

[Detailed guide: Fishing vessels: classification, registration and inspection](#)

Updated: Page updated with latest Fishing vessel survey information

Introduction

This guide explains fishing vessel classification and certification. It also provides information on survey and inspection requirements and procedures and how a vessel can prepare for this. You will also find details on how to register a vessel.

Personal information which you supply to us will be used to keep the UK ship register up to date and to make sure our services are planned to meet ship owner's needs. The information you provide is primarily used for vessel registration purposes but may also be used for other non-vessel registration related purposes and shared with other statutory bodies/organisations to enable them to fulfil their statutory obligations.

The information will only be shared with other organisations where there is a legal obligation to do so, or with the agreement of the vessel owners or their representatives.

Further details on Ship Registrations privacy policy can be found at our [personal information charter](#) page.

Fishing vessels classification and certification

Fishing vessels are classified according to their length in metres.

Fishing vessels less than 24 metres in length

Fishing vessels less than 24 metres are covered by The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall and The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.

[Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall.](#)

[Download MSN 1872 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.](#)

Fishing vessels 24 metres in length and over

Fishing vessels of 24 metres in length and over are covered by MSN 1873 (F) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over.

[Download MSN 1873 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over.](#)

Certification

Fishing vessels are exempt from some certification requirements, although other specialised certificates must be carried, including:

- a UK Fishing Vessel certificate (UKFVC) – for vessels 15-24 metres in length
- an International Fishing Vessel certificate (IFVC) – for vessels 24 metres or longer
- an Oil Pollution Prevention certificate
- an Air Pollution certificate – for vessels of 400 gross tonnes (gt) or more
- a Sewage Pollution certificate – for vessels of 400 gt or more, or carrying up to 15 persons, and on international voyages
- an Anti-fouling declaration – for vessels of less than 24 metres in length and less than 400 gt
- an Anti-fouling certificate – for vessels of 400 gt or more
- a Certificate of Registry
- an International Tonnage certificate – for vessels of 400 gt or more

For information about the certification of fishing vessels, see [vessel survey and inspection requirements on the MCA website](#).

Fishing vessel surveys and inspections

There are separate certifications, and different survey and inspection requirements, for fishing vessels that are:

- less than 15 metres in LOA
- from 15 metres in LOA to less than 24 metres registered length
- over 24 metres in registered length

Fishing vessels less than 15 metres in length are covered by The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall. [Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall.](#)

A separate Code of Practice sets out the requirements for fishing vessels of between 15 and 24 metres in length: The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length. [Download MSN 1872 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.](#)

Fishing vessels of 24 metres and over in length are covered by the MSN 1873 (F) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over. [Download MSN 1873 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over.](#)

New fishing vessels of less than 15 metres, built on or after 16 July 2007 must be built and certificated to Seafish Construction Standards before entering service to make sure that they comply with the appropriate certification requirements.

Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall, built before 16 July 2007 must undergo a Registration Survey, by a Surveyor authorised by the MCA, who will survey the vessel against Seafish Construction and Outfit Standards.

If your vessel was built after 16 July 2007, but not registered as a Fishing Vessel and is either:

- less than 7m Registered Length and has a Seafish Construction Certificate; or
- 7m Registered Length to less than 15m Length Overall and has a Seafish Construction and Outfit Certificate

then you may also use Authorised Surveyors to prove the vessel is seaworthy.

Vessels not Certificated to Seafish Construction Standards after 16 July 2007 will not be accepted.

The Authorised Surveyor will provide a Comparison Report to the MCA for consideration. Based on this report, the MCA may decide to reject the vessel, require additional work on the vessel or accept the vessel as meeting the Seafish Standards. The vessel must then be inspected.

[Download MGN 581 \(F\) FISHING VESSELS: Registration Surveys for Fishing Vessels of less 15m built before 16 July 2007](#)

[Download List of Authorised Surveyors](#)

Before any vessel of less than 15m is Registered, it must then be inspected by the MCA prior to registration as a fishing vessel. These vessels must then be inspected by the MCA every five years to continue working. The owner of the vessel, or their representative, is also required to self-certify annually.

Vessels of 15 metres in length to less than 24 metres must also be built to, and surveyed against, Seafish Construction Standards and then surveyed by the MCA before registration. These vessels must have a full renewal survey every five years with a mid-term inspection to maintain the UKFVC. The owner of the vessel, or their representative, also needs to self-certify annually.

Vessels of 24 metres in length and over must be built to Classification Society Standards and surveyed by the relevant society to make sure it meets those standards. It must then be surveyed by the MCA prior to registration.

The IFVC lasts four years and in that time they must be surveyed annually by the Classification Society, have an intermediate survey by the MCA after two years, and have full renewal survey after four years.

The MCA provides guidance for owners of small fishing vessels on preparing for surveys. [Download a survey preparation guide for vessels up to 15 metres from the MCA website \(PDF, 510K\)](#).

Fishing vessel inspection and survey requirements and procedures

The MCA surveys all UK commercial fishing vessels above 15 metres in overall length in order to make sure they comply with legal safety requirements.

Once your vessel has passed the survey, it will be provided with the relevant safety certificate.

For vessels of 24 metres in length and over, this certificate is the IFVC. For this to remain in force you need to make sure that there is:

- an annual survey of the vessel – by a classification society if the vessel is classed
- an annual survey of the vessel – by the MCA to the standards of a classification society if the vessel is not classed
- an intermediate survey three months either side of the second anniversary of the certificate

For vessels of 15 metres in length to less than 24 metres, the required certificate is the United Kingdom Fishing Vessel Certificate. To remain in force the vessel needs to have an inspection between 24 and 36 months after the certificate is issued.

Commercial fishing vessels under 15 metres in length require inspections instead of surveys. If the vessel passes the inspection, it will be awarded the Small Fishing Vessel Certificate (SFVC) (MSF) 1316).

All commercial fishing vessels need the appropriate Fishing Vessel Certificate before they can go to sea.

Survey requirements for fishing vessels 15-24 metres in length

For commercial fishing vessels 15-24 metres in length, the survey requirements cover safety standards set out in MSN 1872 The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.

[Download a survey/inspection checklist for fishing vessels of 15-24 metres.](#)

Survey requirements for fishing vessels over 24 metres in length

For fishing vessels over 24 metres, the survey requirements cover the safety standards set out in:

- MSN 1873 (F) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over

[Download a survey/inspection checklist for fishing vessels over 24 metres in length.](#)

Fishing vessel survey procedure

For fishing vessels of 15 metres in length and above the procedure involves:

- applying using form MSF 5100 together with your fee deposit
- submitting of plans to the MCA surveyor for approval
- visits – the MCA surveyor will visit your yard during construction, and they will work with Seafish surveyors or class surveyors to make sure the relevant Code of Safe Working Practice and the Seafish certificate of construction (for vessels 15-24 metres in length) is complied with.
- final visit – when the MCA surveyor carries out stability and operational tests and a general inspection of staffing levels, qualifications, health and safety procedures, and whether crew are familiar with all the equipment and emergency drills etc
- sea trials – discretionary attendance

When the MCA surveyor visits, they will need external and internal access to all areas of the vessel. They will only allow exemptions from the survey standards if they can see that equivalent materials or systems are in place.

Renewal surveys usually need two visits from the surveyor, one out of water and one afloat, to carry out operational and stability tests.

If the surveyor isn't satisfied with the survey, they will provide a list of defects and may return later to check that they have been resolved. The MCA surveyor may also decide to detain the vessel.

If the vessel passes the survey, the MCA will issue the relevant United Kingdom Fishing Vessel Certificate (UKFVC), which covers a specific period. In order to make sure the certificate is still valid during this period, the MCA or Classification Society will carry out intermediate inspections or annual and intermediate surveys, dependent on the size of the vessel. Vessels of 15-24 metres in length are also required to conduct annual self certifications.

Risk assessments

All fishing vessels require risk assessments. For further information see the [health and safety at sea section on the MCA website](#).

Fishing vessel documents

To pass a survey, vessels must carry the relevant documents. For example:

- all fishing vessels over 16.8 metres (55 feet) – an official log-book
- all fishing vessels over 24.4 metres (80 feet) – a crew agreement,

- posted on ship with a copy kept at an address within the UK
- all fishing vessels over 12.2 metres (40 feet) – a list of crew, with a copy kept at an address within the UK
 - MSN relevant to fishing vessels

You can find further guidance on documents to be held by vessels of 16.8 metres to less than 24.4 metres in length in MSN M.1303. [Download MSN M.1303 guidance on documents required by law to be maintained for vessels of 16.8 metres to less than 24.4 metres length from the MCA website \(PDF, 12K\).](#)

You can find details on document requirements for fishing vessels of 24.4 metres in length and above in MSN M.1314. [Download MSN M.1314 guidance on documents required by law to be maintained for vessels of 24.4 metres in length and over.](#)

To order these documents you can call the EC Group Helpline on 0845 603 2431.

[Download MSN M.1057 Merchant shipping \(crew agreements, lists of crew and discharge of seamen\) \(fishing vessels\) \(amendment\) Regulations 1983.](#)

Enforcement measures

If your vessel contravenes the relevant Code or conditions for exemptions, you will face a fine or imprisonment if convicted.

Flag-in fishing vessels surveys

You can [find information on the flag-in process for fishing vessels on the MCA website.](#)

Inspection of fishing vessels under 15 metres in length

Inspections are carried out by MCA surveyors or inspectors to make sure that fishing vessels which are less than 15 metres in length meet the requirements of MSN 1871, The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall. Inspections are free of charge.

To pass the inspection, your fishing vessel must meet a range of safety requirements and carry the following documents:

- a list of crew on all fishing vessels over 12.2 metres (40 ft) in length, with a copy kept at an address within the UK
- MSNs relevant to fishing vessels

[Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall.](#)

You can also [find information in annex 1 of the Under 15m LOA Fishing Vessel Inspection Regime Instructions for the Guidance of Inspectors on the MCA website.](#)

How to prepare for a vessel survey

Fishing vessels 15 metres in LOA and over that are registered in the UK must have a UKFVC or an IFVC.

A vessel can be surveyed to make sure it meets safety standards up to six months before its existing certificate expires. The survey can be completed in two visits – although additional visits may be necessary depending on the surveyors' findings. You should have all your records and certification ready for inspection before the survey begins.

The two main elements of a fishing vessel inspection are:

- an 'out of water' survey
- an 'afloat' survey, including stability checks

Out of water survey

You can prepare your fishing vessel for an 'out of water' survey by:

- pressure washing the hull
- carrying out ultra-sonic tests on the total hull area and any suspect areas on steel vessels
- removing and cleaning sea valves, – inlets and overboard
- checking draft marks
- checking propeller shaft clearances by lifting the shaft and using a clock gauge or feeler gauges
- checking the propeller hub condition and operation – eg if it's a controlled pitch propeller
- recording rudder pintle bearing clearances
- ensuring safe access for the surveyor to all areas of vessel
- having a shipwright present during the survey visit to discuss any action needed with the surveyor if the vessel is wooden

Afloat survey

An afloat survey will include:

- a lightship check
- an inclining or roll test
- a stability assessment

Radio survey

A radio survey should also be booked as part of the overall survey. It must be carried out before a UKFVC or IFVC can be issued to the vessel owner.

The MCA provides a list of organisations authorised to survey radio installations on fishing vessels. [Download contact information for authorised surveyors of radio installations on passenger ships, fishing vessels and unclassified cargo vessels.](#)

On board survey

During an on board survey of a fishing vessel, the surveyor will check areas such as the:

- wheelhouse
- wheelhouse top
- casing top
- shelter top
- accommodation
- main deck
- fish room
- engine room
- equipment tests
- vessel operations and drills

Except for remote winch stops, fishing gear is not tested during a UKFVC or IFVC inspection.

Fishing gear

Fishing gear is tested independently of UKFVC/IFVC certification under the regulations:

- Provision and Use of Work Equipment – Marine Guidance Note (MGN) 331 (M+F) – non-lifting equipment on fishing vessels
- Guide to Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations – MGN 332 (M+F) – lifting equipment on fishing vessels

For further information on fishing gear testing see the guide on [fishing safety, health and safe working practices](#).

Booking a fishing vessel survey

You can book a fishing vessel survey by contacting your nearest MCA fishing survey office – [find local fishing survey office contact details](#).

[Download fishing vessel survey preparation guidance from the MCA website \(PDF, 511K\)](#).

Registering fishing vessels

A fishing vessel is a boat used to catch sea fish for profit, even if it is only used occasionally. Every British sea fishing vessel – with certain exceptions – that fishes for profit must be registered by law.

All fishing vessels that catch sea fish for profit must also have a licence issued by the appropriate Fisheries Department. You should contact your Local Fisheries Office about licensing at the same time as applying for registration.

You can get full or simple registration for a fishing vessel.

Full registration requires:

- proof of ownership, including Bills of Sale
- builders certificate for new vessels
- forms MSF 4740, MSF 4728 including a declaration of the maximum continuous engine power (MCEP), MSF 4705 and MSF 4743

A vessel with full registration can have mortgages registered against it.

Simple registration requires:

- an accepted receipted invoice
- forms MSF 4740, MSF 4728, including a declaration of the MCEP

Mortgages cannot be recorded against a vessel with simple registration.

How to Register

You will need to complete a British ship form and submit it with the appropriate fees and support documentation, eg:

- a copy of certificate of incorporation – if the owner is a body corporate
- safety certificate – for vessels over 15 metres
- International Tonnage Certificate (ITC69) – if the vessel is over 15 metres
- Seafish Certificate

[Find form MSF 4740 Application to Register a British Ship.](#)

Carving and Marking

On receiving your application, the vessel will be issued with a Carving and Marking note. The vessel must be carved and marked and measured by an Authorised Measurer. A measurement of vessels:

- 15 metres in length and over is carried out by one of the classification society surveyors, who complete a certificate of measurement and an International Convention certificate 1969
- under 15 metres in length in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is carried out by a local Coastguard – in Scotland measurement is carried out by a local fishery officer and a certificate of measurement only is issued for these vessels

The Carving and Marking note and the measurement certificate are then to be returned to the UK Ship Register in Cardiff, along with the appropriate fee.

When you apply to register, you must have a list of nominated names for the vessel. These names must be unique to the port that you wish to register under. A Certificate of Registry is valid for five years and must be renewed if you want to continue to fish for profit.

Fishing vessel survey

A fishing vessel must be surveyed before it can be registered.

In most cases surveys are carried out by a UK Ship Register surveyor. However, under certain circumstances, surveys can be carried out by a Class surveyor on our behalf.

To avoid any lost time, a transfer of flag survey can be arranged to suit the working pattern of your vessel.

The Principal Fishing Surveyor (PFS) will request a copy of all existing statutory certification in order that new certificates can be prepared prior to survey.

If, during a survey, your vessel meets international standards of safety and pollution prevention, a short-term certification can be issued immediately. Full term certification would then follow in due course.

Details of certification, plans and operational information will be discussed by the owner and the PFS.

You can [find a list of ports of choice on the UK Ship Register website](#).

[Please contact your local marine office to find a list of authorised surveyors/inspectors of marks.](#)

Small fishing vessel survey

If you own a fishing vessel that is under 15 metres in LOA, it will not be subject to a regular statutory survey. However, UK law requires that registered small fishing vessels are seaworthy and equipped to a safe standard so still need to have regular inspections.

If your vessel was built after 16 July 2007, its construction must conform to the Seafish standard for small fishing vessels. If your vessel does not conform to this standard you will not be able to register it. The only way to ensure that your vessel does conform is for Seafish to oversee the construction.

If your vessel was built prior to 16 July 2007, you will need to prove that the vessel is seaworthy. To do this, you will need to have your vessel surveyed by a Surveyor authorised by the MCA to conduct Registration Surveys. The authorised Surveyor will examine the vessel against the Seafish Standard. The UK Registry will examine the Report and either:

- allow registration
- ask you to address areas of concern
- reject the vessel. If there are any areas of concern, you will have to address them before registration can proceed.

If your vessel was built before 16 July 2007 but was built to Seafish Standards and you have a Seafish Construction Certificate, then you must

approach Seafish to conduct a Registration Survey.

[Download MGN 581 \(F\) FISHING VESSELS: Registration Surveys for Fishing Vessels of less 15m built before 16 July 2007](#)

[Download List of Authorised Surveyors](#)

Table for Hull Construction Certificate, Outfit Compliance Certificate and Safety Inspection on new vessels built since 16 July 2007.

Vessel Length Hull Construction Certificate issued by Seafish (chargeable)
Outfit Compliance Certificate issued by Seafish (chargeable) Safety
Inspection conducted by MCA or Seafish (free).

Under 7 metres LOA Yes Not Required Yes
7 metres LOA to less than 15 metres LOA Yes Yes Yes

Table for registration and safety inspection of existing vessels built before 16 July 2007

Vessel Length Registration Survey by Authorised Surveyor (chargeable) Safety
Inspection by MCA (free)

Under 7 metres LOA Yes Yes

7 metres LOA to less than 15 metres LOA Yes Yes

Before buying an existing vessel, you should get professional advice on whether it is suitable to be registered as a fishing vessel.

All existing vessels that want to join the fishing vessel register will have to undergo a Authorised Surveyor Registration Survey.

Seafish surveys, fees and contact details

Seafish charge a fee for the survey of existing vessels that hold a Seafish Construction Certificate.

To arrange Seafish work you should contact them directly. You can call Seafish Marine Services on 01472 252 300 or by Fax on 0131 558 1442. You can also contact them by email at information@seafishmarineservices.com.

Authorised Surveyors charge a fee for the survey of other existing vessels. To arrange work by an Authorised Surveyor, you should contact a Consultant Surveyor of the MCA who can provide an up to date list.

MCA Safety Inspections

An MCA safety inspection on all vessels – new builds and otherwise – must follow the Seafish survey/registration inspection.

The MCA inspection will cover safety equipment and crew qualifications and is free of charge. You can arrange an MCA safety inspection by contacting the

relevant offices. These include:

- West UK: Plymouth Marine Office on 01752 266 211 or fax 01752 225826
- East UK: Hull Marine Office on 01482 866 606 or fax 01482 869
- Scotland and Northern Ireland: Aberdeen Marine Office on 01224 597 900 or fax 01224 573 725

[Download MSF 5100 Application for Survey and Inspection of ships and fishing vessels.](#)

Engine power

Since 10 January 2000, you need to declare the maximum continuous or permanently de-rated engine power (MCEP) to be able to register or re-register a UK fishing vessel.

MCEP is the total power you can get at the flywheel of each engine that can be used to propel the vessel.

You can [find information on engine power on the MCA website.](#)

Further information

Fishing Team Enquiry Line

029 2044 8855

[Download MSN 1871 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Fishing Vessels of less than 15m Length Overall.](#)

[Download a publications catalogue from the IMO website](#)

[Download MSN 1872 \(F\) The Code of Safe Working Practice for the Construction and Use of Fishing Vessels of 15m Length Overall to less than 24m Registered Length.](#)

[Download MSN 1873 \(F\) The Code of Practice for the Construction and Safe Operation of Fishing Vessels of 24m Registered Length and Over](#)

[Download fishing vessel survey preparation guidance from the MCA website \(PDF, 511K\)](#)

[Fishing vessels survey instructions and guidance on the MCA website](#)

[Download contact information for authorised surveyors of radio installations on passenger ships, fishing vessels and unclassified cargo vessels from the MCA website \(PDF, 55K\)](#)

[Fishing survey office contact details on the MCA website](#)

[Download MGN 331 \(M+F\) Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 2006](#)

[Download MGN 332a \(M+F\) Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations](#)

[2006](#)

[Find MSF 4740 Application to Register a British Ship](#)

[List of designated ports on the Marine Management Organisation website](#)

[Download the MSF5100 form – Application for Survey and Inspection of Ships and Fishing Vessels](#)

[Engine Power information on the MCA website](#)

[Flag-in matrix for fishing vessels on the MCA website](#)

[Download MGN 581 \(F\) FISHING VESSELS: Registration Surveys for Fishing Vessels of less 15m built before 16 July 2007](#)

[Download List of Authorised Surveyors](#)