



Advisory Note 10/2017
Supersedes 05/2011

VESSEL-SOURCED SEWAGE DISCHARGE RESTRICTIONS IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AND TORRES STRAIT

Purpose

This advisory note provides guidance to coastal pilots about vessel-sourced sewage discharge restrictions in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) and Torres Strait.

AMSA acknowledges that adhering to these restrictions is the master's responsibility, however it is understood that coastal pilots receive queries from masters and crew regarding the relevant discharge restrictions, from time to time. This PAN provides relevant information to assist coastal pilots when responding to such queries.

MARPOL

Vessel-sourced sewage discharge restrictions in Australian waters (including the GBRMP and Torres Strait) are established under Australian law. These laws give effect to Annex IV of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). *Marine Order 96 (Marine pollution prevention – sewage) 2013 (MO96)* provides that a foreign vessel must comply with the requirements of Annex IV that apply to the vessel.

There are three main considerations related to discharges of vessel-sourced sewage:

- the type of sewage treatment plant (STP) onboard (if any) and whether the plant has current IMO-approval and/or relevant certification
- the type of sewage to be discharged (e.g. treated / comminuted* & disinfected / untreated), and
- the distance from 'nearest land', where the discharge is intended to take place.

*Comminute means to pulverize, to reduce to minute particles or fragments.

Nearest Land

MARPOL defines 'nearest land' to normally mean the territorial sea baseline (of the territory in question), however in the north-eastern part of Australia (including the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait), nearest land is defined by a series of specified coordinates.

The [MARPOL Nearest Land](#) document (available at AMSA's website), provides visual maps of 'nearest land' for these regions. Note that the location of the 'nearest land' boundary in these areas:

- is seaward of the outer eastern edge of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR)
- is generally aligned with the GBRMP boundary
- encloses large parts of Torres Strait.

Maps depicting the nearest land boundary for the Torres Strait and the Inner Route pilotage areas are shown in Figures 1 and 2 below for reference purposes.

Sewage Treatment Plants (STP's)

STP's may use biological, bioreactor, chemical, or membrane filtering processes, or a combination thereof, to achieve the minimum treatment standards (as specified by the IMO).

Ship surveys undertaken by classification societies shall be such as to ensure that the structure, equipment, systems, fittings, arrangements and material fully comply with the applicable requirements of Annex IV to MARPOL.

Vessels on International Voyages

In the case of vessels on international voyages (to and continuing in Australian waters), the discharge of effluent produced by an approved STP *is* permitted in the GBRMP and Torres Strait (with no restrictions related to the distance from nearest land), provided that:

- the STP is approved by the Administration[^], taking into account the standards and test methods developed by the IMO[~] (referred to in regulation 9.1.1 of MARPOL Annex IV), and
- the discharge shall not produce any visible floating solids, nor any discolouration of the surrounding water when discharged.

Vessels that do not have an approved STP must have either a sewage 'comminuting and disinfecting' system onboard (approved by the Administration), with corresponding facilities for the temporary storage of the sewage, or a holding tank for untreated sewage. Under Australian law and MARPOL, vessel-sourced sewage effluent from these types of systems cannot be discharged anywhere within the GBRMP, nor anywhere enclosed by the 'nearest land' coordinates (including the relevant area within Torres Strait).

'Comminuted and disinfected' sewage (generated using an approved system in accordance with regulation 9.1.2 of MARPOL Annex IV) is permitted to be discharged no less than 3NM from nearest land, provided that sewage originating from holding tanks, or sewage originating from spaces containing live animals, is discharged at a moderate rate while the ship is proceeding enroute at a speed not less than 4 knots. MO96 provides standards for the rate of discharge of such sewage.

Untreated sewage can only be discharged at a distance no less than 12NM from nearest land, subject to the same discharge rate and vessel speed requirements described above for 'comminuted and disinfected' sewage.

Further information about MARPOL's vessel-sourced sewage discharge restrictions can be found on AMSA's website (see Table 3 on the [Summary of Discharge Standards](#) page).

[^]For the purposes of STP approval, 'Administration' means the Government of the State under whose authority the ship is operating. With respect to a ship entitled to fly a flag of any State, the Administration is the Government of that State.

[~]Refer to the relevant information contained in the 'Recommendation on International effluent standards and guidelines for performance tests for sewage treatment plants', or in the 'Revised guidelines on implementation of effluent standards and performance tests for sewage treatment plants', adopted by the Marine Environment Protection Committee of the IMO.

Cruise Vessels

Cruise (passenger) vessels intending to operate in the GBRMP must obtain a permit issued by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), prior to operating in such waters. Permits may specify certain limitations on the operation of a STP within the marine park. Cruise vessels operating under a Marine Park permit must ensure that:

- treated sewage (from an IMO-approved STP) is only discharged at a distance greater than 3NM from a reef, island or the mainland
- 'comminuted and disinfected' sewage (from an IMO-approved STP) is not discharged in the Marine Park whatsoever (vessels may only discharge this type of sewage at a distance greater than 3NM from the boundary of the Marine Park)
- untreated sewage (or treated sewage from a non-IMO approved STP) is not discharged into the Marine Park whatsoever (vessels may only discharge this type of sewage at a distance greater than 12NM from the boundary of the Marine Park)
- vessel-sourced sewage is not discharged anywhere when operating within the Whitsundays Plan of Management area.

Further information about sewage discharge restrictions in the GBRMP can be found on the [Vessel Sewage Regulations](#) page at GBRMPA's website.

Further Information & Suspected Non-Compliance

Further information about AMSA's responsibility for the application and enforcement of MARPOL in areas of Commonwealth jurisdiction, is available in the 'Ship Pollution Regulations [Fact Sheet](#)', available at AMSA's website.

Pilots should note that Queensland coastal waters (extending 3NM seaward from the territorial sea baseline) fall under the State of Queensland's jurisdiction and incorporate different, and sometimes more stringent vessel-sourced sewage discharge restrictions. For further information about the discharge restrictions which apply in Queensland coastal waters, please refer to the relevant [page](#) on Maritime Safety Queensland's website.

Masters should also be aware that local laws may prohibit discharges in port. When within port limits, masters should check with the respective port authority regarding the prevailing discharge restrictions, as required.

If any vessel is suspected of illegally discharging sewage in Australian waters, it should be reported to AMSA, preferably via the online [Marine Pollution Report](#) (POLREP) available at AMSA's website. Relevant evidence such as photographs can be uploaded via the online reporting process to support subsequent investigation. Alternatively, please call either of AMSA's 24hr Incident Response telephone numbers as follows:

- Within Australia: 1800 641 792
- Outside Australia: +61 2 6230 6811

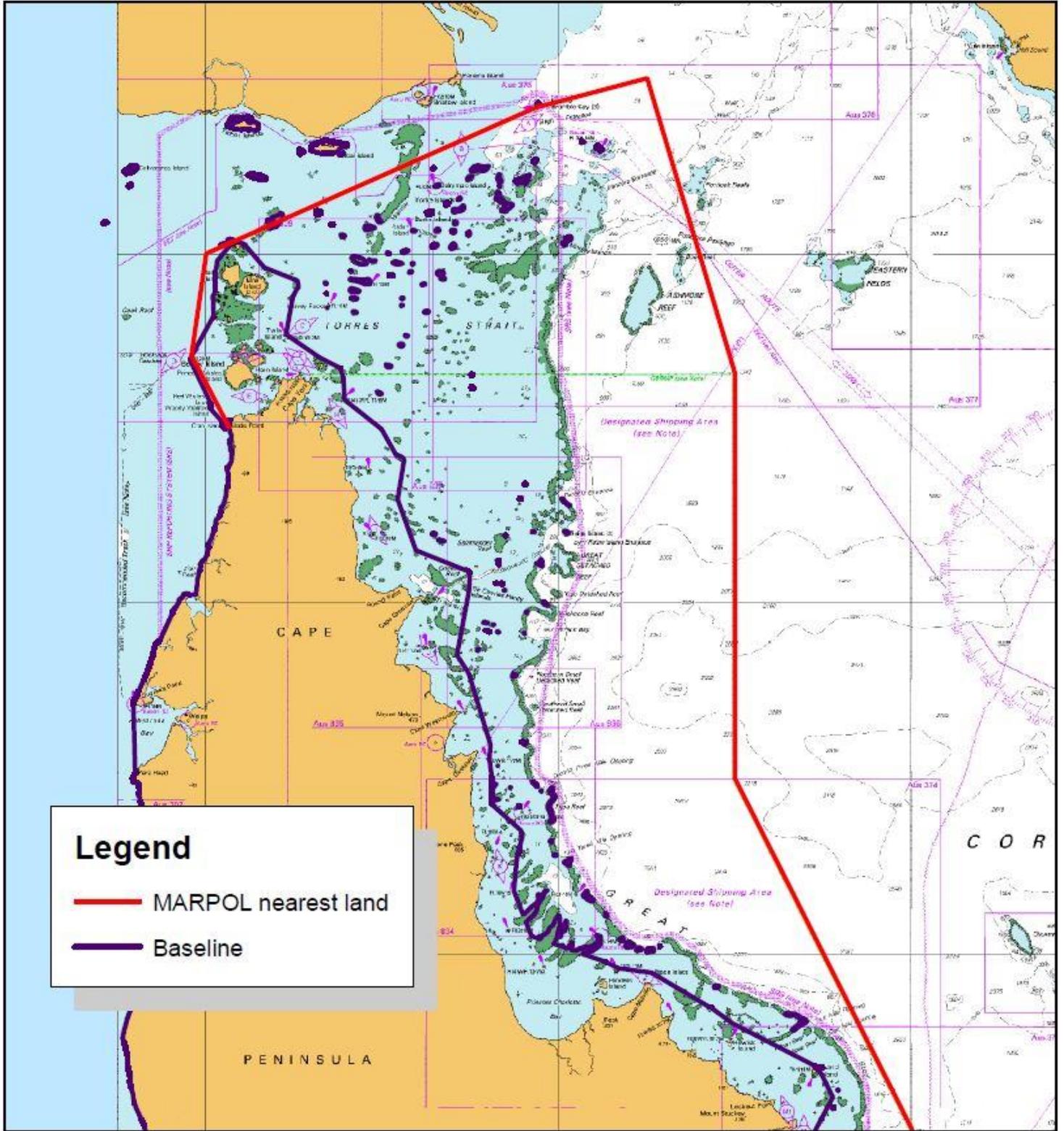


Figure 1 – Nearest Land Boundary Map (Torres Strait to Cape Flattery)

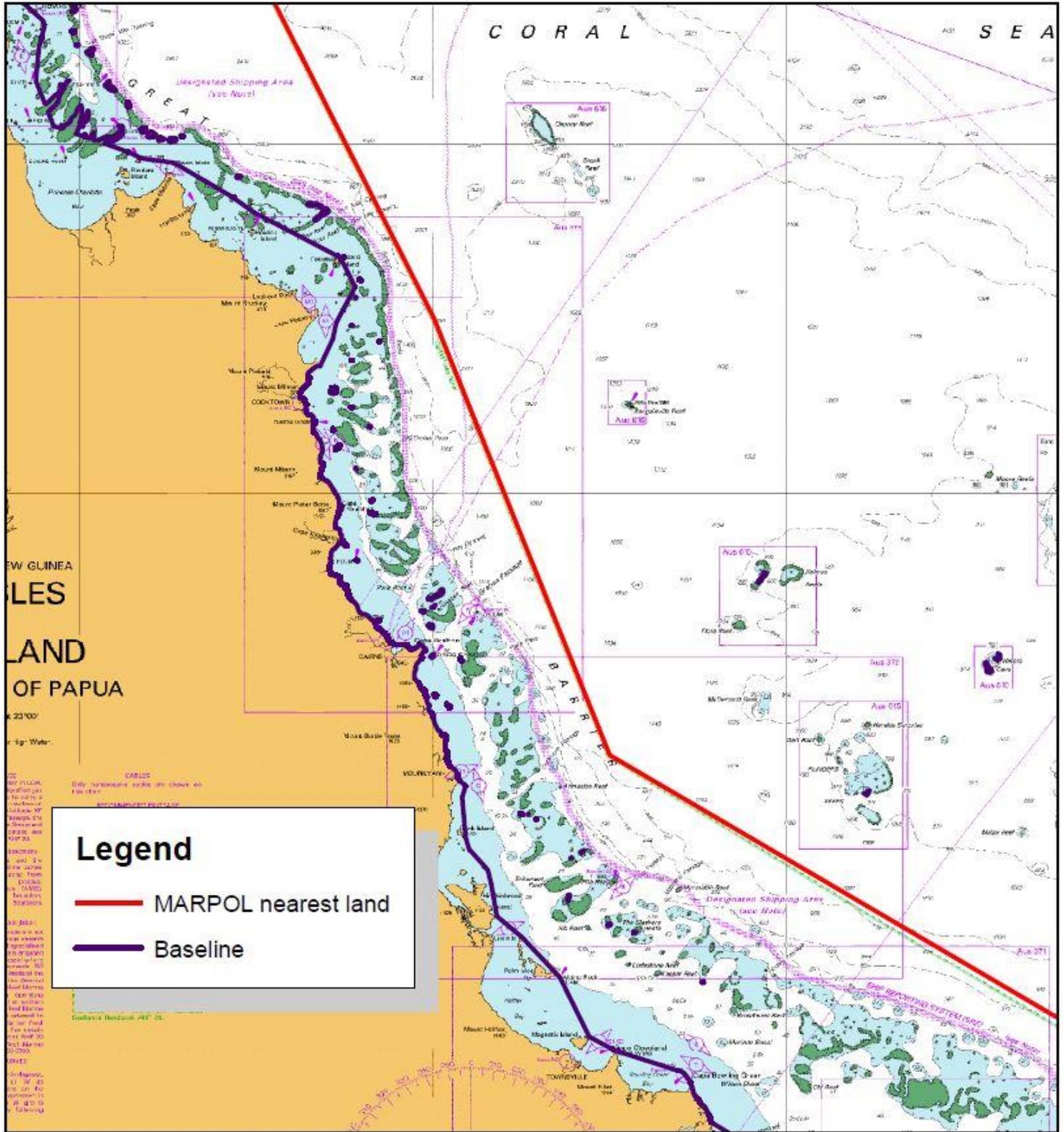


Figure 2 – Nearest Land Boundary Map (Three Mile Opening to Cape Bowling Green)

Please forward any queries about this PAN to coastal.pilotage@amsa.gov.au.