



# Small Craft Safety & Operation

Guidelines for the Safety and Operation of Small Crafts in Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands Maritime Authority  
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# 1. Purpose of the Guidelines

These Guidelines are issued to establish a practical, risk-based safety framework for the operation of small crafts in Solomon Islands.

These Guidelines aim to:

- promote safe construction and operation,
- reduce preventable marine casualties,
- strengthen national and provincial licensing practices,
- introduce basic competency standards for skippers,
- establish a consistent national safety baseline.

A small craft is a vessel, as defined under the Shipping Act 1998 as amended, that is less than 10 meters (32.8 feet) in length. The length of a small craft is measured in a straight line parallel to the waterline from the foremost point of the bow to the aftermost point of the stern, including any fixed or permanent structural parts of the hull, but excluding detachable fittings such as outboard motors, rudders, anchors, or removable projections.

Under Part III of the Act, a small craft is exempted from registration. However, a small craft used for carriage of passenger/cargo and/or fishing on a commercial mode or for pleasure must be licensed.

In addition, Part IX of the Act provides for SIMA to make maritime orders in respect of small craft for and in relation to:

- the recording of information with respect of the small craft, its description and ownership;
- identification and making of small craft;
- periodical and unscheduled inspections;
- construction and equipment;
- licensing of small craft subject to operational requirements and issuing of operators' permits;
- fees payable in respect of the recording of information, inspection, licensing, for small craft, the issuing of operators' permits and other safety services provided for in the maritime orders; and
- the exemptions from the specific requirements of the maritime orders which may be granted in respect of a specified small craft or class of small craft.

These Guidelines therefore operate:

- as a national safety standard for small craft safety and operation purposes,
- as a reference framework for SIMA and Provincial Governments when issuing or renewing small craft licences, and
- as an interim national framework pending the making of a maritime order.

## 2. Classification of Small Craft

### 2.1 Classification by Type of Small Craft

Small crafts are classified as:

- **Class A – Open Small Craft:** a small craft that does not have a fixed cabin or enclosed weather protection for persons on board.
- **Class B – Semi or Fully Enclosed Small Craft:** a small craft that is fitted with a fixed structure providing partial or full enclosure or weather protection for persons on board.

## 2.2 Classification by Type of Voyage

Small craft operations are classified in:

- **"Sheltered Waters Voyage"** – a limited voyage, trade or operation of a small craft within inland waters and protected waters within 3 nautical miles (NM) of beaches or landings.
- **"Inshore voyage"** – a voyage, trade, or operation of a small craft within 30 nautical miles from the baselines of Solomon Islands.
- **"Near-coastal voyage"** – a voyage, trade, or operation of a ship within 200 nautical miles from the coast of any island and include a voyage, trade or operation in the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of another State.

The operational category must be stated on the licence.

# 3. Licensing of Small Craft

## 3.1 Provincial Small Craft List

SIMA and Provincial Governments maintain a Small Craft List recording:

- **Province** – the province that issued the licence.
- **Name** – the name of the small craft (if any).
- **Length** – the length of the small craft as determined at the time of licensing.
- **Color** – the color of the small craft's hull.
- **Engine power** – the power of the engine in kilowatt (kW) or horsepower (hp).
- **Owner** – the name and contact of the small craft owner.
- **Skipper** – the name and the contact of the small craft skipper.
- **Type of voyage** – the type of voyage in reference to section 2.2 of the Guidelines and details of operation.
- **Maximum persons permitted** – the maximum number of persons permitted including the skipper as determined by the Guidelines.
- **Date of inspection** – the date of the last inspection of the small craft.
- **Licence date of issue** – the date the licence of the small craft was issued.

## 3.2 Licensing of Small Craft

A small craft must be licensed.

The licensing of small craft is administered by the Provincial Governments in coordination with SIMA.

A *Small Craft Safety & Operation Licence* shall:

- be in the form in Annex 1 of the Guidelines,
- have a unique licence number,
- be valid for 12 months, and

- be renewed subject to:
  - ✓ licencing fees paid to the Provincial Government of the province the small craft is licenced, and
  - ✓ annual inspection to verify continued compliance of the small craft with the Guidelines – the annual inspection must be carried out not earlier and not later than one (1) month before and after the anniversary date of the licence (based on the date of issue).

### **3.3 Marking of Small Craft**

Every licensed small craft must display its licence number:

- on both sides of the hull,
- in characters at least 75 mm high,
- in a contrasting colour,
- clearly visible above the waterline.

The marking must be permanent and legible at all times.

The licence certificate must be carried onboard whenever the vessel is operating.

### **3.4 Inspection of Small Craft**

Only Small Craft Inspectors shall carry out inspections of small craft. Small Craft Inspectors are SIMA Authorised Officers and Recognised Provincial Officers who are officers designated by the Provincial Government and recognised by SIMA to carry out inspections of small craft.

When inspections of small craft are delegated to Recognised Provincial Officers, SIMA trains them and conducts regular review of enforcement of the guidelines by the Recognised Provincials Officers.

Small crafts shall be inspected:

- at initial licensing, and
- at annual licensing renewal.

Inspections of small craft (see *Small Craft Inspection Checklist & Report* in Annex 2) verify:

- hull condition,
- engine condition,
- safety equipment,
- marking and identification,
- compliance with operational category,
- accuracy of recorded information, and
- passenger limits.

A Small Craft Inspector may conduct unscheduled inspections following a complaint, a marine incident or where safety concerns arise.

As a result of inspection, the Small Craft Inspector shall:

- authorise initial licensing or annual licensing renewal without deficiencies, or
- authorise initial licensing or annual licensing renewal with minor deficiencies to be rectified within one (1) month, or
- require rectification of major deficiencies before initial licensing or annual licensing renewal.

# 4. Safety of Small Craft

## 4.1 General Construction Requirements

All small crafts must:

- be structurally sound,
- have adequate buoyancy and stability, and
- be suitable for their approved operational category.

To demonstrate acceptable construction, the owner of a small craft must provide documentation from the maker including any recognised technical standards related to the construction of small craft.

Adequate buoyancy and stability of a small craft means that it is constructed or fitted with sufficient built-in buoyancy so that, if flooded or swamped, it remains afloat in a substantially horizontal position while carrying its maximum number of persons and normal operating load, without capsizing or sinking. Adequate buoyancy and stability may be tested before initial licensing by Small Craft Inspector.

## 4.2 Maximum Number of Persons

### Number of Persons on a Class A Small Craft:

The maximum number of persons permitted shall be the skipper, crew and passengers determined using the following empirical rule:

*Maximum number of persons (including skipper and crew) = 2 × Length (in metres) rounded down*

The Small Craft Inspector may reduce this number where:

- Freeboard is insufficient,
- Cargo is carried,
- Engine power is inadequate,
- Sea conditions or route risk justify reduction.

A Class A Small Craft shall not operate in Near-Coastal Voyage unless specifically authorised following safety assessment.

### Number of Persons on a Class B Small Craft:

The maximum number of persons permitted shall be the skipper, crew and passengers determined based on available passenger deck space:

*Maximum number of persons = skipper, crew, and seated passengers on available deck space with 0.35 square metres and at least 450 mm width per seated passenger*

The Small Craft Inspector may reduce this number where:

- Freeboard is insufficient,
- Cargo is carried,
- Engine power is inadequate,
- Sea conditions or route risk justify reduction.

## 4.3 Safety Equipment

### Minimum Safety Equipment (All Small Crafts):

All small crafts must carry:

- one lifejacket per person on board,
- anchor with adequate rope,
- bailer or bucket,
- signal mirror,
- torch or waterproof light,
- paddle, and
- basic first aid kit.

### Additional Safety Equipment:

To undertake a Sheltered Waters Voyage, all small crafts must carry the Minimum Safety Equipment and:

- whistle or sound signal, and
- communication device (mobile phone or equivalent).

To undertake an Inshore Voyage, all small craft must carry the Minimum Safety Equipment and:

- VHF radio or reliable radiocommunication device,
- Compass or GPS, and
- Emergency signalling device.

To undertake a Near-Coastal Voyage, a Class B Small Craft must carry the Minimum Safety Equipment and:

- fixed VHF radio,
- compass and GPS,
- emergency flotation device,
- weather protection,
- emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) or Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). 8.3.5
- fixed navigation lights.

## 4.4 Operational Requirements

### Before undertaking any voyage:

Before undertaking any voyage, a small craft skipper must:

- collect weather information from the Solomon Islands Meteorological Service and assess weather before departure,
- possess a valid *Small Craft Safety & Operation Licence*,
- ensure the small craft is not overloaded with passengers and cargoes and fulfil the licensing operational conditions,
- ensure the planned voyage comply with licensing operations conditions of the small craft,
- deliver a safety brief to the passengers.

No small craft shall be loaded so that the top edge of the hull (gunwale) is less than 300 mm above the waterline in calm conditions and the stability is visibly compromised.

All passengers on Class A Small Craft must wear lifejackets when:

- operating beyond 3 NM, or
- sea conditions deteriorate, or
- directed by the skipper.

### Before undertaking an Inshore Voyage or a Near-Coastal Voyage:

In addition to above requirements for any voyage, before undertaking an Inshore Voyage or a Near-Coastal Voyage, a small craft skipper must inform a shore contact of:

- departure time,
- destination,
- expected time of arrival, and
- number of persons onboard.

## 4.5 Supplies

### Fuel Supply:

The skipper of a small craft must ensure there is fuel necessary for the planned voyage, and a reserve of:

- +20% of fuel as reserve for a Sheltered Waters Voyage,
- +30% of fuel as reserve for an Inshore Voyage,
- +50% of fuel as reserve for a Near-Coastal Voyage.

### Drinkable Water Supply:

The skipper of a small craft must ensure there is enough drinkable water for all persons on board for the duration of the planned voyage, based on a minimum of 3 litres of drinkable water per person per day, and a reserve of:

- +25% of drinkable water for a Sheltered Waters Voyage,
- +50% of drinkable water for an Inshore Voyage,
- +100% of drinkable water for a Near-Coastal Voyage.

### Food Supply:

The skipper of a small craft must ensure there is enough food not requiring cooking for all persons on board for the duration of the planned voyage, and a reserve of one full day food for an Inshore Voyage or a Near-Coastal Voyage.

# 5. Competency of Small Craft Skipper

A small craft skipper operating a Class A Small Craft must hold a certificate of participation in a *Small Craft Safety & Operation Course* as outlined in Annex 3 and recognised by SIMA.

A small craft skipper operating a Class B Small Craft must hold a certificate of competency as Master/Engineer Officer Class 6.

# Annex 1 – Small Craft Safety & Operation Licence

## SMALL CRAFT SAFETY & OPERATION LICENCE

Issued under the Shipping Act 1998 as amended

by the Provincial Government of

LICENCE NUMBER	LENGTH	COLOR	NAME <i>if any</i>	ENGINE POWER <i>kW or HP</i>

**Type of voyage<sup>1</sup>:**

Sheltered waters voyage

Inshore voyage

Near-coastal voyage

**Type of small craft<sup>2</sup>:**

Class A – Open Small Craft

Class B – Semi or Fully Enclosed Small Craft

**Maximum number of persons<sup>3</sup>:**

THIS IS TO CERTIFY:

1. That the small craft has been inspected in accordance with the applicable provisions of the *Guidelines for the Safety and Operation of Small Crafts in Solomon Islands* and has been found to comply with the requirements of those provisions.
2. That the inspection confirmed the identification and marking of the small craft.

	Payment of Licensing Fees		Inspection of Small Craft		Licence Expire Date
	<i>Date</i>	<i>Signature &amp; Stamp</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Signature &amp; Stamp</i>	
Initial Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					

<sup>1</sup> Delete as appropriate

<sup>2</sup> Delete as appropriate

<sup>3</sup> The maximum number of persons include the shipper and crew

Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					
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Annual Renewal Licensing					
Annual Renewal Licensing					

# Annex 2 – Small Craft Inspection Checklist & Report

Small Craft Inspection Checklist & Report			
Verifications			
<b>Identity</b>	Confirm licence number matches hull marking		
	Confirm licence certificate is onboard and valid		
	Verify recorded owner and small craft details with the <i>Provincial Small Craft List</i>		
<b>Dimension</b>	Confirm length (in case of modification)		
	Confirm type of small craft (Class A & B) and type of voyage (sheltered waters, inshore or near-coastal voyage) is appropriate for type and use of small craft		
<b>Engine</b>	Confirm engine type and maximum rated power from manufacturer's plate with in the <i>Provincial Small Craft List</i>		
	Ensure engine is securely mounted and in serviceable condition		
<b>Construction</b>	Check integrity of the hull (no major cracks, rot, leaks) and reserves of buoyancy		
	Confirm steering and propulsion systems function		
<b>Safety Equipment</b>	Confirm minimum equipment is present and serviceable		
	Confirm additional equipment is present (depending on type of voyage) and serviceable		
	Confirm lifejackets match number of persons permitted		
Report			
<b>Small Craft Name<sup>4</sup>:</b>		<b>Licence Number:</b>	
<b>Inspection Type<sup>5</sup>:</b>		<b>Inspection Date:</b>	
I, Small Craft Inspector, inspected the above licenced small craft and:			
	authorise initial licensing or annual licensing renewal <sup>6</sup> without deficiencies		
	authorise initial licensing or annual licensing renewal <sup>7</sup> with minor deficiencies* to be rectified within one (1) month		
	require rectification of major deficiencies* before initial licensing or annual renewal		
<b>Small Craft Inspector Name:</b>		<b>Small Craft Skipper Name:</b>	
<b>Small Craft Inspector Signature:</b>		<b>Small Craft Skipper Signature:</b>	

<sup>4</sup> Insert name of the small craft if any

<sup>5</sup> Insert the inspection type: Initial Licensing or Annual Licensing Renewal

<sup>6</sup> Delete as appropriate

<sup>7</sup> Delete as appropriate

<i>Deficiencies</i>			
No.	Deficiency identified	Delay for rectification <sup>8</sup>	
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
I, Small Craft Inspector, inspected the above licenced small craft and confirm rectification of deficiencies on:			
<b>Small Craft Inspector Name:</b>		<b>Small Craft Skipper Name:</b>	
<b>Small Craft Inspector Signature:</b>		<b>Small Craft Skipper Signature:</b>	

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<sup>8</sup> “One (1) month” to rectify minor deficiencies  
“ Before initial licensing” or “Before annual licensing renewal” for major deficiencies

# Annex 3 – Small Craft Safety & Operation Course

A *Small Craft Safety & Operation Course* recognised by SIMA should provide and assess a candidate with the following knowledge and skills:

- **Basic Seamanship and Boat Handling** – develop practical skills in small craft handling, loading, stability awareness, and manoeuvring under varying sea and weather conditions.
- **Navigation and Voyage Planning** – provide foundational knowledge in coastal navigation, use of compass and GPS, weather assessment, and safe voyage planning including fuel and reserve calculations.
- **Collision Avoidance** – provide basic knowledge of basic rules of small craft conduct and safe speed principles, lookout responsibilities, and avoidance of collision with other vessels.
- **Emergency Procedures** – develop practical skills in responding to emergencies including man overboard, engine failure, swamping, distress communication, and survival actions.
- **Pollution Prevention** – knowledge in legal responsibilities and practical measures to prevent marine pollution, including fuel handling, waste management, and environmental protection.
- **Outboard Engine Familiarisation and Troubleshooting** – develop basic skills in outboard engine systems, routine maintenance checks, and practical troubleshooting of common mechanical problems.
- **Safety Equipment** – develop practical skills in using safety equipment, proper use of lifejackets and distress and positioning devices.
- **Human Factors and Leadership** – strengthen decision-making, passenger management, risk awareness, and responsible leadership under normal and emergency conditions.
- **Practical Assessment** – confirms the candidate’s ability to safely operate a small craft through demonstrated practical boat handling, navigation, emergency response, engine troubleshooting skills and use of safety equipment.