



**COWES HARBOUR  
COMMISSION**

**Cowes Harbour Commission  
Towage Guidelines**



<b>Document</b>	<b>CHC Towage Guidelines</b>
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<b>Amendment</b>	
<b>Written by</b>	<b>Ed Walker - HM</b>

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## Amendments

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## 1. Definitions

ABP – Associated British Ports

BP – Bollard Pull

DfT – Department for Transport

MCA – Maritime and Coastguard Agency

QHM – Queens Harbour Master

SWL – Safe Working Load

VTS – Vessel Traffic Service

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## 1. Scope

These guidelines cover:

- All commercial towing operations as described in the Cowes Harbour Pilotage Directions Schedule 1.1
- Any towing operation where the Harbour Master deems it necessary to have an Authorised Cowes Pilot in attendance.

## 2. Introduction

These guidelines have been written using the MCA Port Marine Guide to Good Practice. All towing operations in Cowes Harbour are designated Project Towage and therefore non-routine.

It assumed that all tows bound to and from Cowes Harbour will need prior authorisation from ABP Southampton. Therefore, ABP Southampton will be consulted on any part of the Towage Plan where deemed necessary by Cowes Harbour and / or Cowes Pilot.

## 3. Preparing for Towage Operations

### 3.1. Planning and Co-ordination

Before any towing operation is conducted within Cowes Harbour a comprehensive plan of action needs to be agreed by the Harbour Master, Pilot, Master of towing vessel and person responsible for the operation.

Any conflict or mismatch between the required manoeuvre and the tugs allocated must be resolved before the towage operation begins.

Responsibility for co-ordinating a towage operation lies with whoever has the conduct of the navigation of the vessel being towed, be that the Master or the Pilot. When berthing and unberthing, it is the duty of the Master and/or Pilot to ensure that the vessel is handled in a safe and controlled manner, having due regard to the safety of all those involved, whether it be on the ship, assisting tug(s), line handlers or mooring gangs and other river users as appropriate. The Master and/or Pilot should have a good knowledge of the type and capabilities of the tugs allocated to the job, in order that they can ensure tugs are both suitable for the task ahead and positioned on the vessel so as to be most effective, and to facilitate a safe operation.

The number of personnel employed in any towage operation should be determined having due regard for the size of the vessel and the prevailing operational and environmental circumstances. In all circumstances, sufficient manpower should be provided to ensure that individuals are not exposed to undue risk, and that the operation can be conducted safely and efficiently. Due regard should also be given to the size, weight and scope of the towing gear and lines to be handled.

All those with a responsibility for personnel or equipment involved in assisting the towage/mooring of vessels have a duty to ensure that safe working practices are followed, and that associated equipment is fit for purpose. They should also ensure that those involved are properly trained, adequately briefed in their duties, and issued with, and use, suitable and effective personal protective equipment.

The person responsible for the operation should submit the following documents at least 24 hours before the operation is due to start:

- Risk Assessment
- Method Statement
- Passage Plan
  - Taking account of all relevant factors, including tide, wind, visibility, the ship's size, type and characteristics, the berth operator requirements.

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- Intended manoeuvres based on object being towed
- ABP Southampton's Non-Routine Towing form (Annex1)

Once this information has been submitted a follow up meeting may be required to discuss the operation. The operation **cannot** proceed until the Harbour Master and Pilot have given authority in writing to the person responsible.

### 3.2. Tug and Vessel Procedures

Operations such as mooring and towing impose very great loads upon ropes or warps, gear and equipment. The Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen sets out certain precautions, which should be taken, but the circumstances of recent accidents show that greater emphasis should be given to considering the system as a whole.

As a result of the imposed loads, sudden failure in any part of the system may cause death or serious injury to personnel.

Masters should avoid men being stationed or necessarily working in the bight of a warp or rope formed by the lead from the winch or windlass round and through the fairleads and over-side. In any case, the consequences of failure in any part of the system must be carefully considered and effective precautions taken.

All fixed and running gear including ropes should be carefully maintained, tested, certified and regularly inspected against wear, damage and corrosion. Particular attention is drawn to the need to ensure that fairleads, lead bollards, mooring bits etc. are:

- used appropriately and within their design capabilities;
- correctly sited; and
- effectively secured to a part of the ship's structure which is suitably strengthened.

### 3.3. Watertight Integrity

The watertight integrity of the tug should be maintained at all times. When a tug is engaged on any towing operation all watertight openings should be securely fastened. All watertight openings should be marked with a sign stating that they are to remain closed during towing operations. Any such openings used whilst moving about the tug during a towing operation should be re-secured immediately after use.

### 3.4. Testing and Inspection of Towing Equipment

Towing hooks and alarm bells, if fitted, should be inspected daily. The emergency release mechanisms on towing hooks and winches should be tested, both locally and where fitted remotely, at frequent intervals to ensure correct operation. As a minimum, any emergency release mechanism should be tested before it is used under operational circumstances.

All towing equipment in use should be inspected for damage before undertaking and after completing a towing operation. Records of testing of the emergency release mechanisms shall be kept and made available to the Harbour Authority on request.

### 3.5. Pilot / Master Exchange

In addition to the standard information passed to the Pilot, it is recommended that the Master provide the Pilot with a deck General Arrangement showing the layout and safe working load (SWL) of the mooring fittings, where known, and inform him about:

- which fairleads, chocks, bollards and strong points can be used for towing;

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- the SWL of this equipment;
- areas of hull strengthened or suitable for pushing by tugs and relevant identification marks employed. (This information is needed due to variations in ship construction and the appropriate area frequently being out of line with the chock); and
- any special features (i.e. controllable pitch propellers, thrusters etc.).

Note: Using ships' mooring lines as towlines is not recommended (except in an emergency) as the strength may not be in accordance with tug towing force and may therefore limit the tug's performance.

The Pilot should advise the Master about:

- the tug rendezvous time and position;
- the number of tugs and the mode of towage;
- the planned (optimum) ship speed when connecting to the tug's lines;
- whether the ship's or the tug's line are recommended for use;
- the type of tugs to be used and their bollard pull(s);
- if escorting, the maximum towline forces that the tug may generate at escort speeds;
- maximum planned speed for the operation;
- the method by which the ship's crew should take on board and release the tug's tow line; • the prohibition on the use of weighted heaving lines;
- that on release, the tug's gear should be lowered back always under control;
- areas of the transit posing particular risks with respect to the possible use of the tug;
- intentions with regard to use and positioning of the tug(s) for berthing manoeuvres;
- intentions with regard to use of the tug(s) in an emergency (escort operations); and
- primary (tug working) and secondary VHF channels for use in the operation.

### 3.6. Pilot / Tug Master Exchange

The Pilot and Tugmaster should, as a minimum, discuss the following issues:

- the SWL of the vessel's chocks, bollards and strong points to be used for towing. (Failure to provide this information could result in damaged equipment);
- the tug hook up point, taking into account the prevailing weather and sea conditions, for escorting operation (if appropriate) and berthing;
- the planned (optimum) ship speed when connecting to the tug's lines;
- if active escorting, the start point of the escorted passage;
- the maximum speed of the tug;
- passage details in their entirety while accompanied by the tug(s), particularly details of any swing manoeuvre, release position and sequence of release;
- berthing details in their entirety, including tug positioning around the vessel's hull and the vessels required position on the berth;
- intended and emergency use of ships anchors;
- any unusual items regarding the particular vessel as gleaned from the Master/Pilot exchange;
- if appropriate, any shallow water or bank effect areas where significant surges may be experienced that might add to the tug loads;
- the Tugmaster should advise the Pilot (as far in advance as possible of the scheduled manoeuvre) if the tug is experiencing a failure or reduction in its ability to manoeuvre or deliver full bollard pull; and
- when confirming that the tug is fast and ready to assist, the Tugmaster should also confirm both the tug's name and her position on the vessel.

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## 4. Communication

VHF communications are a vital component of safe towing operations. It is essential that those on board the vessel, the tug(s), where appropriate the mooring/line boats, and those on the berth, are able to communicate promptly and effectively throughout the towing operation, should the need arise.

Prior to towing operations being undertaken, the Pilot, Master, Tugmaster(s), and Linehandlers and Boatmen should establish suitable means of communication, exchange relevant information (e.g. speed of vessel), and agree a plan for the towing operation.

Once VHF communications have been established, tested and Pilot / Tugmaster / Linehandlers and Boatmen information has been exchanged, personnel should keep transmissions to a minimum and should normally only call when in doubt, or in an emergency. Mooring personnel should consider monitoring the tug/ship VHF working channel in order to have a proper appreciation of progress in the berthing/unberthing operation.

During operations, it is important that effective communications are maintained between:

- (a) the towing vessel and both the bridge team, and the mooring decks of the vessel undertow; and
- (b) the ship's tow party(ies) and the bridge team.

In all communications clear identification of the parties communicating should be used to prevent misunderstandings. The Tugmaster and Boatmen should be kept informed of engine movements, helm orders, proposed use of thrusters and anchors on the towed vessel.

It is important that Cowes Harbour Radio and Southampton VTS are included in the communication loop, as appropriate, when planning and then executing a ship towing operation. Cowes Harbour Radio and Southampton VTS will advise the Pilot/Master of any traffic likely to be affected by or affect the towing operation.

During the towing operation, it is important for Pilots and Masters to keep Cowes Harbour Radio and Southampton VTS fully apprised of the planned manoeuvre and its progress, in order that they can keep other port users apprised, and to warn of dangers or restrictions created by the operation.

The Tugmaster shall always maintain, so far as possible, a listening watch on the appropriate VHF channel for Cowes Harbour Radio and Southampton VTS as well as the Pilot / Tug working channel.

## 5. Safe Speed

Safe speed should be agreed and noted in the towing plan. When considering safe speed, the following factors should be considered:

- Type of tow
- Particulars of towed object
- Available navigable water
- Disposition of towing vessel(s)
- Weather and environmental conditions
- Experience of parties involved

## 6. Towing Operations

All towing operations should be discussed and agreed before the operation commences. All operations should be conducted safely and in line with relevant guidance.

Guidance can be found from:

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- Cowes Harbour Commission General Directions
- Cowes Harbour Pilotage Directions
- MCA – MGN 592 - Mooring, towing or hauling equipment on all vessels
- Shipowners – Tugs and Tows – A Practical Safety and Operational Guide
- Tug Use in Port (Henk Hensen)
- Code of Safe Working Practices (COSWP)

Any departure from the Towage Plan is to be dynamically risk assessed and agreed between all parties, namely Tugmaster and Pilot, before execution of change.

## 7. Towage in Restricted Visibility

The following procedures are to be followed by all those involved in ship towage operations

- Tugmasters
- Pilots
- Vessel Masters
- Cowes Harbour Radio

### 7.1. Purpose and Application

The purpose of these procedures is to clarify, in good time, what towage services will be available to vessel Masters and Pilots when Restricted Visibility exists or is expected to exist in, or in the vicinity of, the areas of the Port where tugs will assist vessels.

If restricted visibility is expected, then the towing operation should be re-assessed to take this into account. This re-assessment should include latest fog reports, available abort points and types of towage available should restricted visibility be encountered once the towing operation has commenced.

Should restricted visibility occur during a towage operation, the Pilot and/or Master and the Tugmaster(s) will discuss the situation immediately, perform a dynamic risk assessment and agree upon a course of action to ensure the safety of all persons and vessels involved, given the location, environmental and vessel traffic conditions.

### 7.2. Restricted Visibility

“Restricted Visibility” means when the visibility is within the limits as prescribed by Cowes Harbour Commission General Directions.

## 8. Towage in Adverse Weather

Adverse weather may directly or indirectly affect towage operations and significantly increase the risks associated with the operation.

Any expected adverse weather should be factored in when planning the towage operation. Additional considerations or assessments may include:

- Sea and/or swell conditions at the intended operating area and the route to/from same.
- Wind speed, direction and trend; e.g., rising, steady or falling.
- State of tide and trend.
- Information offered by latest weather forecast and other vessels in the area.
- Type of tug, propulsion method, towing from winch or hook and location of winch/hook.
- Proposed method of towing, including likelihood of shock-load to towing gear.
- Movement of other vessels in the area.



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- Navigational characteristics of the particular area of the river including the use of
- information from Vessel Traffic Services (VTS)

If there is likelihood that the weather conditions may pose a significant threat to the tug, its crew or towing equipment, the Tug Master shall immediately inform the Pilot/Master of any concerns that he may have. The Pilot/Master and Tug Master shall take immediate action to ensure the safety of the tug and the assisted vessel (and their respect crews) and, if necessary, the operation shall be aborted as soon as it is safe to do so.

## **9. Approved Towage Providers**

Cowes Harbour Commission uses the Port of Southampton's Approved List of Towage Providers. This list can be found in the latest issue of *Tugs authorised for use within the Port of Southampton* Notice to Mariners that can be found at

[https://southamptonvts.co.uk/Port Information/Navigation/Notices to Mariners/.](https://southamptonvts.co.uk/Port%20Information/Navigation/Notices%20to%20Mariners/)

## **10. Useful links**

[British Tug Owners Association](#)

[The Workboat Association](#)

[Marine Accident Investigation Branch](#)



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## **Annex 1**

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# Non Routine Towage Assessment

**PART 1 TO BE COMPLETED BY REQUESTING PROJECT MANAGER / AGENT / TOWING MASTER**

Date Of Intended Passage ..... Agent Making Request (POC) .....

Agency ..... Contact Number(s) .....

Type Of Towage Operation (tick)    Dead Ship     Barge     Unusual Object

Towage From ..... To .....

**Details Of The Tow**

Name ..... LOA .....m    Breadth .....m    Draft .....m

Brief Description of Tow .....  
 .....

Is the tow manned? Yes  No

Are safe boarding arrangements available on each vessel requiring a pilot Yes  No

What functioning propulsion/steerage does the tow have?

Propeller(s)  Thruster(s)  Rudder(s)  None

**Tug Details**

Name(s)..... LOA .....m Draft .....m

Power/Bollard Pull ..... KW/t

Towing Arrangement .....

**Nominated Person with Overall Responsibility For The Safety Of The Manoeuvre**

Name ..... Position .....

Organisation/Vessel .....

Contact Telephone No(s) .....

**PART 2 TO BE COMPLETED BY HARBOUR AUTHORITY**

**Pilotage**

Number Of Pilots Required ..... (manned tows require a pilot)

Boarding At ..... Disembarking at .....

Have safe pilot boarding arrangements been verified Yes  No

If 'No' give details .....

Is additional harbour towage required? Yes  No  If yes give details .....

.....

If necessary where will harbour towage be required? From ..... To .....

**HM Department Review**

Passage plan timing limitations .....

Passage Plan Agreed  Risk Assessment/Method Statement Agreed/Sighted

Reviewed By ..... Position .....

**Outcome**

Approved  Additional Action Required  Actions Required.....

.....