



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

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GENERAL EXEMPTION

The Secretary of State, in exercise of their powers conferred by Section 294(1) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 hereby exempts:

Remotely Operated Unmanned Vessels of 2.5 to <4.5 metres in length overall

from the following requirements (to the extent that they apply):

- The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulations 2024 No. 637¹
- The Merchant Shipping (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping) Regulations 2022²
- The Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances and Arrangements) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No. 501)³
- The Merchant Shipping (Survey and Certification) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015 No. 508)⁴
- Merchant Shipping (Musters, Training and Decision Support Systems) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 2722)⁵

¹ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 6(2) of the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulations 2024 (SI 2024 No. 637)

² In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 59(1) of the Merchant Shipping (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping) Regulations 2022 (SI 2022 No. 1342)

³ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 8(1),(2) of the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances and Arrangements) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No. 501)

⁴ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 5(3) of the Merchant Shipping (Survey and Certification) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015 No. 508)

⁵ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 14(1) of the Merchant Shipping (Musters, Training and Decision Support Systems) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 2722)

- The Merchant Shipping (Load Line) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 2241)⁶
- The Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1011)⁷

The vessel must comply with all other applicable Regulations (to the extent that they apply), including those set out in the:

- Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972, as amended (COLREGs);
- The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974;
- The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto, as amended (MARPOL);
- The Merchant Shipping (Safety of Navigation) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No. 673);
- The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No. 621);
- The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019 No. 42);
- The Merchant Shipping (Marine Equipment) Regulations 2016 (SI 2016 No. 1025);
- The Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012 No. 1743);
- The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 2924);
- The Merchant Shipping (Distress Messages) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1691);
- The Merchant Shipping (Tonnage) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No. 1510); and
- The Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 75).

These exemptions are subject to the following conditions:

- (a) The vessel is an ROUV⁸ of 2.5 to <4.5 metres in length overall;

⁶ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 5(1),(2) of the Merchant Shipping (Load Line) 1998 (SI 1998 No. 2241)

⁷ In exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 47 of the Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1011)

⁸ Remotely Operated Unmanned Vessel (ROUV) means a vessel with no persons on board that is operated from a location remote to the vessel

- (b) The vessel does not operate in ground effect (e.g. is not a WIG or hovercraft);
- (c) The vessel is a British ship⁹ wherever they may be, or a non-British ship operating from United Kingdom ports whilst in United Kingdom waters;
- (d) The vessel is unmanned (i.e. operates with no persons onboard);
- (e) The vessel is not permitted to carry any dangerous goods¹⁰;
- (f) The vessel is operated by a dedicated Remote Operator, who may also be the Master, who is in control at all times;
- (g) The Remote Operator and Master only manage and are responsible for one vessel at a time;
- (h) Command and control of the vessel is limited to only one remote location at a time;
- (i) Collaborative control with other platforms in the same or different domains is not permitted;
- (j) The vessel is not permitted to tow or lift a ship¹² or object either on the surface or in semi-submerged form;
- (k) The vessel may stream and operate towed survey equipment beneath the water's surface, provided it can be launched, recovered and monitored from the ROC;
- (l) The vessel is permitted to only carry out a tow as per (k) where the displacement of the towed object is less than or equal to twice the displacement of the towing vessel;
- (m) The vessel is permitted to only carry out lifting operations where the stability of the vessel is not negatively affected¹¹;
- (n) The vessel is only permitted to operate at speeds where latency does not prevent the vessel from complying with the applicable requirements of COLREGs;
- (o) the vessel is not permitted to operate at a speed greater than:
 - .1 the vessel's declared planing speed; or
 - .2 6 knots;
 whichever is lower;

⁹ The definition of "ship" provided in Section 313 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 is – "ship" includes every description of vessel used in navigation

¹⁰ "Dangerous goods" means cargoes classified in the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code which is given force of law through the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No. 2367), as amended

"Cargo" means all items which are transported by the vessel except: fuel for the vessel; ballast (either solid or liquid); permanent outfit and equipment of the vessel and; ships stores for the vessel

¹¹ "Lifting device" means a device used for lifting or lowering loads, and includes its attachments used for anchoring, fixing, supporting the device and connections between device and load

- (p) The vessel is not permitted to have an engine which can only be hand started;
- (q) The vessel is not permitted to have open flame appliances or gas installations;
- (r) The vessel is not permitted to have liquid fuelled cookers or liquid fuelled heating appliances installed;
- (s) The vessel is not permitted to be fitted with a diver lift or be used as a diving platform;
- (t) The vessel is not permitted to operate as a mother vessel¹²;
- (u) The vessel is not in commercial use for sport or pleasure;
- (v) The vessel is not a pleasure vessel;
- (w) The vessel does not have an anti-fouling system applied which contains Cybutryne or a banned organic compound;
- (x) The vessel has a continuously available communications system(s) operated from or installed at the control position providing the following capabilities for the area in which the vessel is operating, not the location of the control position:
 - .1 transmitting ship-to-shore distress alerts by two separate and independent means, each using a different radiocommunication service;
 - .2 receiving shore-to-ship distress alert relays;
 - .3 transmitting and receiving ship-to-ship distress alerts;
 - .4 transmitting and receiving on-scene communications including search and rescue co-ordinating communications;
 - .5 transmitting and receiving signals for locating;
 - .6 receiving Maritime Safety Information¹³;
 - .7 transmitting and receiving urgency and safety communications; and
 - .8 transmitting and receiving bridge-to-bridge communications;
- (y) The position of the vessel is automatically interfaced to the communication system(s);
- (z) All applicable requirements set out in Section 4 of MGN 705 are complied with;
- (aa) The vessel has clearly displayed means of identification including, at a minimum a MCA-issued unique identification number, positioned on its exterior; and
- (bb) Complete the Self-Declaration Form and email the following to codes@mcga.gov.uk:
 - (i) the completed form; and

¹² A mother vessel is a vessel which leads, serves, or carries tenders, and may provide a safe haven for a tender

¹³ Maritime Safety Information should be received in accordance with MSC.1/Circ.1645

(ii) evidence of the clearly displayed means of identification¹⁴.

A vessel to which this exemption applies operating in non-United Kingdom waters must comply with any provisions required by Maritime Administration(s) of the waters in which they are operating.

These exemptions shall have immediate effect for vessels which meet conditions (a) to (bb) and remain effective to the extent that:

- (1) Conditions (a) to (bb) continue to be met; and
- (2) Each and any of the regulations listed above remain in force, or the exemption is amended or revoked.

This exemption shall remain in force until 31 December 2027, unless cancelled or modified by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Dated this day 20 December 2024



Fraser Heasley

Director – UK Technical Maritime Services

¹⁴ Evidence may be provided in a range of formats e.g. photographs.

