



**Australian Government**

**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

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

**Introduction**

**Entry to Australia’s migration zone and the universal visa requirement:** Every person who is not an Australian citizen and wishes to travel to and enter Australia’s migration zone is required to hold an appropriate visa. 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, Tasmania and adjacent islands, and Australia’s sea ports (as proclaimed by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service). The migration zone also includes the islands of the Torres Strait, the Australian territories of Cocos/Keeling, Christmas, Ashmore and Cartier islands, as well as Australian territories in the Coral Sea. Mobile or fixed resources installations, such as oil rigs which are attached to the Australian sea bed, and sea installations installed in coastal areas are also part of the migration zone. The migration zone does not include the territories of Norfolk Island, Heard and Macdonald Islands or the Australian Antarctic Territory.

**Excised Offshore Places** – Special legislation applies to the islands of northern Australia making them Excised Offshore Places (EOP). Australia’s Excised Offshore Places include Christmas Island, Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and all Australian islands across northern Australia from the vicinity of Exmouth to the vicinity of Mackay, including the islands of Torres Strait, as well as any Australian resources and sea installations attached to the Australian sea bed. An EOP is part of the migration zone. However, the excision legislation prevents any person who arrives in Australia at an EOP from making an application for a visa. Therefore, anyone arriving at an EOP must already hold a visa on arrival or they may be subject to detention and removal.

NOTE: This legislation prevents New Zealand citizens and permanent residents of Norfolk Island from applying for a special category visa on arrival as they would on the mainland. New Zealand citizens and permanent residents of Norfolk Island must obtain a visa at an Australian mission overseas before they travel if they intend to enter Australia at an Excised Offshore Place.

**General Information**

Foreign crew of a non-military ship (including supernumerary crew who are personnel that are not part of the standard operational crew but are working on board) entering and departing Australia in the course of an international voyage, generally require a Maritime Crew visa (MCV). The main exceptions are Australian Permanent Residents and those New Zealand citizens who are eligible for a Special Category Visa. A ‘non-military ship’ includes commercial vessels such as cargo or cruise ships and 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. **The 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 a MCV should apply for another type of visa for travel by sea for non-commercial purposes (See *Reference Table – Maritime Activity/Most suitable Visa*, 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 and Border Protection 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 who hold only a MCV cannot sign-on to a vessel that has been ‘imported’; they must hold another type of visa with work rights. 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, some crew may be 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.

Generally, vessels that come to Australia for repair and refit will be ‘imported’. While the MCV will allow crew to enter Australia, they are unlikely to be able to remain in Australia on this visa for the time required to conduct the repairs. Crew may be required to leave Australia and return when the vessel is ready to sail. In some circumstances, a Business (Short Stay) visa subclass 456, which must be obtained before arriving in Australia, may be appropriate for selected crew to oversee repairs and continue vital duties during refits whether in wet or dry dock, and to conduct sea trials. For further information, see below under Business (Short Stay) visa, subclass 456. Please check that crew have appropriate visas before sailing to Australia.

For information regarding ‘import’ policy, please contact the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service at [www.customs.gov.au](http://www.customs.gov.au)

## Visa Types

The following visas may be appropriate for foreign crew depending on their proposed activity in Australia’s migration zone.

**Maritime Crew visa, subclass 988** – This visa is required by crew of non-military ships on an international voyage who arrive by sea, except for Australian Permanent Residents and those New Zealand citizens who are eligible for a Special Category visa. 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 Maritime Global Processing Centre located in Brisbane, Australia. For lawful arrival in Australia by sea, foreign crew will need to hold a valid MCV and a valid national passport; they must also be identified as crew on the vessel (for example: crew list, ship’s articles or seafarer’s ID). **The MCV is not valid for air travel to Australia.** Crew flying to Australia to join their ship must also hold another type of visa that is valid for air travel (eg Transit visa, Visitor visa or Electronic Travel Authority).

**Special Category visa, subclass 444** – Other than for arrival at an excised offshore place (see introduction above), most New Zealand citizens are eligible for, and granted, the Special Category visa (SCV) on arrival in Australia, subject to holding a New Zealand passport that is in force, completing an incoming passenger card and meeting health and character requirements. This visa allows work in Australia’s migration zone.

**Business (Long Stay) temporary visa, subclass 457** – This visa is for sponsored personnel to travel to Australia for work purposes and to fill a nominated skilled position in Australia. Only highly skilled foreign crew are usually eligible for the 457 visa unless there is a Department approved labour agreement in place. A ship’s master or engineers are examples of crew who would meet the skill requirements of the 457 visa. Personnel wishing to work on a resources

installation attached to the Australian sea bed may be eligible for a 457 visa where the work they are performing is of a highly skilled nature. This visa requires an employer to be approved as an eligible sponsor for a visa applicant.

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

**Business (Short Stay) visa, subclass 456** – This visa is for business visitors seeking short-term entry to Australia for up to three months, for purposes such as meetings, conferences, site visits and exploring business opportunities. It does not allow work inside Australia's migration zone, except where the work is urgent, highly skilled and not ongoing (for no more than six weeks in total for the validity of the visa). This visa may also be appropriate for highly skilled personnel who will be conducting work outside Australia's migration zone, and who need to enter Australia for transit, recreation 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 designed for ETA eligible passport holders who are outside Australia and are seeking short-term entry to Australia for up to three months for business purposes. A business ETA may be appropriate for highly skilled personnel who will be conducting work outside Australia's migration zone, and who need to enter Australia for the purpose of transit, or for recreation purposes or repatriation. A business ETA is not appropriate to undertake work in the migration zone - a subclass 457 visa is the appropriate visa. Personnel can apply for a subclass 456 visa if they are required to undertake work in Australia's migration zone that is urgent, highly skilled and not ongoing (for no more than six weeks in total for the validity of the visa). This allows the applicant's purpose of stay to be scrutinised and minimises the possibility of being delayed or refused entry if border officials suspect they are entering Australia to undertake activities which are inconsistent with their visa conditions.

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

**Tourist visa, subclass 676** – This visa allows visitors to enter Australia for tourism purposes. This may include a holiday, visiting family or for other short-term purposes. This visa may be appropriate for applicants who will be conducting work outside Australia's migration zone, and who need to enter Australia for the purpose of transit, or for recreation purposes or repatriation. This visa does not permit work in Australia's migration zone.

**Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) (Tourism), 976** – This authority is designed for ETA eligible passport holders who are outside Australia and are seeking short-term entry to Australia for up to three months for tourism purposes. This ETA does not permit work in Australia's migration zone.

**eVisitor 651 (Tourist and Business Entrant)** - An eVisitor has the same entitlements as an ETA (tourism and business) and was introduced to implement reciprocal entry arrangements with the European Union. It allows online lodgement and is available to eVisitor eligible passport holders who are outside Australia and who intend to enter Australia for tourism or business purposes. It allows visitors to stay in Australia for up to three months on each visit within a 12 month period from the date of grant. An eVisitor is not appropriate to undertake work in the migration zone - a subclass 457 visa is the appropriate visa. Personnel can apply for a subclass 456 visa if they are required to undertake work in Australia that is urgent, highly skilled and not ongoing (for no more than six weeks in total for the validity of the visa). This allows the applicant's purpose of stay to be scrutinised and minimises the possibility of being delayed or refused entry if border officials suspect they are entering Australia to undertake activities inconsistent with eVisitor conditions.

See: [eVisitor](http://www.immi.gov.au/visitors/tourist/evisitor/index.htm) (<http://www.immi.gov.au/visitors/tourist/evisitor/index.htm>)

**Transit visa** – This visa is for people who are transiting through Australia to another country, 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. It is recommended that crew apply for a fresh single entry Transit visa each time they intend to fly to Australia to join a vessel. A multiple entry Transit visa is not appropriate for sea crew as it will cease unless the vessel departs Australia on an international voyage within 72 hours of the crew person's arrival in Australia.

**Superyacht Crew visa, subclass 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 may be eligible to apply for a further 488 visa while in Australia.

**Special Purpose visa** - Foreign naval forces personnel entering Australia by sea are taken to be granted a Special Purpose visa (SPV) on arrival if the vessel on which they enter Australia has prior approval of the Australian government to do so. Members of forces from countries that have agreements with Australia may travel to Australia by air to join their ship as SPV holders, provided that they present a valid passport, military ID and movement orders.

**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
Crew of a commercial vessel <b>entering and departing Australia on an international voyage.</b>	Maritime Crew visa <b>Note:</b> If such vessels are ‘imported’ by Customs and Border Protection, the MCV of all crew members will cease after five days.
Crew on a foreign government-owned and operated scientific vessel.	Maritime Crew visa
Crew on a vessel granted ‘Public Vessel’ status by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.	Maritime Crew visa
Crew on a commercial vessel granted a single or continuing voyage permit by the Department of Infrastructure and Transport, (Infrastructure).	Maritime Crew visa <b>Note:</b> Vessels holding such permits are not subject to Customs ‘importation’ and they retain their international voyage status for the period authorised by the Infrastructure permit (up to a maximum of three months).
Crew on a commercial vessel that has been, or will be, ‘imported’ by Customs and Border Protection. <b>Note:</b> Crew who hold only an MCV are not permitted to sign-on to an ‘imported’ vessel or remain on an ‘imported’ or domestic vessel in Australia.	The Business (long stay) visa, subclass 457, is usually the most appropriate visa for highly skilled workers or crew who intend to travel to Australia and remain working on the vessel, or join the vessel in Australia. The Business (Short Stay) Visitor visa (subclass 456) may be appropriate in limited circumstances for highly skilled applicants (as per legislative and policy guidelines) who wish to remain on a vessel for a total of six weeks. A Maritime Crew visa is only suitable for initial arrival with a vessel that will be ‘imported’ as the MCV will cease after five days unless crew make an international departure from Australia, sign-on to a vessel that has not been ‘imported’ or obtain another visa such as the subclass 457 visa.
Crew on a commercial vessel operating under a coastal trading licence issued by	Maritime Crew visa may apply but will cease 5 days after Customs ‘import’.

the Department of Infrastructure and Transport (Infrastructure).	Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) may be appropriate for skilled workers who intend to remain working on the vessel.
<p>Crew on a commercial vessel operating <b>strictly outside</b> Australia's migration zone For example, a seismic vessel.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Workers and crew on resources installations such as oil and gas rigs or FPSOs are in the migration zone (except for the Joint Petroleum Development Area in the Timor Sea). Crew of vessels supporting resources projects may frequently be working in the migration zone if loading in port etc.</p>	<p>Business (Short Stay) Visitor visa subclass 456, eVisitor 651 (Business Entrant) or ETAs 956 and 977 may be acceptable for highly skilled applicants to enable them to enter Australia in order to join or leave a vessel that is operating outside the migration zone (ports are in the migration zone). A Tourist visa subclass 676, may be appropriate for applicants to enable them to enter Australia in order to join or leave a vessel that is operating entirely outside the migration zone (ports are within the migration zone). <b>Note:</b> Imported vessel crew required to work inside the migration zone will usually require a Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457).</p>
Foreign workers on <b>resources installations, fixed or mobile</b> (for example oil rigs, drill rigs, gas platforms, FPSOs etc) that are attached to the Australian sea bed for operational purposes.	<p>Long Stay Temporary Business visa (subclass 457) is the appropriate visa for resources and sea installations.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Where the resources installation is attached to the Australian sea Bed it is in the migration zone (with the exception of the JPDA).</p>
Foreign workers <b>transiting Australia to the Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA)</b> in the Timor Sea.	<p>Business Short Stay Visitor visa (subclass 456), eVisitor 651 (Business Entrant), ETAs 956 and 977 may be used by highly skilled workers to transit Australia on their way to the JPDA.</p> <p>A Tourist visa (subclass 676) may be used by low skilled workers to transit Australia on their way to the JPDA.</p> <p>A Transit visa may be used by crew signing onto a vessel in Australia or workers transiting Australia by aircraft to go to the JPDA via another country.</p>
Crew on a yacht or other small craft entering Australia for private tourism purposes only.	Tourist visa (subclass 676), eVisitor (Tourist Entrant) or ETA 976 for small craft.
Crew on environmental or religious organisation non commercial vessel	Usually a Tourist visa (subclass 676), eVisitor (Tourist Entrant) or ETA 976. A business short stay Visitor visa 456 may be required for some activities.
Crew on a superyacht entering Australia for private or commercial activity	Superyacht Crew visa 488.

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

