

Port of Dampier – Vessel Safe Access Accommodation Ladders

Number: D19-2026

Date: 14/08/2026

Date of effect:	Immediate
Details:	Safety advice for suspended accommodation ladders and ship-to-shore access arrangements
Former notice:	D13-2026
Charts and publications:	Not applicable
Further notice:	Until cancelled or superseded

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Marine Notice is to reinforce the critical importance of safe ship-to-shore access arrangements within Pilbara Ports, particularly where accommodation ladders are used in a suspended condition and are not landed on the quay, berth or other suitable structure.

Pilbara Ports reminds vessel Masters, owners and operators that safe access to and from a vessel is a key shipboard operation and must be managed through the vessel's safety management system. This includes ensuring that accommodation ladders, gangways and associated equipment are properly maintained, correctly rigged, regularly inspected and used in accordance with manufacturer instructions, class requirements and applicable marine safety standards.

BACKGROUND

Accessing a vessel while at berth or anchor is a routine activity, however it presents significant safety risks if not properly managed. Poor access arrangements can result in serious injury or fatality, particularly where weather, tidal variation, restricted berth arrangements or short port stays affect access arrangements.

AMSA Marine Notice 2023/06 highlights that accommodation ladders and gangways are designed and tested to be landed on solid surfaces. Where access arrangements are used in a suspended condition, additional risk controls must be considered and the arrangement must be appropriately maintained, inspected and managed

Industry experience has identified a continuing pattern of incidents and near misses involving suspended accommodation ladders.

REQUIREMENTS

All vessels calling at Pilbara Ports must ensure that ship-to-shore access arrangements are safe for use before personnel embark or disembark.

Where an accommodation ladder is used while suspended and not landed on the quay, berth or other suitable structure, vessel Masters, owners and operators must ensure that:

- planned maintenance regimes are current and verifiable;
- the ladder is rigged in accordance with the vessel's approved arrangements and applicable standards;
- access arrangements are monitored and adjusted as required for tide, draft, weather and vessel movement;
- suitable lighting, lifebuoys and safety nets are provided where required;
- the risks associated with rigging, adjustment, inspection and removal are assessed and controlled through the vessel's safety management system.

VESSEL RESPONSIBILITIES

Vessel Masters, owners and operators remain responsible for the design, selection, rigging, inspection, maintenance and safe use of ship-to-shore access arrangements.

This includes ensuring that:

- the accommodation ladder, gangway and associated equipment remain within class and manufacturer requirements;
- any support arrangement is engineered, approved, suitable and maintained for its intended use;
- connection points and fittings are structurally suitable for the loads that may be imposed;
- the arrangement does not introduce additional hazards to crew, pilots, terminal personnel or other persons using the access;
- the access arrangement is inspected before use and at appropriate intervals while in use;
- crew undertaking rigging, adjustment or inspection are appropriately protected from fall-from-height and over-side hazards; and
- access is suspended if the arrangement becomes unsafe, damaged, ineffective or uncertain.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT

Vessels should ensure that suspended accommodation ladder arrangements are addressed within the vessel's safety management system.

Risk assessments should include, as applicable:

- rigging and derigging hazards;
- the condition and suitability of accommodation ladder wires, winches, sheaves, fittings and securing points;
- maintenance history and manufacturer requirements;
- class approval status;
- equipment selection and inspection;
- tidal variation and vessel draft changes;
- interaction with shore infrastructure;
- fall-from-height and over-side hazards;
- emergency recovery arrangements; and
- safe access during adjustment or inspection activities.

Where practicable, vessels should rig, inspect and verify accommodation ladder or gangway arrangements in a controlled environment and avoid undertaking complex adjustments during pilotage or other time-critical operations.

VERIFICATION

Pilbara Ports may request evidence that a vessel's access arrangements have been assessed and are safe for their intended use.

Evidence may include:

- current class records or approvals;
- manufacturer instructions;
- planned maintenance records;
- inspection records;
- risk assessments;
- photographs of the rigged arrangement;
- drawings or engineering documentation; or
- confirmation from the vessel's Classification Society where a secondary means of support is fitted or proposed.

Where a vessel proposes to use a secondary means of support, the vessel should be able to demonstrate that the arrangement is approved, accepted or otherwise verified as suitable by the vessel's Classification Society, where applicable.

IMPLEMENTATION

This Marine Notice is issued as a safety advisory and compliance reminder.

Pilbara Ports expects vessel Masters, owners and operators to ensure that accommodation ladders, gangways and associated access arrangements are maintained, rigged, inspected and operated safely at all times.

Pilbara Ports may review this position if class-approved secondary support arrangements become available as a recognised industry standard.

Reference documents

- [AMSA Marine Notice 2023/06](#) – Means of embarkation and disembarkation from ships in port.
- [AMSA Marine Safety Awareness Bulletin Issue 10](#) – Safe vessel access.
- [Marine Order 12](#) – Construction, subdivision and stability, machinery and electrical installations, Sections 23 and 24.

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Figure 1: Accommodation ladder rigged correctly



Figure 2: Unsafe accommodation ladder rigging, showing crew working without fall-protection equipment, incorrectly worn PFDs, and support personnel positioned outside ship rails near the ship's side without PFDs

