Sydney Harbour superyacht guidelines
Guidelines for Masters operating Superyachts on Sydney Harbour
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Executive Summary

Welcome to Sydney.

The aim of these guidelines is to assist superyacht masters with their preparations for a visit to Sydney Harbour and to provide a reference document during the visit.

These Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with, and are subordinate to, NSW and Commonwealth legislation, as amended from time to time, and the information promulgated on relevant websites. In the event of any inconsistency between these Guidelines and the legislation or information promulgated on relevant websites, then the requirements of the legislation and relevant websites take precedence.

For the purposes of these Guidelines superyachts are recreational vessels with an LOA of 30 metres or more which are used for private (non commercial) operations.

Vessels of any size and length used solely for recreation are exempt from the requirement to take a pilot or for the master to hold a Marine Pilotage Exemption Certificate or Certificate of Local Knowledge.

Despite there being no requirement for recreational vessels to take a pilot, superyacht masters may request this service for any passage within the harbour. A master is encouraged to request these services if in any doubt regarding the procedures on the harbour or regarding his/her ability to safely manoeuvre within the harbour.

In certain circumstances the Harbour Master may require a pilot to conduct the vessel on its movement into, out of or within the port.

If the vessel is to be engaged in commercial activity, including any form of charter, then the vessel must comply with the provisions of the Marine Safety Act 1998, the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012 and take a pilot as required.
Port procedures

Directions for navigation

The ports of Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay fall within the jurisdiction of the Port Authority of NSW.

Directions and regulations to be observed

Safe navigation in the port area is maintained through an ongoing process of risk evaluation and mitigation. Vessel Traffic Service, the Harbour Master’s Directions and provision of a pilotage service in the port are all integral components of this process.

Sydney Harbour is both a working harbour and a focus for recreational boating enjoyment. During daylight seagoing ships are escorted by the Port Authority of NSW’s patrol craft to ensure an adequate and safe separation between these ships and the recreational craft.

The Harbour Master has powers under the Marine Safety Act 1998 to direct and control the time and manner in which any vessel may enter or leave the port.

The master of any superyacht navigating in Sydney Harbour must comply with any direction given by the Harbour Master, the NSW Special Rules and the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (Colregs).

Schedule 4 of the Marine Safety Regulation 2016 provides the NSW Special Rules and Colregs. Additionally, the master is required to comply with all relevant State or Federal Legislation and International Conventions.

Required charts

The following paper charts, or equivalent electronic charted areas, are to be held onboard the superyacht:

- **Aus. 197** Approaches to Sydney Harbour [Port Jackson]
- **Aus. 200** Port Jackson
- **Aus. 201** Port Jackson Eastern Sheet
- **Aus. 202** Port Jackson Central Sheet
- **Aus. 203** Port Jackson Western Sheet

Port services

Pilotage

Refer to the pilotage page on the website of the Port Authority of NSW.

Tugs

Tugs bookings can be made by an authorised shipping agent through Sydney’s Integrated Port System (ShIPS).

Pilotage requirements

Sydney is a pilotage port and pilotage is compulsory for vessels with an LOA of 30 metres or more.

However, under clause 109A of the Marine Safety Regulation 2016, a recreational vessel is exempted from pilotage.

Despite there being no requirement for recreational vessels to take a pilot, superyacht masters may request this service for any passage within the harbour. A master is encouraged to request these services if in any doubt regarding the procedures on the harbour or regarding his/her ability to safely manoeuvre within the harbour.

In certain circumstances the Harbour Master may require a pilot to conduct the vessel on its movement into, out of or within the port.

If the vessel is to be engaged in any commercial activity then the vessel must comply with the provisions of the Marine Safety Act 1998, and take a pilot as required.

For details of what is considered commercial activity refer to the Marine Safety Regulation 2016.
Wind and weather

The weather and sea conditions in Sydney Harbour are subject to sudden severe changes throughout the year. During settled weather in summer (December to February) the predominant wind is the strong, north easterly sea breeze. This breeze is often interrupted by the Southerly Buster, an intense line squall bringing a sudden wind shift from a southerly direction, freshening rapidly often to gale force. After a Southerly Buster the wind usually returns to its former direction and strength.

During autumn (March to May) and early winter, strong southerly and easterly winds are frequently associated with cyclones in the Tasman Sea, off the central coast of New South Wales.

During settled weather in winter (June to August) and early spring, strong westerly winds are predominant. The visibility is generally good, but fog, misty rain, dust and haze, sometimes occur. Intense easterly winds are sometimes experienced. These cause heavy seas along the coast which break heavily at Sydney Heads and occasionally pass through the entrance to break on to the harbour’s western foreshore. Easterly gales are frequently accompanied by haze banks which might affect the visibility of lights.

Wind Frequency Analyses are attached at the end of these Guidelines.

Port Authority of NSW
Vessel Traffic Service

The Port Authority of New South Wales operates a Vessel Traffic Service (Sydney Ports VTS) within Sydney Harbour. All vessels with an LOA of 30 metres or more are required to participate in the services.

Pilot boarding place

Port Authority of NSW’s Pilot Boarding Ground is 4.15 nautical miles east of Cape Solander (34° 01.02’S 151° 18.88’E).

By prior arrangement, pilots may board 4 nautical miles east of Hornby Light (33° 50.05’S 151° 21.68’E).

Disembarkation is at the Pilot Boarding Ground off Port Botany.
Speed restricted areas

In addition to the speed limits specified above for vessel with an LOA of 30 metres or more, the following areas on Sydney Harbour are subject to speed restrictions for all vessels.

A transit zone has been established in the vicinity of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. A 15 knot maximum speed limit is enforced in this zone. The zone is defined as the area bounded by:

a. At the eastern extremity, a straight line drawn between Bennelong Point and Kirribilli Point, and
b. At the western extremity, a straight line drawn between Millers Point and Blues Point, and
c. Excluding Walsh Bay, Sydney Cove and Lavender Bay.

Within this zone anchoring or drifting is prohibited unless in the event of an emergency. Vessels may only travel through the zone to reach an area adjacent to or outside of the transit zone.

Sydney Harbour Transit Zone
Darling Harbour – White Bay – Rozelle Bay – Blackwattle Bay

Speed limits are as indicated below.
The Spit

Speed limits are as indicated below.
Conduct within Sydney Harbour

General Conduct
All vessels with an LOA of 30 metres or more are required to participate in the Vessel Traffic Service. Section 2.1 of Harbour Master’s Directions refers.

Masters of superyachts are required to maintain a listening watch on VHF Ch 13 at all times and, unless fitted with AIS, advise Sydney Ports VTS when passing reporting points. When sightseeing close to the shore, it is advisable to passage in an anti-clockwise direction, keeping to the starboard side of the waterway in order to be consistent with the flow of the majority of traffic engaged in similar operations.

Special attention should be given when navigating in the vicinity of the Harbour Bridge, Sydney Cove and the Opera House, giving due regard to the increased traffic density and ferry operations in this area.

Special attention should also be given when navigating in the vicinity of Darling Harbour, giving due regard to the increased traffic density in this area.

Superyacht masters should use VHF Ch 13 as required to state their intentions to other large vessels, commercial vessels and ferries on the Harbour.

Priority Over Sail
Masters of sailing superyachts, when under sail, are required to give way to ferries displaying an orange diamond shape which grants ferries priority over sailing vessels by day.

Passage of seagoing ships and Naval Vessels
Vessels are not to impede the passage of seagoing ships, vessels under the conduct of a pilot, exempt master or naval vessels inside the shipping channel or fairway. Section 2.38 of the Harbour Master’s Directions refers.

Hovercraft, high speed ferries and Rivercats
These craft carry the normal lights for a power-driven vessel underway and, in addition, they exhibit an all-round flashing yellow light. This light does not provide any priority over sailing vessels.

Personal Watercraft (PWC)
Operating a PWC in Sydney Harbour is prohibited. In order to operate a PWC in other areas of NSW waters, a person is required to hold both a General and PWC licence. The Safe Boating Hand Book refers.

Bradleys Head Safe Water Mark
The buoy in position 143°(T), 350 metres from Bradleys Head Lighthouse is a safe water mark. All vessels navigating in the vicinity of this buoy shall pass so that they keep the buoy on their port side. Section 2.33 of Harbour Master’s Directions refers.

Prohibited areas for general navigation

General
Superyacht masters should familiarise themselves with the latest exclusion zones, navigation warnings, shipping movements and weather information as broadcasted by Sydney Ports VTS to all ships on VHF Ch 13. The prohibited areas for general navigation are listed in Section 2.34 of Harbour Master’s Directions.

Restricted access areas

Cockle Bay
Property NSW controls Cockle Bay. Vessels may enter whenever a closure notice is not displayed on the electronic notice panel on the centre of the Pyrmont Bridge. Contact may be made with the bridge controller to check on closures by calling Pyrmont Bridge on Channel 13. Vessels may berth at the visitor’s marina on the eastern side of the Bay, for which there is a fee. Use of the wharves on the western and southern sides is by arrangement with the Property NSW only.

Sydney Cove (Circular Quay)
Circular Quay is a ferry and passenger ship terminal. Access for recreational vessels is prohibited without written permission from NSW Maritime Division.

Campbells Cove
Masters of superyachts wishing to enter Campbells Cove must first receive written permission from NSW Maritime Division of Roads and Maritime Services.

Naval Waters
Naval Waters are indicated on the chart. A vessel may enter these waters, although Naval authorities are at liberty to restrict access when necessary. A vessel may not anchor in Naval Waters.

For security reasons, people are prohibited from climbing, attaching themselves or helping another person to attach themselves to a naval vessel.

A moving exclusion zone operates for naval vessels underway in NSW waters. This zone extends 200m from bow and 60m on either side and astern of a naval vessel.

A ‘distance off’ of 60m from a naval vessel which is moored, anchored or berthed applies at all times. Yellow buoys delineate prohibited zones around Garden Island and other naval installations. Penalties apply.

Parramatta River
Waters west of Silverwater Bridge are closed to all vessels other than ferries.
Collision or incident reports

If a superyacht navigating within Sydney Harbour has grounded, or has been involved in a collision with another vessel, navigation mark, wharf, or structure, or has been in serious danger of grounding, or in a close-quarters situation with another vessel, then the master is required to immediately report the incident to Sydney Ports VTS, Section 2.1.29 of Harbour Master’s Directions refers.

A Vessel Incident Report is available from the website of NSW Roads and Maritime.

Pollution, nuisance or danger

Roads and Maritime views seriously any kind of pollution occurring in State waters. The Regulations provide for heavy penalties upon conviction of offenders and Maritime Officers can issue on-the-spot fines for polluting.

Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 and the Marine Pollution Regulation 2014, it is illegal to discharge treated or untreated sewage into the waters of NSW.

Any incidents of pollution are to be reported immediately to Sydney Ports VTS who will initiate an immediate pollution response.

Berthing at commercial wharves

Where the Port Authority of NSW has approved the occupation of a commercial berth by a superyacht, then the conditions contained in section 2.85 of Harbour Master’s Directions apply.

Marine Pollution Act 2012

If discharge of oil or any oil mixture or liquid substance occurs from a superyacht into State waters, the master and the owner, and any other person whose act caused the discharge, are each guilty of an offence, punishable upon conviction by a court imposed fine of up to A$500,000.

If the offender, in the above circumstances, is a Corporation the penalty is increased to a court imposed fine of up to A$10 million.

A person who fails to inform of discharge or escape is liable to a court imposed fine of up to A$120,000.

The Port Authority of NSW may recover from the master or owner all costs and expenses incurred by it in respect of action taken for the recovery or dispersal of pollutants. (Section 46 of the Marine Pollution Act 2012 refers).

Pump-out facilities

Vessels with a toilet fitted should also have a holding tank. It is illegal to discharge raw sewage from toilets, holding tanks or effluent produced by on board sewage treatment plants, into NSW water. Superyacht operators have a variety of options available to properly manage sewage pollution from vessels.

Public pump-out facilities are provided in a variety of locations throughout NSW. For a list of pump-out facilities, visit the Roads and Maritime website or call 13 12 36. Superyachts may discharge their sewage at marinas fitted with sewage pump-out facilities or into a barge or road tanker suited for this purpose.
Garbage

The *International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)* (MARPOL 73/78) applies to all vessels including dinghies, yachts and fishing vessels. All garbage must be retained on board for disposal ashore.

Causing of nuisance or danger

Under the *Marine Safety Act 1998*, administered by NSW Maritime Division of Roads and Maritime, the master of a vessel in port may be penalised where the vessel interferes unreasonably with the lawful use of waters (or adjoining land) by other persons.

It is therefore obligatory that spotlights and floodlights on board superyachts be prevented from interfering with either the safe navigation of other vessels or the lawful use of adjoining land. The *Marine Safety Act 1998* provides for an ‘on the spot’ fine of A$500.00.

Superyacht masters should be aware of the wash generated by their superyacht or auxiliary tenders’ wake and are advised to operate at a speed which results in minimum discomfort to other users of the harbour. Excessive wash may also constitute an offence in certain circumstances.

Qualifications and registration

Boat licences and certificates of competency

Any person who operates a power driven vessel on NSW waters at a speed of 10 knots or more must hold a general boat driving licence.

It is neither the size of a vessel nor the power of an engine which determines whether a person needs to be licensed. It is the speed at which a vessel is operated.

Holders of NSW and interstate Certificates of Competency as a master, mate or coxswain are exempt from the requirement to hold a general boat driving licence.

A NSW general boat driving licence is not required by a master if that person is:

a. Not ordinarily resident in NSW, and
b. Has been operating power-driven recreational vessels in NSW waters for less than three months, and

c. Is authorised under the law of another State or Territory to operate the vessel concerned.

If the vessel is a commercial vessel the master and crew may require a NSW Certificate of Competency. Masters and crew holding overseas Certificates of Competency must apply to the Australian Maritime Safety Authority for recognition of their certificate. Recognition granted by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority will be automatically recognised in NSW. Certificates of competency issued interstate are automatically recognised in NSW.

On a case by case basis, Roads and Maritime may grant exemptions from the requirement to hold a general boat driving licence or Certificate of Competency.

Registration of vessels

All commercial and recreational vessels operating in NSW waters are required to be registered unless exempt. A vessel is exempt from registration if it:

a. Is not ordinarily operated in State waters, and

b. Has been in State waters for less than 3 months, and


c. Is registered under the law of another State or Territory, or of another country, and is operated in accordance with that law.
Protected animals

All native mammals, birds and reptiles are protected in NSW. Vessel operators must look out for and avoid harming these animals. Protected aquatic animals include whales, seals, dolphins, penguins and turtles, as well as a variety of water birds.

Boat-based whale watching has become a popular activity. To safeguard whales and minimise danger to vessels, there are certain rules governing vessel speeds and approach distances around whales (diagram below refers).

Large whales are known to enter Sydney Harbour during their migration season.

Approach distances

The approach distance for a vessel is 100 metres from a whale or 50 metres from a dolphin.

When calves are present, the approach distance for a vessel is 300 metres from a whale and 150 metres from a dolphin.

Speed

Vessels must always travel at a safe speed which will enable them to stop in time to avoid distressing or colliding with an animal. This speed will vary according to the circumstances and conditions. In the Caution Zone (a distance of between 100 metres and 300 metres from a whale and between 50 metres and 150 metres from a dolphin) vessel speed must be constant and slow, and leave a negligible wake.

Whales and dolphins rely on sounds underwater to communicate, find food and navigate so vessel operators must travel at a speed which will minimise the noise around them, and ensure their vessel does not suddenly change its direction.

Approach directions

Assess the direction in which the animals are travelling, then plan a course so that your vessel will not cut across their path, or put the vessel directly in front of or behind them. Approach the Caution Zone at an angle of not less than thirty degrees from their direction of travel at a steady constant speed, and remain aware of changes in animal behaviour or direction.

Under the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009, a vessel operator cannot enter the caution zone if there are more than two other vessels already in it. This may mean waiting for other vessels to leave. If there are two or fewer vessels in the Caution Zone, continue on course at a constant slow speed and travel alongside the animals.

If there is a calf in a group (defined as half the length of the adult of the same species), it is illegal under the Regulation to enter the Caution Zone.

Be aware of other vessel movements and changes in animal movement or behaviour. Never chase or encircle a whale or dolphin or pass through the middle of the group.
Action if a marine mammal approaches

Whales and dolphins sometimes approach vessels, or dolphins may ride the bow wave (it is an offence under the Regulation to encourage them to do so). In these situations, a master should not suddenly change speed or direction, and should slow down, engage neutral and wait until the animal has moved beyond the approach distance. The vessel should then be navigated at a constant slow speed until out of the Caution Zone.

Procedures and the Regulation can be found at Approaching whales and dolphins in NSW.

Penguin colonies in the Spring Cove area are protected by a four knot speed limit and a no anchoring or fishing zone.

For further details about the protection of whales, penguins and other aquatic animals, visit the Office of Environment & Heritage website or call 131 555.

Little penguins are another endangered species, and parts of Sydney Harbour have been declared a ‘critical habitat’ to better protect these birds. Special rules apply in these areas during the penguin’s breeding season (1 July–28 February), including restrictions on anchoring and approaching habitats.

Communications

VHF channels

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<tr>
<td>Channel 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney Ports VTS – Sydney / NSW Maritime Patrol Vessels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channel 16</td>
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<td>Distress and Calling</td>
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<td>Channel 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Boarding</td>
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<td>Channel 68, 69, 72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tugs – Sydney Harbour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channel 8, 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tugs – Botany Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Channel 16 / 67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water Police &amp; Marine Rescue NSW</td>
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Important contact details

| Roads and Maritime Info Line | 13 12 36 |
| Water Police                 | 02 9320 7499 (24 hour) |
| VTS Email                    | vts@portauthoritynsw.com.au |
| Port Authority of NSW        | 02 9296 4999 |
| Port Authority of NSW        | Sydney Ports VTS |
| Emergency Response           | VHF Channel 13 – Sydney Harbour |
|                             | VHF Channel 12 – Botany Bay |
| AQIS                        | 1800 900 090 |
| Department of Immigration and Border Protection | 02 6264 1111 |
| Property NSW                 | 02 9273 3800 |
Useful websites

Airservices Australia
airservices.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Meteorology
bom.gov.au

Department of Immigration and Border Protection
border.gov.au

Australian Maritime Safety Authority
amsa.gov.au

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity

Civil Aviation Safety Authority
casa.gov.au

Harbour Master’s Directions for Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay (Harbour Master’s Directions)
sydneyports.com.au/port_operations/harbour_masters_directions

National Parks and Wildlife Service
environment.nsw.gov.au

NSW Acts and Regulations
legislation.nsw.gov.au

NSW Superyacht Industry Association
superyachtsydney.com.au

Roads and Maritime Services
rms.nsw.gov.au

Superyacht Base Australia
rms.nsw.gov.au/maritime

Port Authority of NSW
portauthoritynsw.com.au

The Great Southern Route Directory
greatsouthernroute.com

Tourism NSW
visitnsw.com.au
Photographs

Anzac Bridge

Rozelle Bay Superyacht Marina
Campbells Cove
Sydney Cove – Circular Quay

Fort Denison

Garden Island Naval Base
Walsh Bay
Sydney Harbour Bridge

Jones Bay Wharf, Pyrmont

Kirribilli Point

PHOTO: ANDREA FRANCOLINI
Anzac Bridge

Glebe Island Bridge

Farm Cove
Wind frequency analyses

WIND FREQUENCY ANALYSIS (in km/h)
SYDNEY AIRPORT AMO    STATION NUMBER 066037
Latitude: -33.94°   Longitude: 151.17°

9 am
23333 Total Observations (1939 to 2004)

Calm 10%

Wind directions are divided into eight compass directions. Calm has no direction.
An asterisk (*) indicates that calm is less than 1%.
An observed wind speed which falls precisely on the boundary between two divisions (eg. 10km/h) will be included in the lower range (eg 1-10 km/h). Only quality controlled data have been used.

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WIND FREQUENCY ANALYSIS (in km/h)
SYDNEY AIRPORT AMO STATION NUMBER 066037
Latitude: -33.94 ° Longitude: 151.17 °

3 pm
23407 Total Observations (1939 to 2004)

Calm 2%

Wind directions are divided into eight compass directions. Calm has no direction.
An asterisk (*) indicates that calm is less than 1%
An observed wind speed which falls precisely on the boundary between two divisions (eg 10km/h) will be included in the lower range (eg 1-10 km/h). Only quality controlled data have been used.

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