

New maritime crew requirements due this year

New legislation this year will require foreign sea crew to apply for maritime crew visas before they come to Australia. It will replace the current situation in which all a ship's crew are covered by a special purpose visa on arrival if they all hold valid passports and documents that verify their employment on the ship.

The legislation is expected to take effect on 1 July 2007. From that date, the 130,000 foreign sea crew who come to Australia annually on commercial ships such as cargo and cruise ships and other non-military ships will need to apply for and hold the new maritime crew visa (MCV) before they arrive.

A six-month transitional period will end on 31 December 2007. It will allow the maritime industry to adapt to the requirements and to apply for maritime crew visas. From 1 January 2008, the maritime crew visa will be mandatory.

New processes will be implemented by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and Australian Customs with the introduction of the MCV legislation, which will strengthen Australia's border security but enable the entry of genuine foreign seafarers.

The design of the new visa will largely mirror the current special purpose visa regime. The new visa will require a formal application submitted and approved before arrival in Australia, bringing entry requirements for seafarers in line with other visitors to Australia.

The maritime crew visa will be:

- required by all foreign sea crew (except New Zealanders and Australian permanent resident visa holders)
- free
- valid for three years
- valid for multiple entries into Australia by sea (not by air).

Maritime crew visa applications can be made via the Internet or on a paper form starting from 1 July 2007. Internet applications are expected to take a few minutes to complete and most will be finalised within days. An application can be made by sea crew or by a third party on their behalf, for example a shipping company, crew manning agent, or ship's agent.

The maritime crew visa application form is likely to require the following information:

- applicant passport biographical data
- residential address and contact details
- employer address and contact details
- character- and security-related declarations.

DIAC and Customs are working to ensure a smooth introduction of the maritime crew visa into the shipping industry.

Further information

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