



MEDIA FACT SHEET

THE SAFETY OF LIFE AT SEA

The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea

What is SOLAS?

The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) is described by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as being 'generally regarded as the most important of all international treaties concerning the safety of merchant ships'.¹

SOLAS and the *Titanic*

The SOLAS Convention was created as a direct result of the sinking of the RMS *Titanic* on 15 April 1912.

One of the key advancements in maritime safety brought about following the sinking of the *Titanic* was in relation to the number and use of lifeboats. The *Titanic* did not have sufficient lifeboats for all passengers, a lifeboat drill was not conducted, nor did the crew have adequate training in loading and lowering the lifeboats. Under SOLAS, all passenger ships must carry enough lifeboats (some of which can be substituted by liferafts) for all passengers, plus liferafts for 25 per cent of passengers. SOLAS also requires every crew member to participate in regular practice drills and have easy access to training manuals. Under SOLAS Chapter III an 'abandon ship' and fire drill must take place weekly on all passenger ships.²

Inspections of passenger ships visiting Australia

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) conducts port State control (PSC) inspections on cruise ships visiting Australia, as per other types of vessels.

Selection of a ship for inspection depends on a number of factors, including any risk it may pose to the environment, specific complaints and an AMSA risk-based ship inspection targeting scheme. As a general rule, ships become eligible for inspection every six months. However, if considered necessary, AMSA may reduce this period.

When an Australian surveyor conducts a PSC inspection of a foreign passenger ship it is a requirement that the surveyor witness the conduct of a safety drill to verify the emergency preparedness and competency of the crew to handle or manage an emergency situation. The emergency scenario for the drill is selected by the surveyor.

¹ <http://www.imo.org/KnowledgeCentre/ReferencesAndArchives/HistoryofSOLAS/Pages/default.aspx>

² <http://www.imo.org/OurWork/Safety/Regulations/Documents/TITANIC.pdf>

Search and rescue in Australia

Australia is a signatory to many conventions relating to the provision of search and rescue services. This includes SOLAS, which requires signatories to:

"...ensure that any arrangements are made for coast watching and for the rescue of persons in distress at sea around its coasts. These arrangements should include the establishment, operation and maintenance of such maritime safety facilities as are deemed practicable and necessary having regard to the density of the seagoing traffic and the navigational dangers, and should, so far as possible, afford adequate means of locating and rescuing such persons" (Chapter V regulation 15).

Australia has a cooperative search and rescue plan with AMSA, Defence, Police and volunteers all contributing to very effective search and rescue response arrangements in a search and rescue region covering about one tenth of the earth's surface.

Operating 24 hours, AMSA's Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC Australia) in Canberra is responsible for the national coordination of both maritime and aviation search and rescue.

RCC Australia is also responsible for the management and operation of the Australian ground segment of the Cospas-Sarsat distress beacon detection system.

RCC Australia is staffed by search and rescue (SAR) specialists who have a naval, merchant marine, air force, civil aviation or police service background.

The RCC also coordinates medical evacuations, broadcasts maritime safety information and operates the Australian Ship Reporting System (AUSREP).

Looking after our seafarers

A vital component of safety at sea is seafarer welfare.

AMSA performs the inspectorate function under the *Occupational Health and Safety (Maritime Industry) Act 1993* with the purpose of regulating work systems to ensure the health and safety of seafarers on ships prescribed under the Act.

AMSA's ability to regulate the health and welfare of seafarers has primarily been restricted to Australian-flagged ships, but this is changing.

In February 2006, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006 was adopted by the 94th (Maritime) Session of the ILO.

The MLC is a global maritime priority, setting minimum working and living conditions standards for the world's 1.2 million seafarers. It covers conditions of employment, hours of work and rest, accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering, occupational health and safety protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection. In December 2011, Australia became the 22nd country to ratify the convention, which enters into force 12 months after ratification by 30 countries.

Navigation Act 1912

The *Navigation Act 1912* is Australia's primary legislation regulating ship and seafarer safety, and shipboard aspects of protection of the marine environment. It also supplements employment conditions for Australian seafarers. It is a key legislative vehicle to give domestic effect to Australia's PSC responsibilities and implements a range of international conventions covering matters such as the safety of life at sea; training and certification of seafarers; prevention of collisions at sea; watertight integrity and reserve buoyancy of ships; pollution prevention standards for ships; safety of containers; salvage and regulations to determine gross and net tonnage of ships.

The original Navigation Bill was in progress when the *Titanic* sank on 15 April 1912. The Bill was consequently amended to take into consideration international recommendations made following the disaster.

In the second reading of the Navigation Bill in the House of Representatives on 16 August 1912, Mr Robert Howe (Member for Dalley) spoke about changes required in the maritime industry following the immense loss of life from the *Titanic*.

Mr Howe³ spoke in support of the recommendations by the then Secretary of the United States Navy and British Commissioner of the *Titanic* Inquiry that vessels be required to carry sufficient life boat and rafts.

"I put these statements by the Secretary of the United States Navy and the British commissioner appointed to inquire into the Titanic disaster in juxtaposition to the contention raised by the honorable member for Parkes, who is evidently very much afraid that some of the requirements of this Bill will operate against the profits of the ship owners. I am not concerned about the question of profits. The honorable member has said that to institute these reforms will merely be to place an additional burden upon the public. The security of life, however, is the first essential; and if fair provision is not being made for life and property at sea, then the general community are getting their present service too cheaply, and in their interests we should see that such requirements are insisted upon as will give greater security."

When talking further about the Bill, Mr Howe reiterated its importance for the future of maritime safety in Australia.

"There is very little in it that will not be beneficial, not only to the seamen, but to the community at large."

The *Navigation Act 1912* is now 100 years old and in the course of its lifetime it has been amended many times, often on an ad hoc basis without a strategic focus. As a result, it embodies a mix of archaic and modern concepts. At the Natship09 Conference in Sydney on 5 June 2009, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, announced that the Australian Government would rewrite the *Navigation Act 1912*.

The Minister stated that the *Navigation Act 1912* would be redrafted in plain language, to reflect contemporary conditions and practices, to do away with unnecessary and out-dated provisions, and provide much-needed confidence and certainty for industry.

The rewrite of the *Navigation Act 1912* is being coordinated by the Department of Infrastructure and Transport. The draft Bill is available on their [website](#).

Further information

- [SOLAS 1914 – IMO](#)
- [SOLAS 1974 – IMO](#)
- [History of SOLAS – IMO](#)
- [Surviving disaster – The *Titanic* and SOLAS – IMO](#)
- [Search and rescue in Australia – AMSA](#)
- [Port State Control in Australia – AMSA](#)
- [IMO World Maritime Day 2012 – 100 years after the *Titanic*](#)
- [Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 – ILO](#)
- [Re-write of *The Navigation Act 1912* – Department of Infrastructure and Transport](#)

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Images are available to download on the AMSA Media Portal www.amsa.gov.au/media

³ Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Navigation Bill, Second Reading, Friday, 16 August 1912, Mr Robert Howe (Dalley).