Australian Government
Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Proposed changes to certificate of survey requirements

Consultation: Marine Order 503

Proposed changes

We want your feedback on these proposed changes.

Clarifying and updating the requirements for novel vessels

New requirement: Recognised organisations (ROs) to develop and apply technical specifications for novel vessels. ROs to survey novel vessels according to these specifications. Novel vessels under 35 metres will not need a certificate of class.

Applies to: Vessels using novel technologies such as lithium battery electric vessels, alternative fuels (e.g. methanol), and other novel designs.

Background

Australia's domestic commercial vessel (DCV) sector is increasingly adopting new and emerging technologies—such as battery electric propulsion and alternative fuels.

These novel vessel technologies often fall outside existing technical standards, including the National Standard for Commercial Vessels (NSCV). Clearer processes will improve certainty for operators, surveyors, and designers.

What we're proposing

We are proposing that ROs be permitted to develop and apply technical specifications for novel vessels. ROs would survey novel vessels according to these specifications. Novel vessels under 35 metres would not be required to obtain a certificate of classification.

This proposed change would involve:

- clarifying the criteria for determining when a vessel is novel
- requiring ROs to develop and apply technical specifications for a novel vessel

- clarifying the survey requirements for novel vessels, including survey frequency.

This approach establishes performance-based outcomes for owners of novel vessels by providing flexibility in the way ROs assure the safety of novel vessels, and controlling the unique risks associated with emerging technologies.

How performance-based outcomes would work

Example: 11.8m Fully foiling, battery-electric (440 kWh) Class 2D vessel, 12 pax

Vessel element	Applicable survey standard
Structure	NSCV
Arrangements	NSCV
Displacement mode stability	NSCV
General electric system	NSCV
Lithium-ion propulsion battery system	Class rules
Fire safety	NSCV and class rules
Foil design	Performance-based outcome
Foil-borne stability	Performance-based outcome
Active foil-control system	Performance-based outcome

Because neither class rules nor NSCV fully cover foil design, foil-borne stability, or the active foil-control system, these elements are addressed through performance-based outcomes. These require the vessel to demonstrate stable foil-borne operation, safe transitions between foil and displacement modes, and a controlled fallback mode if the control system fails.

The RO verifies compliance through design review, construction surveys, and sea trials. Survey frequency is set by the RO or defaults to 'MO503 high survey frequency' where not specified.

Next steps

AMSA is developing a policy framework to enable risk-based novel vessel certification. This will allow us to tailor the design and survey requirements for lower risk novel vessels.

AMSA will release further information about the framework later in 2026.

Standards

Change to existing requirements: Allow a new vessel that is less than 35m in length to meet the construction, engineering or anchoring standards in either the National Standard for Commercial Vessels (NSCV) or class rules.
Applies to: New vessels under 35m in length.

We're proposing that new vessels less than 35m can choose to comply with either the construction, engineering or anchoring standards in the NSCV or class rules if design approval was completed by an RO.

Change to existing requirements: Include the use of Clause 3.12 of USL Code 5F (1989) for transitional vessels.
Applies to: Transitional vessels.

We're proposing to change the transitional standards for arrangement, accommodation and personal safety to include the use of Clause 3.12 of USL Code 5F (1989). This change includes escape provisions that are not covered in the NSCV Part C1.

Change to existing requirements: Require new vessels to meet the watertight and weathertight integrity standards in the NSCV Part C2.
Applies to: New vessels that are entering service for the first time, or new vessels that have made a Schedule 1 change that affects watertight and weathertight integrity.

We're proposing to make it mandatory for applicable vessels to comply with the NSCV Part C2 for watertight and weathertight integrity standards. Currently, new vessels can meet either the NSCV Part C2 or the USL Code.

Change to existing requirements: Clarify 'sister vessel' arrangements.
Applies to: Sister vessels.

A sister vessel is a vessel built to the same design as another vessel. These vessels can use the original vessel's plan approval for a certificate of survey application instead of having to apply for a full plan approval. This makes it easier to obtain a certificate of survey for a sister vessel.

We're proposing that the definition of sister vessel be clarified to better explain when vessels may access this arrangement.

Vessel changes/modifications

Change to existing requirements: Clarify the Schedule 1 vessel changes.
Applies to: Vessels with a Schedule 1 change.

We're proposing to clarify the Schedule 1 changes that apply to vessels. This includes clarifying that the following scenarios are Schedule 1 changes:

- any change or addition of a service category that has not been permitted in the last 5 years, except for decreases in operational area only (e.g. from 3C to 3D)
- a vessel carries a class of dangerous goods that it has not previously been permitted to carry
- a vessel commences overnight operations with berths in use (instead of berths being merely present), or the voyage is more than 36 hours without access to a shore-based sleeping facility, or where the NSCV C1 applies, there is an increase in accommodation levels
- the maximum number of people on board the vessel exceeds a previous certificate of survey limit for the vessel within the last 5 years
- an increase in the windage profile of the vessel that invalidates information used in the design approval
- removing, repositioning, installing or modifying certain listed equipment, including stern gear, that invalidates previous structural or stability design approval calculations or assumptions.

Change to existing requirements: Allow a new vessel that is less than 35m in length to only comply with updated standards for an area of the vessel affected by a Schedule 1 change.
Applies to: New vessels under 35m in length.

We're proposing that new vessels less than 35m in length that have had a Schedule 1 change will only need to meet the updated NSCV or class rules standards for the area of the vessel affected by the change. E.g. installing a new refrigeration system will require a vessel to comply with updated NSCV standards for the system, but not require unrelated parts of the vessel to be brought up to current standards.

Change to existing requirements: Amend the survey requirements for vessels with certain Schedule 1 changes.
Applies to: Vessels with a Schedule 1 change.

We're proposing to amend the survey requirements for certain types of Schedule 1 changes.

This includes only requiring an initial survey for the area of the vessel e.g. engine, affected by the change for either:

- clause 7(b): an increase in propulsion power, or

- clause 8: a change to the vessel's loading, structure or watertight integrity that requires the vessel's structural or stability design approval to be re-assessed.

Vessels with these changes do not need to reassess areas unrelated to the change.

Change to existing requirements: Reduce the requirements when updating certain vessel components and equipment.
Applies to: Existing vessels changing certain vessel components and equipment.

We're proposing to reduce the transitional standards that apply to a vessel when there is a change to any of the following aspects:

- battery type or capacity
- fixed fire system
- gas system
- electrical power and generators.

This proposed change will enable existing vessel owners to make improvements without triggering transitional requirements for the whole vessel. Owners still need to:

- ensure the updated components and equipment meet current standards
- comply with a reduced set of transitional standards for other aspects of the vessel.

Survey requirements

Change to existing requirements: Align timeframes with the 5 year survey cycle.
Applies to: Vessels relying on a previous certificate of survey to determine the standards or survey requirements that apply.

We're proposing to change the timeframe from 2 years to 5 years for the maximum length of time:

- a new vessel can re-enter survey while still using the standards that applied to the vessel when it was issued a certificate of survey
- a vessel last held a certificate of survey when applying for a renewal
- before a vessel with an expired certificate of survey is required to undergo an initial survey before a certificate of survey can be issued.

We're also proposing to introduce a maximum five year period during which a previously permitted type of operation may be reinstated without being treated as a Schedule 1 change.

These changes will align with the 5 year survey cycle.

Change to existing requirements: Allow more time to conduct periodic surveys.
Applies to: Vessels undergoing their periodic survey.

We're proposing to increase the timeframe in which certain vessels have to undergo a periodic survey. The change will apply to medium-risk vessels and allow a 'Year 3 periodic survey' to be completed in the 15 months before, or 3 months after it is due. This change will give these operators more flexibility to complete a periodic survey.

New requirement: Clarify that a copy of an electrical survey must be supplied to the person conducting the commissioning survey of a vessel.
Applies to: Vessels undergoing initial survey.

We're proposing to require a copy of an electrical survey to be provided to the person conducting the commissioning survey of a vessel if the electrical survey was done by a licenced electrician or a person qualified only for extra-low voltage survey. The person conducting the commissioning survey has responsibility for providing AMSA with a copy.

New requirement: Clarify that a person conducting an electrical survey must hold appropriate public liability insurance.
Applies to: Persons conducting electrical surveys.

We're proposing to clarify that anyone who is undertaking an electrical survey must hold appropriate public liability insurance. This is consistent with the insurance requirements for persons conducting other types of surveys.

New requirement: Change the survey frequency requirements for wooden vessels at their next renewal.
Applies to: Traditional timber vessels.

We're proposing to change the survey frequency for traditionally constructed timber vessels at their next reissue of a certificate of survey. Vessels without a modifier condition will move to a medium survey frequency category, and those with a modifier condition will move to a high survey frequency category.

Certificates of survey

Change to existing requirements: Allow a certificate of survey to be varied to reduce the number of people allowed on board.
Applies to: Vessels seeking to reduce the number of people they are permitted to carry.

We're proposing to allow a certificate of survey holder to seek a variation when reducing the number of people they are permitted to carry on board. This will reduce the costs for survey holders because they'll no longer need to submit a full renewal application when making this change.

Note: Minimum and appropriate crewing requirements under Marine Order 504 will still apply.

Change to existing requirements: Increase the maximum period a certificate of survey may be suspended for.
Applies to: Non-compliant vessels.

We're proposing to increase the maximum duration a vessel can have its certificate of survey suspended for, from 6 months to 24 months. This change aligns Marine Order 503 with the suspension periods in other marine orders.

Change to existing requirements: Clarify the conditions where AMSA may revoke a certificate of survey.
Applies to: Vessels involved in marine incidents or vessels that are no longer domestic commercial vessels.

We're proposing to clarify that AMSA may revoke a certificate of survey if a vessel is involved in a serious incident, such as sinking or being significantly damaged. This change will ensure vessels are suitably repaired and re-certified before restarting operations after a serious incident.

We're also proposing to clarify that AMSA can revoke a certificate of survey if a vessel stops operating as a domestic commercial vessel. This could be because a vessel:

- has been decommissioned
- has become a regulated Australian vessel
- has become a foreign-flagged vessel.

This change will reduce the potential for confusion about the status of the vessel and ensure that we have accurate data on the domestic commercial vessel fleet.

Notification requirements

New requirement: Require vessel owners to notify AMSA if an insurance claim is made on a damaged vessel.
Applies to: Vessels that have been damaged and an insurance claim made.

We're proposing to require a vessel's owner to notify AMSA if they make an insurance claim on a vessel that has been damaged. This ensures AMSA is aware of vessels that have been significantly damaged and that may need to be reassessed before resuming operations.

Change to existing requirements: Clarify who is responsible for notifying AMSA of a change in vessel ownership.
Applies to: Vessels changing ownership.

We're proposing to require that the person receiving a vessel (e.g. a buyer) must notify AMSA of a change in vessel ownership instead of the person handing over the vessel (e.g. a seller). This change

ensures that the person who is now responsible for the vessel informs AMSA of the change in ownership.

Vessel classifications and definitions

Change to existing requirements: Clarify when certain existing vessels become transitional vessels.
Applies to: Existing vessels obtaining a certificate of survey for the first time.

We're proposing to clarify that existing vessels that are issued a certificate of survey for the first time will become a transitional vessel and must meet the relevant transitional standards. This only applies to existing vessels that previously did not have a certificate of survey due to operating under an exemption.

Change to existing requirements: Remove the hull material from the definition of 'modifier'.
Applies to: Vessels with a hull at least 15 years old.

We're proposing to stop using hull material as a criteria for deciding if an older vessel needs more frequent surveys. Age is the most significant factor for determining a vessel's risk and all vessels with a hull at least 15 years old will be required to undergo more frequent survey.

Administrative

New requirement: Allow AMSA to make determinations and approvals on our own initiative.
Applies to: Vessel owners seeking a determination or approval mentioned in the Surveyors Accreditation Guidance Manual Part 2.

We're proposing to enable AMSA to make determinations or approvals in specified circumstances without the need for an application. This will reduce administrative burden and allow vessels to use correct standards or approvals without delay.

Change to existing requirements: Remove the EIAPP certificate requirements from Marine Order 503 as they are now covered in Marine Order 97

Applies to: Vessels required to have an EIAPP certificate.

We're proposing to remove the requirement in MO503 that some vessels must have an Engine International Air Pollution Prevention (EIAPP) certificate in order to be issued a certificate of survey. These vessels still need to have an EIAPP certificate but this requirement is now managed through Marine Order 97.

Minor editorial changes.

We're proposing to make minor editorial changes to:

- present information in a clearer manner, through tables or descriptions
- clarify existing standards that apply, or can apply
- remove unnecessary provisions
- include notes to provide the reader with additional relevant information
- correct drafting errors.

These changes will improve the readability of the marine order and provide greater clarity on the requirements for operators.