



# Guidance on updated Exemption 24 – Marine safety (Emergency service vessels)

Exemption 24 allows trained volunteer emergency services crew to operate a vessel without a certificate of competency.

An updated exemption 24 comes into effect from 1 July 2025. Find out what's changing, who is eligible, what activities are permitted, and the training and crewing standards you will need to meet under the updated exemption.

## Summary of changes

You can [find out more about what's changing in the consultation feedback report](http://www.amsa.gov.au/exemption-24-consultation-feedback-report) (www.amsa.gov.au/exemption-24-consultation-feedback-report).

What's changing	Before	From 1 July 2025
<b>Scope and definitions</b>	Covered survey frequency and certificate of competency requirements Definitions were difficult to interpret and apply	Only covers certificate of competency (crew competency) requirements Clearer definitions to support consistent application and compliance
<b>Organisation requirements</b>	Different requirements for VMR, SES and fire services.	Same requirements for VMR, SES and fire services.
<b>Permitted activities</b>	Difficult to understand and inconsistently applied	Clear guidance on in-scope activities
<b>Crew competency requirements</b>	Varied between VMRs and other services	Consistent for all eligible volunteer emergency services
<b>Crew sharing</b>	Not addressed	Supported and clarified
<b>Application process</b>	Required for emergency service organisations (Form AMSA792)	Not required for eligible organisations



What's changing	Before	From 1 July 2025
<b>Training for 12–24m vessels</b>	Not specified	Required from 1 July 2026
<b>Radio certification</b>	Always required	Depends on vessel and operation
<b>Trainer requirements</b>	Validated trainers and assessors required	Flexible arrangements introduced

### National law requirements still apply

Exemption 24 only relates to crew competency requirements. Emergency service vessels must still meet the same requirements as other domestic commercial vessels. This includes:

- having a valid permission or certification for their vessel (such as a non-survey vessel approval, Class C restricted operations vessel approval or a certificate of survey)
- being listed on a certificate of operation (unless exempt)
- operating under a safety management system (SMS) that meets the requirements of Marine Order 504
- displaying a unique vessel identifier (UVI) (unless exempt)

[Find out more about the requirements for DCVs on our website](http://www.amsa.gov.au/vessels-operators/domestic-commercial-vessels) (www.amsa.gov.au/vessels-operators/domestic-commercial-vessels).

## Eligible master and crew

Under exemption 24, masters and crew do not need a certificate of competency if they:

- are undertaking permitted activities (described below)
- meet competency requirements, and
- are either:
  - a worker (staff or volunteer) of an eligible organisation such as a VMR, SES or a volunteer fire service organisation
  - a volunteer of other emergency service organisations.

## Eligible organisations

The exemption applies to eligible master and crew working on vessels operated by:

- emergency service organisations (ESOs)
- volunteer marine rescue organisations (VMRs)
- fire service organisations (FSOs)

### Emergency service organisations:

- are established to provide emergency response, management or disaster relief, and
- have responsibilities assigned by a state, territory or the Australian Government during emergencies.

Examples: State Emergency Services (SES), surf lifesaving organisations.



**Volunteer marine rescue organisations:**

- focus on marine rescue, public safety or search activities
- have responsibilities assigned by a state, territory or the Australian Government during emergencies.

**Fire service organisations:**

- prevent or suppress fires
- protect people and property from fire-related danger or harm.

Find full definitions of eligible organisations in the exemption.

**You don't need to apply to operate under exemption 24**

## Multi-agency crewing

You can crew a vessel using volunteers from other eligible organisations under the exemption.

The vessel owner must ensure all crew meet the training and assessment requirements.

The vessel owner must also ensure all masters and crew receive proper induction, safety and emergency training. This is part of the vessel's safety management system as per Marine Order 504.

## Permitted activities

Under this exemption vessels can:

- conduct search and rescue
- emergency or disaster or response activities
- fire-fighting
- mitigate threats to public safety
- other related incidental activities.

Other incidental activities may include:

- transporting individuals and/or equipment to and from incidents
- training volunteers or employees
- promoting public awareness
- pollution incident support.

Vessels must be appropriately equipped and/or certified under the National Law for any activities undertaken.

## Excluded activities

Examples of activities not covered under the exemption include:

- charter activities such as scheduled (non-urgent) medical transfers
- towing outside a search and rescue event
- recreational boat licence training



- other commercial activities.

## Operational judgement

You may need to decide on a case-by-case basis if an operation or activity is permitted. Example scenarios include:

- unexpected events that are likely to become an emergency without emergency services intervention
- emergency towing to a practical safe haven
- remote area medical transfers where commercial services are not available.

If your activity isn't covered by exemption 24 (or another exemption), you must comply with National Law crew competency requirements.

### Make sure your SMS is up to date

Operations must be covered in the vessel's safety management system. The crew must also be trained for the specific risks involved. [Find out more about SMS](http://www.amsa.gov.au/vessels-operators/domestic-commercial-vessels/safety-management-systems) ([www.amsa.gov.au/vessels-operators/domestic-commercial-vessels/safety-management-systems](http://www.amsa.gov.au/vessels-operators/domestic-commercial-vessels/safety-management-systems)).

## Fees, payments and funding

Under this exemption, organisations:

- **cannot charge fees or seek payment** for any services or activities conducted under the exemption. This excludes government funding arrangements.
- may accept unsolicited donations, including after a rescue.

Commercial activities are not permitted under exemption 24. If your organisation conducts commercial activities, you must comply with the full National Law requirements, including crew competency requirements, while undertaking these activities.

## Crewing requirements

To be a master or crew member under this exemption, a person must:

- be at least 16 years old
- meet medical and eyesight standards
- inform the operator of any relevant long term or permanent medical conditions that could impact their duties
- meet their organisation's internal training and recordkeeping requirements
- only carry out duties or functions if they have met the relevant competency, training and assessment requirements for their role.



### Existing certifications and qualifications

- People certified by a VMR before 1 July 2018 can continue carrying out duties under that approval.
- Masters or crew with a valid National Law certificate of competency can operate within the limits of their certification.

## Training and assessment requirements

To operate under exemption 24, all masters and crew must meet minimum training and assessment requirements for their role. A training record for all masters and crew must be kept.

### Training requirements by role

Role or function	Requirements
<b>Master a vessel operating in inland waters or personal watercraft (PWC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational boating operator licence for relevant state or territory</li> <li>• Meet 3nm master competency requirements</li> <li>• Complete any vessel-specific training provided by the operator</li> </ul>
<b>Crew or deckhand</b> Not required for crew in inland waters or on PWCs Less than 500kW inboard engine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current first aid certificate (at least HLTAID011 <i>Provide first aid</i>)</li> <li>• Complete training equivalent to 4 MAR Maritime Training Package units (MARF028, MARF029, MARF060 and MARN008)</li> <li>• Complete an induction provided by the vessel's operator</li> <li>• Any additional units of competency or training required by the vessel's operator</li> </ul>
<b>Master up to 3nm from shore or sheltered waters</b> Less than 12m long Less than 500kW inboard engine (no limit on outboard)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current first aid certificate (at least HLTAID011 <i>Provide first aid</i>)</li> <li>• Short Range Operator Certificate of Proficiency (SROCP)</li> <li>• Training equivalent to MAR Maritime Training Package Coxswain Grade 2 near coastal course (Cert I)</li> <li>• Internal training on safe towing arrangements</li> <li>• Any additional units of competency or training required by the vessel's operator</li> </ul>
<b>Master beyond 3nm (up to 30nm or 50nm in QLD Great Barrier Reef region or Torres Strait Zone)</b> Less than 24m long Less than 500kW inboard engine (no limit on outboard)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current first aid certificate (at least HLTAID011 <i>Provide first aid</i>)</li> <li>• SROCP or Long Range Operator Certificate of Proficiency (LROCP) (if fitted with HF radio)</li> <li>• Training equivalent to MAR Maritime Training Package Coxswain Grade 1 near coastal course (Cert II)*</li> </ul>



Role or function	Requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal training on safe towing arrangements and search and rescue coordination</li> <li>Any additional units of competency or training required by the vessel's operator</li> </ul> <p>*MAR units <i>Survival at sea using survival craft</i> and <i>Perform basic servicing and maintenance of main propulsion and auxiliary systems</i> are only required if applicable.</p>
<b>Master 12–24m vessels (from 1 July 2026)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet Master beyond 3nm competency requirements</li> <li>Plus, additional MAR deck and engineering unit requirements from 1 July 2026*</li> </ul> <p>*This is due to increased complexity of the machinery, ancillary and auxiliary equipment. Details in the exemption.</p>

## MAR training packages (or equivalent)

Accredited courses must be delivered by a registered training organisation (RTO).

Non-accredited courses must be delivered by a validated trainer or a supporting trainer under direction.

A **validated trainer** must:

- meet RTO trainer requirements (for example hold relevant credentials such as a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment).

A **supporting trainer** must:

- have relevant maritime experience or vocational competencies
- deliver training under the direction of a validated trainer.

A validated trainer must oversee and guide training when it's delivered under direction. They ensure the quality of training provided and that it meets the training package requirements.

## Assessment

All masters and crew must pass an assessment by a validated assessor confirming competence to undertake their duties (apart from those operating a PWC or in inland waters who instead need to complete the relevant in-house training).

**Validated assessors** must:

- be a validated trainer, or
- hold a current assessor skill set - TAESS00019, TAESS00011, TAESS00001 (or successor).

A supporting assessor who has relevant maritime experience or vocational competencies can gather evidence for assessment under validated trainer direction.

Only validated assessors can make the final assessment judgement.



## Get help

If you need help or have questions about the updated exemption 24, contact AMSA Connect.

Our operators are available from 8 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday AEST by calling [1800 627 484](tel:1800627484) or emailing [AMSAConnect@amsa.gov.au](mailto:AMSAConnect@amsa.gov.au).

You can [find out more about exemption 24 on our website](http://www.amsa.gov.au/about/regulations-and-standards/exemption-24-marine-safety-emergency-services-vessels) ([www.amsa.gov.au/about/regulations-and-standards/exemption-24-marine-safety-emergency-services-vessels](http://www.amsa.gov.au/about/regulations-and-standards/exemption-24-marine-safety-emergency-services-vessels)).