Code of Practice for the Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots on the Thames 2013

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PORT OF LONDON AUTHORITY

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE EMBARKATION AND DISEMBARKATION OF PILOTS ON THE THAMES 2013

GOOD PRACTICE AGREED AND USED COLLECTIVELY BY
ESTUARY SERVICES LIMITED AND LONDON AND MEDWAY PILOTS

FOREWORD

The purpose of this Code is to act as a guide to safe practice in the boarding and landing of Pilots by pilot boat and is commended to all those involved in the provision of a pilotage service. The Code not only covers the act of transfer between a pilot boat and ship, but in addition also addresses issues such as the operation of the pilot boat, boarding/landing areas and the responsibilities of all of those involved in the transfer, and their training. It should be used primarily as a guide to safe operating procedures which can be adapted to suit particular locations or circumstances.

The Code has been updated to incorporate current SOLAS and UK legislation and in particular the Guide to Good Practice associated with the Port Marine Safety Code.

In what is seen as a positive and natural development, two of the Competent Harbour Authorities (CHAs) providing pilotage services in the Thames Estuary – the Port of London Authority and Peel Ports, Medway – together with Estuary Services Limited, the organisation that provides pilot boat services for the two CHAs, have agreed to combine their established codes of practice and guidance into one combined code for their pilotage operations in the Thames Estuary and lower River Thames

This new Code of Practice replaces all previously published guidance issued separately by the three organisations.

January 2013

1. INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice incorporates the content of a separate Code of Practice entitled *The Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots*, prepared jointly by the Marine/Pilotage Working Group of the British Ports Association and the UK Major Ports Group, and the Technical & Training Committee of the United Kingdom Maritime Pilots' Association. An additional section describes local arrangements at berths on the lower Thames where Pilot transfers may be conducted using tugs which have the requisite licences.

2. THE PILOT BOAT

A Competent Harbour Authority (CHA) must ensure that any pilot boats in service in its Pilotage District meet the requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats and any subsequent additions or amendments. In addition, the CHA must, in accordance with the Pilotage Act 1987, approve or licence the pilot boats regularly employed in the provision of a pilotage service, having satisfied itself that they are suitable for such use.

Prior to leaving the berth and at least once per watch, the Coxswain should ensure that the boat is in all respects ready for sea. Hatches and watertight openings should be closed when underway, and safety equipment and any deck lighting should be routinely tested. An up to date log should be

maintained onboard to include entries of all such safety checks. If possible, mooring ropes should remain ashore and any ropes left onboard must be properly stowed. The deck of the pilot boat should be clear of all unnecessary obstructions allowing clear passage and movement to the Pilot and Crew. Both the Pilot and Crew should be familiar with the stowage of the safety equipment and its operation.

3. LEAVING THE BERTH

The pilot boat should not leave a berth unless it is in all respects ready for sea and properly manned. Furthermore, the boat should only operate within the terms of the MCA Pilot Boat Certificate, which should be clearly displayed onboard. The CHA should establish procedures for routine reports from the boat's Crew to operational staff ashore with respect to departing, completing the assigned task and returning to the berth. These reports should include the number of persons on board.

All persons are required to wear lifejackets or buoyancy aids whilst outside of the pilot boat cabin. The Pilot and Crew should wear the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as required by the appropriate licensing authority (e.g. the MCA) and the CHA. All personnel should visually inspect their PPE regularly or as instructed.

The Pilot should remove his/her lifejacket when inboard on the pilot boat. This is to enable him/her to exit the boat in the event of a sudden flooding or capsize without the encumbrance of the lifejacket auto-inflating and hindering his/her escape. While aboard the pilot boat, the Pilot must follow the instructions of the Crew.

4. BOARDING AND LANDING AREAS

The CHA should identify and evaluate areas for the boarding and landing of pilots ensuring that there is sufficient sea room for ships to manoeuvre, that there is sufficient depth of water, and where possible, shelter from the more exposed elements of prevailing winds and weather. Additionally, these areas should be located where there is minimal seabed gradient and shipping activity. Such areas should be clearly defined in nautical publications and marked on the appropriate charts.

Ships should avoid waiting or anchoring in a designated pilot boarding and landing area. They should remain clear of the area until the time of their pilot boarding operation or until instructed to move into the area by the pilot boat or the relevant VTS Centre.

5. ON APPROACHING THE SHIP

It is important that VHF contact is established in good time between the pilot boat and all vessels to be served, in order to confirm their relative positions and intended movements so that a safe plan for conducting pilot transfers can be agreed. The pilot boat Coxswain should advise the ship of the side

on which to rig the pilot ladder, the required distance of the lower step above the water and the heading/speed in order to establish the best lee for the pilot transfer. Due allowance should be made for the close proximity of other vessels, intended movements, the possible effects of wash and any set due to wind and tidal stream. On approaching a ship from ahead on the same side as the pilot ladder care must be taken to ensure the wash from the pilot boat does not interfere with the safe boarding/disembarkation of the Pilot. It is prudent to use a searchlight at night to check for incoming wash. It will be necessary for vessels to get underway if they are unable to provide a lee whilst at anchor.

During the approach to the ship both the Pilot and Deckhand should remain in the cabin until instructed to proceed forward by the Coxswain. This is to ensure that the boat has established an appropriate speed in the lee of the vessel and is settled ready for the transfer to take place. The pilot boat radar should be switched to standby – if navigationally safe to do so - before the Pilot uses the ladder. At night and during the final approach, the pilot boat searchlight should be used to illuminate the pilot ladder and forward deck of the pilot boat before anyone proceeds on deck. In adverse or difficult conditions where there is significant risk to personnel or the pilot boat, the Coxswain should make the ultimate decision whether to place the boat alongside the ship or to abort the transfer.

Should the Pilot become aware or be advised by the Deckhand or the Coxswain that the pilot ladder rigged on the vessel appears to be or is, clearly damaged, unsafe or rigged incorrectly, the Pilot should request the ship to replace or re-rig the ladder; or if necessary, refuse to board or disembark the vessel until a safe means of embarkation/disembarkation is provided. The Pilot should report formally all cases of pilot ladder non-conformity to the CHA for submission to the MCA (Port State Control).

6. THE SHIP AND THE PILOT LADDER

The ship should rig a pilot ladder or combination on the side requested and in accordance with the regulations stated in SOLAS Chapter V, Regulation 23 and IMO Resolution A.1045 (27). These requirements are illustrated at the end of this Code of Practice. Clearly, these regulations and cannot prescribe for the safe rigging of a pilot ladder in every configuration or type of vessel construction. If a Pilot considers the rigging of a pilot ladder to be inappropriate, he should convey his views to the vessel Master and complete deficiency report as described in Section 5 above. Operations should not be undertaken with ships that do not fully comply with the regulations.

The ladder should be rigged and secured at the ship's side or side door as near mid-ships as practical, and on the parallel body of the ship, clear of all overboard discharges. The ladder should sit flush against the ship's side and if a list is unavoidable, the ladder should be rigged on the side opposite to the list, whilst always taking into account the need to make a sufficient lee. When rigging an accommodation ladder it must lead aft to the pilot ladder and be rigged sufficiently high to allow the pilot boat to lie alongside the pilot ladder without any risk of the pilot boat coming into contact with the accommodation ladder due to any swell.

During the pilot transfer the supervising ship's officer should be in direct contact with the bridge. The ship should maintain steerage way at speed that allows the pilot vessel to remain comfortably alongside and should not stop or reverse engines except in an emergency or when requested by the pilot boat Coxswain.

7. LOW FREEBOARD SHIPS

When a ship has a low freeboard similar to the pilot boat, the transfer can be particularly hazardous since the boat will have insufficient hull of the ship to work against. Such situations are made more difficult in adverse weather conditions when both the pilot boat and ship may roll or pitch creating an increased risk of injury to the Pilot and/or Deckhand, and possible damage to the pilot boat should it become "hung up" on the ship's gunwale. The increased amount of time necessary to conduct a safe transfer under such conditions means that the intended course and speed is critical to ensure the ship and the pilot boat do not run into danger.

8. PILOT EMBARKATION OPERATION

The decision whether or not to attempt to put a pilot boat alongside a vessel is the responsibility of the Coxswain, whereas the Pilot will make the decision whether to embark.

The Deckhand and the Pilot should be wearing approved buoyancy aids and protective clothing secured in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Prior to moving out of the cabin the Pilot should arm his/her PLB (if fitted), secure the jacket using the zip, chest and waist straps. He/she should consider the use of the crotch strap.

The Deckhand should be secured by a life line to Hadrian's Rail whilst on deck, without the line restricting his freedom of movement. When leaving the cabin, the Deckhand, followed by the Pilot, should pass along the outboard side of the cabin to the boarding position. The Pilot should take all necessary precautions, and consider the use of the Hadrian's Rail, when on he deck of the pilot boat.

The Deckhand should be ready to lift the end of the pilot ladder clear of the pilot boat when coming alongside, because if the ladder becomes trapped it can place excessive strain on the ladder and cause damage to the boat. Before the Pilot steps onto the ladder he should establish it is secure by talking to the crew at the top of the ladder.

The Pilot should not embark if there is nobody at the top of the ladder. The action of stepping off the pilot boat onto the ladder requires timing so as to step onto the ladder at the top of a wave or roll. If conditions are such as to create any risk of injury then the attempt should be abandoned.

Where the Pilot has a reasonably short climb, it is better for the pilot boat to remain alongside whilst the climb is completed to ensure the pilot boat does not foul the ladder when leaving the vessel's side. The definition of a short climb is recommended to be approximately no more than 2 metres from the deck of the pilot boat to the deck of the ship. This is also the approximate distance between the lowest spreader bar and the bottom of the ladder.

However, with a long climb, the Pilot may prefer the pilot boat to move away from the vessel's side in order to avoid serious injury in the event of a fall. Such a decision should be made as a result of consultation between Pilot and Coxswain prior to the Pilot leaving the cabin. If the pilot boat leaves the vessel's side, particular care must be made not to foul the ladder.

9. PILOT DISEMBARKATION

As with boarding, communication should be established between the vessel and pilot boat to make arrangements in advance. Before leaving the bridge, the Pilot should inform the Master of the traffic situation, any navigational dangers and the need to keep a lee until the Pilot is safely disembarked and the pilot boat clear of the ship's side. The Pilot should also obtain an assurance from the Master that the pilot ladder is properly secured.

Before stepping onto the ladder the Pilot should check that it is properly rigged and that the Deckhand is at the bottom of the ladder, having ensured that it is at the correct height. The Deckhand should advise the Pilot how many steps to go when descending the ladder especially in adverse weather and give physical help as required. The deckhand, positioning himself behind the Pilot as he/she descends, should ensure that there is sufficient space behind the Pilot to enable him/her to step backwards off the pilot ladder and on to the deck of the pilot boat safely.

The Pilot should normally walk aft to the cabin on the outboard side of the boat, away from the ship. When all personnel are safely in the cabin the Deckhand should proceed aft checking that the decks are clear and safe. The decision as to whether to disembark from a ship rests with the Pilot.

10. HYDRAULIC BOARDING AND LANDING FRAMES

Some pilot boats are fitted with hydraulic boarding and landing frames on both sides of the vessel, designed to assist and increase the safety of the pilot transfer operation. The following procedures apply when the hydraulic frames are used:

Boarding:

The Pilot informs the cutter crew that he wishes to use the frame as soon as possible and in good time before arrival at the vessel. The Coxswain must instruct the ship to be served that the ladder is to be set at a height of 2m above the water. On approaching the vessel, the pilot boat should run parallel a few metres from the ship. The frame should be deployed, and the Pilot, followed by the Deckhand, should proceed to the foredeck. The Pilot should then climb up onto the frame, and wait on the secure platform whilst the Coxswain manoeuvres the pilot boat into position alongside the ship, before boarding. The Coxswain should then move the pilot boat away from the ship at an appropriate time.

Landing:

When giving the ETA at the landing point, the Pilot should inform the pilot station that he wishes to use the hydraulic frame. The ship should be informed that the ladder is to be set at a height of 2m above the water. The pilot boat should approach the ship, and deploy the frame. Prior to the transfer, the ship's master should be advised to hold his course until the landing operation has been completed, and the Coxswain has communicated to the ship that all is clear. The pilot boat should then move into position alongside the ship with the frame just forward of the pilot ladder. The Pilot will then make the transfer to the pilot boat, and having done so, wait on the secure platform. The pilot boat should then move away from the ship, and hold a parallel course, with the ship maintaining its course. The Pilot should then dismount from the frame, and proceed to the cabin with the Deckhand. Once the Coxswain is satisfied that both Pilot and Deckhand are in a safe position, the ship's master is given 'all clear' to proceed on passage.

Note: *The hydraulic frame is a new development (2012) and these guidelines may be revised as experience is gained in using the boarding/landing frame. Any user who identifies any potential improvements to these guidelines should submit suggestions to their elevant manager.*

11. LEAVING THE SHIP'S SIDE

Should the pilot boat have any difficulty leaving the side of a ship the Coxswain should communicate the problem to the Master and request that appropriate action be taken to alter the heading/speed of the vessel.

12. HEAVY WEATHER OPERATIONS

In heavy weather, pilot boats should proceed at a speed appropriate to the wind conditions, sea state and design of the boat. Maximum use should be made of seating and seatbelts where fitted. Loose equipment and stores should be stowed to avoid injury.

13. RESTRICTED VISIBILITY

The pilot boat must be allowed extra time on task in order to proceed at a safe speed in poor visibility. Radar, and AIS when fitted must be operated and the fog signal sounded. The Coxswain must determine by radio communication with the ship, its position, course and speed, and position relative to other vessels. Rule 19 should be observed at all times; the Coxswain making an approach around the stern and not across the ship's head.

In all cases where visibility is impaired, the Deckhand should act as lookout until the ship and any navigational marks are sighted by the Coxswain. In poor visibility the Coxswain should wait until the Deckhand has returned to the cabin and is acting as lookout before departing the ship.

14. MAN OVERBOARD PROCEDURES

In the event of a man overboard, the priority is to locate the casualty and keep him in sight, a task to which all Crew and Pilots must devote their whole attention (subject to keeping a proper navigational lookout). A distress call should be instigated immediately by using the DSC distress button, and informing the Coastguard and other stations of the emergency by using the prefix “Pan Pan”. If time allows, the appropriate VTS Centre should be informed of the situation.

Should the pilot boat subsequently lose sight of the man overboard, a distress call (Mayday) should be issued to the Coastguard.

Once the casualty is located, the retrieval equipment can be prepared and deployed as the pilot boat is positioned. Recovery should be made using a well-practised drill. A full report of the incident should be forwarded by the Coxswain to the appropriate manager.

15. TRAINING FOR RETRIEVAL OF CASUALTIES

The success of any rescue is directly related to the expertise of the boat Crew and Pilots and their training with regard to the recovery equipment, treatment of hypothermia, artificial resuscitation and first aid. All sea-going pilotage staff should receive training in resuscitation and the treatment of hypothermia to the standards defined in MGN 50 (M). Furthermore, during initial training, Pilots should operate the recovery equipment as part of a man overboard drill. Retrieval drills for boat Crews and checks of the equipment should be regularly carried out and recorded in the vessel’s log book.

16. BOARDING OPERATIONS INVOLVING NON-REGULAR SHIPS AND TUGS

When boarding ships that do not comply with the requirements of Sections 8 & 9, care must be taken to establish a safe means of transfer. A risk assessment should be carried out with the Pilot making the final decision whether to board the ship. Ships without parallel sides such as high speed craft and some Ro-Ro vessels may request that the Pilot join at the previous port.

Pilot Transfers using Tugs

Preparations on the Tug

Before a tug goes alongside a vessel to transfer a Pilot, VHF communications must be established between the Tugmaster and the Master of the vessel or the Pilot. The tug should only proceed alongside when the vessel has confirmed that it is steady on course/speed and ready to receive the tug, having established a suitable lee. A Deckhand must be in attendance at the foot of the pilot ladder to assist the boarding or landing of the Pilot and to ensure that the ladder does not foul on any part of the tug. If the height of the bottom of the pilot ladder above the water is incorrect for the tug, the Tugmaster should inform the vessel so that the situation can be corrected. The man overboard recovery gear must be prepared prior to the transfer and the transfer point illuminated at night. It may be prudent for a second tug to provide a lee when boarding in rough sea conditions.

Preparations on the Vessel

The vessel should make a good lee and be steady on course at a speed of about 6kts for the transfer. The transfer should not take place until the vessel Master has confirmed that he is ready to receive the tug alongside.

Pilot Transfer

In adverse weather conditions, the Tugmaster is responsible for making the decision as to whether the transfer should take place. When the tug is in position and the Tugmaster is satisfied that it is safe for the boarding/landing operation to commence, he will indicate that readiness to the Tug Deckhand that he his ready for the transfer.

The Pilot should not step onto the pilot ladder until this signal has been given. During the transfer only one person at a time should use the pilot ladder and any transfer of bags should be made by heaving line after the Pilot is clear of the ladder. The tug should maintain position until the transfer is complete. On completion of the transfer the tug should clear the vessel and then report to the Master that the transfer is complete and that the tug is clear.

17. TRANSFER OPERATIONS INVOLVING NON-OPERATIONAL PERSONS

The transfer of passengers or supernumeraries by pilot boat, including non-operational staff and visitors, is to take place only by prior arrangement with, and at the discretion of the CHA and the pilot boat operators - Estuary Services Ltd; and will be subject to the completion of a dedicated safety briefing beforehand.

Vessel owners and operators contemplating this activity are also referred to Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 432.

In order to comply with insurance requirements, all passengers and supernumeraries must be attached to the boat by a safety line at all times when on deck whilst the vessel is underway, unless moving from the pilot boat to the pilot ladder.

REFERENCES

1. Code of Safe Practice for The Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots – *UKMPA August 2006.*

2. SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 17 – *IMO, London.*

3. Small Commercial Vessel Code – *Maritime & Coastguard Agency.*

4. Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 50 (M) – Manning of Pilot Boats.

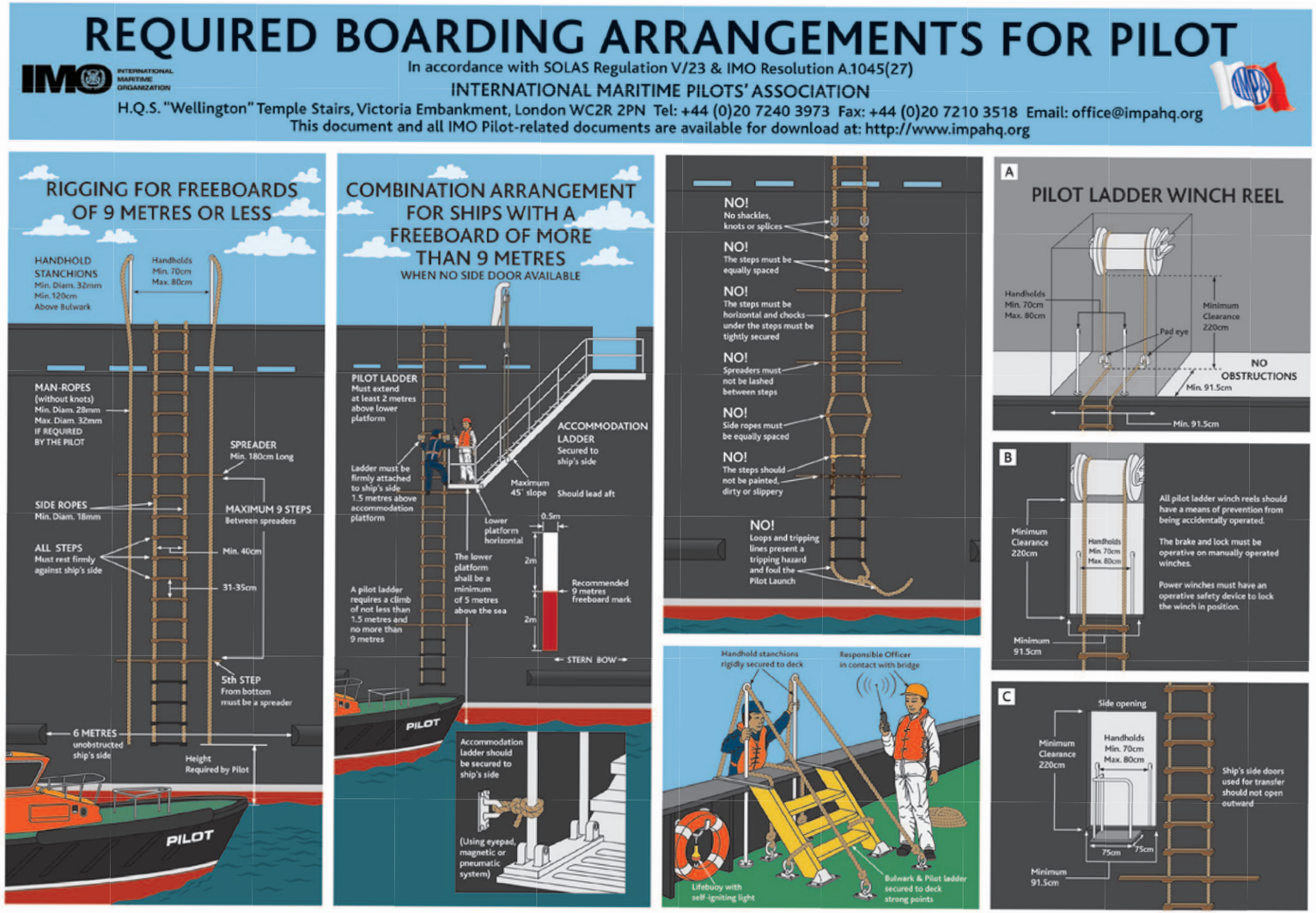
5. Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 280 (M) - Small Vessels in commercial use for Sport or Pleasure, Workboats and Pilot Boats: Alternative Construction Standards.

6. Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 432 (M) - Safety during transfers of Persons to and from Ships.

January 2013

ANNEX

International Marine Pilots Association – Required Boarding Arrangements for Pilot



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Annex B

Port of London Authority's risk assessment dated 29 March 2016 for pilot boarding and landing operations

PLA RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

(Green boxes/rows are to be completed)

Number:	1126
Issue:	4
Date:	30/03/2010

Name of Assessor
H&S Committee No 9

Area or Task
PLA Pilots - Boarding & Landing

Date of Assessment
29/03/2016

	Person	Date
STEP 5 - Date to be reviewed & reviewer		

Risk = Probability x Severity
Probability: 3 = Highly likely. 2 = Likely. 1 = Unlikely
Severity: 3 = Major. 2 = Serious. 1 = Minor

Line No.	STEP 1 - Identify the (Significant) Hazards.	STEP 2- Identify who could be harmed?	STEP 3 - Identify the existing precautions	Probability	Severity	Risk	What further action is necessary to control the significant risks. (Compare with good practice.)	Will this suitably reduce the residual risk?	STEP 4 - Plan to control the risks. Who?	When?	Done
1	Access to pilot launches from pontoons etc & vice-versa - slip/trip hazards		Non-slip deck materials, handrails, man-lines & personal protection equipment (PPE) and other effective maintenance solutions. Option to refuse if conditions unsuitable/unsafe & to re-locate. Prompt incident reporting	2	1	2					
2	Ship to shore transfer by pilot launches & vice-versa - normal marine hazards plus heightened risk of falls in heavy weather		Pilot boat regulations, pilot training inc safety briefing, onboard safety equipment. Prompt incident reporting. PPE.	2	2	4					
3	Boarding/landing from ships **underway**, using ships pilot ladders - slips, falls, sprains heightened risk in heavy weather		Pilot ladder regulations code of practice. Prompt incident reporting and HM notified. Vessel compliance statement on arrival in outer limits of district. Pilot boat crew experience, option to refuse if conditions unsuitable/unsafe & to overcarry to next port. PPE.	2	2	4					
4	Boarding/landing from ships **alongside berths or anchored,** using ships pilot ladders - slips, falls, sprains heightened risk in heavy weather		As above plus option to refuse & to remain on board until conditions are suitably safe.	2	2	4					
5	Pilot ladders in general - slips, falls, sprains heightened risk in heavy weather		Pilots own experience & judgement, backed by initial training by acknowledged experienced colleagues. Prompt incident reporting and HM notified. PPE.	2	2	4					
6	Joining/leaving ships at berths, jetties etc. by land - slip/trip/fall hazards, guard dogs, locked gates		Option to refuse or to seek assistance if available. Prompt incident reporting. PPE.	1	1	1					
7	Joining/leaving ships at berths, jetties etc. by land - difficult or encumbered access, hazardous working areas, lighting		Option to refuse or to seek assistance if available. Prompt incident reporting. PPE.	1	1	1					
8	Wharves, piers, jetties, pontoons etc. when joining/leaving pilot boats or ships - slips/trips/falls/ overhead working		HSAW controls PPE including hard hats where applicable. Prompt incident reporting.	1	1	1					