hoist, a ladder must be rigged adjacent to the hoist and available for immediate use in the event of mechanical failure. The Pilot should climb the flexible short pilot ladder into the rigid upper section before indicating that he is ready to be hoisted at which point the pilot vessel should move away from the ship. The Pilot must ensure that no part of his clothing or equipment becomes entangled in the hoist mechanism.

Bags should not be worn over PPE while climbing the pilot ladder. If the Pilot has a bag, a heaving line should be used to lift it onto the ship after the Pilot is clear of the ladder. The ship should be informed in advance.

Use of man ropes to assist the Pilot is the personal choice of the Pilot involved and should be provided or removed as required.

## 10. PILOT DISEMBARKATION OPERATION

As with embarkation, communication should be established between the vessel and pilot boat to make arrangements in advance.

Before leaving the bridge the Pilot should inform the Master of the traffic situation, any navigational dangers and the need to keep a lee until the Pilot is safely disembarked and the pilot boat clear of the ship's side.

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The Pilot should also obtain an assurance from the Master that the pilot ladder is properly secured. The transfer point is to be well lit and a buoyancy aid made available.

Use of man ropes to assist the Pilot is the personal choice of the Pilot involved and should be provided or removed as required.

Before stepping onto the ladder the Pilot should check that it is properly rigged and that the Deckhand is at the bottom of the ladder, having ensured that it is at the correct height. Any non-compliance should be immediately reported to QHM, and a dynamic risk assessment made as to whether it is safe to continue the transfer. If it is not, then the ship may need to proceed to anchor or return to berth.

The Deckhand should advise the Pilot how many steps to go when descending the ladder especially in adverse weather and give physical help as required.

Personnel returning to the cabin should do so via the outboard waist. When all personnel are safely in the cabin the Deckhand should proceed aft checking that the decks are clear and safe.

The decision as to whether to disembark from a ship rests with the Pilot.

## 11. LEAVING THE SHIP'S SIDE

Should the pilot boat have any difficulty leaving the side of a ship the Coxswain should communicate the problem to the ship and request that appropriate action be taken to alter the heading / speed of the vessel.

## 12. HEAVY WEATHER OPERATIONS

In heavy weather, pilot boats should proceed at a speed appropriate to the sea state and design of the boat.



Maximum use should be made of seating and seatbelts where fitted. Loose equipment and stores should be stowed to avoid injury.

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In heavy weather conditions, the risk associated with boarding operations are heightened. Neither the Pilot nor the Deckhand should proceed from the cabin until the pilot boat is in the lee of the ship and the decision to proceed with the approach has been made by the Coxswain.

## 13. RESTRICTED VISIBILITY

The pilot boat must be allowed extra time on task in order to proceed at a safe speed in poor visibility. The appropriate lights should be shown in compliance with Rule 29. Radar and AIS must be operated and the fog signal sounded. The Coxswain must determine by radio with the ship its position, course and speed, and position relative to other vessels. Rule 19 should be observed at all times, the Coxswain making an approach around the stern and not across the ship's head.

In all cases where visibility is impaired the Deckhand should act as a lookout until the ship and any navigational marks are sighted by the Coxswain. In poor visibility the Coxswain should wait until the Deckhand has returned to the cabin and is acting as lookout before departing the ship.

Coxswains are reminded that keeping a good lookout includes by listening and they should take appropriate actions, whilst maintaining suitable watertight integrity, to ensure they can hear the fog signals of other vessels/navmarks.

## 14. MAN OVERBOARD PROCEDURES

In the event of a man overboard, the priority is to locate the casualty and keep the casualty in sight, a task to which all crew and Pilots must devote their whole attention (subject to keeping a proper navigational lookout). The Coastguard, VTS and shipping should be informed immediately and an emergency communication channel established. Once the casualty is located, the retrieval equipment can be prepared and deployed whilst the pilot boat is positioned. Recovery should be made using a well practised drill. A full report of the incident should be forwarded by the Coxswain to the appropriate manager.



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## 15. TRAINING FOR RETRIEVAL OF CASUALTIES

The success of any rescue is directly related to the expertise of the boat crew and Pilots and their training with regard to the recovery equipment, treatment of hypothermia, artificial resuscitation and first aid. All sea-going pilotage staff should receive training in resuscitation and the treatment of hypothermia to the standards defined in MGN 50 (M). Furthermore, during initial training Pilots should operate the recovery equipment as part of man overboard drills. Retrieval drills for boat crews and checks of the equipment should be regularly carried out and recorded in the log book.



## 16. BOARDING OPERATIONS INVOLVING RN NON - REGULAR SHIPS AND SUBMARINES

Pilots need to be aware that RN ships, some other warships and many barges are not best designed for pilotage transfers and in some instances are unable because of their design to fully follow the code. A number of initiatives have been taken by Materiel and Operation Duty Holders to make the process safer including guidance in BR67 and in RNTMs which should be consulted. Pilots should be aware of any risk assessments applicable to a pilot transfer.

When boarding ships that cannot fully comply with the requirement of the Pilot Transfer Arrangements (Sections 8 & 9) due to their design, care must be taken to establish a safe means of transfer. A local on-site risk assessment should be carried out with the Pilot making the actual decision whether to board the vessel. Special care should be taken when boarding tugs or their tows, and the Coxswains should ensure they do not pass between the tug and tow when making an approach.

Ships that do not provide a parallel side for boarding should consider the pilot joining by helicopter.

Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) aircraft carriers have boarding positions in the lift wells on the starboard side. These have not been used for pilot transfers in Portsmouth. Instead, after alongside and underway trials and a detailed consideration of risks,



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standard practice for the class is to board over the transom. This requires the ship to steam into the sea at about 7 knots, stopping shafts to reduce wash. The coxswain will then discuss conditions with the lead pilot, requesting alterations of course and speed from the ship until it is safe for the pilot boat to nose onto the transom. Once contact has been achieved, the coxswain will then increase power to hold the pilot boat in position. Personnel will then transfer to/from the QEC vessel over the bow of the pilot boat. If swell south of Nab is significant, boarding may have to wait until the carrier is in calmer waters. The decision to proceed north of Nab Tower without a pilot embarked must be agreed between pilot, Duty QHM and QEC command, and should only proceed if it is considered likely that a safe boarding can be achieved by the time the ship reaches Nab East Buoy.

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## ANNEX

### International Marine Pilots Association – Required Boarding Arrangements for Pilots

# REQUIRED BOARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PILOT

In accordance with I.M.O. requirements and I.M.P.A. recommendations

**RIGGING FOR FREEBOARDS OF 9 METRES OR LESS**

- HANDHOLD STANCHIONS:** Min. diam. 20mm (20cm) above bulwark; min. 70cm; max. 80cm apart.
- MAN-ROPES:** without knots; min. diam. 20mm.
- IF REQUIRED BY PILOT:** Always fit side of ship.
- SIDES ROPES:** Min. diam. 18mm.
- STEPS:** Must rest against ship's side.
- SPREADER:** Min. 180cm long.
- Max. 6 steps between spreaders.**
- 5th step must be a spreader.**
- Height required by pilot.**

**SHIPS WITH HIGH FREEBOARD (MORE THAN 9M)**  
When no side door available

- PILOT LADDER:** Must extend at least 2 metres above lower platform.
- Accommodation Ladder:** Should rest firmly against ship's side; should lead aft; Maximum 35° slope; Lower platform horizontal; Right handrails preferred.
- A PILOT LADDER COMBINED WITH AN ACCOMMODATION LADDER:** is usually the safer method of embarking or disembarking a pilot on ships with a freeboard of more than 9 metres.
- Recommended 9 metre mark:** Stern → Bow.
- 2 to 7 metres depending on size of pilot launch and height of mast.**
- 0.5m** (height of mast)

**MECHANICAL PILOT HOIST**

- Two main ropes ready for immediate use; Min. diam. 18mm.
- Divert.
- Guard rope.
- Rigid part.
- Flexible part.

A pilot hoist made and rigged in accordance with SOLAS Chapter V, together with a pilot ladder, subject to agreement between the Master and the Pilot. It should be noted that the distance between the nearest side ropes of the pilot hoist and pilot ladder will be at least 1.4 metres.

**NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!**

- No shackles; No knots; No splices.
- The steps must be equally spaced.
- The steps must be horizontal.
- Spreaders must not be lashed between steps.
- The side ropes must be equally spaced.
- The loops are a tripping hazard for the pilot and can become foul of the pilot launch.

**AT NIGHT:** Pilot ladder and ship's deck lit by forward shining over-side light.

**NO OBSTRUCTIONS:** Bowark ladder secured to ship; Lifebuoy with self-lighting light; Responsible officer.

**NO!** Very dangerous ladder too long.

**NO!** Two handhold stanchions rigidly secured to ship's structure.

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## REFERENCES

1. Code of Safe Practice The Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots  
*UKMPA July 2021.*
2. SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 17. *IMO London*