



Department
for Transport

Shipping Fleet Statistics: 2020

About this release

This statistical release presents summary statistics for UK and world shipping fleets, including analyses by country of registration, UK ownership and management, and trading vessel type.

All figures are based on vessels of 100 gross tonnes (GT) or over.

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Further information

Detailed statistics covering the UK and world fleets can be found in the [statistical tables](#).

Gross tonnage on the UK Ship Register (UKSR) fell 5% to 10 million GT at end December 2020.

Official data from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - for all merchant vessels over 100GT¹ - shows that gross tonnage on the UKSR has declined for the third year in a row, and is now 38% lower than the previous peak in 2017.

Based on world fleet data (supplied by IHS Global) for trading vessels only, at the end of 2020, the UK registered trading fleet:

- ▶ accounted for 0.5% of the world fleet on a deadweight tonnage basis (a measure of cargo carrying capacity), and 0.6% when based on gross tonnage (a measure of vessel size), both down slightly since 2019.
- ▶ was the 24th largest trading fleet in the world, on a deadweight tonnage basis, as it was in 2019.
- ▶ accounted for 20% of deadweight tonnage of the Red Ensign Group, which as a whole would be the world's 10th largest trading fleet. This proportion has increased slightly from 19% in 2019.

These statistics provide other measures of the UK shipping fleet, based on vessel ownership and management, which show that at the end of 2020:

- ▶ the 'UK fleet' of ships either owned, parent owned or managed in the UK is larger than the UK registered trading fleet - comprising in total around 4% of the world fleet, by deadweight tonnage. This share has remained stable since the previous year.
- ▶ the deadweight tonnage of ships with a UK parent owner decreased by 2% in 2020 compared with 2019, following an upward trend since 2014.



¹ UKSR figures also include bareboat charters (i.e. cover parts I and IV of the register). registered trading fleet, but vessels of an unknown registry are not counted as their own trading fleet.

About these statistics

These statistics provide different measures of UK shipping interests, set in the global context, including the number of UK registered (UK flagged) vessels. Every merchant ship must be registered in a country (the 'flag state') and ship registration can, in part, be considered an indicator of the overall health of a country's maritime sector.

Data sources

This release presents figures from two different data sources:

- ▶ **Section 1** presents figures for the UK Ship Register, provided by MCA, which show trends in the UK registered fleet using official data
- ▶ **Sections 2 and 3** use data from a commercial source (IHS Global and predecessors) to provide context, giving the UK position in the global fleet (section 2) and other measures of UK shipping interests (section 3)

Users are advised to use MCA figures for a definitive picture of the state of the UK Register; the commercial data provides access to a wider range of contextual information (such as the world fleet or Red Ensign group, ownership or vessel details) or a longer historic series. An overview of the main differences between the two sources is outlined in the 'background notes' section.

Coverage and key definitions

Time period. Both sources relate to the fleet as at 31 December of each year.

Vessel size. Both sources relate to vessels of 100 gross tonnes (GT) or over

Vessel type. UKSR figures cover merchant vessels, including bareboat charters (parts I and IV of the register). Figures from the IHS data presented in this release relate to trading vessels - those which carry cargo or passengers for commercial purposes. However, the accompanying data tables also cover non-trading vessels (e.g. fishing vessels). Around half of UK registered vessels classified as non-trading vessels in the IHS data are included in the UKSR statistics given here.

Measures of ship size (tonnage). There are two alternative ways that the size of ships is measured within these statistics:

- ▶ **Gross tonnage (GT)** represents the size of the vessel, and is not a measure of weight - it is calculated using a formula based on the volume of enclosed spaces of the vessel. It is used to assess the cost of vessel registration, and is the headline tonnage measure for the UKSR
- ▶ **Deadweight tonnage (DWT)** measures the cargo carrying capacity of a vessel, excluding the weight of the ship itself. In general, DWT has been used as the main measure where statistics are based on world fleet data (as in previous years), as overall trends are broadly similar for both measures. The accompanying data tables contain figures for both DWT and GT.

Measures of shipping interests. A country's shipping interests may be measured in different ways. UKSR statistics relate to vessels which are registered in the UK. These vessels may be owned or managed by non-UK companies; the commercial data provides other measures of UK shipping including ownership and management. These are summarised in section 3.

Section 1: The UK Ship Register

Official figures show that the UK registered merchant fleet fell by 5% in gross tonnage (GT) in the year to end December 2020.

Gross tonnage fell to 10 million tonnes at end of December 2020, below the previous low of 10.5 million tonnes in 2019. After three years of growth up to 2017, gross tonnage has declined by 38% from 2017 to 2020. Overall vessel numbers also decreased from 2019 to 2020, decreasing by 4%.

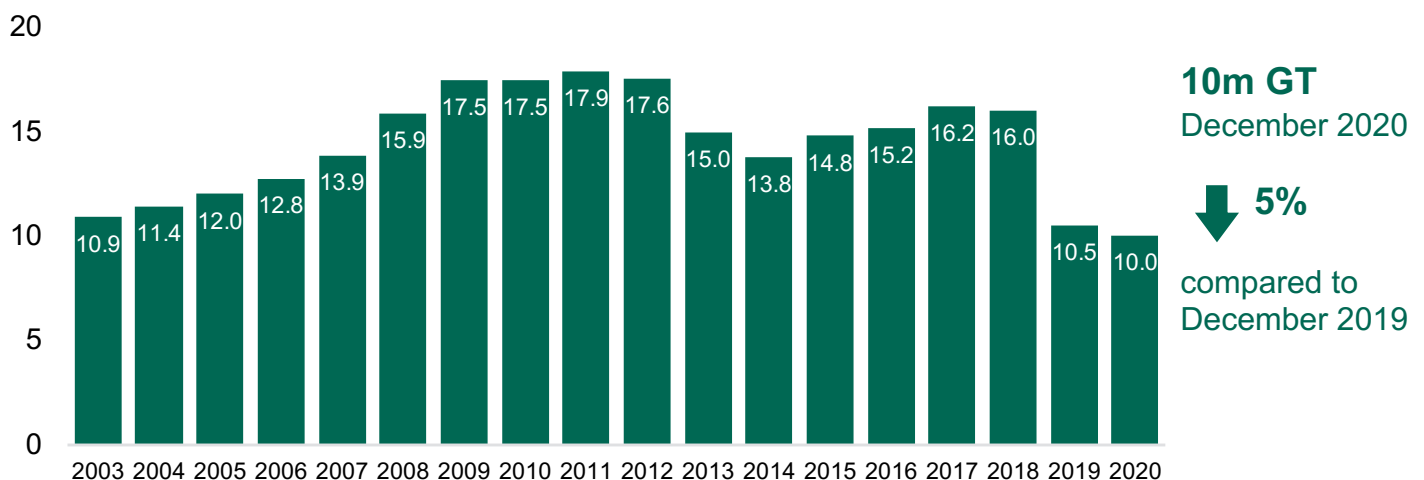
Decline in tonnage on the UK shipping register between 2018 and 2020 is likely to be related to uncertainty over the UK's exit from the EU. The large decline between 2018 and 2019 largely reflects one company's decision to change the flag of its fleet.

Consistent official figures exist back to 2003, though commercial data shows (see section 3) that over the longer term, the UK registered fleet was at historically low levels during the 1990s, before increasing in the decade to 2009. This may reflect the impact of the UK [tonnage tax scheme](#) introduced in 2000 in promoting the UK Ship Register. Tonnage Tax companies are required to elect into the regime for a 10-year period and may extend that election on a rolling annual basis.

Between 2009 and 2014, the UK registered fleet declined, with a couple of larger companies moving their fleets away from the UK flag for commercial reasons during this period. [The Maritime Growth Study \(MGS\)](#), published in 2015, was launched in response to these trends, with the aim of growing the sector; the [UK Ship Register Advisory Panel](#) report also covered possible actions to increase the size of the UK flag.

10 million GT on the UKSR at end 2020

Gross Tonnage, in millions, on the UK Ship Register (parts I and IV) at end year: 2003-2020 [table [FLE0100](#)]



Further information

The table [FLE0100](#) presents end year statistics for the UK Ship Register.

Further information about the UKSR and [ship registration](#), including regular 'flagging up' newsletters which present the latest statistics, is published by MCA.

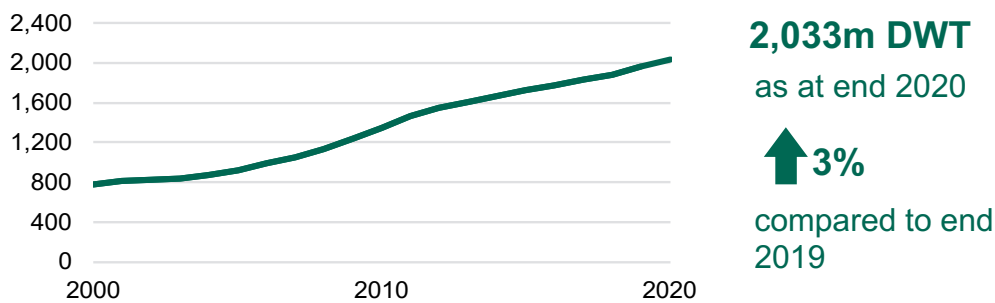
Section 2: Trading fleets: World and Red Ensign Group

Based on data from IHS Global, the UK share of the world trading fleet was 0.5% by deadweight tonnage and 0.6% by gross tonnage at the end of 2020. The UK registered trading fleet was the 24th largest in the world by deadweight tonnage.

At the end of 2020, there were around 62,100 vessels in the world trading fleet, with a total deadweight tonnage of 2,033 million DWT. By deadweight tonnage, the world fleet has doubled in size since 2005 and despite the growth slowing in recent years, it has still increased by 3% since 2019.

The world trading fleet continues to grow.

World trading vessels over 100GT, million deadweight tonnes [\[FLE0502\]](#)



Data source and coverage

The figures in this section are based on world fleet data supplied by IHS Global.

These figures cover trading vessels over 100GT, and are not directly comparable with the UKSR statistics presented in section 1 (a brief comparison of the two sources is given in the background notes)

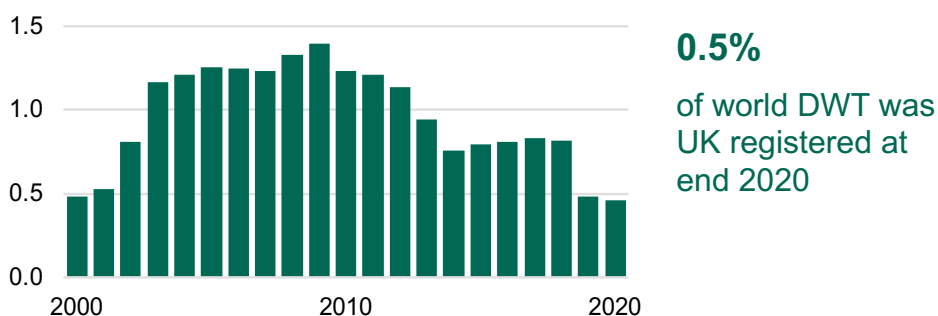
Statistical tables

[FLE05](#): World fleet registered vessels for selected countries (by gross and deadweight tonnage)

The UK registered share of the world trading fleet has remained relatively stable in 2020, following a large decrease in 2019. On a deadweight tonnage basis, the UK's share of the world trading fleet has remained at 0.5%, a similar level as it was in 2000. On a gross tonnage basis, the UK's share has decreased slightly to 0.6% in 2020, from 0.7% in 2019.

The UK registered share of the world fleet has remained broadly stable on the previous year

UK registered share (%) of world fleet deadweight tonnage - trading vessels over 100GT [\[FLE0502\]](#)



The UK registered trading fleet is the 24th largest in the world by DWT, the same as it was in 2019². The largest trading fleets, such as Panama, are open registers, available to all ships regardless of the place of business of the owner. The UK register is a traditional, or national registry, which requires ships to be owned, at least in part, by national interests ([registration information](#) for the UK is published by MCA). The large open registers also account for a large proportion of the overall growth of the world fleet in recent years, most notably the Marshall Islands.

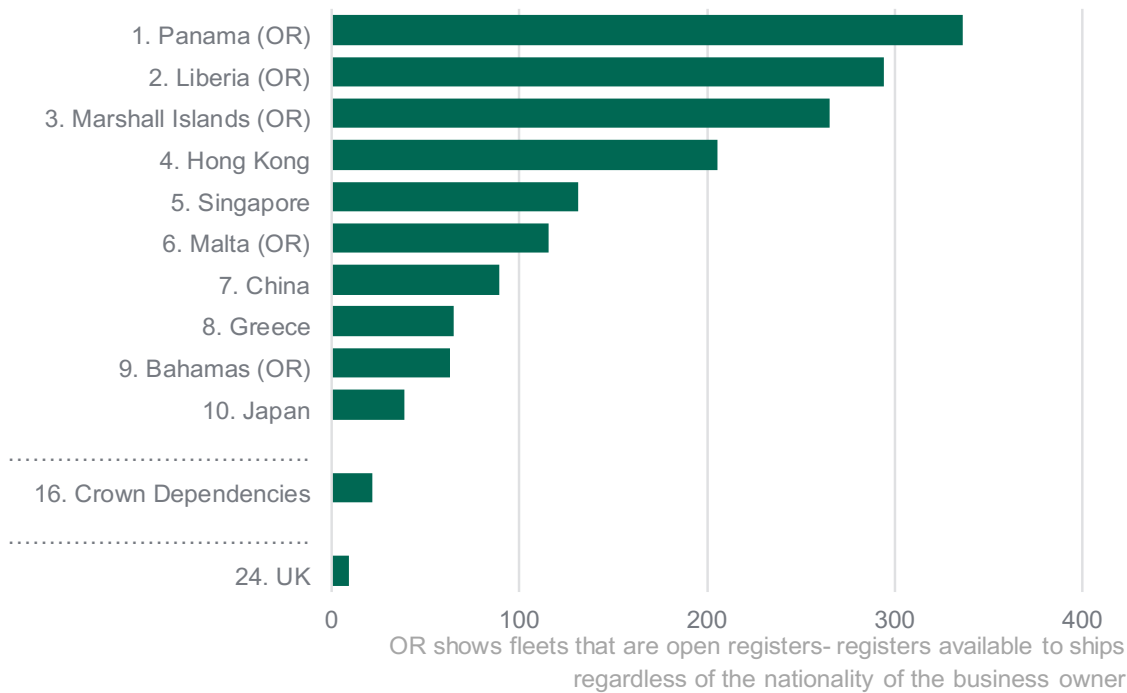
² Unlike in 2019, the total deadweight tonnage of trading vessels of an unknown registry was greater than the deadweight tonnage of the UK registered trading fleet, but vessels of an unknown registry are not counted as their own trading fleet.

The UK registered trading fleet was the 24th largest in the world by DWT in 2020

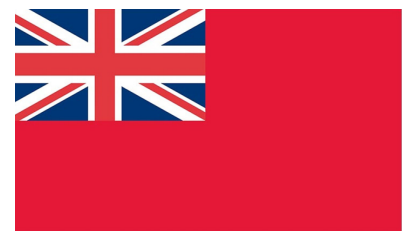
The largest ship registers by deadweight tonnage (vessels over 100GT, million DWT): end 2020

Largest trading fleets end 2020, by country of registration

Million deadweight tonnes, vessels over 100 GT



If taken as a group, the Red Ensign Group would have the 10th largest registered trading fleet in the world at the end of 2020, the same rank as in 2019. The total registered deadweight tonnage has reduced by 4% from 2019 to 48.1 million DWT.



The Red Ensign Group is the collective title for the shipping registers of the UK, the Crown Dependencies and the Overseas Territories. Registration with the Red Ensign Group provides vessels with the support of British consular services worldwide, UK defence and security responsibilities also extend to vessels flagged to the Red Ensign Group.

The UK accounts for 20% of the Red Ensign Group's deadweight tonnage, whilst the Crown Dependencies (effectively the Isle of Man) account for 45% and the Overseas Territories account for 36%³. From 2003 to 2009 the UK and Isle of Man registered trading fleets were at a broadly similar level; since then the Isle of Man trading fleet has grown more than 70% up to 2018. However, the Isle of Man register has declined since 2018, with gross tonnage and deadweight tonnage both falling by 10% in the latest year.

Statistical tables

[FLE03](#): UK and Crown Dependency registered vessels (by type)

[FLE04](#): Red Ensign Group

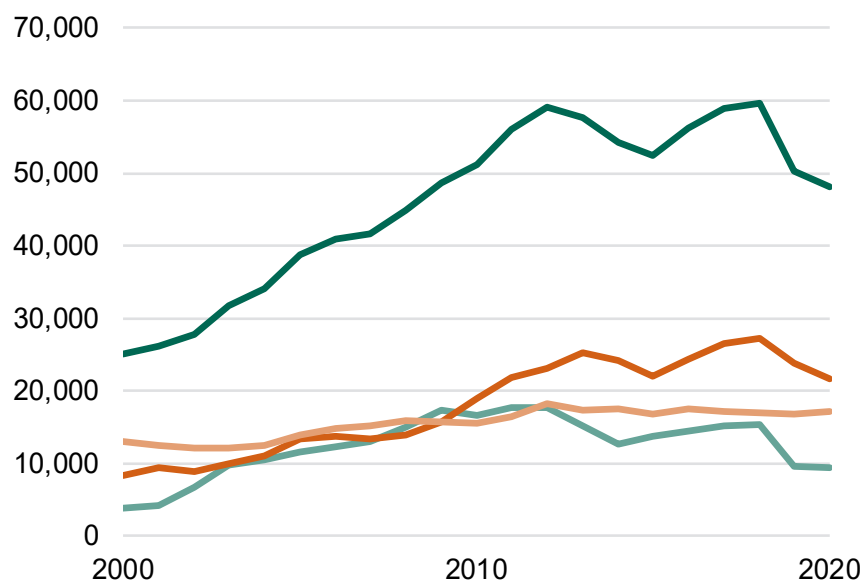
³Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Whilst the UK and the Crown Dependencies have seen reductions in their trading fleets in 2020, the Overseas Territories' deadweight and gross tonnage have both increased by 2%, driven by growth in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands' fleets.

The Crown Dependencies ranked as the 16th largest registered trading fleet in the world measured by deadweight tonnage at end 2020, and in combination, the Red Ensign Group would be in 10th place (48.1m DWT). Outside the UK, Red Ensign Group members, like many non-European open registries, are able to offer very attractive fiscal regimes to potential customers.

The Crown Dependencies (largely Isle of Man) account for nearly half of DWT for the Red Ensign Group trading fleet, but their register has declined

REG registered trading vessels over 100GT, million deadweight tonnes
[\[FLE0402\]](#)



48.1m Red Ensign Group

Of which:

21.6m Crown Dependencies

17.1m Overseas Territories

9.4m United Kingdom

Red Ensign Group countries

The **Crown Dependencies** are the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. Of these, the Isle of Man accounts for over 99.9% of the combined deadweight tonnage.

The **Overseas Territories** are Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, St Helena and the Turks & Caicos Islands.

Section 3: Other measures of UK Shipping Interests

The 'UK fleet' of ships owned, parent owned or managed in the UK is considerably larger than the UK registered trading fleet - in total accounting for 4% of the world fleet by deadweight tonnage. This has remained stable since 2018.

Shipping is a complex international business, and many different parties, often based in different countries, may have a commercial interest in a single vessel. Both ownership and management of shipping can have economic value to the country in which they are located.

In comparison to the UK, many of the large open flags typically have relatively small fleets of parent owned vessels.

Statistical tables

[FLE01](#): UK interest in trading ships and fleets

[FLE02](#): UK owned vessels (by type)

[FLE07](#): UK managed vessels (by type)

In these statistics, the following, non-mutually exclusive, definitions of the UK fleet are used:

- ▶ **UK registered:** the vessel is UK registered
- ▶ **UK direct owned:** the registered owner of the vessel is a company registered in the UK
- ▶ **UK parent owned:** the company having the controlling interest in the direct owner is a UK company
- ▶ **UK managed:** the company managing the ship is a UK company

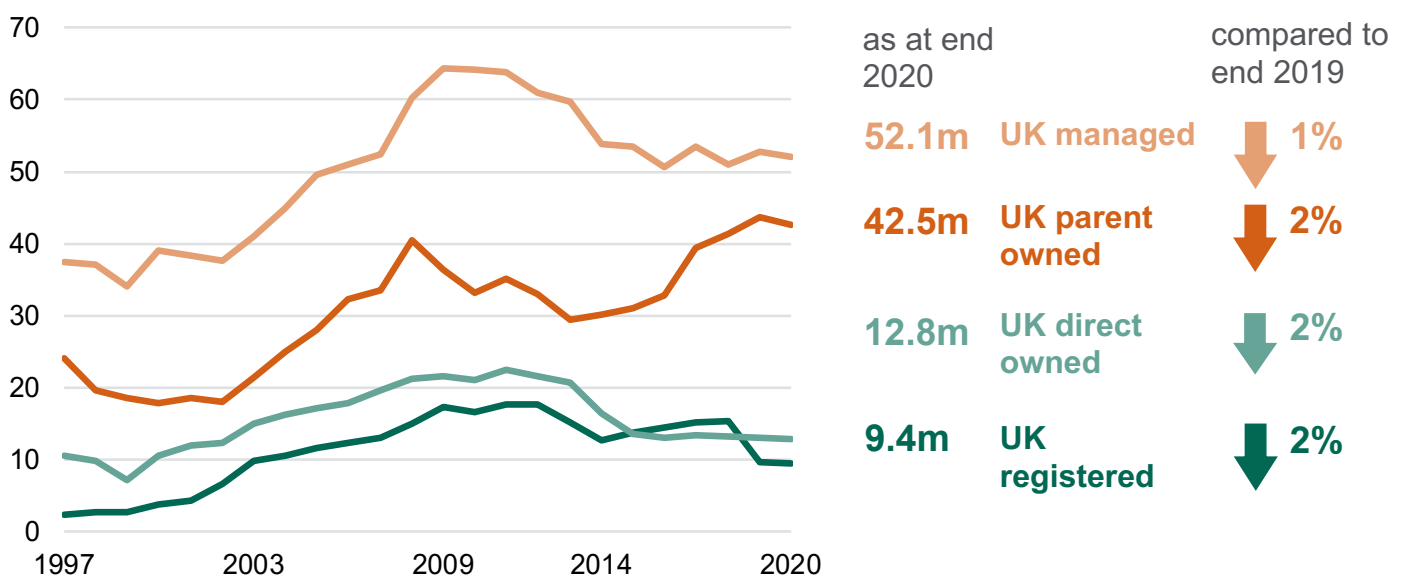
The above categories are not mutually exclusive – for example, a vessel could be both UK owned and UK managed. In total, 1,495 trading vessels totalling 72.1 million deadweight tonnes, 4% of the world fleet’s deadweight tonnage, are either directly owned, parent owned or managed from the UK (see FLE0102). In comparison, the UK registered trading fleet accounted for 9.4 million deadweight tonnes, 0.5% of the world fleet’s deadweight tonnage.

In 2020, all four measures of the UK trading fleet – relating to ownership and management as well as registration – declined slightly, but the recent trend shows a mixed picture.

- ▶ In general there was growth throughout the decade to 2009. UK tonnage tax, introduced in 2000, may have contributed to this growth through promoting the UK Ship Register.
- ▶ Decline from 2009 to 2014 followed, possibly related to the economic downturn.
- ▶ Since 2014 up to 2018, the UK registered trading fleet and UK parent ownership have grown, while UK direct ownership and management remained fairly flat despite fluctuations since 2014.
- ▶ In 2020, the UK registered trading fleet fell slightly in DWT, after a large decrease in 2019. UK direct ownership, parent ownership and management also fell slightly in 2020.

Slight fall in UK shipping interests - ownership, management and registration - in 2020

UK interests in trading vessels, million deadweight tonnes (vessels over 100GT), end year: 1997-2020 [[FLE0101](#)]



Further detail

Detailed statistical tables containing breakdowns and time series of the number, deadweight tonnage and gross tonnage of vessels by type of vessel, size of vessel, fleet definition, and selected international fleets may be found at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/maritime-and-shipping-statistics

Further guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics may be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/maritime-and-shipping-statistics-guidance

Related information

The [Maritime and Coastguard Agency](http://www.mca.gov.uk) is responsible for ship registration in the UK, and maintains the definitive UK ship register, to which the figures in section 1 of this publication relate.

The 2015 [Maritime Growth Study](http://www.maritime.gov.uk) report provides further analysis of the UK and world fleet data and background context.

A range of other sources provide information on the global shipping fleet. For example the UNCTAD annual [Review of Maritime Transport](http://www.unctad.org) includes a more in-depth analysis of trends in the global fleet (though based on an alternative source of data than is used for this publication).

Data sources - strengths, weaknesses, and comparison

These statistics are based on data from two sources.

The majority of these statistics, including all those in sections 2 and 3 of this publication and data tables other than the first section of FLE0100, are derived from commercial data sourced from **IHS Global Limited** covering vessels in the world fleet. They are believed to be of good quality, and the underlying dataset is validated by DfT and used in the production of other maritime statistics. However, as the management of the data set is not within DfT control they are not eligible for National Statistics badging. However, these statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. There was a definitional change affecting the comparability of data over time in 2009; figures for 2009 are presented on both the new and old basis in the data tables to allow an assessment of the size of this effect to be made.

The figures in section 1 of this publication and presented in table FLE0100 are derived from information provided by the **Maritime and Coastguard Agency** for UK registered large commercial vessels. These figures are extracted from the Fleet Management System used by the Registry of Shipping and Seamen who are responsible for managing the registration process. Therefore the figures are considered to be robust; though there are occasional administrative issues (such as a lag between a vessel leaving or joining the flag and appearing in the statistics) analysis carried out by DfT suggests that these have a minimal impact on the totals for vessels and tonnage. The statistics cover only Parts I and IV of the UK Ship Register, relating to commercial vessels. Statistics for Parts II (fish catching) and III (small ships) are not reported in the same way. A consistent time series is available since 2003, when the MCA completed a registration renewal exercise.

DfT has carried out a comparison and matching of data from the two sources in relation to the UK registered fleet. Some of the main points to note include:

- ▶ The coverage of the two sources differs. For example, the MCA data includes some vessels not captured in the commercial source, many of which are inland waterway vessels (e.g. barges, passenger vessels operating on rivers and inland tankers). Conversely, the MCA figures do not include non-merchant vessels such as fishing boats and most yachts, which are recorded in the IHS data as 'non-trading' vessels (though other 'non-trading' vessels are included in the MCA data).
- ▶ There are a number of other reasons why the two sources do not match completely, though these account for a small number of vessels. For example, the IHS information on new UK registrations may lag slightly behind that on the UK Register. Also, information on changes of registration are notified separately to MCA and IHS, and therefore may appear in each data set at slightly different times, although efforts are made to exchange information between the two data sets to minimise such differences.
- ▶ When presented on a broadly comparable basis (by excluding fishing vessels from the commercial data), figures from the two sources are similar as shown in table FLE0100. In particular, the majority of the largest vessels are consistently identified in both sources meaning that, when the coverage of the IHS data is made as comparable as possible to the UKSR data, tonnage figures are very similar.
- ▶ However, in sections 2 and 3 of this publication, data from the commercial source are presented for trading vessels only, and on a DWT basis (to be consistent with previous publications). This means vessel numbers and tonnage are not directly comparable with the official figures given in section 1, which will for example include some 'non-trading' merchant vessels. However, the majority of UK registered vessels included in the IHS data as trading vessels are also present in the MCA list so that figures for the UK registered trading fleet can be considered to represent a considerable majority of the tonnage on the UK Ship Register.

Contact us

We always welcome feedback on these statistics. Please contact the team via maritime.stats@dft.gov.uk or using the contact details on the front page.

Next publication

Statistics for the world fleet at the end of 2021 are scheduled for publication in March 2022.

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