

Changes to Compulsory vessel Pilotage – Darwin Harbour

Darwin Port was surprised by the NT Government’s announcement yesterday, which changes the requirements for compulsory vessel pilotage within Darwin Harbour. Darwin Port, which provides the harbour pilotage services, had not been consulted prior to the announcement and would not have supported the changes that were announced due to safety concerns.

Over many years Darwin Port has benchmarked best practices in relation to all aspects of the port business. Port safety is always regarded as our primary concern. The pilot exemption requirements have been reviewed in the past, with the existing 35 metre requirement assessed as best practice to satisfy safety standards. This position considers, the types and size of ships using Darwin harbour such as LNG tankers, large cruise ships and naval vessels along with the challenging tidal and climatic conditions. The requirement for vessels over 35 metres to embark a qualified pilot is the standard across most of Australia, with NSW being 30 metres and Queensland 50 metres. No other jurisdiction has the announced 55 metre exemption.

Without consultation, it is impossible to identify how the proposed changes addresses issues that the Minister alluded to or to adequately assess and mitigate any safety risks. The Government announcement contained a number of inaccuracies:

- Average pilotage movements over 10 years is 2,000 not 3,250 (projects such as Barossa see a temporary spike and higher demand)
- Average pilotage length is 2.5 hours not 4.5 hours
- Darwin Port has not experienced pilotage shortages over the years. Pilot numbers have remained stable, peak demand periods can impact scheduling due to fatigue management, climatic conditions and the availability of third-party contractors and suppliers such as tugs. The last round of recruiting saw 141 applicants with 3 trainees engaged.
- A review of the data indicates that less than 10% of vessels will be affected by the announcement not the 20% indicated.

Darwin Port strives to provide the safest operating environment for all port users and does not support the changes announced.

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