



ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE, WASTE MANAGEMENT, AND NAVIGATION SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR COMMERCIAL AND PLEASURE YACHTS IN THE BALTIC SEA

Yachting Notice 20

Notice to Yacht Owners, Yacht Operators, Managers, Masters, Owners' Representatives, Appointed Surveyors, Recognised Organisations and Stakeholders

1. Introduction & Purpose

The purpose of this Yachting Notice is to draw the attention of all owners, managers, masters, skippers, and crew members of Malta-flagged commercial yachts and pleasure yachts operating in or planning voyages to the Baltic Sea Area to the strict regional environmental standards, navigational rules, and waste management procedures in force.

The Baltic Sea is designated as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) under MARPOL and is subject to stringent environmental protections governed by the 1992 Helsinki Convention (HELCOM). Compliance with these regional standards is mandatory for all vessels, encompassing both commercial shipping and pleasure craft/small vessels.

2. Application & Scope

Pursuant to the 1992 Helsinki Convention, environmental regulations, particularly regarding sewage, garbage, and anti-pollution standards, apply equally to all vessels, including commercial yachts, working vessels, and pleasure craft.

Masters and operators of both commercial and pleasure yachts must ensure that all onboard equipment complies with these regional requirements prior to entering the Baltic Sea.

3. Key Environmental Regulations in the Baltic Sea

Oil and Oily Mixtures: Any discharge of oil or oily mixtures into the Baltic Sea is strictly prohibited. Commercial and pleasure yachts must ensure that any machinery space oil drainage is processed via approved oil filtering equipment. Visible oil slicks are treated as illegal discharges subject to aggressive aerial and satellite surveillance, leading to strict enforcement and prosecution.

Sewage Discharges:

- Under MARPOL Annex IV and Helsinki Convention provisions, small pleasure craft and yachts built on or after 1 January 2000 and fitted with a toilet should be equipped to connect to port reception facility pipes and comply with standard discharge restrictions.
- For commercial yachts and larger craft, strict regional sewage special area rules and advanced treatment plant standards apply. All yacht masters should verify local port capabilities and utilize fixed-link shore reception facilities where available.



Garbage Management: The Baltic Sea is a MARPOL Annex V Special Area where the discharge of all garbage into the sea is strictly prohibited, with the sole exception of comminuted/ground food wastes permitted strictly beyond 12 nautical miles from the nearest land. Commercial and pleasure yachts must maintain appropriate garbage retention and separation bins on board.

Exhaust Gases & Fuel Quality (SECA): The Baltic Sea is a designated SO_x Emission Control Area (SECA). All vessels must use fuel oil with a sulphur content not exceeding 0.10% m/m or utilise an approved equivalent exhaust gas cleaning system (scrubber). Note that scrubber washwater discharge restrictions may apply in specific rivers, ports, or territorial waters.

Ballast Water Management: Due to the low salinity and sensitive brackish ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, standard Ballast Water Exchange (BWE) is generally discouraged or incompatible within the sea basin. Vessels should coordinate with regional joint harmonized procedures (JHP) regarding exemptions or high-seas exchange protocols when transiting between the Baltic and North-East Atlantic.

4. Navigational Safety and Routeing Measures

Routeing and Traffic Schemes: Navigators of commercial and pleasure yachts must utilise up-to-date hydrographic charts and publications, such as the *Mariners' Routeing Guide for the Baltic Sea* (Chart 2911 published by BSH). Mandatory ship reporting systems (such as GOFREP, SOUNDREP, and BELTREP) and Areas to be Avoided (ATBA) must be strictly observed.

Under Keel Clearance (UKC): Given the shallow nature of the Baltic Sea (average depth around 50 meters), masters and skippers must meticulously calculate UKC prior to transit, accounting for static draught, squat effects proportional to vessel speed, dynamic heel during course alterations, and local meteorological water-level variations.

Winter Navigation: During freezing conditions (typically peak ice coverage in February–March), vessels navigating the Baltic must adhere to mandatory ice class rules and ice-strengthening standards announced via traffic restrictions and managed through platforms like <https://www.baltice.org/>

5. Port Reception Facilities and Waste Delivery

Baltic ports generally enforce a "no-special-fee" system for ship-generated wastes (oily bilge water, sewage, and garbage) to remove economic incentives for illegal sea disposal.

Yachts are required to submit advance notification forms regarding waste delivery to their next port of call at least 24 hours in advance (or immediately upon departure if the voyage duration is under 24 hours).



6. Incident Reporting and Enforcement

In the event of any pollution incident, structural damage affecting safety, or navigational impairment, the master or skipper shall immediately notify the nearest coastal State via the fastest telecommunication channels.

Baltic coastal authorities maintain 24/7 aerial and satellite surveillance (including EMSA services) coupled with automated drift-tracking tools ([SeaTrackWeb](#)) to detect unauthorized discharges. Suspected violations are vigorously investigated, sharing evidence across borders to trigger stringent Port State Control inspections and harmonised minimum fines upon arrival at subsequent ports.

7. Further Information

For comprehensive details, original regulatory text, and specific guidance documents, operators are advised to consult the official [HELCOM](#) website and the [Baltic Sea Clean Shipping Guide](#).

Merchant Shipping Directorate

21 October 2026

Malta Transport Centre
Hal Lija LJA 2021, Malta

Tel: +356 2125 0360
Email: yachtsmalta.tm@transport.gov.mt
www.transport.gov.mt/ship-registration



Merchant Shipping Directorate
ISO 9001:2015 certified