

Seafarer port welfare survey

Survey findings report

Contents

Background	3
The Australian Seafarers Welfare Council (ASWC)	3
Port Welfare Committees (PWCs)	3
This survey	3
Overview	4
Survey delivery and promotion	4
Risks and dependencies	4
Language barriers	4
Limited internet connectivity	4
Short survey	5
Port of arrival	5
Importance of services	7
Seafarer comments and feedback	8
Barriers to shore leave	8
Transportation and port access challenges	8
Internet, connectivity and essential services	8
Extended Survey	9
Demographics	9
Internet access on board	9
Transport from ship to gate	10
Company support	10
Health, wellbeing and recreational services	11
Seafarer Centres	12
Access to welfare information	13
Key survey findings and future priorities	14

Background

The wellbeing of seafarers is critical to ensuring safe, sustainable and efficient maritime operations. That's why we, the Australian Seafarers Welfare Council (ASWC) have sought feedback on the welfare services available to seafarers visiting Australian Ports.

The Australian Seafarers Welfare Council (ASWC)

The [Australian Seafarers Welfare Council \(ASWC\)](#) aims to promote and encourage the provision of seafarer welfare services across Australian ports through collaboration, partnerships and stakeholder engagement.

The council is based on a tripartite membership framework with government, seafarer and industry representatives including welfare providers, port authorities and others from both national, and local organisations that contribute to the welfare of seafarers. It is chaired by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

Port Welfare Committees (PWCs)

ASWC provides national leadership by supporting a network of currently 18 regional Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) across Australian ports.

Each PWC consists of representatives from welfare providers, industry, government and unions, all working towards a shared goal of delivering quality onshore seafarer welfare facilities within their port.

This survey

In 2023, a PWC workshop was facilitated to assess the current state of seafarer welfare services and facilities across Australian ports. The workshop aimed to understand existing service offerings at Australian ports and identify opportunities for improvement.

In 2025, this survey was subsequently developed to validate the workshop findings and to gather direct feedback from seafarers on which shore-based welfare services are most important to them.

Overview

The seafarer port welfare survey ran from **1 October 2025** to **4 February 2026** to gain a better understanding of the welfare needs and experiences of seafarers arriving in Australian Ports.

The survey was divided into two sections to encourage seafarers to complete the high-priority questions first before choosing to respond to additional, more detailed questions.

A total of **436** seafarer responses were received

- 210 respondents (51%) completed the 'short' survey
- 204 respondents (49%) completed the 'short' and 'extended' survey

While the survey received 436 responses, it represents only a small proportion of the seafarers visiting Australian ports each year. With more than 2,800 foreign-flagged vessel arrivals to Australia annually, the findings provide valuable insights into seafarer experiences but may not be representative of the broader seafarer population.

Survey delivery and promotion

The seafarer port welfare survey was delivered online through a dedicated survey page which was promoted across the ASWC and AMSA websites.

Promotional activities included social media campaigns, news articles on the ASWC and AMSA web pages, and a postcard size flyer featuring a QR code linking directly to the survey.

A communications package was also shared with ASWC members and PWC representatives to share via their local channels.

Risks and dependencies

Language barriers

Many international seafarers speak English as a second language, which may impact their understanding of the survey questions. To address this the survey used simplified wording, including short and direct sentences. Where possible, visual aids such as icons, graphics, and symbols were also incorporated to support understanding.

Limited internet connectivity

Restricted, or low-quality internet on board may reduce the time seafarers can spend online, limiting their ability to complete the survey. To mitigate this the survey was optimised for mobile devices and designed to minimise data usage.

A shortened version, featuring a quick three-question option was also offered so that seafarers with limited time ashore can still participate.

Short survey

The first three questions of the survey, referred to as the short survey, consisted of the following high-priority questions:

- What port did you arrive in?
- What welfare services are most important to you?
- Do you have any comments or feedback about your access to welfare services when you come to Australia?

Port of arrival

For the first question, “*what port did you arrive in?*” Newcastle recorded the highest number of responses, followed by Port Hedland, Fremantle, Bunbury and Gladstone as seen in figure 1 below.

While responses were distributed across a broad range of port locations, over half of all responses came from these top five ports.

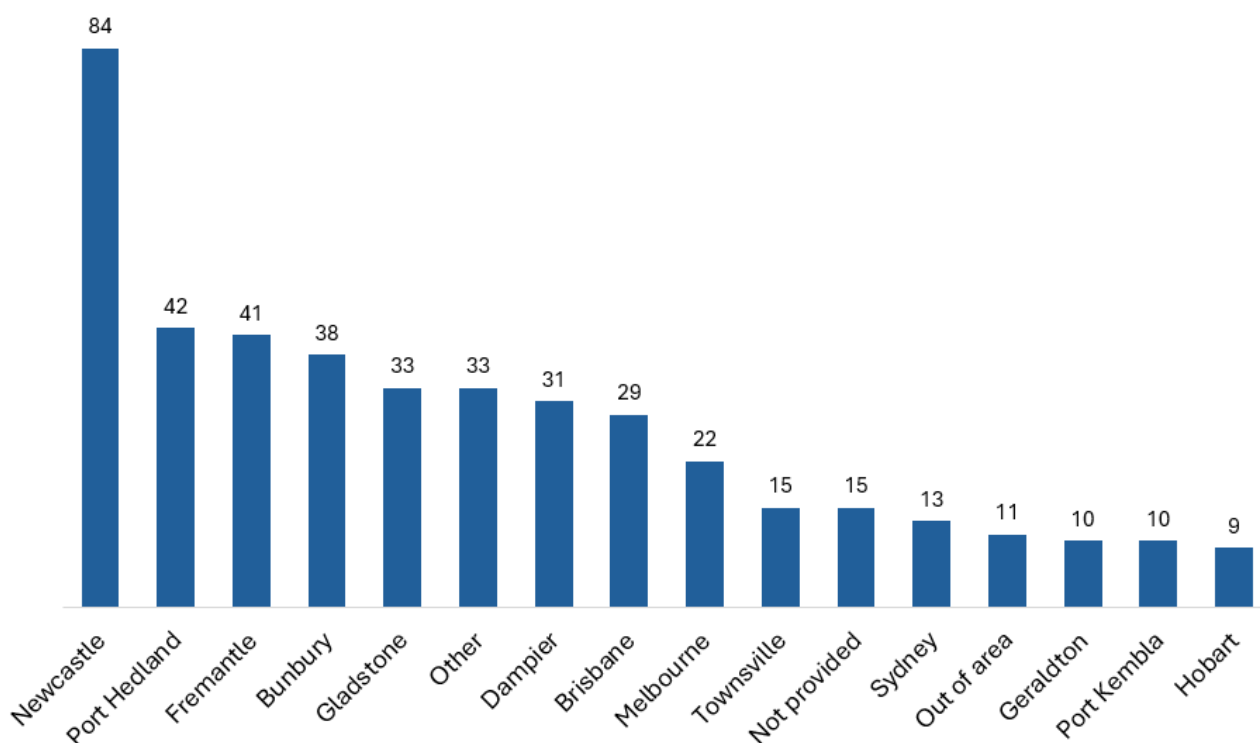


Figure 1: Survey responses broken down by port of arrival¹

¹ 'Other' represents the ports of arrival which received 8 responses or less, and 'out of area' represents overseas port locations which were manually inputted.

As per figure 2, this is not proportionate to the number of ship arrivals per port for 2025. When adjusted for port arrivals, Bunbury recorded the highest rate of survey responses.

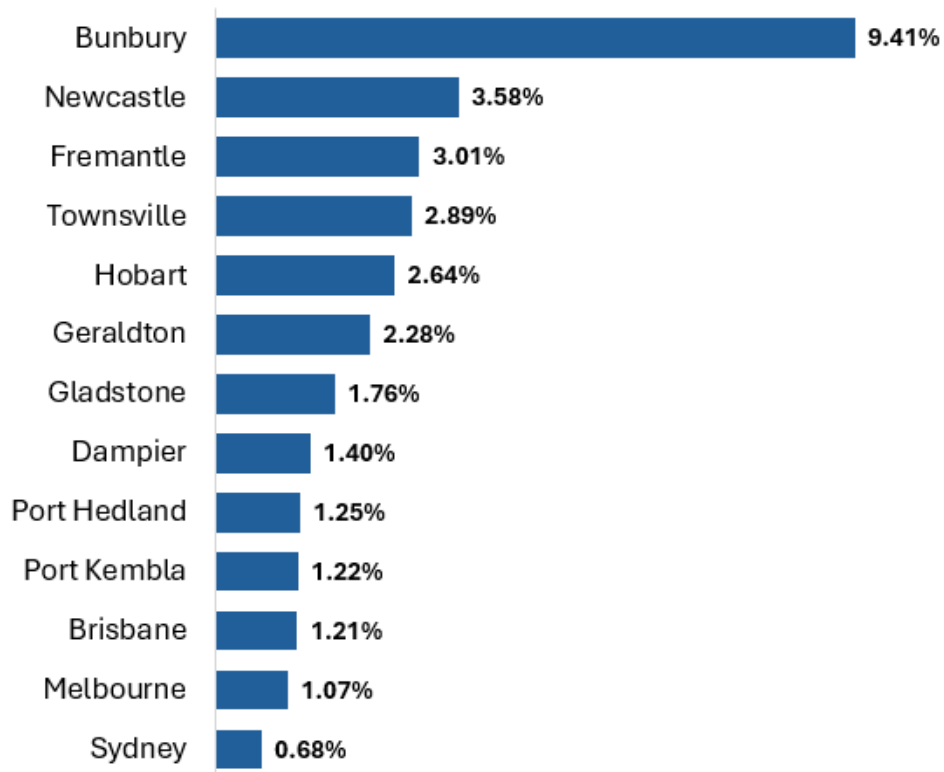


Figure 2: Survey respondents by port proportionate to number of port arrivals for 2025

Importance of services

For the next high-priority question, respondents were asked to rank the following services by importance.

- Internet / Wi-Fi access
- Access to shore leave
- Access to mental health support (i.e. company support, peer support program, access to counsellor/psychologist to maintain mental wellbeing)
- Access to the seafarer centre
- Access to shops to essential items and services (toothpaste, mobile sim card, foreign currency exchange etc.)
- Safe access (from ship to shore)

Respondents were asked to drop and drag the options, ordering the services from most important, to least important.

As shown in figure 3, Internet/Wi-Fi is the highest priority service, with the largest number of 'most important' rankings (179 responses), indicating strong demand for connectivity.

Shore leave is also highly valued, receiving the highest number of 'second most important' rankings (168) and a strong overall positive weighting.

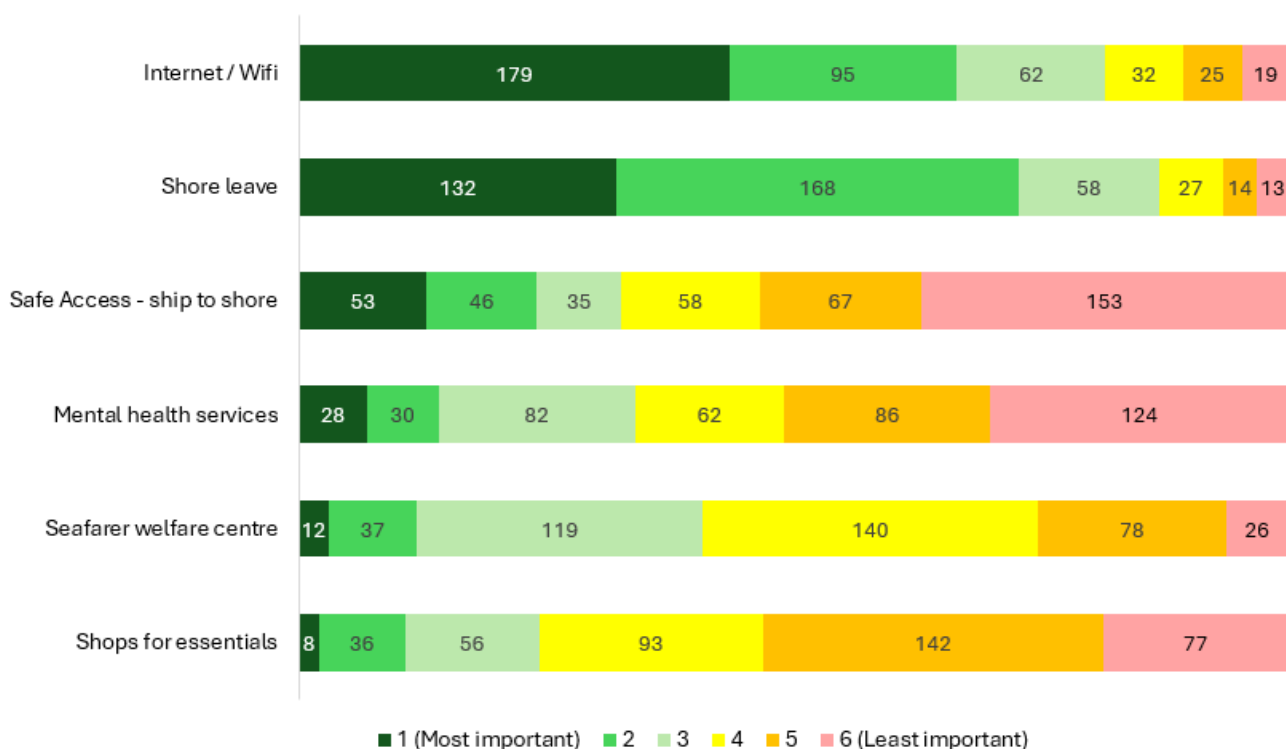


Figure 3: Importance of each service – Ranked by seafarers

Seafarer comments and feedback

The final question of the short survey was open-ended, providing respondents with an opportunity to share direct feedback on their experiences. Seafarers were asked: “Do you have any comments or feedback about your access to welfare services when you come to Australia?” This question enabled the collection of qualitative insights, capturing personal experiences, challenges, and suggestions that may not have been reflected in the structured survey responses.

Key themes from this feedback included:

Barriers to shore leave

Fast cargo operations, short port stays, inspections, and onboard duties (particularly for senior crew) significantly restrict opportunities to go ashore. Many respondents noted that loading speeds and tight schedules often eliminate any realistic chance of shore leave, even where services are available.

Transportation and port access challenges

Transport availability is a major constraint impacting access to welfare services. Common concerns include:

- Limited or infrequent shuttle bus services
- Restricted access to taxis or ride shares within port
- Long distances between berth and gate
- High transport costs when alternatives are available

Internet, connectivity and essential services

Access to internet/Wi-Fi, SIM cards and communication tools in a recurring theme. Seafarers highlighted the importance of reliable and affordable connectivity to contact family and access services. There were also requests for:

- Easier access to currency exchange
- Availability of essential goods (either ashore or delivered on board)
- Improved access to welfare facilities and centres on weekends

Extended Survey

Upon completing the short survey, respondents were invited to answer an additional eight questions. A total of 204 respondents (49%) chose to complete this extended section.

Demographics

Majority of the extended survey respondents (58.3%) arrived in Australia on Bulk carriers. This is proportionate to AMSA's Foreign Flagged vessel arrival data for 2025.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their nationality, 62 per cent identified as being from the Republic of the Philippines.

Internet access on board

Respondents were asked "what kind of internet access the company/owner provides on board your ship?". As seen in figure 4 below, 62 per cent of respondents (127) reported having internet access both at sea and in port. 35 per cent (71) reported having access at sea only, highlighting that connectivity may still be limited while in port. 4 respondents indicated having access only in port and almost no respondents (2) reported having no internet access at all.

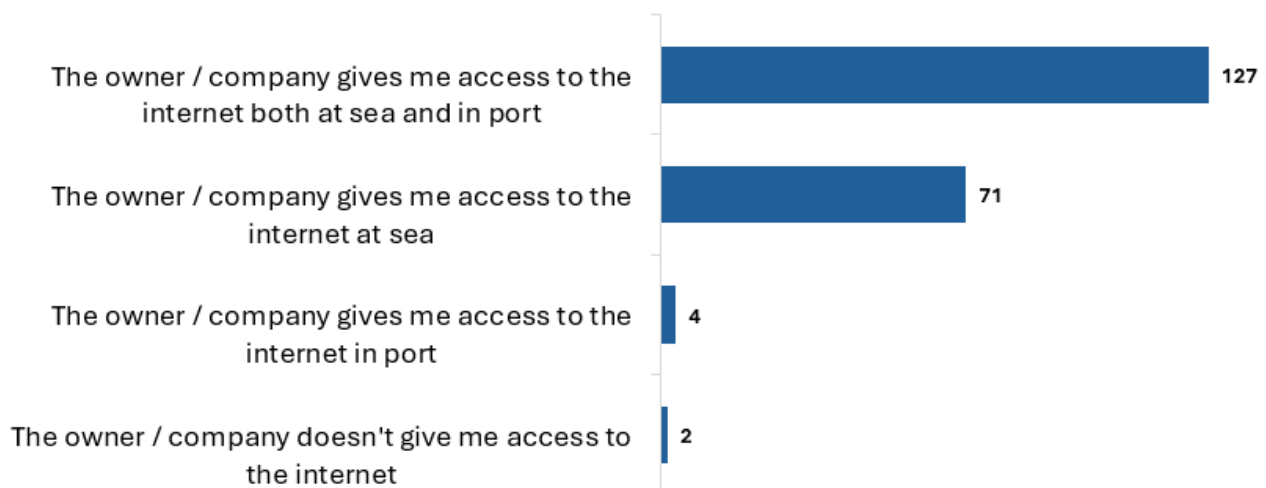


Figure 4: Type of internet access provided by the company/owner on board

This issue was reflected in the amendments made to the MLC which were approved and adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on 6 June 2022.

One of the key amendments was to ensure seafarers are provided with social connectivity onboard. An example of which is internet access. This was addressed in the updated [Marine Order 11 \(Living and working conditions on vessels\)](#) which entered into force on 23 December 2024. Further work remains to increase internet access in ports without cost to seafarers.

Transport from ship to gate

Respondents were asked how they travelled between ship and the port gate during their arrival. Results to this question indicated varied experiences with 56 respondents indicating they were picked up immediately by a shuttle bus, 55 respondents were unable to get off the ship, highlighting a significant access barrier to shore leave and shore-based welfare services.

A further 49 respondents reported the shuttle bus was experiencing delays, whilst 42 respondents walked. Overall, while shuttle transport plays a key role in facilitating movement, the high number of respondents unable to disembark highlights ongoing challenges in shore access. (see figure 5 or in figure 5).

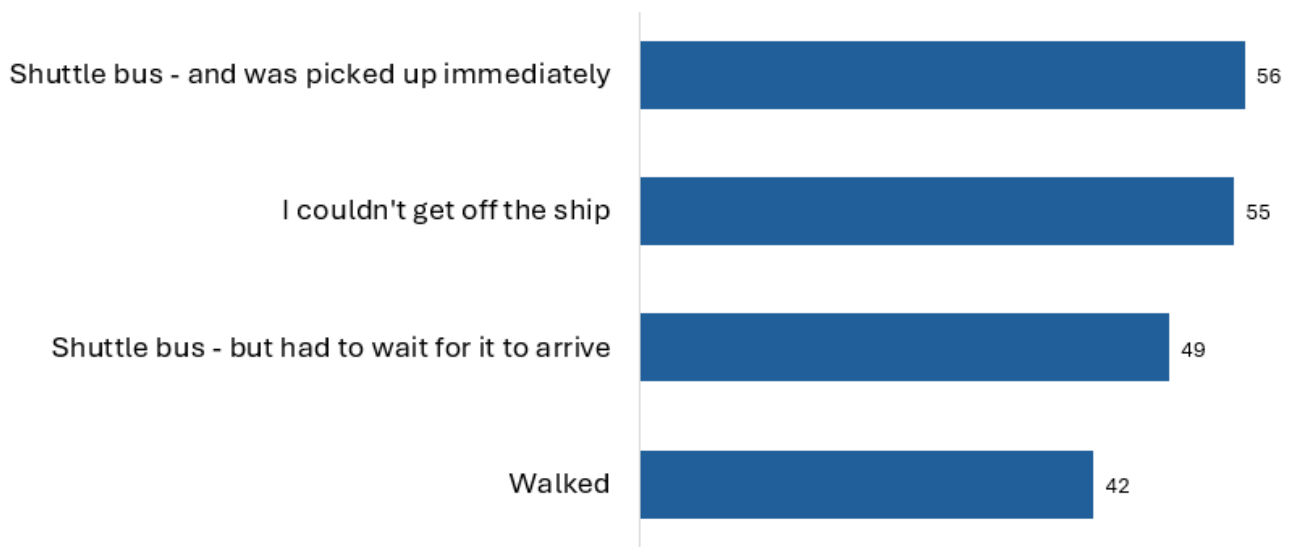


Figure 5: How respondents travelled between ship and port gate

Company support

For this section, respondents were asked to rate the various types of support provided by their company from most to least important:

- Access to immediate, urgent medical care
- Access to non-urgent medical and dental care (i.e., general practitioner)
- Access to mental health support (i.e. company support, peer support program, access to counsellor/psychologist to maintain mental wellbeing)
- Fair access to shore leave
- Safe Access (From ship to shore)
- Internet access/Wi-Fi
- Deliveries to berths or while at anchor

Figure 6 shows that seafarers place the greatest importance on essential support services, particularly access to urgent medical care, internet/Wi-Fi, and safe ship-to-shore access, all of which received strong “very important” and “important” ratings. Fair access to shore leave is also highly

valued, though with slightly more variation. Overall, services linked to health, safety, and shore access are prioritised most.

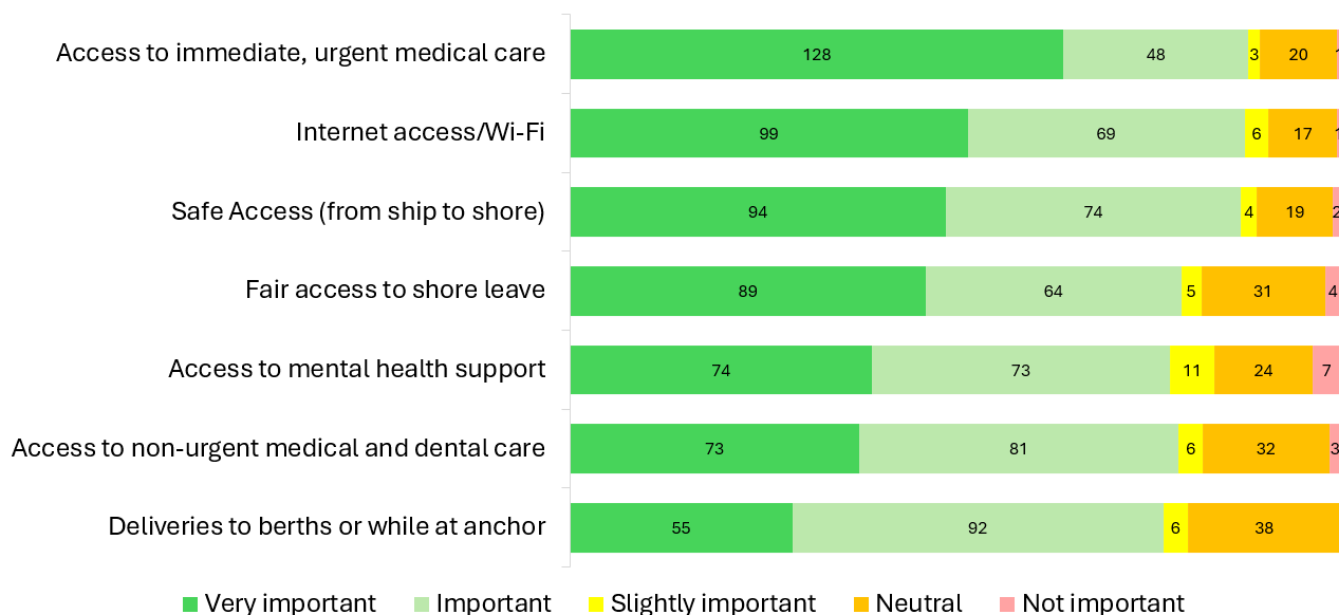


Figure 6: The importance of company support services, ranked from most, to least important

Health, wellbeing and recreational services

Respondents were also asked to rate how important the following services are to them when going ashore in Australian ports:

- Access to foreign exchange services
- Access to shops to purchase personal items
- Access to shops to purchase non-essential purchases, such as gifts
- Recreational facilities (including social and tourist activities)
- Access to pastoral, spiritual or religious care

Access to shops to purchase personal items received the highest 'very important' rating (72 responses), and a strong "important" rating (88 responses), although most services are considered 'important' or 'very important' as indicated by Figure 7.

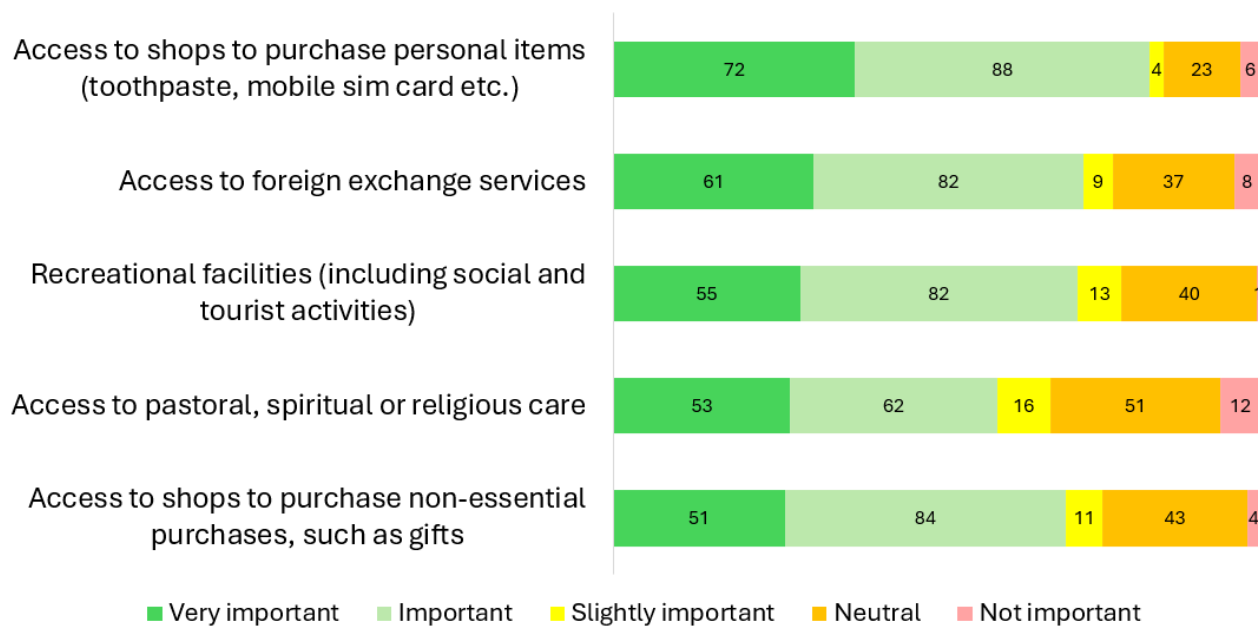


Figure 7: Health, wellbeing and recreational services rated from most, to least important

Seafarer Centres

Respondents were asked how often they visit a seafarer's centre during shore leave in an Australian port. Options ranged between always, often, sometimes, rarely, never, and this doesn't apply to me.

Results indicate that visits to seafarer centres are inconsistent across respondents. The most common response was sometimes (61), followed by rarely (43) always (41).

Overall, the findings suggest that seafarers' centres continue to play an important role in providing welfare services to seafarers, as seen in figure 8

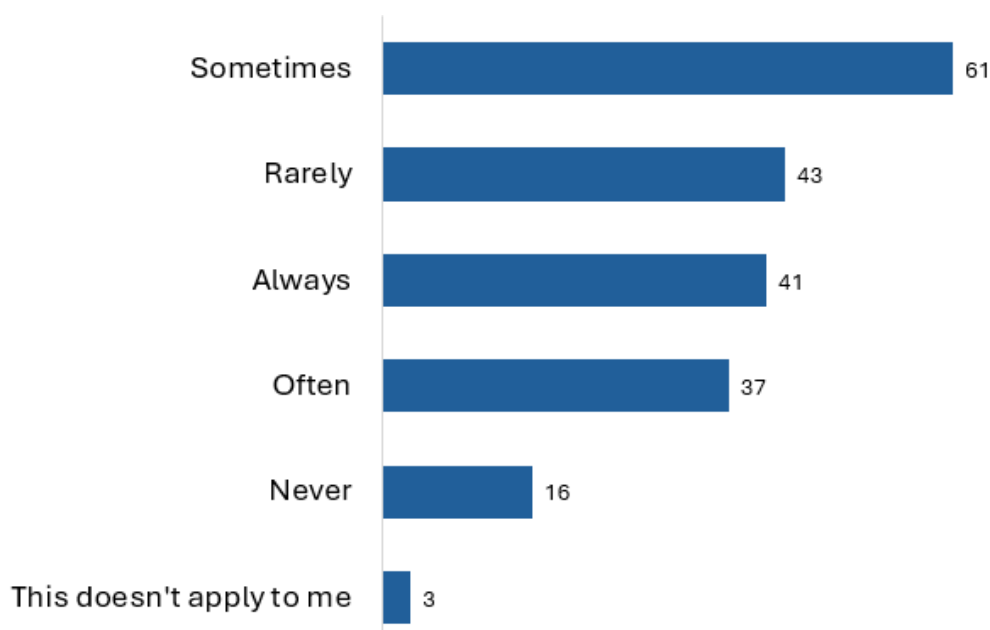


Figure 8: How often respondents visit a seafarer centre during shore leave in an Australian port

Access to welfare information

This question asked “*how do you find out what shore-based welfare facilities are available in Australian ports?*”.

Figure 9 shows that respondents primarily rely on on-board sources such as the master or agent to find information (98 responses), this is followed by other crew members (67 responses). Internet and social media are also widely used (55 responses), followed by port chaplains or ship visitors (45 responses) demonstrating the value of direct engagement with welfare providers.

Overall, the findings suggest that while multiple channels are used, trusted onboard sources and personal interactions remain the primary means of communication, with digital platforms and welfare representatives playing a supporting role.

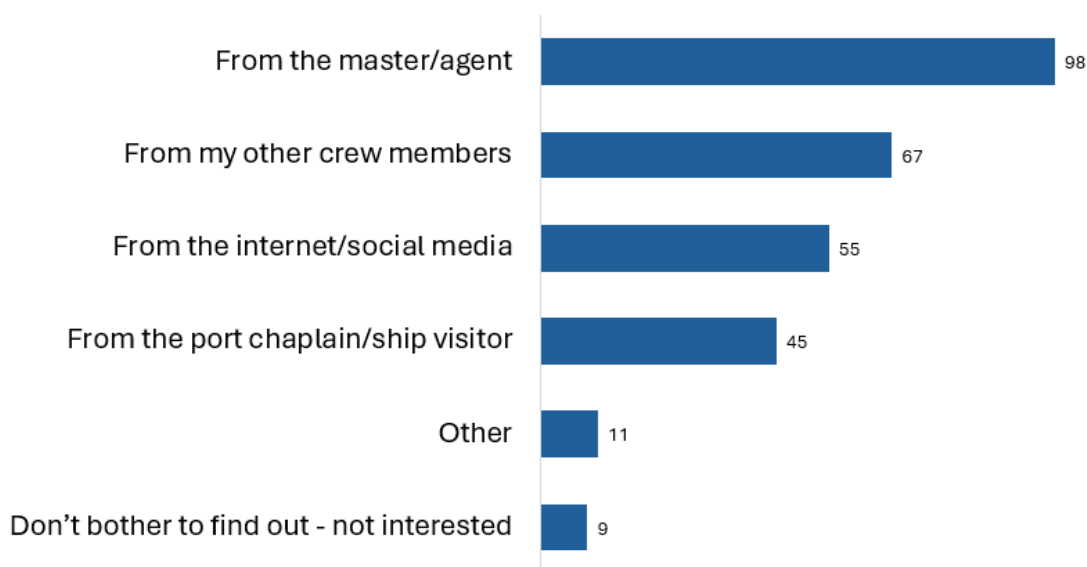


Figure 9: How respondents find out what shore-based welfare facilities are available in Australian ports

Key survey findings and future priorities

The survey findings demonstrate that Australia has a strong foundation of seafarer welfare services; however, access to those services is often limited by operational, transport and port access constraints. Reliable internet/Wi-Fi was consistently identified as the highest priority for seafarers, highlighting the importance of maintaining social connectivity for seafarers' wellbeing.

Shore leave and safe ship-to-shore access were also highly valued by seafarers, while difficulties accessing transport and leaving the vessel emerged as significant barriers to shore leave. The finding that 55 out of 202 respondents were unable to go ashore during their port call highlights the need for targeted action to improve practical access to welfare services.

These findings provide valuable evidence to inform ASWC's ongoing work to improve seafarer welfare outcomes across Australian ports. To better understand the existing welfare services available at key Australian ports, ASWC is currently developing a Port Services Matrix to identify service gaps, barriers to access, and opportunities for improvement. This work supports the ASWC strategic goals, particularly the establishment of a national network of seafarer support arrangements and promoting a consistent welfare service delivery model. The outcomes will support the development of a targeted Port Welfare Committee (PWC) Strategy, helping to strengthen port-based welfare networks and address key issues identified through the survey, particularly those relating to shore leave, transport and ship-to-shore access.

ASWC