

# GUIDANCE for medical fitness – National or Ring-fenced seafarers

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Last updated: May 2019

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A seafarer may request a certificate of medical fitness to allow them to use a national or ring-fenced maritime certificate and work on a ship.

This guidance covers:

- the purpose of the examination
- background on a seafarers working environment
- process of examination, including any requirement to assess against prescriptive standards
- different medical categories that can be assigned [here](#)
- completing the medical certificate and record keeping
- reference material and additional help

## Note:

Some seafarers have an international STCW Certificate. Only approved maritime medical practitioners (GPs approved by the Director of Maritime NZ) can issue medical certificates to seafarers that have a STCW certificate.

## Purpose of Medical Examinations for Seafarers

1. A seafarer cannot join or begin employment on a ship unless they hold a current *certificate of medical fitness* with a category A, A(T) or B.
2. Any New Zealand registered GP can be asked to conduct an examination and issue a medical certificate. The relevant maritime certificates are listed in Appendix 1.
3. The purpose of the medical examination is to test:
  - a) Are there any matters that may render the seafarer unfit for duty?
  - b) Can the seafarer safely perform the duties covered by their maritime certificate?
  - c) Is the seafarer sufficiently healthy to handle the challenging conditions experienced on-board ships – including in emergencies?

- d) Do they have any medical condition likely to be aggravated by service at sea?
- e) Is issuing the certificate consistent with maintaining the safety of vessels at sea while protecting the seafarer's health?
- f) Is there any risk to the seafarer's health and safety, other crew or passengers, and/or the safety of the ship?
- g) If yes (to f) above), does proximity to shore lower the risk to health and safety and the safety of the ship?

4. The examination is intended to certify fitness for two years. (Although, a certificate of fitness for someone under 18 only lasts 12 months.) Lesser periods may be stated as a condition on the medical certificate.

### The seafarer's working environment

5. There are unique working conditions for a seafarer on a ship, including:
- adjusting to the ship moving all the time (rolling, pitching etc.)
  - living and working in the limited spaces of the ship
  - keeping watches at varying times of day and night.

The following table describes physical abilities associated with common ship life.

On ship	Related physical ability of seafarer
<p><b>Routine movement around the vessel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on moving deck</li> <li>• between levels</li> <li>• between compartments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• climb up and down vertical ladders / stairways</li> <li>• step over coamings/sills</li> <li>• open and close watertight/heavy doors</li> <li>• maintain balance and move with agility</li> </ul>
<p><b>Routine tasks on board</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of hand tools</li> <li>• movement of ship's stores (food, equipment)</li> <li>• overhead work</li> <li>• valve operation</li> <li>• keeping watch/look-out (including at night) – requiring uneven sleep/rest patterns -</li> <li>• working in small or restricted spaces</li> <li>• responding to alarms, warnings and instructions</li> <li>• verbal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lift, pull and carry a heavy load</li> <li>• strength, dexterity and stamina to manipulate mechanical devices</li> <li>• reach upward</li> <li>• stand, walk and remain alert for an extended period</li> <li>• work in small spaces and move through restricted openings</li> <li>• visually distinguish objects, shapes and signals</li> <li>• hear warnings and instructions</li> <li>• give a clear spoken description</li> </ul>

On ship	Related physical ability of seafarer
<p><b>Emergency duties on board</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• escape</li> <li>• firefighting</li> <li>• evacuation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• escape from smoke-filled spaces</li> <li>• don a lifejacket or immersion suit</li> <li>• take part in firefighting duties, including use of breathing apparatus</li> <li>• take part in vessel evacuation procedures</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Physical abilities of seafarers – based on Appendix C of ILO guidance**

### Ability to access medical care – proximity to shore

6. In many situations around New Zealand ships can return to port if a seafarer requires urgent medical care, or another vessel or helicopter can enable rapid support. But, the time to get help (hours/days) will vary, depending on where a ship is operating.

7. Maritime certificates specify how far away that seafarer can operate from New Zealand. See Appendix 1.

8. Some certificates have an “unlimited” operating limit, i.e. can operate outside 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres).

9. Medical equipment and expertise on board may be limited.

**Note:**

Judging how far from medical care a seafarer might be can be difficult. If, following your medical examination, you conclude a seafarer should not risk being too far from land, you can note this on the medical certificate. See restrictions section in paragraphs 16-20.

### Examination Process – steps and matters to consider

10. The following are suggested stages of a medical examination.

a) Determine the reason for the examination (e.g. renewal of medical certificate after 2 years, return after illness, or follow-up for continuing health)

b) Verify the seafarer’s identity- generally sighting photographic I.D. is appropriate.

c) Confirm the relevant maritime certificate(s) for which the exam is required

See Appendix 1 for national and ring-fenced certificates. Particularly identify whether it is a deck and/or engineering certificate, as the required eyesight standards vary.

Seafarers with ring-fenced certificates have a VOS (Verification of Status) card.

d) Review Medical history – identify matters relevant to current and future ship activities: covering past and current illnesses, diseases, surgery, conditions and injuries.

A list of relevant conditions is included in the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Guidelines

(Appendix E of the Guidelines on the medical examination of seafarers' available on [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)). But as no list can be exclusive, the expectation is that the GP will use their judgement as to what is relevant.

- e) Confirmation from seafarer that all relevant information has been disclosed.

**It is good practice for the seafarer to formally confirm their agreement to a record being taken of their medical history.** The extent to which this is needed will be affected by the GP's previous knowledge of the seafarer. It is at your discretion, as the examining GP, whether a specific written record of agreement is made.

- f) Physical examination and capability testing, as required, to confirm the seafarer has the necessary physical abilities. Use table 1 (above) as a guide, alongside discussion with the seafarer about conditions on ships.

<b>Limitations may arise from conditions such as:</b>	<b>The functions that may require assessment include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high or low body mass/obesity</li> <li>• severely reduced muscle mass</li> <li>• musculoskeletal disease, pain or limitations to movement</li> <li>• a condition following an injury or surgery</li> <li>• lung disease</li> <li>• heart and blood vessel disease, and</li> <li>• some neurological diseases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strength</li> <li>• stamina</li> <li>• flexibility</li> <li>• balance and coordination</li> <li>• size – compatible with entry into confined areas</li> <li>• exercise capacity – heart and respiratory reserve</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Physical limitations and functions relevant to seafarers**

If in doubt, you should quantify the degree or severity of any relevant impairment by means of objective tests or by referring the seafarer for further assessment.

g) **Eyesight test** –against specific standards.

The medical certificate has an eyesight section to complete. Standards are in table three.

<u>Vision to be tested</u> <i>(with methodology notes)</i>	<b>deck certificates</b>	<b>engineering certificates</b>
Distance vision – can be aided or unaided  [Note: metre notation is provided as that is most common in New Zealand. The Snellen test with decimal notation is an alternative.]	6/12 <sup>1</sup> in each eye  If the seafarer has monocular vision refer to Appendix 2.	6/15 <sup>2</sup> combined
Near/intermediate vision  Near vision should be tested with reading test type.	Vision required for ship's navigation (e.g. reading charts and navigational instruments)	Vision require to read instruments in close proximity, to operate equipment, and to identify systems/components as necessary
Colour vision  [Note: An examinee must not use colour vision aids, including red-tinted, chromas lenses, and chromagen lenses. The use of colour-correcting lenses will invalidate test results.]	38 plate Ishihara test with two errors allowed.  A colour vision test is valid for 6 years for the purposes of the medical certificate – unless a colour blindness condition has been previously recorded	No standards to be met
Visual fields	Normal visual fields	Sufficient visual fields
Night blindness	Vision required to perform all necessary functions in darkness without compromise	Vision required to perform all necessary functions in darkness without compromise
Diplopia (double vision)	No significant condition evident	No significant condition evident
Eye disease	In addition, to above standards the seafarer must be examined for evidence of serious or progressive eye disease.	

**Table 3 Vision standards**

<sup>1</sup> 0.5 in Snellen Test

<sup>2</sup> 0.4 in Snellen test

## Is an optometrist assessment required?

Yes – for applicants for new maritime national deck certificates – they are required to have their eyesight and colour vision tested by a registered optometrist.

For renewal of a current maritime certificate, a ring-fenced certificate and for all national engineering certificates you have the option of referring to an optometrist's certificate, or relying on your own assessment.

If you have any doubts about eyesight or colour vision test results, the examinee must be referred to a registered optometrist. Specialist assessment should be undertaken if reduced night vision is suspected.

Visual aids - use of spectacles or contact lenses to meet the standard should be noted on the certificate.

Colour blindness - If a seafarer has a known and previously recorded condition of colour blindness then the 6 yearly test is not required. The assumption is that it is a stable and recognised condition.

Not meeting the colour vision standard (required for deck certificates) -- a medical certificate can still be issued, but this must be recorded on the certificate – see paragraph 24.

How recent must the eyesight test be?

- **new (first time issue)** deck and engineering the preceding 12 months
- **renewals (including ring-fenced)** - in the preceding 24 months.

h) **Hearing test** – international guidance is that hearing capacity for seafarers “should be an average of at least 30 dB (unaided) in the better ear and an average of 40 dB (unaided) in the less good ear within the frequencies 500, 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000 Hz (approximately equivalent to speech-hearing distances of 3 metres and 2 metres, respectively)”.<sup>3</sup>You should give regard to this, along with the purpose of the medical certificate (see above), when determining what medical category is appropriate.

There is no specific requirement for hearing examinations to utilise a pure tone audiometer. Speech and whisper testing can be useful for rapid practical assessments. It is recommended that those undertaking national deck certificates are able to hear whispered speech at a distance of 3 metres.

Hearing aids are acceptable where the individual will be capable of safely and effectively performing the expected routine and emergency duties. It will be important that arrangements will mean they will be reliably aroused from sleep in the event of an emergency alarm.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B of the Guidelines on the medical examination of seafarers' from the International Maritime Organization and International Labour Office available on [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

## Medication

11. If prescribing medications for a seafarer or reviewing the medications being taken:

- some medications can have side effects, affecting the performance of duties
- effectiveness/use of oral medication at sea may be prevented by nausea and vomiting.

12. International guidance on medications that can impair routine and emergency duties include those that:

- affect central nervous system functions (e.g. sleeping tablets, antipsychotics, some analgesics, some anti-anxiety and anti-depression treatments and some antihistamines)
- increase the likelihood of sudden incapacitation (e.g. insulin, some of the older anti-hypertensives and medications predisposing to seizures)
- impair vision (e.g. hyoscine and atropine).

13. Does medication mean there should be a limitation of the length of time a seafarer is at sea because of monitoring requirements?

14. If medication might have adverse effects that develop slowly, would a condition requiring the seafarer to work closer to land (and therefore medical care) be appropriate?

## Completing the medical certificate

15. The medical certificate to complete is available from the Maritime NZ website link [here](#).

### Assigning a Medical Category and any conditions/restrictions

16. A medical category must be chosen and recorded on the medical certificate. There are six medical categories: A, A (T), B, C, D or E.

Description	Required statements on the certificate	Expiry date on certificate (noting <18 years different)
A Standard met for unrestricted (global) sea service		2 years (standard) - write a date 2 years after the date of examination.
A(T) Standard met for unrestricted (global) sea service but - medical surveillance is required at intervals (ie prior to expiry of certificate).	State when the next medical surveillance/ examination is required – write this as the “expiry date”	Use expiry date to note when the seafarer needs to be re-examined.  Reduce the period for which the certificate is valid to less than the standard 2 years to match the planned surveillance

Description	Required statements on the certificate	Expiry date on certificate (noting <18 years different)
B	Standard has been met for restricted sea service only	State the type and length of the restriction.
	Types of restriction include: restricted geographical area* and/or limits on duties/jobs with associated time limits.	Variable – writing a different expiry date is optional  2 years (standard) Or if appropriate the expiry date may be adjusted to allow a shorter period of validity
	<b>Examples of geographic limit -</b>	Sufficient visual fields
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a restriction that the seafarer can only operate out to a specific distance – for example “stay within 50 nautical miles (nm) of land”. (Note, although weather and other factors are relevant, less than 50 nm helicopter aid is likely less than 6 hours away)</li> <li>describing a known and definable area of operation – e.g. within the Hauraki Gulf, within Wellington Harbour</li> </ul>	
C	Standard not met. Temporarily unfit for sea service	State the number of weeks that should pass before the seafarer can be re-examined.
D	Standard not met. Indefinitely unfit for sea service	State the number of months that should pass before the seafarer can be re-examined.
E	Standard not met. Permanently unfit for sea service	Not applicable – leave expiry date blank

**Table 4: Medical Categories, restrictions and endorsements**

### Conditions for B Categories

17. To check whether any restriction is appropriate and understandable, ask:

- does the condition still allow the individual to go to sea at all – i.e. be on a ship away from land and medical assistance?
- if so, will an existing or potential employer understand the limitations imposed and know what tasks and duties the seafarer can and cannot undertake?
- if there is a risk that the seafarer may require assistance to ensure their own safety, is that clear?

18. In addition to geographic limitations (see table 4), other conditions could be:

- must wear prescribed hearing aids
- must take XX medication
- maximum working hours to be no more than XX without a break
- no lifting loads over XX kg.
- related to colour blindness (see paragraph 24)

19. Avoid restrictions that are hard to implement. Examples to AVOID:

- “must not be left alone” – impractical on a ship
- “must not go to sea in rough weather” – weather not able to be controlled.

20. If the necessary condition for health and safety is not practical then the medical category should be C, D or E.

### **Completing the Expiry date**

21. Under Maritime Rules, certificates of medical fitness cannot be valid for longer than 2 years. The reason for writing the expiry date on the certificate is to assist those that examine the certificate (e.g. employers) and the seafarer themselves.

### **Vision standard**

22. Particular attention is given to recording passing (or not) the vision standards. The monocular distance vision standard is an option for seafarers with ring-fenced certificates. Note on the medical certificate if the seafarer is considered monocular (ie has only one good eye).

23. If you require a seafarer to wear corrective lenses to meet the eyesight standard, tick the relevant box.

24. Colour vision standard failed – relevant where a seafarer holds a deck certificate and fails the colour vision test. The appropriate category is B with a condition such as “exercise of privileges to daylight hours only” or “only to oversee a navigational watch during the hours of daylight”.

25. Note failure of colour vision will normally only be an issue for the issue of new maritime certificates, as it is not generally a condition that changes with time.

26. Failing the vision standards (other than for colour vision) will mean the medical certificate has to be a C, D or E.

### **Signing**

27. Please complete all relevant parts and sign the certificate.

28. The certificate also requires that the seafarer sign the certificate. This emphasises the importance of them understanding the assigned category and any conditions.

### Issuing a category B, C, D or E certificate – ability to be re-examined

29. If you issue a seafarer with a category B, C, D or E certificate, please bring it to the seafarer's attention that they are entitled to apply for another examination.
30. Seafarers may apply to the Director of Maritime NZ for another examination. Requests can be made by emailing [seafarers@maritimenz.govt.nz](mailto:seafarers@maritimenz.govt.nz). The Director would nominate a GP to conduct the re-examination.
31. It is your decision if you consider it appropriate to give the seafarer a report outlining the conditions that should be fulfilled before they can apply for re-examination.

### Completed form

32. Give the original certificate to the seafarer.
33. A copy of the medical certificate should be kept in the files of the health institution in which it was issued.

#### **Note:**

If the seafarer has a national certificate (not a ring-fenced certificate) please send a copy of the completed certificate of medical fitness to Maritime NZ at [medicals@maritimenz.govt.nz](mailto:medicals@maritimenz.govt.nz)

### Further information

34. If you require further advice and guidance please contact Maritime New Zealand at the following email address:

[seafarers@maritimenz.govt.nz](mailto:seafarers@maritimenz.govt.nz)

## APPENDIX 1: National and ring-fenced certificates with their maximum operating limits

These tables specify MAXIMUM limits. A seafarer may be further restricted in distance from shore due to the vessel on which they are operating.

### Note:

*If the seafarer holds a maritime certificate that is not listed here it may be an international STCW Certificate. Only approved maritime medical practitioners (approved by the Director of Maritime NZ) can issue medical certificates in these cases.*

### 1.1 National deck certificates

National deck certificates	Maximum Potential distance from New Zealand allowed under the certificate	
	Distance in nautical miles (nm) 1 nm = 1.85 km	Formal term for limit (see maps)
Master yacht less than 24 metres	200 nm	Offshore limit
Qualified deck crew	200 nm	Offshore limit
Qualified Fishing Deckhand	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Skipper coastal/offshore	200 nm	Offshore limit
Skipper restricted limits	12 nm	Inshore fishing limit
Skipper restricted limits endorsed to 24 metres	50 nm	Coastal limit
Skipper restricted limits endorsed to 500 GT	50 nm	Coastal limit
Skipper Restricted Limits endorsed to between 500 GT and 3000 GT	Sheltered waters and waters closely adjacent to sheltered waters (e.g includes the Hauraki Gulf and Nelson Bays)	Restricted limits

### 1.2 National engineering certificates

National engineering certificates	Maximum Potential distance from New Zealand allowed under the certificate	
	Distance in nautical miles (nm) 1 nm = 1.85 km	Formal term for limit (see maps)
Marine Engineer Class 4 (MEC4)	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Marine Engineer Class 5 (MEC5)	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Marine Engineer Class 5 (MEC5) Steam	200 nm	Offshore limit
Marine Engineer Class 5 (MEC5) Motor and Steam	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Marine Engineer Class 6 (MEC6)	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited

## Ring-fenced certificates

### Note:

If the seafarer's verification of status (VoS) card lists a maritime certificate that is not in tables 1.3 or 1.4, you can contact Maritime NZ to find the operating limit.

### 1.3 Ring-fenced deck certificates

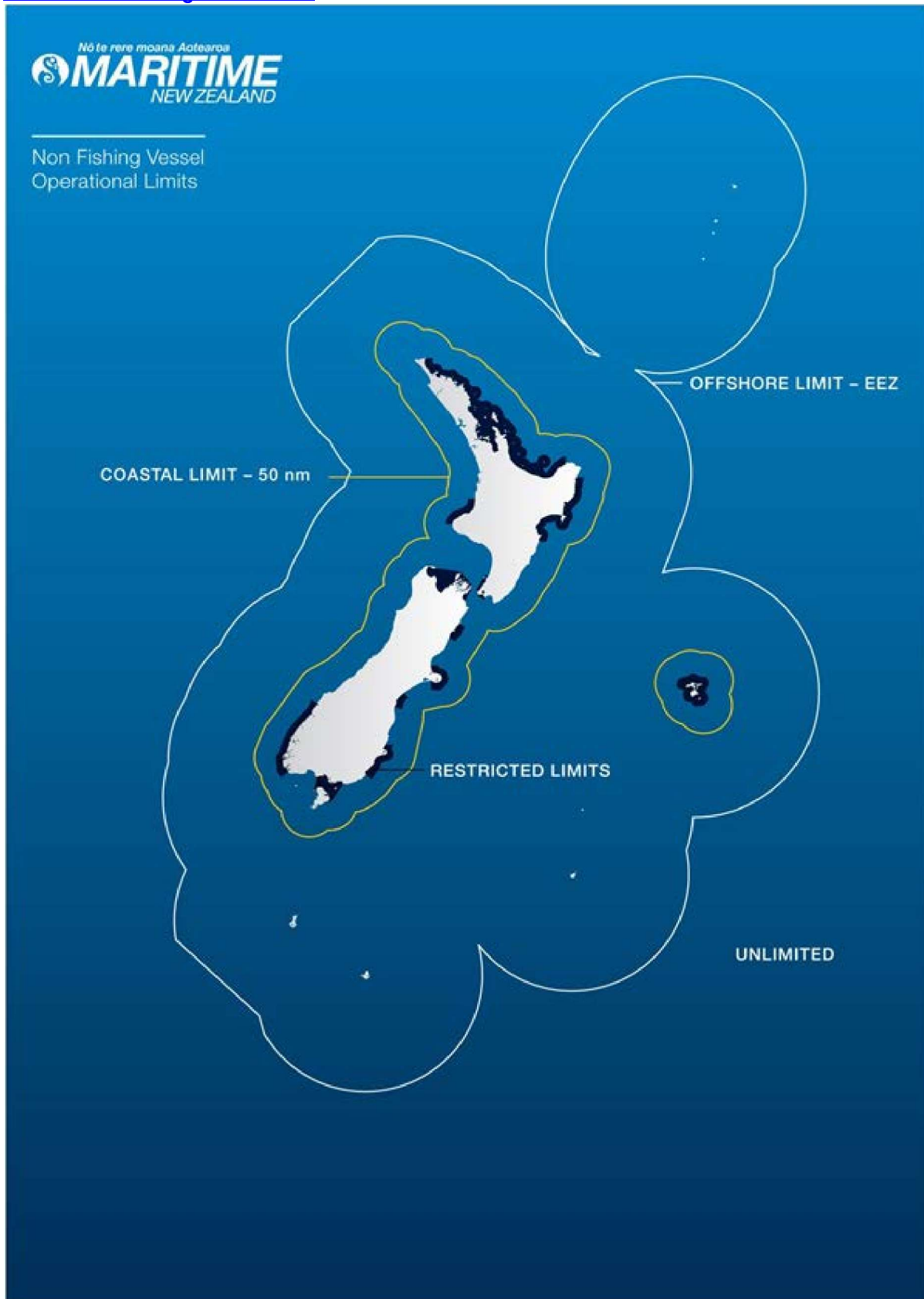
Ring-fenced deck certificates	Maximum Potential distance from New Zealand allowed under the certificate	
	Distance in nautical miles (nm) 1 nm = 1.85 km	Formal term for limit (see maps)
Commercial Launch Master	50 nm	Coastal limit
Inshore Fishing Skipper	50 nm	Coastal limit
Inshore Launch Master (ILM)	50 nm	Coastal limit
Local launchman's licence	12nm	Inshore fishing
Local Launch Operator (LLO)	12 nm	Inshore fishing limit
Master Home Trade	Beyond 200 nm	Offshore limit
Mate Home Trade Ship	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Mate of a Deep Sea Fishing Boat	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Master of a Foreign Going Fishing Boat	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Master of a Restricted-limit Launch	50 nm	Coastal limit
Master River Ship	12 nm	Inshore fishing limit
Master River Ship (holding an engineering qualification)	12 nm	Inshore fishing limit
Master Small Home Trade Ship	150 nm	Offshore limit
New Zealand Coastal Master	100 nm	Offshore limit
NZOM (without endorsements)	200 nm	Offshore limit
NZOW	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
NZOW with ILM endorsement	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Qualified Fishing Deckhand	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Skipper of Coastal Fishing Boat	100 nm	Offshore
Skipper of a Deep-sea Fishing Boat	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited

## 1.4 Ring-fenced engineering certificates

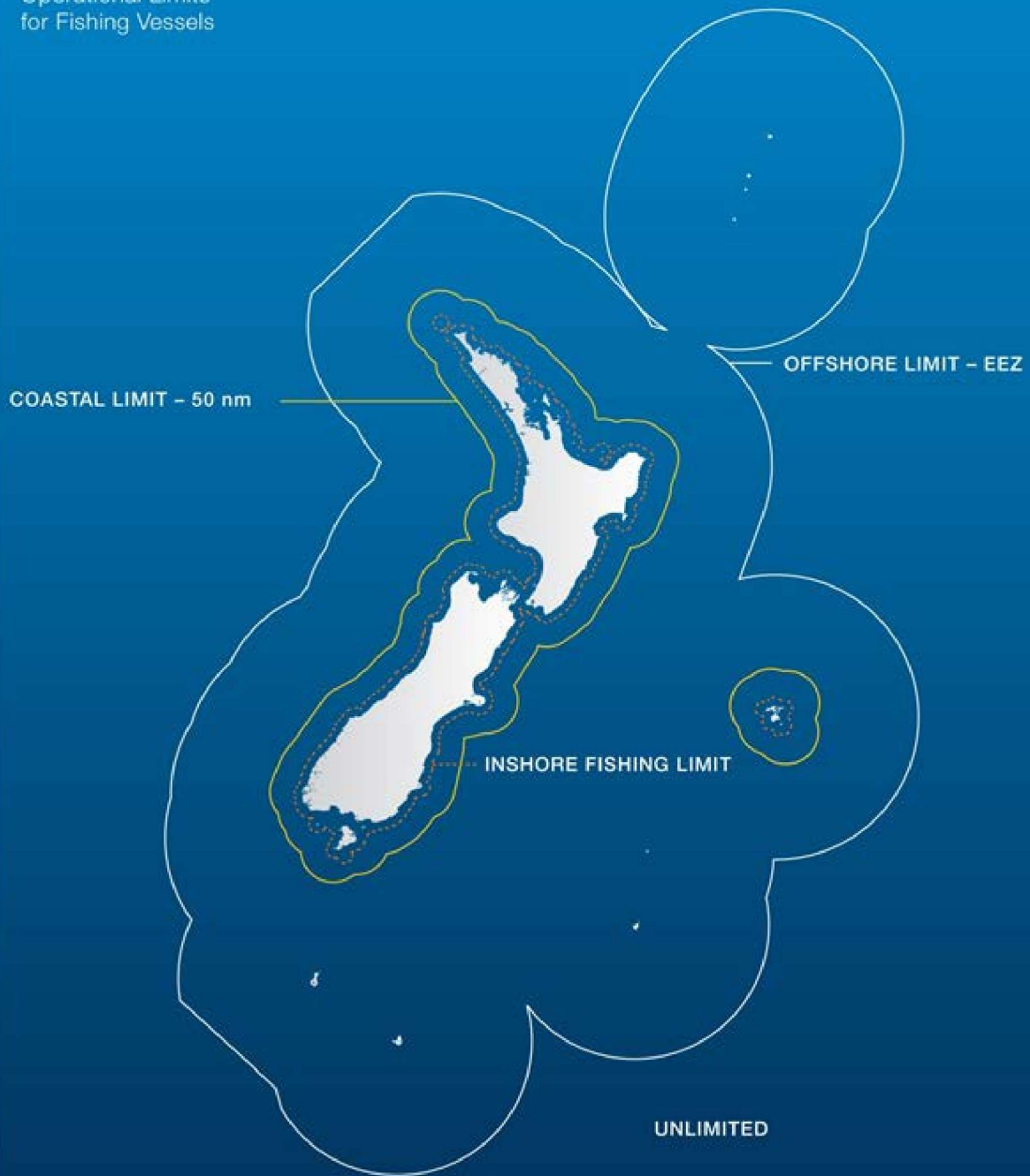
Ring-fenced engineering certificates	Maximum Potential distance from New Zealand allowed under the certificate	
	Distance in nautical miles (nm) 1 nm = 1.85 km	Formal term for limit (see maps)
Chief Tug Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Engineer Local Motor Ship	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Engineer Local Ship	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Engineer Restricted Limits Motor Ship	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
First Class Coastal Motor Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
First Class Diesel Trawler Engine Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Marine Engineer Class 3 issued before September 1999	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Marine Engine Watchkeeper	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Powered Vessels Other than Steam (PVOS)	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
River Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Second Class Coastal Motor Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Second Class Diesel Trawler Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Third Class Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Third Class Steam and Motor Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited
Third Class Steam Engineer	Beyond 200 nm	Unlimited

### 1.3: Diagrams of operational limits

Further information on operational limits can be found in Maritime Rules Part 20, available at [www.maritimenz.govt.nz/rules](http://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/rules).



Operational Limits  
for Fishing Vessels



## APPENDIX 2. – Monocular Vision - Ring fenced Deck Certificates

The following alternative standard is only applicable for seafarers with ring fenced deck certificates who have monocular vision.

All other seafarers must meet the table 3 standards in full including:

- a seafarer applying for a new deck certificate
- renewal of national certificates
- seafarers with engineering certificates – noting that the visual distance acuity standard in table 3 is not per eye, but combined – hence monocular vision is accounted for.

When holders of ring-fenced certificates were originally issued their certificates, if they were monocular it was a requirement that the Director of Maritime NZ, after consultation with an approved optometrist, was satisfied that the seafarer could cope with the range of tasks likely to be encountered when at sea.

### Note:

**monocular vision** means—

- (a) being totally unsighted in 1 eye, but having vision of 6/60 or more in the other eye; or
- (b) having vision, without a corrective lens, of less than 6/60 in 1 eye, but having vision of 6/60 or more in the other eye:

### Monocular vision standard for ring fenced deck certificates:

- he or she has distance vision visual acuity of at least 6/60 without a corrective lens and at least 6/6 with a corrective lens;

**PLUS, the seafarer must meet all the other requirements of table 3.**

If you have any doubts about a seafarer's eyesight (be it distance vision, implications of possible safety implications of eye disease or any other matters in table 3), the examinee must be referred to a registered optometrist.

**Check-** should the medical certificate include a condition/requirement for on-going monitoring and reporting requirements?

If so, the appropriate category is A(T) - with a the certificate expiry date aligning with the date for the next assessment/ check-up (see para 16-20).

Other restrictions (ie under category B) also remain available, to be used as appropriate.