

Navigational Advisory on Pilotage for Tankers at Chittagong Port

Jointly presented by



1. Background

Chittagong (Chattogram) remains one of the most challenging ports globally in terms of navigation. The combination of **strong tidal currents (4–6 knots)**, **soft mud bottom**, and **dense non-compliant coastal traffic** creates a complex and high-risk operational environment. Despite these constraints, vessel calls—particularly tankers—have increased sharply in recent years, causing **significant congestion** at the Outer Anchorage.

Further complexities have arisen due to new coastal developments, such as:

- Floating LNG Terminals near Maheshkhali
- Coastal LPG Terminals
- Matarbari Deep Sea Port and Power Plant Projects

These installations have **reduced navigable sea room** in both Chittagong and Kutubdia Anchorages, heightening navigational and operational risks, especially for laden tankers.

2. CPA Circular Requirements

As per **CPA Circular No. 46/2019**,

- **Pilotage / Navigation Assistance Service** is *compulsory* for vessels with drafts exceeding **10.0 metres**, and *recommended* for vessels between **9.5 and 10.0 metres** transiting between Kutubdia and Chittagong Outer Anchorage (“A”, “B”, “C”).
- **Anchorage stay limits:**
 - 5 days during March–September
 - 7 days during October–February
- **Exemption** may be granted to Masters with prior local experience.

However, this regulatory threshold **does not reflect the actual navigational risk** faced by tankers in current conditions, which warrant pilotage support irrespective of statutory exemptions.

3. Practical Pilotage Recommendations

(a) Bay Pilot – Kutubdia to Chittagong

- Although not mandatory for vessels under 10 m draft, **engaging a Bay Pilot is strongly recommended** for all laden tankers.
- The Kutubdia–Chittagong passage involves **shoaling zones, strong crosscurrents, and dense fishing/coastal traffic**.
- The Bay Pilot provides real-time navigational guidance and coordination with port traffic control.

Recommendation: Engage Bay Pilots for *all laden tanker transits*, regardless of draft.

(b) Stand-by Pilot – Chittagong Outer Anchorage

- CPA allows vessels (≤ 9.5 m draft) to remain without a pilot, mainly for bulkers. However, **for tankers**, retaining a **Stand-by Pilot** until completion of lightering is considered *best practice*.

Operational Justifications:

- **Anchor Dragging Prevention:** Frequent due to soft seabed and strong tidal currents.
- **Lighter Coordination:** Ensures safe approach and mooring of lighter vessels.
- **Operational Safety:** Dragging tendency increases when lighters are alongside.
- **POAC Role:** The Stand-by Pilot effectively functions as the *Person in Overall Advisory Control (POAC)*, in line with OCIMF's *Ship-to-Ship Transfer Guide*.

Recommendation: Maintain a Stand-by Pilot on board during all lightering operations at the Outer Anchorage, regardless of vessel draft.

(c) Harbour Pilot – Post-Lightering / Departure

- After lightering or discharge, a **Harbour Pilot** should be employed to assist in shifting from the anchorage to the CPA Pilot Boarding Ground.
- The area experiences **heavy cross-traffic** from local craft often disregarding COLREGs.

Recommendation: Use Harbour Pilot services to mitigate collision risk during final shifting.

4. Recommended Pilotage Scheme

Phase	Area / Activity	Pilotage Recommendation	Rationale
Laden Entry	Kutubdia → Chittagong	Bay Pilot (mandatory in practice)	Reduces grounding and traffic-conflict risks
At Anchorage	During lightering	Stand-by Pilot (POAC role)	Controls dragging, directs lighters, manages weather
Post-Lightering	Anchorage → Pilot Boarding Ground	Harbour Pilot	Mitigates collision risk amid dense cross-traffic

5. Operational & HSE Rationale

These pilotage practices align with **OCIMF**, **P&I Club**, and **Interport Maritime** risk management guidelines emphasizing:

- **Risk-based pilotage** beyond statutory minimums.
- **Continuous local control** during dynamic anchorage operations.
- **Integration of the Stand-by Pilot** role within the vessel's **HSE and STS Management Framework**.

6. Key Takeaways

Given prevailing conditions at Chittagong:

- Engage **Bay and Stand-by Pilots** for all tanker arrivals and lightering operations.
- CPA pilotage exemption may be considered *only* for highly experienced Masters.
- Continuous pilot presence enhances **navigational safety**, **STS integrity**, and **port efficiency**.

7. Assistance from Interport Maritime Limited

As local **P&I Correspondents and Marine Risk Advisors**, Interport Maritime Limited regularly assists international shipowners in the selection and appointment of **qualified Bay, Stand-by, and Harbour Pilots** at Chittagong and Kutubdia.

- Some local agents have been observed to engage pilots at **disproportionately high rates**, increasing port-call costs unnecessarily.
- Interport maintains **direct coordination** with experienced, licensed pilots, enabling **competitive, transparent, and safe** pilotage arrangements.

Should Owners or Operators wish, Interport will be pleased to provide:

- Pilotage arrangements, or
- Detailed quotations in advance of any scheduled call at Chittagong or Kutubdia.

About Interport Advisory Services

Interport Advisory Services, the consulting arm of the Interport Group, integrates global advisory standards with deep local expertise. Drawing on the Group's long-standing presence in the maritime domain — encompassing roles as P&I Correspondents, Ship Agents, Marine Surveyors, and Logistics Specialists — the division provides strategic, practical, and execution-focused solutions to stakeholders across the shipping and trade sectors.

Each advisory engagement is underpinned by Interport's decades of operational experience and a strong emphasis on implementation and risk control, ensuring that every recommendation translates into tangible outcomes in complex and evolving maritime environments.

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