



# Navigational watchkeeping principles guidance on domestic commercial vessels

## General

This guidance provides supporting information for domestic commercial vessel operators in determining voyage planning and navigational watchkeeping requirements for their vessels.

## Certification

Crew members in charge of the navigational or cargo watch must be appropriately certified in accordance with [Marine Order 505 \(certificates of competency – national law\) 2022](#) for the length and operational area of the vessel, as applicable.

## Voyage planning

### General requirements

The intended voyage needs to be planned in advance, taking into consideration all relevant information, and any voyage plans cross-checked before the voyage commences. Additional considerations may be necessary for vessels carrying hazardous, dangerous, toxic, or highly flammable cargoes.

### Planning prior to each voyage

Prior to each voyage the master and other appropriately qualified watchkeepers need to ensure that the intended route from point of departure to the intended destination is planned and cross-checked. Adequate and appropriate charts<sup>1</sup> and other nautical publications necessary for the intended voyage must be used.

The charts<sup>1</sup> must contain accurate, complete and up to date information regarding those navigational limitations and hazards which are of a permanent or predictable nature, and which are relevant to the safe navigation of the vessel.

### Verification and display of planned route

The planned route must be clearly displayed on appropriate charts<sup>1</sup> and be continuously available to the person in charge of the watch, who will verify each course to be followed prior to using it during the voyage.

### Deviation from planned route

If a decision is made, during a voyage, to change the planned route, then an amended route must be planned prior to deviating substantially from the originally planned route.

## Appropriate crewing

Having completed the voyage planning the master needs to determine the watchkeeping schedule to allow for safe navigation of the vessel. The risk of fatigue must be considered as part of the risk assessment.

<sup>1</sup>Nautical charts and chart systems must comply with the requirements of the National Standard for Commercial Vessels

## Keeping a navigational watch

### Watchkeeping arrangements

In determining the watchkeeping arrangements, the master must consider all relevant circumstances and conditions to ensure safe and effective navigation as well as a proper lookout is continuously maintained including:

- watchkeepers observe the International Rules for the Prevention of Collision at Sea (“COLREGs”);
  - continuously monitor and confirm the vessel’s position;
  - ensuring the wheelhouse is never left unattended during the voyage;
  - ensuring watchkeepers are not assigned additional duties or tasks which could interfere with the safe navigation of the vessel;
  - communication requirements with other vessels and/or with shore;
  - consideration of weather, sea, visibility, tidal conditions, traffic density and proximity to dangers to navigation; and
  - considerations of the risk of fatigue for crew members assigned watchkeeping duties.
- in an emergency, raising the alarm, informing the master, taking all measures to prevent any damage to the vessel, its cargo, and persons on board, and, if necessary, requesting assistance from the shore authorities or neighbouring vessels;
  - being aware of the vessel’s stability condition at all times;
  - take early and appreciable action including changing course or speed and using signalling equipment so as not to allow hazardous situations to develop;
  - monitoring radio and communication equipment for transmissions
  - ensuring logbook is maintained and required entries are made;
  - helping vessels or persons in distress.

### Undertaking a navigational watch

The person in charge of the watch must be trained and competent in the usage of, and limitations of all navigational equipment installed on the vessel. They must be competent in using the safety equipment and know how and when to raise the alarm.

The person in charge of the watch is responsible amongst others for:

- maintaining a continuous state of vigilance by sight and hearing as well as by all other available means;
- carrying out master’s instructions, standing orders and night orders;
- following any procedure to alert the master;
- monitoring weather updates and forecasts and taking the necessary measures to protect the vessel, persons on board and cargo in worsening conditions;

### Handing over the watch

It is good practice to ensure that a procedure is in place for a formal handing over of the watch. A handover checklist can be an effective tool to ensure the continuity of the watch, and that the incoming watchkeeper is properly prepared and ready to takeover. This may include relaying information with regards to the vessel’s position, speed, proximity to hazards, current and anticipated traffic, sea state, weather, communications received and defects.

The incoming watchkeeper should also be satisfied of the serviceability of all navigation equipment, lights displayed, and other signalling equipment, ensuring navigation aids and radios are properly functioning and tuned. Enough time must be provided to ensure the relieving watchkeeper is prepared to assume the watch, with vision adjusted.