



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**MARITIME ACTIVITIES IN AUSTRALIA – A GUIDE TO VISAS FOR FOREIGN SEA CREW**

**Introduction**

Australia has a universal visa requirement. This guide outlines the visa arrangements that typically apply to foreign sea crew seeking entry to Australia and its Migration Zone\*. It is a **guide only**. For further details regarding particular visas, or to contact the Department for further advice, please visit our website at [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)

\*As a general rule, Australia's migration zone includes the Australian mainland and adjacent islands, Australia's sea ports (as proclaimed by the Australian Customs Service), the islands of the Torres Strait, the territories of Cocos/Keeling, Christmas, Ashmore and Cartier islands, as well as Australian territories in the Coral Sea and Australian resource and sea installations which are attached to the Australian sea bed, such as oil rigs.

**General Information**

- Foreign crew (including supernumerary crew) of a non-military ship entering and departing Australia in the course of an international voyage generally require a Maritime Crew visa (MCV), except for Australian Permanent Residents and those New Zealand citizens who are eligible for a Special Category Visa. The term 'non-military ship' generally encompasses commercial vessels including cargo vessels, cruise ships and commercial fishing vessels. It also includes foreign government-owned and operated scientific vessels, and vessels accorded 'public vessel' status by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A MCV is not valid for air travel to Australia.
- The MCV is not appropriate for crew of yachts and other non-commercial vessels. Those who hold an MCV should apply for another type of visa for travel by sea for non-commercial purposes. See Table below for further guidance.
- The MCV is not appropriate for foreign crew remaining in Australia and onboard a vessel that has been, or will be, 'imported' by the Australian Customs Service. 'Imported' is the common term for a vessel that has been subject to a Customs entry declaration. Such vessels usually seek to remain or operate in Australia. As a consequence of being 'imported', a vessel is deemed to have ceased its international voyage. A MCV held by foreign crew will usually cease five days after a vessel is 'imported' to allow crew time to depart Australia lawfully.
- Foreign crew seeking to remain in Australia on an 'imported' vessel beyond five days must hold an appropriate work visa - usually the Business Long Stay visa (subclass 457) - on the basis that crew will spend time working inside Australia's migration zone. However, crew are often ineligible for the 457 visa due to its requirements for highly skilled applicants, an employer who will sponsor the applicant, and the need for employers to satisfy training-related criteria.
- For information regarding 'import' policy, please contact the Australian Customs Service [www.customs.gov.au](http://www.customs.gov.au)

## Visa Types

The following visas may be appropriate to foreign crew depending on their proposed activity in Australia and, in some cases, the extent to which crew will be working in the Australian migration zone.

**Maritime Crew visa (MCV)**– From 1 January 2008, this visa is mandatory for crew and supernumerary crew of non-military ships on an international voyage who arrive by sea. Foreign crew are required to lodge a visa application while outside Australia. Applications are available from the department's website [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au) and can be lodged through the internet using the on-line application form or by sending a paper application to the Brisbane Global Processing Centre in Australia. For lawful arrival in Australia by sea, foreign crew will need to hold a valid Maritime Crew visa and a valid national passport, they must also be identified as crew on the vessel (eg. crew list, ship's articles, seafarer's ID). Crew flying to Australia to join their ship must also hold another type of visa that is valid for air travel (eg Transit visa, ETA).

**Special Category visa (SCV)** – Most New Zealand citizens are eligible for, and granted, the Special Category visa on arrival in Australia, subject to meeting health and character requirements. This visa allows work in Australia including as ships' crew. To be eligible, a New Zealand citizen must present a valid New Zealand passport and a completed Incoming Passenger Card with health and character declarations.

**Temporary Business Long Stay visa (subclass 457)** – This visa is for people who are travelling to Australia for work purposes and to fill a nominated skilled position in Australia. Foreign crew, other than those who are highly skilled, are often ineligible for the 457 visa. A ship's master or engineers are good examples of crew who **may meet the skill requirements** of the 457 visa. Overseas workers on Australian oil rigs may be eligible for a 457 visa where the work they are performing is of a skilled nature. This visa also requires an employer to be approved as an eligible sponsor for the visa applicant.

**See:** [Workers](http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm) (<http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm>)

**456 Business Visitor visa** – This visa is for business visitors seeking short-term entry to Australia for purposes such as meetings, training, vessel inspections and equipment installation. It usually does not allow work inside Australia's migration zone except for highly skilled persons in emergency situations for up to 6 weeks. The 456 visa may also be appropriate for people who will be conducting work outside Australia's migration zone, and who need to enter Australia from time to time for recreation purposes or repatriation. **See:** [Workers](http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm) (<http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm>)

**Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) (Business) 956 or 977** – These authorities are similar to the 456 Business Visitor visa (above) for ETA-eligible passport holders. These authorities are for business visitors seeking short-term entry to Australia for purposes such as meetings, training, vessel inspections and equipment installation. They do not usually allow work inside Australia's migration zone except for highly skilled persons in emergency situations for up to 6 weeks.. These authorities may also be appropriate for people who will be conducting work outside Australia's migration zone, and who need to enter Australia from time to time for recreation purposes or repatriation.

**See:** [Workers](http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm) (<http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm>)

**Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) (Tourism) 976** – This authority allows visitors to enter Australia for tourism, recreational activities and other short-term purposes. It does not permit work in Australia.

**676 Tourist visa** – This visa is similar to the ETA 976 (above). The visa allows visitors to enter Australia for tourism, recreational activities and other short-term purposes. It does not permit work in Australia.

**See:** [Workers](http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm) (<http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/index.htm>)

**Superyacht Crew 488** – This temporary visa allows crew members to work on board a Superyacht and remain in Australia for periods of up to 12 months at a time. Applicants are to provide evidence of their employment and sponsorship by the captain of the Superyacht on which they are working. Superyacht Crew visa holders can apply for a further 488 visa while in Australia.

**Transit visa** – This visa is for people who are transiting through Australia to another country or place outside Australia, or signing on as crew to a non-military ship (other than a ship that is being imported into Australia). It is valid for no longer than 72 hours from arrival in Australia.

**Reference Table – Maritime Activity / Most Suitable Visa**

The following reference table identifies some common maritime activities involving foreign crew and the visa/s that would be most suitable. For further advice or clarification, please contact the Department.

MARITIME ACTIVITY	MOST SUITABLE VISA
<p>Crew of a commercial vessel <b>entering and departing Australia on an international voyage</b></p> <p>For example, unloading cargo or catch, entering for fuel or supplies, coming in for temporary repair</p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa</p> <p><b>Note:</b> If such vessels become subject to Customs ‘import’ for any reason, MCV will cease after five days.</p>
<p>Crew on a foreign government-owned and operated scientific vessel</p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa</p>
<p>Crew on a vessel granted ‘Public Vessel’ status by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa</p>
<p>Crew on a commercial vessel granted a <b>single or continuing voyage permit</b> by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Infrastructure).</p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Vessels holding such permits are not subject to Customs ‘import’. By virtue of this, they effectively retain their international voyage status for the period authorised by the Infrastructure permit (up to a maximum of three months).</p>
<p>Crew on a commercial vessel that has been, or will be, <b>‘imported’ by Customs</b></p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa may apply but will cease five days after Customs ‘import’.</p> <p>Crew who hold only a MCV will not be permitted to sign-on to an imported vessel in Australia. Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) may be appropriate for skilled workers who remain working on the vessel, or wish to join the vessel in Australia.</p>

MARITIME ACTIVITY	MOST SUITABLE VISA
<p>Crew on a commercial vessel operating under a coastal trading licence issued by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Infrastructure).</p>	<p>Maritime Crew visa may apply but will cease 5 days after Customs ‘import’.</p> <p>Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) may be appropriate for skilled workers who remain working on the vessel.</p>
<p>Crew on a commercial vessel operating <b>strictly outside</b> Australia’s migration zone</p> <p>For example, seismic vessel, pipe-laying vessels, and so on.</p>	<p>456 Business Short Stay visa or ETAs 956 and 977 may be acceptable to enable crew to enter Australia in order to join or leave a vessel that is operating outside the migration zone (which includes ports).</p> <p>Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) is appropriate if crew are required to conduct any work inside the migration zone.</p>
<p>Foreign workers on Australian resource installations, such as oil rigs</p>	<p>Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) may permit highly skilled work in Australia.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Where the resource installation is in Australian waters and attached to the Australian sea bed, it is considered to be in the migration zone.</p>
<p>Foreign workers <b>transiting</b> Australia to the Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA) (Timor Sea)</p>	<p>456 Business Short Stay visa or a Transit visa (multiple-entry) will permit workers to transit Australia.</p>
<p>Crew on a yacht or other small craft entering Australia for private <b>tourism purposes only</b></p>	<p>Tourist visa 676 or ETA 976 for small craft.</p>
<p>Crew on a superyacht entering Australia for private or <b>commercial activity</b></p>	<p>Superyacht Crew Visa 488</p>

**Note:** New Zealand citizens (including those working as sea crew) may be eligible for the Special Category visa as highlighted under **Visa Types**.