



ILFRACOMBE HARBOUR

TOWING WITHIN HARBOUR JURISDICTION

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE FOR USERS

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1.0 DOCUMENT CONTROL

This plan is subject to an Annual review and periodic amendment as required

Major changes will be issued as a new version with all minor amendments to that version annotated by a decimal point e.g. V2 will become V2.1, V2.2 etc.

Amendment proposals should be sent to the Harbour Master using the following means:

Email: harbourmaster@northdevon.gov.uk

Phone: 01271 862108

Post: Harbour Masters Office, The Quay, The Pier, Ilfracombe EX34 9EQ

1.1. RECORD OF REVIEWS & AMENDMENTS

<i>Review (R) Amendment (A)</i>	Ver #	Date	Description of changes
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This guide provides practical requirements and safe working steps for harbour users who may tow (or be towed) within harbour limits. It is intended to reduce the risk of a tow breaking free, causing injury, pollution, or a navigational obstruction.

2.0 KEY RULES (READ FIRST)

- **Harbour Master permission:** Obtain permission from the Harbour Master before any tow commences. VHF Channel 12 or Mobile 24hr number 07775532606.
- **Preferred method:** Use the **alongside tow** method unless specifically agreed otherwise.
- **Suitable towing vessel:** Only a vessel capable of controlling the disabled/stricken vessel may tow (power, manoeuvrability, displacement, freeboard).
- **Strong points and lines:** Use appropriate towing lines, chafe protection, and **strong points** on both vessels (do not tow from rails/stanchions/cleats not designed for towing).
- **PPE:** All persons involved to wear approved buoyancy aids/lifejackets as appropriate.
- **Weather and tide:** Consider tide, stream, visibility and forecast before starting; delay if conditions are unsuitable.
- **Communications:** Agree communications and emergency actions before moving.
- **Pollution prevention:** Manage fuel/oil risks; have spill response arrangements ready where required.

3.0 WHEN TO TOW (AND WHEN NOT TO)

- **Towing may be suitable** when the disabled vessel is stable and controllable, and the tow can be completed safely in the prevailing conditions.
- **Do not tow** if conditions exceed your capability; if there is significant flooding/fire; if the tow would create unacceptable risk to life; or if safe strong points/lines cannot be rigged.
- If in doubt, **stop and contact the Harbour Master** for instruction.

4.0 MINIMUM EQUIPMENT (TYPICAL)

- Serviceable towing line(s) of adequate strength and length (plus spare line if available).
- Short breast/spring lines for an alongside tow (multiple lines recommended).
- Fenders along the tow-side and at contact points.
- Chafe protection (e.g., hose/cloth) where lines pass fairleads/gunwales.
- Sharp knife readily accessible.
- VHF radio/phone for communications (as applicable).
- Basic pollution control readiness as required (e.g., absorbent pads/booms via harbour arrangements).

5.0 ROLES, BRIEFING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Nominate a **tow master** (person in charge of the tow) and confirm who has control of propulsion and helm on each vessel.
- Brief everyone: intended route, speed, abort points, line handling hazards, and the emergency plan (including how to stop/cast off quickly).
- Agree a primary means of communication (e.g., VHF channel, phone, or hand signals) and a back-up method.
- Keep non-essential persons clear of lines and potential snap-back zones.

6.0 ALONGSIDE TOW METHOD (RECOMMENDED)

1. **Plan the move:** Choose the safest route with room to manoeuvre. Consider wind/tide set, traffic, shallow areas, and berthing plan.
2. **Prepare both vessels:** Fit fenders, clear decks of trip hazards, and confirm strong points for lines. Ensure the towed vessel is watertight as far as practicable and any loose gear is secured.
3. **Approach and make fast safely:** Manoeuvre alongside at minimum speed. Make fast with **multiple lines** (e.g., two springs and two breast lines as a minimum where possible) to control fore-and-aft movement.
4. **Control and steering:** Maintain slow speed. Use the towing vessel's propulsion/helm to steer the combination. If the towed vessel has steerage/engine available, agree how it will assist (and avoid conflicting helm inputs).

5. **Monitor continuously:** Watch lines for chafe, slipping, overload, and interaction with fenders. Re-check strong points and adjust as needed.
6. **Stopping/holding position:** Identify safe places to stop if conditions change or if lines need re-rigging. Avoid sudden power changes that can shock-load lines.
7. **Berthing and securing:** Bring both vessels alongside/into berth/ pick up mooring at very low speed. Make secure before removing tow lines. Maintain fenders until fully separated.

7.0 WEATHER, TIDE AND TRAFFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Check forecast and current conditions (wind strength/gusts, sea state/swell where applicable, visibility, and precipitation).
- Consider tidal height and stream: allow for set and drift, under-keel clearance, and reduced control at slack water or strong streams.
- Plan to minimise interaction with other traffic: keep clear of fairways where possible and comply with harbour directions.
- Operate at a speed that maintains control while minimising wash.

8.0 POLLUTION PREVENTION

- Before moving, check for obvious fuel/oil leaks and minimise release where safe to do so.
- Secure vents, caps and loose containers; keep bilge discharges off during the tow.
- If there is a risk of pollution, notify the Harbour Master and ensure spill response equipment/assistance is available as directed.

9.0 EMERGENCY ACTIONS

- **Tow starts to fail / lines part:** Reduce speed immediately, regain control, and if safe re-rig using spare lines. Keep people clear of loaded lines (snap-back hazard).
- **Loss of control / risk of grounding:** Abort the tow if necessary, move to a safe holding area, and contact the Harbour Master for instructions/assistance.
- **Person overboard:** Stop, raise the alarm, keep visual contact, and recover using established man-overboard procedures.
- **Fire/flooding on either vessel:** Stop the tow where safe, call emergency services as required, and inform the Harbour Master.
- **Pollution incident:** Stop the source if safe, contain if possible, and notify the Harbour Master immediately.

10.0 QUICK PRE-TOW CHECKLIST

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Permission obtained from Harbour Master | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong points identified on both vessels |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weather/tide/traffic checked; route agreed | <input type="checkbox"/> Correct lines rigged with chafe protection, spare line available if possible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alongside tow selected; fenders rigged | <input type="checkbox"/> All persons wearing buoyancy aids; decks clear; knife available |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications agreed (primary and back-up); emergency actions briefed | <input type="checkbox"/> Pollution risk checked; response arrangements in place if needed |

11.0 HARBOUR TOWING RISK ASSESSMENT

Service Area	TASK / ACTIVITY	RECORD NO.	DATE OF ASSESSMENT
			05/05/2026
Ilfracombe Harbour	Towing within Harbour Jurisdiction	Tow 01	DATE ASSESSMENT REVIEWED
ASSESSMENT PREPARED BY	REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY		DATE NEXT REVIEW IS DUE
Ric Simpson	Capt. Georgina Carlo-Paat MBE DL		05/05/2027



ACTIVITY AFFECTING	EMPLOYEES	THIRD PARTY	VESSEL	PLANT	PROPERTY	WILDFLOWERS & TREES	ANIMALS
(Delete tick as necessary)		✓	✓		✓		

Hazard	Possible Consequences	L	I	R	Control Measures	L	I	R	Further Control Measures Required	L	I	R
Vessel being towed breaks free causing potential danger to life	Minor	2	2	4	<p>Permission to be obtained from Harbour Master prior to any tow commencing.</p>	1	2	3				
	Major	2	5	10	<p>Tow to be of the alongside method using strong lines, strong points on both vessels and only using a vessel capable of towing the stricken vessel.</p> <p>Tides and Weather forecast must be considered.</p> <p>All persons to wear approved lifesaving buoyancy aids.</p> <p>Method of tow to be understood by all parties and plan of action to be undertaken and understood by all parties</p> <p>Emergency procedures to be understood and contact numbers held</p>	1	5	5				

Hazard	Possible Consequences	L	I	R	Control Measures	L	I	R	Further Control Measures Required	L	I	R
Vessel being towed breaks free and flounders causing potential pollution incident	Minor	2	2	4	Permission to be obtained from Harbour Master prior to any tow commencing.	2	2	4				
	Major	2	4	8	<p>Tow to be of the alongside method using strong lines, strong points on both vessels and only using a vessel capable of towing the stricken vessel.</p> <p>Tides and Weather forecast must be considered.</p> <p>Oil Spill response equipment to be available and ready for use.</p> <p>Method of tow to be understood by all parties and plan of action to be undertaken and understood by all parties</p> <p>Emergency procedures to be understood and contact numbers held.</p>	2	3	6				

Hazard	Possible Consequences	L	I	R	Control Measures	L	I	R	Further Control Measures Required	L	I	R
Vessel being towed breaks free and grounds causing potential Navigational obstruction.	Minor	2	2	4	Permission to be obtained from Harbour Master prior to any tow commencing.	2	2	4				
	Major	2	4	8	<p>Tow to be of the alongside method using strong lines, strong points on both vessels and only using a vessel capable of towing the stricken vessel.</p> <p>Tides and Weather forecast must be considered.</p> <p>Method of tow to be understood by all parties and plan of action to be undertaken and understood by all parties</p> <p>Emergency procedures to be understood and contact numbers held.</p>	2	3	6				

L: Likelihood		I: Impact		Risk Score	Likelihood				
1	Very unlikely	1	Negligible		1	2	3	4	5
2	Unlikely	2	Minor		Very unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Very likely
3	Possible	3	Moderate	Critical	5	10	15	20	25
4	Likely	4	Major	Major	4	8	12	16	20
5	Very likely	5	Critical	Moderate	3	6	9	12	15
				Minor	2	4	6	8	10
				Negligible	1	2	3	4	5

Risk Score		Likelihood	
ASSESSMENT PREPARED BY:		ASSESSMENT APPROVED BY:	
Name:	Ric Simpson	Name:	Capt. Georgina Carlo-Paat MBE DL
Position:	Ilfracombe Deputy Harbour Master	Position:	Ilfracombe Harbour Master
Signature:		Signature:	
Date:	05/05/26	Date:	05/05/26

May 26