



Safety on offshore vessels and structures

Who is the regulator?

Introduction

Working offshore means staying safe is critical – and there are different regulators involved, depending on where you are and what you are doing.

In Commonwealth waters – generally beyond the three nautical mile coastal waters boundary, noting boundaries can vary between states and territories – safety requirements for offshore vessels and structures are usually overseen by either the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) or the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA).

State and territory regulators are generally responsible for activities in coastal waters.

This fact sheet helps duty holders understand which regulator is responsible for safety-related matters, including who to contact when NOPSEMA or AMSA may be involved.

NOPSEMA's jurisdiction

Under the *Commonwealth Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006* (Cth) (OPGGGS Act), NOPSEMA regulates health and safety, well integrity, and environmental management, for petroleum and greenhouse gas storage activities in Commonwealth waters.

NOPSEMA also regulates these things in coastal waters where a state or territory has conferred regulatory powers. This currently includes Victoria's coastal waters.

NOPSEMA's regulation of safety focuses on facilities. A facility is any vessel or structure whether floating or fixed, and regardless of its ability to navigate independently – that is being used, or is being prepared for use, for the recovery, processing, storage or offloading of petroleum.

This includes:

- vessels engaged in drilling, well servicing, pipeline construction, erection, dismantling or decommissioning, or other petroleum-related activities in regulated waters
- accommodation for people working on another facility

Pipelines licensed under the OPGGS Act are also facilities. However, pipelines are not vessels and the navigation-related provisions outlined below do not apply to pipelines.

When a vessel is operating as a facility, relevant Commonwealth maritime safety legislation does not apply to the extent it would otherwise duplicate NOPSEMA's role, ensuring there is a single safety regulator for those facility-related activities.

The 500 metre petroleum safety zones (PSZ) that can be established around facilities do not change whether the facility is a structure or a vessel. PSZs are intended to restrict unauthorised access for safety purposes.

When a vessel is operating as a facility, NOPSEMA is the regulator regardless of its flag.

Since 12 June 2025, facility operators are required to notify NOPSEMA if a vessel becomes a facility or ceases to be a facility.

For more information about when a vessel is considered a facility, see NOPSEMA's guidance note and guideline available at nopsema.gov.au. You can also contact NOPSEMA on (08) 6188 8700.

AMSA's jurisdiction

AMSA regulates vessel and seafarer safety, and protection of the environment from vessel-sourced pollution. Vessels may be regulated by AMSA under the *Navigation Act 2012* (Cth) or the *Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012* (Cth), including:

- Regulated Australian vessels
- Foreign vessels
- Domestic commercial vessels

AMSA is also the Inspectorate for the *Occupational Health and Safety (Maritime Industry) Act 1993* (Cth).

While AMSA has a role in regulating foreign-flagged vessels in Australian waters or visiting Australian ports, their safety standards are mainly determined and enforced by their flag State.

When a vessel is in Commonwealth waters, is being used in navigation by water, and is not a facility or part of a facility, AMSA is responsible

for its safety regulation. This includes a pipelaying vessel, or a vessel undertaking drilling or well intervention activities, once it has completed its offshore petroleum operations and is transiting to another location.

Vessels that are offtake tankers or Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) units do not become a facility when they are connected to a NOPSEMA-regulated facility for the purposes of conducting cargo transfer operations. They remain regulated by AMSA for vessel safety and marine operations.

Vessels only conducting the offshore activities listed in table 1.6 of regulation 1.6 of the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety) Regulations 2024* are also not considered facilities and will be regulated by AMSA. Examples include:

- Vessels laying umbilicals or cables
- dumb barges temporarily attached to a facility to provide extra space for petroleum operations.

Since 12 June 2025, NOPSEMA can conduct inspections on vessels that are en route to, or leaving, a title area if preparations or decompression activities, including therapeutic decompression, are occurring onboard. These inspections concern the safety of divers and do not change AMSA's role as the primary regulator for vessel safety.

If you are unsure who to contact, you can contact AMSA on 1800 627 484 or send an online enquiry to amsa.gov.au/about/contact-us. AMSA and NOPSEMA work together when regulatory responsibility changes, such as when a vessel becomes a facility or when a facility stops being a facility.

Who regulates petroleum safety in coastal waters?

In coastal waters the relevant state government agency is typically responsible for regulating petroleum operations safety.

Petroleum activities onshore or in coastal waters	WA	Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety
	NT	Department of Lands, Planning and Environment
	VIC	Resources Victoria (onshore only)

Contact details for state and territory marine safety agencies

State or Territory	Agency name	Phone	Website
New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory	Transport for NSW	13 12 36	rms.nsw.gov.au
Queensland	Maritime Safety Queensland	13 74 68	msq.qld.gov.au
Victoria	Transport Safety Victoria	1800 223 022	transportsafetyvic.gov.au
Tasmania	Marine and Safety Tasmania	1300 135 513	mast.tas.gov.au
South Australia	Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure	1300 183 046	sa.gov.au
Western Australia	Department of Transport	1300 863 308	transport.wa.gov.au
Northern Territory	Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics	08 8924 7100	nt.gov.au
OHSMI Act	SeaCare	02 6275 0070	www.seacare.gov.au

Case studies

The following case studies provide common examples to help workers identify the appropriate safety regulator. For specific advice, contact NOPSEMA or AMSA.

Case study 1

A supply vessel leaves Dampier Port to bring divers and equipment to support decommissioning work on a fixed platform in Commonwealth waters

The vessel is regulated by AMSA while it is enroute to the title area.

NOPSEMA becomes the regulator for the vessel when it arrives at the title area and starts preparations for diving work associated with the facility.

Supply vessels performing other work, and tugs and anchor handlers, are generally not facilities, unless they are being used, or being prepared for use, for the recovery, processing, storage or offloading of petroleum.

Case study 2

A warm stacked foreign-flagged Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit (MODU) in Victorian coastal waters leaves for a drilling campaign off the coast of WA

The MODU is regulated by AMSA while it is warm stacked in Victoria and enroute to WA.

The MODU becomes regulated by NOPSEMA once it is on the title and is being prepared for use.

Case study 3

FPSO in Commonwealth waters has disconnected to avoid a cyclone

NOPSEMA is the regulator while the FPSO is connected to the seabed.

AMSA becomes the regulator from the time it disconnects from the seabed up until it reconnects to the seabed and is used or prepared for use again as a facility.

AMSA is the regulator for the vessels (tugs) assisting non-self-propelled FPSOs to move location.

From 12 June 2025, operators must notify NOPSEMA when a facility becomes or ceases to be a facility.

Note: This document, including the fact sheet and case studies, is provided for illustrative and general guidance only. It is intended to help workers understand typical regulatory boundaries between NOPSEMA and AMSA.

Each real-world scenario will depend on its specific facts and circumstances, including the activities being undertaken, the location, and the vessel or facility's operational status.

This document does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied on as a definitive interpretation of the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006*, associated regulations, or any other law. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure accuracy, but users should seek case-specific guidance before relying on this information.

For case-specific guidance, contact NOPSEMA or AMSA directly:

NOPSEMA: 08 6188 8700 / communications@nopsema.gov.au

AMSA: 1800 627 484 / amsa.gov.au/about/contact-us



Australian Government
Australian Maritime Safety Authority

